

Minutes of	Scrutiny Committee
Meeting date	Tuesday, 12 October 2021
Committee members present:	Councillors Michael Green (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Julie Butterly, Matt Campbell, Jacqui Mort, Colin Sharples, Stephen Thurlbourn, Kath Unsworth and Karen Walton
Committee members attended virtually (non-voting):	Councillor David Howarth (Attended virtually)
Officers present:	Gary Hall (Chief Executive), Mark Lester (Director of Commercial), Victoria Willett (Service Lead - Transformation and Partnerships), Neil Anderson (Assistant Director of Projects and Development), Darren Cranshaw (Shared Services Lead - Democratic, Scrutiny & Electoral Services), Rachel Salter (Service Lead (Development and Business)) and Charlotte Lynch (Democratic and Member Services Officer)
Other attendees:	Councillor Paul Foster, Councillor Margaret Smith (Attended virtually), Councillor Phil Smith, Councillor Michael Titherington, Councillor Matthew Tomlinson and Councillor Carol Wooldridge (Attended virtually)
Public:	0

13 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Will Adams, Jacky Alty, Colin Coulton, Mal Donoghue, David Howarth and Matthew Trafford.

Councillor Jacqui Mort attended as a substitute for Councillor Colin Coulton.

14 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

15 Minutes of meeting Tuesday, 13 July 2021 of Scrutiny Committee

Resolved: (unanimously)

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, held on Tuesday, 13 July 2021, be approved as a correct record for signing by the Chair.

16 Minutes of meeting Monday, 13 September 2021 of Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the minutes of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel meeting, held on Monday, 13 September 2021, be noted.

17 Matters Arising from previous Scrutiny Committee meetings

Members received an update on the recommendations made at previous meetings of the Scrutiny Committee.

Several queries were raised with particular regard to recommendations made in 2019, which had not been implemented.

Further updates on masterplans and the Air Quality Strategy were requested and members also emphasised the desire for site visits to Worden Hall and the Extra Care Facility in Chorley to be planned following the easing of COVID restrictions.

More information was also sought in regard to engagement with the police further to a meeting with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. In response, the Chief Executive explained that changes in senior staff at Lancashire Constabulary was underway and a transition to a geographical policing model was expected.

Resolved: (unanimously)

That

1. the update be noted; and
2. those completed actions be removed from the Matters Arising sheet.

18 Peer Challenge 2021

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Paul Foster) and the Shared Services Lead – Transformation and Partnerships presented a report on the recent Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge and subsequent Action Plan.

The Peer Review had taken place virtually between 30 June and 2 July 2021 and was undertaken by a team of peers including elected members, a Chief Executive, and other Executive Directors from across England.

Members welcomed the outcome of the Peer Review but questioned what was meant by 'embed', which was used frequently in the report. In response, members were advised that this meant ensuring that every area of the authority worked in the same way.

A query was raised regarding how success of the Action Plan would be measured, and members were advised that this would be monitored and reported quarterly with performance updates provided to the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel, which the committee welcomed.

Discussion focused around shared services with Chorley Council and clarification was sought as to whether phases one and two of shared services had now been delivered. It was confirmed that phase two work on a shared revenues and benefits department and shared customer services was still ongoing and that formal discussions on further development were being held with members at Chorley Council.

Members referenced the “takeover” narrative within shared services which was discussed in the Peer Review report. Challenges in cultural change were acknowledged but assurances were provided that staff feedback is regularly surveyed.

In response, it was agreed that the results of the employee survey would be made available to the committee once available and that examples of best practice adopted across both South Ribble and Chorley Councils as a result of shared services be presented to a future Shared Services Joint Committee.

It was also suggested that recommendation 3, which related to a Programme Plan for the delivery of future work and political priorities, be strengthened to ensure capacity and delivery of corporate projects.

The budget gap within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy was raised and mentioned at recommendation 4 in the report and assurances were provided that the Council had several influences to aid in closing this gap, such as strategic reserves.

The committee also welcomed commitment to involving all members in the interim review of the My Neighbourhood Community Hubs and were pleased to hear that the LGA had commended the council on the work of the Hubs.

In response to a query regarding what was meant by ‘political engagement’ as mentioned in recommendation 4, challenges in cross-party working and relations and a need for all parties to work better together for the good of the community were acknowledged. The Leader explained that he felt positive about this going forwards.

Members referred to the possibility of a review of the council’s Scrutiny function, as mentioned in recommendation 8, and emphasised the annual self-assessment undertaken by the committee and its national commendation for best practice.

Clarification was provided that any review into the Scrutiny function would be undertaken by the committee and would assess best practice and effectiveness.

The committee thanked the Leader of the Council and the Shared Services Lead – Transformation and Partnerships for their attendance and report.

Resolved: (unanimously)

That the Scrutiny Committee:

1. welcomes the report and the outcome of the Peer Review and looks forward to working together on delivering the action plan;
2. is grateful for the commitment to develop clear measures and that progress monitoring reports would be presented to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee;

3. asks that recommendation 3 be strengthened to reflect that capacity requirements will be assessed and put in place to ensure delivery of the corporate projects;
4. is grateful for the offer of the employee survey results being made available to the Scrutiny Committee once completed; and
5. suggests that examples of best practice adopted across both South Ribble and Chorley councils as a result of shared services be presented to a future Shared Services Joint Committee.

19 Update of new Leisure Company and future Leisure Projects

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing (Councillor Mick Titherington), the Director of Commercial and the Assistant Director of Projects and Development presented an update on the recently-established Council-owned South Ribble Leisure Company.

