

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING DATE Thursday, 13 February 2020

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors David Howarth (Chair), Michael Green (Vice-Chair), Will Adams, Jacky Alty, Matt Campbell, Colin Coulton, Chris Lomax, Colin Sharples and Karen Walton

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

OFFICERS: Peter McHugh (Assistant Director of Property and Housing), Jane Blundell (Interim Section 151 Officer), Darren Cranshaw (Assistant Director of Scrutiny & Democratic Services) and Charlotte Lynch (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

OTHER MEMBERS: Councillor Colin Clark, Councillor Keith Martin, Councillor Margaret Smith (Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Conservative Group), Councillor Phil Smith and Councillor Angela Turner

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38 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jim Marsh, Stephen Thurlbourn and Matthew Trafford.

39 Declarations of Interest

None.

40 Minutes of meeting Thursday, 23 January 2020 of Scrutiny Committee

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the minutes of the last Scrutiny Committee meeting, held on Thursday, 23 January 2020, be signed as a correct record by the Chair.

41 Minutes of the Last Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel

The minutes of the last Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel, held on Monday, 10 February 2020, were noted.

42 Worden Hall project Update

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets (Councillor Matthew Tomlinson) and the Assistant Director of Property and Housing (Peter McHugh) presented a report on the progress of the Worden Hall project to the Committee and responded to members' comments and queries.

A clear steer had been received through the public consultation and significant investment was anticipated for the Hall as a result.

Members were informed that an indicative timescale had been devised, with a planning application to be submitted in May 2020 and works to begin in autumn 2020. It was anticipated that works would last for 12 months.

Around 500 people had responded to the public consultation regarding the future of Worden Hall and members queried the demographic of respondents. Responses had largely been submitted online but there had been substantial attendance at open days. Councillor Tomlinson acknowledged that some users of Worden Park are not South Ribble residents, but a significant number of respondents resided in Leyland.

In response to a query around the social value of the project, limitations in measurability were recognised. In order to assess the social value of the works to the Hall, the demographic of customers and visitors would be assessed to understand the appeal and uses of the Hall.

Members expressed some concern with the possibility of overspending and sought reassurance around the measures that the Council would take to mitigate any risk of this. The timescale for delivery of the project would be carefully managed and the Council would appoint external agencies to provide professional expertise where required. Members were also assured that officers have allowed for contingencies within the project's budget.

It was anticipated that by the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in March 2020, the funding for the project will have been confirmed by Full Council and work on the planning application will have progressed.

The Committee welcomed the progress made and thanked the Cabinet Member and Assistant Director for their attendance.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That

1. the Scrutiny Committee welcomes the progress made on bringing Worden Hall back into use.
2. the Scrutiny Committee welcomes the proposals for the opening of Worden Hall in autumn 2021.
3. the Scrutiny Committee looks forward to a further update at the next meeting.

43 2020/21 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 to 2023/24

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.

The report proposed a 1.99% increase in council tax and members were informed that this 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.

It was also proposed that reserve accounts would remain unused for a 12-month period and reserves for City Deal and business rates would be retained.

Members acknowledged funding gaps highlighted within the report and sought clarification on the measures being taken to reduce these. Emphasis was placed on a widespread list of initiatives, such as the Leyland Music Festival, which would increase income and would help to mitigate any risk posed by funding gaps.

In response to a query about business rate risk, members were informed that any potential risks would be minimised due to reserves amounting to £2.6 million. Confirmation was also provided that the current pooling arrangements would remain in operation for 2020-21.

Members requested an update on 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 and members expressed their enthusiasm for this.

Clarification was sought as to the rationale for a 1.99% increase in council tax. It was suggested that a £5 increase per band D property may be more suitable in generating additional funding, but members were advised that a 1.99% increase is the minimum government expectation and would enable more residents to save money.

The deliverability of the Capital Strategy was questioned due to slippage experienced in previous years. Assurances were given that slippage was to be expected in any budget forecast and that the Cabinet Member and officers were confident that all aspects of the Capital Strategy could be delivered.

Members noted a significant forecasted increase in expenditure for leisure and sport within the Capital Programme. This would largely enable refurbishment of the borough's leisure centres and comparisons were made between this forecasted cost and the cost of the previous plans for a new leisure campus in Leyland. A full audit was being undertaken regarding the previous administration's costings for a new leisure centre and the committee requested that the findings of this be shared once complete.

Discussions focused around the impact of Brexit on the budget and uncertainties surrounding the impact of Brexit upon businesses in South Ribble were acknowledged.

