

Report of Scrutiny Committee

1. This report summarises the business considered at the meetings of the Scrutiny Committee held on 22 October 2020 and the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel held on 9 November 2020.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 22 OCTOBER

Community Wealth Building Action Plan

2. The Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Social Justice and Wealth Building, Councillor Aniela Bylinski Gelder, and the Director of Planning and Property, Jonathan Noad, presented the South Ribble Community Wealth Building Action Plan to the Committee.
3. We were also joined by the independent Policy Advisor, Matthew Baqueriza-Jackson.
4. We initially sought assurance that the proposals were realistic for a shire district like South Ribble compared to cities and unitary authorities but confidence in the delivery of benefits in South Ribble was expressed.
5. Examples of other local authorities which had successfully implemented similar Wealth Building Action Plans were provided and further information can be found on the Centre for Local Economic Strategies website.
6. In response to a query regarding the evidence base for the Action Plan, we were informed that a core officer group had been established in the Council's Economic Development department and consultation had been undertaken with South Ribble Partnership.
7. However, we were disappointed that the report and draft action plan did not include engagement with businesses and business organisations. Assurances were provided, however, that officers would meet with local businesses to discuss the Action Plan in early November and we recommended that corporate organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses, the Chamber of Commerce and the Institute of Directors, also be consulted.
8. We also queried how the success of the Action Plan would be measured and were informed that a Social Value Monitoring Officer would be employed to oversee progress and observance by businesses and employers. A social value portal would also provide ready-made indicators for success.
9. We also look forward to performance measures being developed as part of the implementation plan.
10. We expressed some concern over the abilities of small businesses to commit to the social values of the Action Plan but were assured that the report would recommend that the values only apply to tenders over £30,000.
11. We also recommended that more explicit links between the Action Plan and the Community Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy be made.

12. We welcomed suggestions of using case studies of social value work and the Action Plan on the Council's online channels to communicate and promote community wealth-building in a user-friendly and understandable way.
13. It was suggested that, owing to the implicative and novel nature of the Action Plan, the report should be considered by Full Council. The Cabinet Member and officers were receptive to this recommendation and confirmed that this could be included in the Cabinet's resolution if appropriate.
14. A Member Briefing could also be held to ensure that the proposals are sufficiently communicated to all members.
15. We questioned the reference to 'socially-just use of land' and how this could be practiced in South Ribble. It was explained in response that the Council could utilise land previously inaccessible to residents for different uses, such as community and health benefits. We requested further information on land owned by the Council.
16. In response to a question regarding the benefits of the Action Plan for residents, it was explained that more opportunities would be available and spending power would be concentrated for residents of South Ribble.
17. We anticipate a progress report on the action plan as part of the performance monitoring report.
18. We noted the report and thanked the Cabinet Member, the Director of Planning and Property and the Policy Advisor for their attendance.

Scrutiny Portfolio Update: Community Engagement, Social Justice and Wealth Building

19. The Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Social Justice and Wealth-Building, Councillor Aniela Bylinski Gelder, and the Directors of Customer and Digital, Paul Hussey; Neighbourhoods and Development, Jennifer Mullin; and Planning and Property, Jonathan Noad, presented an update on the work of the portfolio since May 2019.
20. The Cabinet Member highlighted some of her key achievements and we commended the work of the portfolio since its creation last year.
21. We also praised the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and support provided to residents, businesses and communities.
22. We queried the wide-reaching breadth of the portfolio and its appropriacy, but we were assured that the different areas of the portfolio link well together and underpin the practices of care for South Ribble residents.
23. In response to a query regarding learning from customer complaints, members were informed that complaints are thoroughly investigated with learning shared with the relevant department and regular training sessions for Gateway staff.
24. We sought clarification on the term 'channel shift' and how residents who cannot access services electronically can still engage with the council. 'Channel shift' was defined as the move from traditional methods of engagement to informal means such as social media and live chat. We were assured, however, that traditional methods of communication would remain available for residents who could not access services

digitally and that extensive training would be held for the public. Further information on this would be available in due course.

25. We were also pleased that work on the Council's new website was in the advanced stages and a beta version would be available for members to test before Christmas 2020.
26. We discussed the delivery of the portfolio's projects and officers expressed confidence in the current capacity of staff.
27. We questioned the decision-making and budgetary powers of the new My Neighbourhood Hubs and were informed that the models were still in development. It was hoped that decision-making would be more autonomous and Individual budgets would be allocated to each Hub with the option of applying for additional funding from a central budget consisting of £20,000 for larger-scale projects.
28. We welcomed assurances that further development of the My Neighbourhood Hubs would take place in early 2021 and that this was a key priority for the portfolio moving forwards, in addition to implementing the Community Wealth Building Action Plan.
29. We thanked the Cabinet Member and the Directors of Customer and Digital, Neighbourhoods and Development and Planning and Property for their attendance and wished the Cabinet Member well with her portfolio priorities moving forwards.

