

Minutes of Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date Monday, 8 February 2021

Members present: Councillors David Howarth (Chair), Michael Green (Vice-Chair), Will Adams, Jacky Alty, Matt Campbell, Colin Coulton, Susan Jones, Colin Sharples, Stephen Thurlbourn, Matthew Trafford and Karen Walton

Cabinet members: Councillor Paul Foster (Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member (Strategy and Reform) and Leader of the Labour Group), Councillor Michael Titherington (Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member (Health and Wellbeing) and Deputy Leader of the Labour Group) and Councillor Matthew Tomlinson (Cabinet Member (Finance, Property and Assets))

Officers: Gary Hall (Chief Executive), Chris Sinnott (Deputy Chief Executive), James Thomson (Deputy Director of Finance), Darren Cranshaw (Shared Services Lead - Democratic, Scrutiny & Electoral Services) and Charlotte Lynch (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Other members: Councillor Margaret Smith (Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Conservative Group)

31 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mal Donoghue and Jim Marsh.

32 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

33 Minutes of the Last Scrutiny Committee Meeting

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday, 12 January 2021 be approved as a correct record.

34 Minutes of the Last Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the minutes of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel meeting held on Monday, 9 November 2020 be noted as a correct record.

35 Matters Arising from Previous Scrutiny Committee Meetings

The Committee received an update on progress made against matters arising from previous meetings.

Members requested more in-depth updates on recommendations dating back to 2019, particularly around town centre masterplans. Members were asked to identify by email those recommendations that they wanted a detailed update on, and officers would endeavour to provide this for the next meeting.

The update was noted and those actions implemented would be removed from the table.

36 Budget 2021/22 and Summary Position over the Medium Term

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets (Councillor Matthew Tomlinson) and the Section 151 Officer (James Thomson) presented a report that set out the Council's proposed Revenue Budget for 2021/22 and forecasts for the two years thereafter.

The report proposed a freeze on council tax rates and members were informed that this would be of some help to residents who had undoubtedly experienced difficulties from the COVID-19 pandemic. A 1.99% increase was proposed for the years 2022/23 and 2023/24.

The report also highlighted the financial impact on the council of issues in the leisure industry, as a result of COVID-19. Members were aware that proposals to bring management of the borough's leisure facilities in-house had recently been approved by Cabinet and Council and the report provided budgeted costs for running the leisure centres. It was predicted that the project would breakeven in the 2024/25 financial year.

Members were assured that the council was in a healthy and robust financial position and the Cabinet Member commended the work of staff during the pandemic.

Consultation on the budget was widely discussed and members were pleased to note that approximately 100 responses had been received online so far. Other stakeholders, such as Lancashire County Council, would be consulted with once the budget was approved by Cabinet and members were encouraged to publicise the consultation to residents in their wards.

In response to a query regarding why consultation was already underway as the report stated it would not begin until after receiving Cabinet's approval, the Cabinet Member advised that he and officers wanted to facilitate as much consultation with the public as possible.

Members queried the projected deficit in business rates income and asked if these could be redistributed from other authorities. In response, it was advised that such practice was subject to government approval but that spreading the deficit over a number of years if income fell short would be permitted.

However, the Section 151 Officer expressed confidence in the income levels of business rates and did not anticipate any major impact from the projected deficit.

Responding to a member query regarding temporary impacts of COVID-19 and Brexit on income through fees and charges, the Cabinet Member expressed confidence that these would not be permanent. An increase in subscriptions to the green waste scheme and in income through planning applications was highlighted as assurance.

Members were also advised that a £346k surplus was anticipated in 2021/22 with deficits forecasted in the years following. The predictions had accounted for worst possible situations.

Members raised the subject of funding for My Neighbourhood Community Hubs. It was advised that each Hub would have financial autonomy as long as spending complied with the council's corporate priorities.

In reference to additional funding to invest in the council's priorities, members queried how value-for-money would be ensured and what return was anticipated. In response members were advised that a return on investment in all corporate priorities was expected and that value-for-money would be assessed in terms of both financial outcomes and social value.

Commitment to including members in the development of the Council's transformation programme was welcomed.

Members were pleased to note that a review of the council's reserves was ongoing and that the community hubs and credit union had been partially funded from reserves.

On the topic of leisure services, members were interested to hear what financial opportunities the in-house management provisions would bring. The Cabinet Member advised that it would support the local economy by keeping money in South Ribble.

