

Minutes of Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel

Meeting date Monday, 13 September 2021

Members present: Councillors David Howarth (Chair), Will Adams, Colin Coulton, Colin Sharples and Karen Walton

Cabinet members: Councillor Paul Foster (Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member (Strategy and Reform) and Leader of the Labour Group) and Councillor Michael Titherington (Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member (Health and Wellbeing) and Deputy Leader of the Labour Group)

Officers: Gary Hall (Chief Executive), Louise Mattinson (Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer), Victoria Willett (Service Lead - Transformation and Partnerships), Howard Anthony (South Ribble Partnership Manager), Darren Cranshaw (Shared Services Lead - Democratic, Scrutiny & Electoral Services) and Charlotte Lynch (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Other members: Councillor Margaret Smith

Public: 0

42 Apologies for absence

None.

43 Declarations of interest

None.

44 Minutes of the meeting Monday, 14 June 2021 of Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel

Resolved: (unanimously)

That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Monday, 14 June 2021, be approved as a correct record for signing by the Chair.

45 Matters arising from previous Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel meetings

Members of the Panel received a report which provided updates on the progress of recommendations made at previous meetings of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel.

A further update, relating to a recommendation about the deliverability of the capital programme, was provided verbally and would be included in future versions of the Matters Arising document.

Resolved: (unanimously)

That

1. the matters arising from previous meetings of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel be noted; and
2. all actions remain on the report for further updates.

46 Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring Report 2021-22

The Panel considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive which outlined the Council's performance against the delivery of the Corporate Strategy projects and objectives during Quarter 1 (April to June 2021).

Overall, performance of the projects was good with 11 of 14 projects on-track and 3 rated amber. Of 24 key performance indicators (KPI's), 3 were rated green, 2 rated red and 2 yet to be baselined and the Panel welcomed the progress made in the quarter.

The Panel put questions to the Leader, Chief Executive and Shared Services Lead for Transformations, including the anticipated outcomes of shared services in customer services and ICT across South Ribble and Chorley Councils.

In response to this, members were advised that sharing these services would result in the upskilling of staff; improving access to information; improved infrastructure such as internet connectivity; software improvements; and an upgrade of IT systems and infrastructure to aid in the delivery of the Joint Digital Strategy.

Members were also keen to learn whether the recent technical issues experienced with IT had been rectified, to which the issues were acknowledged and confirmation provided that these had not been fully resolved but that sufficient workarounds were in place.

The rationale for merging the South Ribble Partnership and the Chorley Public Service Reform Board was queried, with members asking about the consultation and decision-making of this.

It was stated 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, particularly when engaging with partners on a bigger scale.

Members 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.

Slight concern was experienced that staff vacancies and skills gaps were causing delays in the delivery of the Joint Digital Strategy but assurances were provided that

a recent restructure had filled most positions. It was also suggested that the project could get back on track by 'buying in' expertise.

The panel 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.

The work of the mental health support programme for young people alongside the Community Conversations was commended and the panel asked for further information on the number of young people engaging with the Community Conversations and the link being made between the events and mental health support.

In response to further discussion on mental health support, it was advised that some officers and members had commenced mental health first aid training and that it was hoped that this could be offered to more members and officers soon.

Members also queried if the success of the Community Hubs could be measured more robustly and were advised that an annual review would commence in the coming months to determine the further development of the Hubs. The panel requested further examples of outcomes from the Hubs and the proposed method for evaluating success.

Members were also pleased to note the progress of the Community Wealth Building Action Plan and requested that a detailed report be provided to the Scrutiny Committee.

Further information on the take-up rates of the Credit Union were also requested.

In response to a query regarding the suspension of pre-planning advice due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was suggested that this should be resume shortly and a further update would be provided to members.

Concern was also raised that residents and members were experiencing long wait times when calling the Council's customer services. Assurances were provided to the panel that this is monitored regularly and current data suggests drastic improvement but further information on response times would be provided.

Resolved: (unanimously)

That the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel:

1. thanks the Leader and Chief Executive for attending and for their detailed report;
2. welcomes the performance report and progress made in the first quarter of the year;
3. is grateful for the commitment for the new single strategic partnership to be scrutinised in the future and potential for joint scrutiny;

4. asks that the key performance indicator for fuel poverty be reviewed as part of the next refresh of the corporate strategy;
5. looks forward to receiving further information on the number of young people engaged in the community conversations and the link being made with mental health;
6. welcomes the offer of further examples of the outcome from the community hubs in future reports and the proposed evaluation;
7. asks that a report on the progress of the Community Wealth Building Action Plan be considered by the Scrutiny Committee;
8. looks forward to future reports including credit union take-up; and
9. is grateful for the offer of an update on the pre-planning advice services resuming and customer service response times

47 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 1

The Panel considered a report of the Director of Finance which provided an update on the Council's overall financial position as at 31 July 2021/22.

It was explained that the format of the report had been revised, following feedback from members previously, and the panel welcomed the new user-friendly layout.

Members were interested to note the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Council and were advised that this had resulted in a slight decline in council tax collections and had impacted sales fees and charges.

However, it was assured that the Council remained in a strong financial position and that an extra £200,000 income from government offsets had been beneficial.

Some concern was expressed over an understatement on payments to the Lancashire Pension Fund, which would be managed by additional contributions amounting to £386,000.

In response to a query as to how this understatement had not been noticed sooner, the panel was advised that the Pension Fund had only just completed reconciliation works. However, the Director of Finance remained confident in the Council's ability to breakeven in the current financial year.

It was 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.

Discussion also focused on vacancies in the Neighbourhoods team and how this impacted service delivery.

It was stated that performance within this directorate remained relatively good and that interim arrangements were in place for those vacancies.

The panel 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.

Further information was requested on the refurbishment of the Birch Avenue playground in Penwortham and a commitment to providing this after the meeting was given.

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 members were assured that a number of schemes had made great progress so far.

Resolved: (Unanimously)

The Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel:

1. thanks the Leader and Director of Finance for attending and presenting the detailed report;
2. welcomes the new user-friendly layout and format of the report;
3. is grateful for the commitment to engagement and consultation with regards the playground refurbishment programme; and
4. asks for an update on the timescales involved in completing Birch Avenue Playground.

Chair

Date