

Report of Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel

1. This report summarises the business considered at the meeting of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel held on 13 September 2021.

Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel – 13 September 2021

Quarter 1 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 1 (April-June 2021).
3. We welcomed the progress made in the quarter, with 11 of 14 projects on-track and 3 rated amber.
4. We received further information on the anticipated outcomes of shared services in customer services and ICT across South Ribble and Chorley Councils and were keen to learn whether the recent technical issues experienced with IT had been rectified, to which confirmation was provided that these had not been fully resolved but that sufficient workarounds were in place.
5. We also queried the rationale for merging the South Ribble Partnership and the Chorley Public Service Reform Board and were advised that consultation had taken place with all partners and that there had been a consensus that a single strategic partnership for South Ribble and Chorley would be of greater benefit.
6. We welcomed assurances that the single strategic partnership would remain being scrutinised in the future and that there would be potential for joint scrutiny with Chorley Council.
7. We expressed slight concern that staff vacancies and skills gaps were causing delays in the delivery of the Joint Digital Strategy but were assured that a recent restructure had filled most positions. It was also suggested that the project could get back on track by 'buying in' expertise.
8. We noted that the percentage of households living in fuel poverty in South Ribble was lower than the national average but requested that the key performance indicator be reviewed as part of the next refresh of the corporate strategy to be more challenging.
9. We commended the work of the mental health support programme for young people alongside the Community Conversations and asked for further information on the number of young people engaging with these and the link being made between the events and mental health support.
10. We also requested further examples of outcomes from the Community Hubs and the proposed method for evaluating success as well as a detailed report to be provided to the Scrutiny Committee on the progress of the Community Wealth Building Action Plan.
11. Further information on the take-up rates of the Credit Union was also requested.

12. Following a query regarding the suspension of pre-planning advice due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we asked for a further update.
13. We also requested further information on response times to customer service calls following feedback about long wait times from members and residents.
14. We thanked the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive for their attendance.

Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 1

15. The Leader of the Council and the Director of Finance presented an update on the Council's overall financial position at the end of Quarter 1 of the 2021-22 financial year.
16. We welcomed the new user-friendly layout of the report, following member feedback.
17. We queried the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Council and were advised that there had been a slight impact but that the Council remained in a strong financial position.
18. We expressed some concern over an understatement on payments to the Lancashire Pension Fund and queried how this had not been noticed sooner. In response, we were advised that the Pension Fund had only just completed reconciliation works but the Director of Finance remained confident in the Council's ability to breakeven in the current financial year.
19. We also noted that a review into the Council's earmarked reserves being undertaken by the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets was making steady progress.
20. We discussed vacancies in the Neighbourhoods team and how this impacted service delivery and were informed that performance within this directorate remained relatively good and that interim arrangements were in place for those vacancies.
21. We questioned the consultation methods used during the refurbishment of playgrounds and were informed that members and residents were fully engaged and that a new consultation process had been recently adopted.
22. We requested further information on the refurbishment of the Birch Avenue playground in Penwortham.
23. The deliverability of the capital programme by the end of the financial year was also questioned and confidence was expressed in this. Some challenges were acknowledged but we were assured that a number of schemes had made great progress so far.
24. We thanked the Leader of the Council and Director of Finance for their attendance.

Recommendation(s)

That Council note the report.

Councillor David Howarth
Chair of Scrutiny Committee
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