Members were interested to learn how the process of bringing the management of leisure centres in-house had gone and what the benefits of this had been. In response, it was advised that the process had been successful and allowed the council to be ‘hands-on’ in the development of leisure centres in the borough.

It was acknowledged, however, that the company had only been established 6 weeks prior and that a more detailed account of progress would be available for future meetings of the Scrutiny Committee.

Members also noted the impact of the changes on leisure centre staff and queried what support was in place for them.

It was explained that staff were consulted through engagement sessions, on-site meetings and union representatives.

Disruption to customers, for example cancellation of children’s swimming lessons, during the transfer of management was also acknowledged as regrettable but due to unforeseen circumstances.

A query regarding the difference in service seen by customers was raised and members were advised that, although the new leisure company was still new, a marketing plan had been devised with a new app and website established and marketing campaigns due to commence at optimum times, such as the New Year.

Clarification was sought as to where responsibility for the leisure centres lay, as the report was listed under both Directors of Commercial and Communities.

In response, it was explained that responsibility for leisure provisions lay within the Communities directorate and the responsibility for the leisure company and day-to-day organisation fell within the Commercial directorate.

Members welcomed an offer to recirculate the decision-making matrix and governance structure of the Leisure Strategic Partnership Board and Company to members.

Further explanation as to the role of the management accountant was also sought, with members advised that this position was specially dedicated to the leisure centres and was a new post within the council's shared services with Chorley Council. An external auditor would also be commissioned to review the leisure centres' finances.

The committee also requested that the report be made more user-friendly and welcomed the offer to inform future reports with the information desired.

Members discussed the possibility of updates on the management of leisure centres being a standing item on the Scrutiny Committee agenda but it was agreed that this would be provided on a quarterly basis.

The committee thanked the Cabinet Member and Directors for their attendance and report.

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Scrutiny Committee

1. welcomes the Cabinet Member and Director's update on the Council's future strategy for the leisure centres and tackling health inequalities in the Borough;
2. will consider the information needed to scrutinise the leisure company performance in the future, including the development of a financial and performance dashboard;
3. is grateful for the reassurance that an engagement and marketing plan is being developed for the leisure centres and that users are to be consulted on the facilities and service received; and
4. looks forward to receiving the governance structure of the leisure company outside of the meeting.

20 Worden Hall Progress Update

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets (Councillor Matthew Tomlinson), the Director of Commercial and the Shared Services Lead – Development and Business presented an update on progress of the Worden Hall project.

Members noted that it was an exciting time for the development, with works ongoing and booking enquiries already being received, and welcomed confirmation that the project remained on-track for completion by the Platinum Jubilee Leyland Festival in 2022.

The committee also welcomed a commitment to arranging a site visit to Worden Hall following the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

A query was raised with regards to the Cabinet Member's confidence in keeping to the budget of the project and assurances were provided in response that

contingencies of £250,000 had been incorporated into the budget in the event of unforeseen circumstances.

Members were also keen to learn how the Council's climate change ambitions had been incorporated into the project. Some difficulty in this was recognised due to the building's Listed Building status but members were informed that a new and more-efficient heating system and new windows would be installed to cut emissions.

Some risk was identified due to the national shortage of materials in the construction industry but the Council was working with the building contractors to ensure access to and supply of necessary materials.

The committee thanked the Cabinet Member, Director and Shared Services Lead for their report and attendance.

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Scrutiny Committee

1. thanks the Cabinet Member and Director for their report and welcomes the progress being made with the project;
2. is grateful for the reassurance that the project is currently on track to open for the Platinum Jubilee Leyland Festival and currently within budget; and
3. looks forward to a site visit of Worden Hall as soon as this can be arranged.

21 Urgent Decisions

The committee received a report of the Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer which outlined a number of urgent decisions taken since 21 July 2021 in accordance with urgency procedures outlined in the Council's Constitution.

The report highlighted that 7 urgent decisions had been submitted during this period, which required agreement from either the Mayor or the Chair of Scrutiny Committee to be taken using urgency procedures.

Members expressed some concern over the number of urgent decisions taken, given that these were not subject to call-in and therefore ineligible to be considered by the Scrutiny Committee.

Assurances were provided to the committee that a legitimate process had been followed in the approval of these decisions.

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Scrutiny Committee

1. notes the report;
2. expresses concern at the use of waiving call-in; and
3. asks that the Executive use this procedure sparingly in future.

22 Scrutiny Matters

22a Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee Update

Members received and noted the minutes of the last meeting of Lancashire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee.

22b Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities Update

Members were advised that the work of the Scrutiny Review Task Group into Health Inequalities was ongoing.

The Task Group were in the process of organising a final workshop to consider their recommendations, which would take place by the end of November.

22c Meetings and training attended by Scrutiny Committee members

There had been no recent training undertaken by any committee members.

22d Forward Plan

The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.

22e Scrutiny Committee 2021/22 Forward Plan and Review Programme

Members received and considered the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan for the 2021/22 municipal year, which also included potential topics for a Scrutiny Review Task Group.

A review of the Council's assets was suggested, and it was agreed to get an update on this before agreeing to establish a full task group.

It was agreed to establish a Scrutiny Review Task Group to examine the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Group Leaders were asked to contact Democratic Services with up to 2 nominations from the Labour and Conservative Groups and 1 from the Liberal Democrat Group.

Chair

Date