

Report of Scrutiny Committee

1. This report summarises the business considered at the meetings of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel held on 14 June 2021 and the Scrutiny Committee held on 13 July 2021.

Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel – 14 June 2021

Quarter 4 (January-March 2021) Performance Monitoring Report 2020-21

2. The Leader of the Council presented a report on the Council's performance against the delivery of the Corporate Strategy projects and objectives during Quarter 4 (January-March 2021).
3. We queried the delay in the South Ribble Together Hubs project and were advised that this was due to the inability to engage with the public due to the pandemic. The Chief Executive indicated that the Council would follow Government guidance and progress the project as soon as possible.
4. We noted that there remained a high demand for food banks throughout the borough and welcomed work on the Food Bank Network which would promote partnership working to deliver resources through a variety of service outlets.
5. We welcomed progress on the Community Wealth Building Action Plan projects, especially the South Ribble Credit Union and the Social Value Portal. Further work would be done in embedding the social value element into the Leyland Town Deal.
6. We queried the 3 month delay of decarbonisation work at the borough's leisure centres and were advised that this revolved around funding opportunities with time needed to submit the bids.
7. We welcomed confirmation by the Leader that the long-term future strategy for the leisure centres would be considered by the Council.
8. We discussed the creation of more affordable housing and were informed that land and sustainability had presented issues regarding this. We were pleased to note that it was a top priority for the Cabinet and that new sites were being actively pursued.
9. We queried the length of time to approve Disabled Facilities Grants although one case had impacted the performance indicator. We acknowledged that partnership working would be required to reduce waiting times generally and we wished the Council well in the partnership discussions. We also asked to be kept updated on progress.
10. We welcomed the numerous ways in which the Council is being proactive to support the health and wellbeing of staff, particularly during the pandemic, including regular 1-2-1s with line managers, the staff wellbeing survey, and management development training for managers.

Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring 2020-21 Outturn

11. The Cabinet Member (Finance, Property and Assets) and the Director of Finance presented an update on the Council's overall financial position at the end of Quarter 4 of the 2020-21 financial year.

12. We queried staff vacancies, particularly 2 engineering posts, and were advised that the Capital Programme had expanded to a larger programme of work and therefore different skills were required.
13. We noted future plans to fill a vacant post within Planning Enforcement and to develop the area further. We acknowledged that it was difficult to source certain skills as the private sector could offer higher salaries. A hybrid model was being implemented, with local staff carrying out the more straightforward enforcement work and the Council outsourcing specialist skills for more complex cases.
14. We welcomed the reassurance that staff vacancies are not impacting on service delivery in key areas.
15. We queried the increase in provision for bad debt and were assured that the Council was being prudent and making provisions in response to the uncertainties created by the pandemic.
16. We sought clarification on the process of setting the level of reserves which would be increased significantly at the request of the Cabinet. We welcomed assurances that senior staff are robustly challenged and have to justify the figures.
17. We were informed that a substantial element of the increase in reserves over the course of the year would come from government funding for business rates.
18. We were also advised that the budget for the repair and maintenance of leisure centres had been planned and that works would be underway.
19. We queried the actions being taken to ensure delivery of the Capital Programme as planned. We noted that this had been affected by the pandemic and that some projects would need to be reprofiled.

Scrutiny Committee – 13 July 2021

Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Report

20. The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing (Councillor Mick Titherington), Director of Communities, Community Safety and Safeguarding Manager, and Chief Inspector of Lancashire Constabulary presented an update on the work of the Community Safety Partnership.
21. Overall, crime figures had decreased, and the Cabinet Member emphasised that South Ribble remained a safe place to live.
22. We were particularly interested in what the CSP had learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic and were advised that the reliance on the Partnership and the level of collaboration between partners had been noted especially. The Chief Inspector also commented that the unpredictability of demand for assistance and the need to be flexible with this fluidity had been recognised.
23. We queried how the Partnership ensures good governance and it was confirmed that robust governance measures are in place and that these are well-documented and publicly available.

