

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 15 November 2021.

Corporate Strategy Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report, Quarter Two 2021/22

2. The Chief Executive and the Shared Services Lead for Transformation and Partnerships presented update on the Council's performance against the delivery of the Corporate Strategy projects and objectives during Quarter 2 (July-September 2021).
3. We welcomed progress made within the quarter, with 11 of 14 projects on-track and one rated amber.
4. We queried the processes in place to ensure the validity of the data and welcomed the reassurance that the Council has robust data quality policies and procedures in place.
5. We had some concerns over staff vacancies and the impact this may have on the delivery of the Joint Digital Strategy. It was acknowledged that a review of the Council's IT department had been undertaken and appointments to vacancies would take place shortly. Delivery of the Joint Digital Strategy had continued, with the implementation of Sharepoint and work on Planning software.
6. We also welcomed assurances that residents would still be able to have face-to-face and telephone contact with the Council, despite the development of self-service channels.
7. We commended the Council for having a greater overall employment rate than the North West average but requested that future performance indicators choose more appropriate comparators which are similar to South Ribble in terms of geography, affluence and demographic.
8. We welcomed a commitment to share the outcomes of the recent Chorley and South Ribble Partnership Economic Summit with members.
9. We expressed slight concern over it taking an average of 21 days to process a new Housing Benefits claim and queried what could be done to improve this. It was acknowledged that additional resources were needed, and that digitisation was key to enable data transfer which would ultimately expedite the process.
10. It was noted that 27,500 trees had been planted in South Ribble in 2021 and further information was requested on how those which survive and thrive are monitored and managed and the length of time it would take for these trees to mature.
11. We commended the work of the Planning department for deciding on 100% of major planning applications within 13 weeks and asked that their congratulations be passed onto staff
12. We thanked the Chief Executive and the Shared Services Lead – Transformation and Partnerships for their attendance.

Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring

13. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets and the Director of Finance presented an update on the Council's revenues and reserves and overall financial position as at 30 September 2021.
14. We queried the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Council's finances and were informed that the Council had benefitted from central government funding, which both compensated for income lost from fees and charges and reimbursed the Council for the redeployment of staff to frontline roles.
15. Clarification was sought as to a surplus of £149,000 on housing benefit subsidy and we suggested that this could be utilised to improve the time taken to process new claims.
16. We acknowledged the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on recruiting apprentices, which currently had an underspend of £44,000, and requested an update on the current position of apprenticeships within the Council and how this underspend could be reduced.
17. We also received clarification on the Net Interest Receivable/Payable overspend.
18. We thanked the Cabinet Member and staff for the site visit to Worden Hall which had been held in the previous week.
19. We thanked the Cabinet Member 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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