Regular progress updates on leisure centre management was requested by the Committee.

The deliverability of the capital programme was raised and the Cabinet Member expressed belief that this was realistic and manageable.

Members asked the Cabinet Member if the Scrutiny Committee had been fair in its questioning and how it could be more robust in scrutinising future budgets. In response, the Cabinet Member welcomed the work and questions of the committee and expressed belief in the value of the committee's role in the decision-making process. Hopes were expressed that the budget could be considered earlier in the year by the Scrutiny Committee going forwards.

The committee thanked the Cabinet Member and the Section 151 Officer for their attendance.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Scrutiny Committee

1. thanks the Cabinet Member and Section 151 Officer for attending and presenting the detailed and clear report;
2. welcomes the commitment to involve Members in developing the transformation strategy;
3. invites the Cabinet Member to provide an update on leisure centre management at regular intervals;
4. notes the Cabinet Member's reassurance that the capital programme is deliverable; and
5. is grateful to the Cabinet Member for suggesting that Scrutiny is involved earlier in the budget process in future years.

37 Worden Hall Progress Update

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets (Councillor Matthew Tomlinson) presented an update on the progress of the Worden Hall project to the Committee and responded to members' comments and queries.

Members were informed that the planning application for the project was awaiting an ecology report and was anticipated to be considered by the Planning Committee in March 2021.

Procurement for the enabling works had begun and it was expected that first works would take place on the site by the end of March.

In response to a member query regarding whether the Council had officers with the expertise to manage a project of this scale, the Cabinet Member advised that this was not an expertise area that the council had in-house. A contract for the project management of the project had been awarded to a South Ribble-based company.

Members welcomed the Cabinet Member's assurances that the project was still on schedule to be completed by June 2022.

A site visit was requested once COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted.

The Committee also discussed the possibility of removing progress updates as a standing item from meeting agendas. The Cabinet Member concurred that this was practical, as steady progress was now being made, but some members felt that there was still much to assess.

It was agreed that progress updates would now be provided to alternating meetings.

The Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for his attendance.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Scrutiny Committee

1. thanks the Cabinet Member for his report;

2. welcomes the re-assurance on the timescales involved and project management arrangements in place;
3. undertakes a site visit to Worden Hall at an appropriate time when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted; and
4. receives future updates on the project on an alternate meeting basis unless a more frequent update is necessary.

38 Scrutiny Matters

38a Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities Progress Update

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee and the Scrutiny Review Task Group on Health Inequalities, Councillor David Howarth, provided an update on the progress of the review.

The Task Group had scoped the review, started to assess documentation and met with several key stakeholders, including the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, to gather evidence.

The Task Group looked forward to presenting their draft report at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting

38 Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee Update

b

The Chair, Councillor David Howarth, attended a recent meeting of Lancashire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee and provided an update to members.

The meeting reviewed the Shaping Care Together programme which was a partnership of NHS organisations aimed at improving health and care services in West Lancashire, Southport and Formby.

The Health Scrutiny Committee also assessed their work programme.

38c Meetings and training attended by Scrutiny Committee members

Councillor Michael Green informed members that he had attend a recent meeting of the North West Strategic Scrutiny in Practice Network. The meeting had included testimony from the Deputy Chief Executive of Manchester City Council and facilitated discussions into scrutinising Town Deals and authorities' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Councillor Green advised the Committee that he found the meeting interesting and that it was a useful networking opportunity.

Councillor Stephen Thurlbourn had also recently undertaken Scrutiny Leadership training, which focused on action learning and the role and effectiveness of the scrutiny function.

38 Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

d

Members considered the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan, which identified reports and topics due for consideration at future meetings.

A query was raised regarding a review of the Environment portfolio, which was originally scheduled for January 2021 but was postponed due to the portfolio holder stepping down from the Cabinet.

Members were advised that the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing would provide a portfolio update to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting and that this portfolio now included some aspects of the former Environment portfolio.

A further update on the possibility of review housing association providers in the borough was requested. In response, members were informed that officers were currently liaising with the Council's Housing Officers to facilitate this and it was anticipated that a report would be provided to the meeting in June 2021.

In-depth reviews into the management of leisure facilities and mental health provisions in the borough would be included on the work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year.

38e Forward Plan

The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.

Chair

Date