24. We questioned why South Ribble and Chorley CSPs had indicated that a thematic model for Lancashire was their preferred approach, given the usual practice of a geographic neighbourhood model typically adopted by South Ribble. Reassurances were provided in response that this would only apply to the wider Lancashire Community Safety Partnership and would have no impact on the CSP in South Ribble. It was advised that a thematic model was preferred to fully utilise the specialisms of officers within the Partnership.
25. We were informed that a decline in reoffending rates was viewed as the main indicator of the success of the Integrated Offender Management scheme and welcomed the Chief Inspector's offer to provide figures on this after the meeting.
26. We also acknowledged the success of Community Protection Warnings, with only 10 of 51 being escalated to Community Protection Notices and 1 Fixed Penalty Notice.
27. We were interested to hear the extent to which Domestic Homicide Reviews are conducted independently from the Council and how lessons are learned from such Reviews. We were advised that Reviews are chaired independently and then verified by the Home Office with the possibility of further assessment before publication.
28. Further clarification on the work of the South Ribble Integrated Team (SRIT) was also requested and we were informed that each local area has their own Integrated Team, although it was acknowledged that some are more advanced.
29. We were pleased to note that discussions were ongoing regarding engagement between the CSP and My Neighbourhood Community Hubs and that there had been a commitment from the police to attend Community Hub meetings where required. The CSP would also have an annual conference, which members would be invited to attend.
30. We asked that the Community Safety Partnership works more closely with the Council's Community Hubs and encouraged the police to engage with elected Members more as part of their feedback model.
31. We focused slightly on catalytic converter theft, which was acknowledged as a significant issue by the Chief Inspector. The police were in receipt of funding to provide catalytic converter theft marking kits to previous victims and owners of targeted vehicles, which are provided free of charge although recipients are politely asked to provide a small donation to charity.
32. We noted that the Council had implemented many road safety schemes, such as Bikeability and bike maintenance workshops but we requested that the Community Safety Partnership considers what more can be done to improve road safety and reduce road casualties and deaths in the borough.
33. We welcomed confirmation that Speed Indicator Devices (SpIDS) had been rolled out across the borough and that these could be relocated as needed. Members should contact the Director of Communities if they know of any speeding hotspots where a SpID would be of benefit.
34. We queried the possibility of a new prison being developed just outside of South Ribble, to which the Chief Inspector and Director of Communities advised that this had not yet been discussed by the CSP.

35. We also welcomed assurances that the crime rates within the borough are comparable to those of similar demographics and that Lancashire Constabulary are well-prepared for a 'Black Swan' event of multiple major incidents occurring at once.
36. We thanked the Cabinet Member, the Director of Communities, Community Safety and Safeguarding Manager and Chief Inspector of Lancashire Constabulary for their attendance.

Climate Emergency Action Plan

37. The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing (Councillor Mick Titherington), Lead Member for Climate Change (Councillor Keith Martin), Director of Communities and Senior Environmental Health Officer presented the Climate Emergency Action Plan and responded to our queries and comments.
38. We commended the Climate Emergency Task Group for developing the Climate Emergency Action Plan and welcomed reassurance that partners have been engaged in the development of the action plan.
39. We requested further information on the financial implications of the action plan and were informed that there would need to be significant investment in the projects highlighted within the plan. Each individual scheme would be costed, and officers would submit bids for grant funding.
40. We welcomed the commitment to reviewing each action to ensure it is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) and look forward to further detail on this.
41. We queried how the action plan will be monitored to ensure delivery and were advised that performance indicators and potential risks would be developed and identified. The schemes within the action plan would be incorporated into quarterly performance monitoring reports as part of the Green Agenda and considered by the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel.
42. We questioned how we as members can champion the action plan and help to tackle the climate emergency and it was suggested that we could broadcast and promote the action plan; petition the government for change; scrutinise the work on climate change undertaken by external partners; and create our own climate emergency action plans within our My Neighbourhood Community Hub areas. The committee encourages members to take personal responsibility in helping to tackle the climate emergency.
43. We also noted that discussions were underway with the council's procurement team to incorporate consideration of climate change impacts when awarding procurement contracts.
44. We welcomed assurances that the council has the knowledge, skills and capacity to deliver the action plan and were informed that any additional resources would be reliant on receiving funding.
45. We queried how the council would enforce the measures identified within the action plan without any real legal power and were told in response that the council would endeavour to promote the action plan and persuade residents to engage with the projects within it.

46. We also welcomed confirmation that there would be a Member Briefing on the action plan prior to it being considered at Full Council and asked that a report on the successes of the Air Quality Action Plan from 2018 be provided.
47. We thanked the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, Lead Member for Climate Change, Director of Communities and Senior Environmental Health Officer for their attendance.

Worden Hall Progress Update

48. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets (Councillor Mick Titherington), the Director of Commercial and the Service Lead for Development presented a progress update on the Worden Hall project and responded to our queries and comments.
49. We welcomed the progress made since the last update and the confirmation that the project remained on-track to be completed in time for Leyland Festival in the summer of 2022.
50. We noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted costs and material supply within the construction industry and that this could have some effect on the project's budget.
51. We asked for confirmation of the intention for the revenue model to break-even and create a surplus and this was provided by the Cabinet Member.
52. We were also advised that several fixed contracts had been introduced into the scheme, including an additional retail space, to meet demand and gain further income.
53. We expressed slight concern over the additional backlog of maintenance and how this had been unaccounted for during earlier surveys. In response, it was explained that such repairs had been identified in the preparatory work but that they were more significant than originally anticipated.
54. We queried what progress could be expected by the next update and were advised that the contract for the works will have been awarded with contractors on site. Hopes that visible progress would be apparent were also expressed.
55. We had previously requested a site visit to the Hall to see the works in progress, but this had been postponed due to the pandemic. As restrictions are now easing, we look forward to taking the Cabinet Member up on his offer of a site visit to Worden Hall to view the project.
56. We thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets, the Director of Commercial and the Service Lead for Development for their attendance.

Recommendation(s)

That Council note the report.

COUNCILLOR DAVID HOWARTH
CHAIR OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
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