

Report of Scrutiny Committee

1. This report summarises the business considered at the meeting of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel held on 10 February 2020 and the meetings of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 February and 13 February 2020.

SCRUTINY BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE PANEL – 10 FEBRUARY

Period 1 Performance Monitoring Report

2. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Paul Foster, and the Interim Chief Executive, Gary Hall, presented a report on the performance of the Corporate Plan at the end of Period 1.
3. The report set out the performance between October and December 2019 against the delivery of the Corporate Plan projects and objectives that was approved in September 2019.
4. We were pleased that the current timescales of 43 out of 46 projects have been met or are within the agreed targets.
5. Although we were concerned that the Council's pledge of carbon neutrality by 2030 was off-track as the scope for the climate emergency working group had not been agreed, we were assured that progress was ongoing as a climate change officer had been appointed and a further report on climate change was due to be considered at Full Council in June 2020.
6. We were satisfied with the significant improvements in the performance of the Council's business and conference centre and queried whether the income target should be increased as a result. This would be reviewed, and we asked for further information on the hire fees for the centre.
7. In response to our queries around the Apprentice Factory, we were informed that nine apprentices were recruited within a 12-month period and that this exceeded a target of 7 apprentices per annum. Information on the total number of apprentices recruited since the Apprentice Factory was established was requested.
8. We were pleased that some recommendations of the Scrutiny Review, 'Mind the Gap', were being implemented to support the borough's most vulnerable residents. A particular example of this was the holiday hunger project which was piloted in Bamber Bridge, Leyland and Penwortham. An update on the progress of the wider review was requested for the next meeting of the Panel.
9. We also received further information on call-waiting times, as requested at the previous meeting. We were pleased to note the work undertaken to reduce waiting times for residents who contact the Council by telephone and we welcomed these improvements.
10. We noted the report and I thanked the Leader and Gary Hall for their attendance

Budget Monitoring 2019/20 – Quarter 3

11. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets, Councillor Matthew Tomlinson, and the Interim Section 151 Officer, Jane Blundell, presented a report on the Council's overall financial position at the end of December 2019.
12. We were informed that an underspend of £272,000 was forecasted for the end of the financial year and that significant work had been undertaken to reduce this forecasted figure over the last quarters.
13. In response to our queries around the forecasted staffing underspend, we were assured that the Council was actively trying to fill vacancies and that there has been an increase in staff recruitment. Although there had been a slight impact on performance as a result of staff vacancies, improvements were anticipated following the development of shared service arrangements with Chorley Council over the course of 2020.
14. We were pleased to note that the council would remain part of the Lancashire Business Rates Pool for 2020/21, although arrangements for the following year have not yet been confirmed.
15. As the borough investment reserve accounted for a significant amount of the forecasted underspend, we queried the governance procedures for changing the Investment Property Strategy to enable expenditure and were informed that amendments would be subject to the approval of Full Council.
16. We requested further information on the following areas:
 - a breakdown of the budget by service area
 - a further update on the progress of the Green Links project at Shruggs Wood in Leyland.
17. We noted the report and I thanked the Cabinet Member and the Interim Section 151 Officer for their attendance.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 11 FEBRUARY

Cabinet Agenda Item 9 - Strategic Review of Community Involvement, including My Neighbourhoods Final Report

18. We held a special meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on this date following receipt of a call-in request, relating to the Cabinet decision to implement the recommendations of the Strategic Review of Community Involvement, including My Neighbourhoods Final Report.
19. I began the meeting by explaining the role of the Scrutiny Committee and how it has powers to call-in a Cabinet decision before it was implemented. The Scrutiny Committee would look at whether the decision made complied with the Council's decision-making process. If the Committee believed that this had not been complied with, it could then refer the matter back to Cabinet for reconsideration.
20. The Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Margaret Smith, and Councillors Gareth Watson and John Rainsbury explained that they had signed the call-in request as they felt that the decision did not maintain the principles of openness and

transparency, that there had not been sufficient consultation with parish/town councillors, My Neighbourhood Forum members and group leaders, and that it constituted a key decision as there would be budget implications over £100,000 and would affect more than two wards within the borough.