Worden Hall Progress Update

30. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets, Councillor Matthew Tomlinson, and the Assistant Director of Projects and Development, Neil Anderson, presented an update on the progress of the Worden Hall project.
31. We sought clarification on the expected cost of the project and were informed that £2.17 million had been reserved for the project. This sum also included cover for any contingencies.
32. We queried if the Hall would retain its name following completion of works and were assured, in response, that the matter had not been discussed and that there was no intention to change it.
33. We were pleased to note that the project was expected to be completed in the next financial year and acknowledged the major works being undertaken.
34. We questioned the decision to extend the current car park site at Worden Park as opposed to creating a separate provision and were informed that the original plans would have meant cutting down trees which was felt to contradict the administration's green agenda.
35. We were also pleased to note that the car park would comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) to include disabled parking provisions and further information on the number of parking spaces within the extended car park was requested.
36. A planning application for the project was likely to have been submitted for consideration by the Planning Committee by the next meeting of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel and we looked forward to receiving a further progress update then.

37. We thanked the Cabinet Member and the Assistant Director of Projects and Development for their attendance.

SCRUTINY BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE PANEL – 9 NOVEMBER 2020

Period 2 Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report 2020/21

38. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Paul Foster, the Interim Chief Executive, Gary Hall, and the Shared Services Lead for Partnerships and Transformation, Vicky Willett, presented a report on the performance of the Council's Corporate Plan at the end of period 2.
39. The report set out the performance between June and September 2020 against the delivery of the Corporate Plan projects and objectives.
40. We were pleased that 8 out of 14 of projects were on-track.
41. We queried how the link between projects and priorities could be strengthened and were informed that all projects were scoped to ensure clarity and a more streamlined approach. However, we welcomed the suggestion that the project mandates could be supplied to Panel members to provide further detail.
42. We noted the period of change for the Council and queried other methods of transformation besides Shared Services. We also requested that organisational development be looked at in more detail at a future meeting.
43. In response to our questions, we were provided with an overview of the work of the South Ribble Together Community Hub and the Holiday Hunger Scheme and any financial implications for the Council.
44. We also discussed the mental health support for youth project and queried the timescales for the delivery of this. In response, we were assured that development would progress quickly in 2021 and that other support networks and mechanism were in place in the meantime.
45. We were pleased to note that the support programme would be offered to those aged up to 24 years but asked that the timeframes involved the delivery of the programme be reviewed.
46. With regards to the percentage of 16 and 17-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET), we were assured that several Council initiatives such as the Apprentice Factory and partnerships with schools and local businesses were in place to improve access to opportunities for young people.
47. We noted the report and thanked the Leader, Interim Chief Executive and Shared Services Lead for Partnerships and Transformation for their attendance.

South Ribble Corporate Framework Review

48. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Paul Foster, and the Shared Services Lead – Partnerships and Transformation, Vicky Willett, presented a report on the outcomes of a review into the Council's Corporate Performance Framework.

49. We requested that performance information on other Council services, such as missed bin collections, be more explicitly reflected in the Framework and were advised that detailed breakdowns of performance in each service could be provided to the Panel to allow us to decide what to assess further.
50. We also queried the accuracy and reliability of the data and were informed that all performance measures were subject to a robust review process.
51. We noted the report and thanked the Leader and Shared Services Lead for Transformation and Partnerships for their attendance.

Budget Monitoring 2020-21 Quarter 2

52. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets, Councillor Matthew Tomlinson, and the Section 151 Officer, James Thomson, presented a report on the performance of the budget outturn at the end of Quarter 2.
53. Discussion largely focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and we questioned the current budgetary implications of support provided by the council. In response, we were advised that the situation was superfluous but that £20 million had been provided to support businesses during the initial lockdown earlier in the year and additional funding from central government was anticipated to cover the second lockdown period.
54. We welcomed the Cabinet Member's suggestion of incorporating all COVID-19-related financial information into one report in the interests of transparency and ease of monitoring.
55. We queried how the savings target of £187,000 identified in the report would be achieved. This figure was noted as target savings from Shared Services but we were informed that, due to issues in Human Resources, these savings would not be met. A report detailing proposals for further savings would be considered at the next Full Council meeting.
56. We wondered if a further cut could be made to the garden waste charges as the income was more than expected but were advised that, although the reduced charge had led to an increase in subscriptions, the Cabinet Member was confident in the appropriacy of the current £25 fee.
57. Similarly, we noted a deficit in income from court summons and were informed that this was a result of courts being closed due to the pandemic but also because of the need for sensitivity and compassion during the COVID-19 outbreak.
58. Discussion largely focused on staff vacancies and the progress of recruiting a second Enforcement Officer and Head of Licensing was queried. We also questioned whether the Museum Curator would be replaced following his retirement earlier this year.
59. We also sought assurances on the number of vacancies within the Governance directorate. Although some concern was acknowledged, it was felt that there was no impact on ability to deliver services.

60. With regards to the review of reserves, work is still ongoing, and we look forward to learning the results of the review as part of next year's budget process.
61. We were also pleased to note the Cabinet Member's confidence in the current delivery of the capital programme.
62. We noted the report and thanked the Cabinet Member and the Section 151 Officer for their attendance.

Recommendation(s)

That Council note the report.

COUNCILLOR DAVID HOWARTH
CHAIR OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
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