Members were informed that the Council was in receipt of grants amounting to £17,000 which had not yet been allocated but could be allocated to departments that may be affected by Brexit.

Further information on the methods of consultation on the budget were requested and it was understood that public consultation had begun in early February 2020 and was promoted through the Council's social media channels. Members noted that there had been some positive media coverage and that the Cabinet would consider all responses prior to Full Council in February.

The Committee expressed enthusiasm to undertake deeper examination of individual directorates and their budgetary forecasts throughout the financial year.

As a part of the Corporate Plan, money had been allocated to reducing crime and disorder and further detail as to how this would be achieved was requested. In response, members were informed that the youth support programme would be established to divert young people in South Ribble from crime and that a Youth Development Co-ordinator would be recruited to oversee this work. Members were pleased to note this and requested progress updates as the programme develops.

Members queried the rationale and value for money for several projects identified in the budget. Work on Hurst Grange Coach House in Penwortham was subject to lottery funding but the Council will supplement the project to create a user-friendly and attractive feature within the borough.

Assurances were provided that the figure included in the budget was a gross cost and that lottery funding, if awarded, would reduce this. An updated figure would be provided to the committee once the funding sum was confirmed.

Members also questioned plans for a new entrance to the conference and business centre at the council's offices and were advised that the project would be beneficial in generating further income, improving convenience and establishing a reputation distinctive from the council and in improving capacity for evening hire.

Detailed plans for the entrance would be circulated to committee members.

The Council's budget would also provide a loan to supplement a new village hall in Hoole. Members queried the terms and repayment scheme for the project and were advised that officers were in advanced negotiations to determine the terms of the loan and its repayment which would be subject to interest charges.

In response to the possibility of the council investing money in Qatar as part of its Investment Strategy, members expressed concern around investing in countries with human rights violations. Members were assured that although Qatar was included on the list of possible countries for the council to invest money in, it was highly unlikely to be chosen.

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

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That

1. the Scrutiny Committee encourages the council to work towards being a Living Wage employer with its contractors.
2. the Scrutiny Committee welcomes the Cabinet Member's assurance that the Capital Strategy is deliverable.
3. the Scrutiny Committee requests a copy of the audit findings from the review of leisure centre costs at the appropriate time.
4. future budget reports break the budget down to below the directorate level.
5. the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel consider the level of detail that would be helpful in the budget breakdown, including deep dives.
6. the Scrutiny Committee looks forward to receiving an evaluation of the new youth support funding as it progresses.
7. the Scrutiny Committee requests a breakdown of the capital funding proposal for the Hurst Grange Coach House.

44 Scrutiny Matters

44a Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Update

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

A key item for South Ribble was the work of the 'Our Health, Our Care' Programme. Councillor Howarth informed members of the committee that, due to time constraints, the item had been deferred.

The 'Our Health, Our Care' team would be invited to LCC's next meeting of the Health Scrutiny Committee. The meeting date would be circulated once confirmed and Councillor Howarth encouraged any interested members to attend.

Councillor Chris Lomax left the meeting at 7:30pm.

44 Meetings and training attended by Scrutiny Committee members

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Councillor Colin Sharples informed members of the committee that he and Councillor Chris Lomax had attended a two-day event hosted by the Local Government Association on 'Effective Scrutiny'.

The event examined the roles of Scrutiny Committee members, identified questioning techniques and discussed the types of questions which may be beneficial when scrutinising.

Councillor Sharples emphasised the usefulness of the event but found that South Ribble stood out in terms of efficiency and support from officers, for which Councillor Sharples gave commendation.

It was noted that other authorities appeared to undertake more project-based work and it was agreed that the committee's work programme should be revisited throughout the year.

44c Forward Plan

The committee noted the Forward Plan.

44 Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

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Members of the committee were informed that a report on housing associations within the borough would be provided to the next meeting, as previously requested.

This would be presented by the Cabinet Member for Planning, Regeneration and City Deal, Councillor Bill Evans, and members felt that it may be beneficial for Councillor Evans to provide a wider update on the work of his portfolio whilst in attendance.

45 Exclusion of Press and Public

As there were no members of the public in attendance at the meeting, it was not necessary to exclude the press and public.

46 Appendix for Worden Hall Project Update

The Scrutiny Committee received a copy of the plans and costings for the works at Worden Hall.

The plans and costings were based on the planned hybrid option, which would allow the Hall to operate for a mix of community and private hire use. Members noted that this was the preferred option identified by public consultation.

Members acknowledged the costings for the project and queried the possibility of rent reviews.

Chair

Date