

- Minutes of** **Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel**
- Meeting date** **Monday, 15 November 2021**
- Committee members present:** Councillors David Howarth (Chair), Will Adams, Colin Sharples and Karen Walton
- Committee members attended virtually (non-voting):** Councillor Colin Coulton (Attended virtually)
- Officers present:** Gary Hall (Chief Executive), Louise Mattinson (Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer), James Thomson (Deputy Director of Finance), Victoria Willett (Service Lead - Transformation and Partnerships), Darren Cranshaw (Shared Services Lead - Democratic, Scrutiny & Electoral Services) and Charlotte Lynch (Democratic and Member Services Officer)
- Other attendees:** Councillor Michael Green (Attended virtually), Councillor Margaret Smith (Attended virtually), Councillor Phil Smith, Councillor Michael Titherington, Councillor Matthew Tomlinson, Councillor Angela Turner (Attended virtually) and Councillor Carol Wooldridge (Attended virtually)
- Public:** 0
- 48 Apologies for absence**
- None.
- 49 Declarations of interest**
- None.
- 50 Minutes of the meeting Monday, 13 September 2021 of Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel**
- Resolved: (unanimously)
- That the minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 13 September 2021 be approved as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Councillor Phil Smith as an observer.
- 51 Matters Arising from Previous Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panels**
- Members of the Panel received a report which provided updates on the progress of recommendations made at previous meetings of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel.

Further detail on the costs of refurbishing Penwortham Leisure Centre and the works undertaken was requested.

Members also considered undertaking a deep dive into outcomes of the My Neighbourhood Community Hubs but were advised to await the review into these groups for further information.

Additional clarification was sought on current customer service response times as some members had received feedback that was contrary to the update provided.

It was acknowledged that the call abandonment rate was 10% and that performance could be improved by routing all calls through the Council's contact centre.

Resolved: (unanimously)

That

1. the Matters Arising from previous meetings of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel be noted and
2. any completed actions be removed from the report

52 Corporate Strategy Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report, Quarter Two 2021/22

The Chief Executive and the Shared Services Lead for Transformation and Partnerships presented a report of the Deputy Chief Executive which outlined the Council's performance against the delivery of the Corporate Strategy projects and objectives during Quarter 2 (July-September 2021).

Overall, performance of the projects was good with 11 of 14 projects on-track and one rated amber. Of 8 key performance indicators (KPI's) reported, 3 were rated green, 3 rated red and 2 yet to be baselined.

The Panel welcomed the progress made in the quarter and queried the processes in place to ensure the validity of the data. Measures such as a shared framework, multiple checks by senior officers and directors, regular monitoring meetings with project managers, officer-led networks and project management boards were in place and members welcomed this reassurance.

Some concerns were expressed over staff vacancies and the impact this may have on the delivery of the Joint Digital Strategy. It was acknowledged that a review of the Council's IT department had been undertaken and appointments to vacancies would take place shortly. Delivery of the Joint Digital Strategy had continued, with the implementation of Sharepoint and work on Planning software.

Members also welcomed assurances that residents would still be able to have face-to-face and telephone contact with the Council, despite the development of self-service channels.

The Panel commended the Council for having a greater overall employment rate than the North West average but requested that future performance indicators

choose more appropriate comparators which are similar to South Ribble in terms of geography, affluence and demographic.

This had been a focus of discussion at a recent Chorley and South Ribble Partnership Economic Summit and a commitment was provided to share the outcomes of this with members.

Members expressed slight concern over it taking an average of 21 days to process a new Housing Benefits claim and queried what could be done to improve this. In response, it was acknowledged that additional resources were needed, and that digitisation was key to enable data transfer which would ultimately expedite the process.

It was noted that 27,500 trees had been planted in South Ribble in 2021 and further information was requested on how those which survive and thrive are monitored and managed and the length of time it would take for these trees to mature.

The Panel also commended the work of the Planning department for deciding on 100% of major planning applications within 13 weeks and asked that their congratulations be passed onto staff.

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel

1. thanks the Chief Executive and Shared Services Lead for Transformation and Partnerships for their report and answering questions;
2. welcomes the reassurance that the Council has robust data quality policies and procedures in place;
3. asks that future performance indicators choose more appropriate comparators which are similar to South Ribble and our Borough, to help make the most of the benchmarking data available;
4. expresses gratitude for the offer of the outcomes from the post-COVID Economic Summit and updated key issues for South Ribble being provided to Members;
5. expresses concern at the time taken to process new housing benefit claims and requests that the plans to improve this are expedited and additional resources be made available to improve performance;
6. requests that further information be provided on how the number of trees that are planted that survive and thrive are monitored and managed; and
7. congratulates the Planning Team on the improved performance with regards the % of planning applications decided within 13 weeks.

53 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring

The Panel considered reports of the Director of Finance which provided an update on the Council's revenues and reserves and overall financial position as at 30 September 2021.

Members queried the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Council's finances and were informed that the Council had benefitted from central government funding, which both compensated for income lost from fees and charges and reimbursed the Council for the redeployment of staff to frontline roles.

Clarification was sought as to a surplus of £149,000 on housing benefit subsidy and members suggested that this could be utilised to improve the time taken to process new claims.

In response to discussion, it was acknowledged that a reduction in income generated by trade waste could be as a result of less waste amongst businesses or due to the competitive market.

The Panel acknowledged the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on recruiting apprentices, which currently had an underspend of £44,000, and requested an update on the current position of apprenticeships within the Council and how this underspend could be reduced.

Clarification was also provided on the Net Interest Receivable/Payable overspend.

Members also thanked the Cabinet Member and staff for the site visit to Worden Hall which had been held in the previous week.

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel

1. thanks the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets and Director of Finance for their report and answering questions;
2. asks that consideration be given to the housing benefit surplus of £149,000 being used to improve the speed of processing housing benefits claims;
3. looks forward to an update on the recruitment of apprentices and reducing the £44,000 underspend; and
4. expresses its gratitude to the Cabinet Member and staff for the site visit to Worden Hall held on 12 November 2021.

Chair

Date