21. The Leader of the Council, members of the Cabinet, the Director of Neighbourhoods and Development, Jennifer Mullin, and the Assistant Director of Scrutiny and Democratic Services, Darren Cranshaw, were in attendance to answer questions of the Committee.
22. Confirmation was provided by officers that this was not a key decision as it did not meet the £100,000 value threshold and, as the report was high-level, it was not felt that the decision would have a significant effect on residents in two or more wards. Any individual recommendations would be developed further and formal approval sought from Cabinet or Council as appropriate.
23. In response to queries regarding consultation undertaken around the recommendations, it was clarified that the working group was formed of representatives from all political parties and existing and previous parish/town councillors.
24. Councillor Bylinski Gelder, the Leader of the Council and the Assistant Director of Scrutiny and Democratic Services had met with Chairs and clerks of each parish council and member and staff workshops were held in November 2019.
25. Councillor Bylinski Gelder had also attended meetings of Leyland My Neighbourhood Planning Forums to gain the views of colleagues.
26. After careful consideration, a motion was moved by Councillor Michael Green, seconded by Councillor Stephen Thurlbourn, that the decision be referred back to the Cabinet for consideration.
27. Upon taking a vote, it was RESOLVED by the Chair's casting vote that **the motion was lost** and the request for call-in was subsequently dismissed.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13 FEBRUARY

Worden Hall Project Update

28. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets, Councillor Matthew Tomlinson, and the Assistant Director of Property and Housing, Peter McHugh, presented a report which provided an update on the progress of the Worden Hall project.
29. We were pleased to note the indicative timescale and costings for the project and welcomed the proposals for the opening of the Hall in autumn 2021.
30. Discussion focused around the following areas:
 - We queried the demographic of the 500 respondents to the consultation. Responses had largely been submitted online but there had been substantial attendance at open days. Although some users of Worden Park are not South Ribble residents, a significant number of respondents resided in Leyland.

- We queried the social value of the project and were pleased that the demographic of customers and visitors would be assessed to understand the appeal and uses of the Hall.
- We had some concerns about the possibility of overspending on the project and were assured that the timescale for delivery of the project would be carefully managed and that the Council would appoint external agencies to provide professional expertise where required. It was good to note that officers have also allowed for contingencies within the project's budget.
- We were pleased to hear that by the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in March 2020, the funding for the project will have been considered by Full Council and work on the planning application for the Hall will be ongoing.

31. We noted the report and I thanked Councillor Tomlinson and Peter for their attendance.

2020/21 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 to 2023/24

- 32. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets (Councillor Matthew Tomlinson) and the Interim Section 151 Officer (Jane Blundell) presented a report that set out the Council's proposed Revenue Budget for 2020/21 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2020/21-2023/24.
- 33. The report outlined the Council's proposals including a 1.99% increase in council tax, which we were told would enable the Council to reduce charges to residents around green waste collection and replacement bin charges and would provide some extra funding to projects like the Holiday Hunger Scheme, that reserve accounts would remain unused for a 12-month period and that reserves for City Deal and business rates would be retained.
- 34. Discussion focused around the following areas:
 - Funding gaps were highlighted within the report and we sought clarification on the measures being taken to reduce these.
 - We queried business rate risk.
 - The second phase implementation of the council's status as a living wage employer, which would mean that the council would require partner companies and organisations to pay the living wage. This would be contained within the budget for 2021/22.
 - The rationale for a 1.99% increase in council tax.
 - The deliverability of the Capital Strategy.
 - The significant forecasted increase in expenditure for leisure and sport included within the Capital Programme.
 - The impact of Brexit on the budget and on businesses in South Ribble.

- We queried the consultation undertaken on the budget proposals.
 - We queried the rationale for several projects identified in the budget such as Hurst Grange Coach House in Penwortham, a new entrance to the conference and business centre and a loan for a village hall in Hoole. An updated figure for Hurst Grange Coach House would be provided to the committee once the funding sum was confirmed as well as detailed plans for the business centre entrance.
35. We hope to undertake deeper examination of individual directorates and their budgetary forecasts throughout the financial year.
36. I thanked the Cabinet Member and Interim Section 151 Officer for their attendance.

Recommendations

That Council note the report.

COUNCILLOR DAVID HOWARTH
CHAIR OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
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