

Report of Scrutiny Committee

1. This report summarises the business considered at the meetings of the Scrutiny Committee held on 17 March 2022 and the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel held on 21 March 2022.

Scrutiny Committee – 17 March 2022

Shared Services Update

2. The Leader of the Council and the Deputy Chief Executive attended the meeting to present an update on the shared services arrangements with Chorley Council.
3. We welcomed the achievement, progress and improvements made as a result of Shared Services but queried if the Council would consider sharing services with other authorities than Chorley where applicable. In response, the Leader confirmed that the administration would be open to this.
4. We queried how the different cultures of each authority are recognised and maintained and the sovereignty and individual priorities of each authority were emphasised.
5. We were keen to note any challenges experienced through shared services and what lessons had been learnt. Challenges in the reorganisation of the Council's IT and Gateway services were acknowledged and lessons around communication to and with staff were recognised.
6. We asked that the individual examples of issues concerning ICT systems be investigated further but felt reassured that the Council is aware of the issues with the Customer Services and ICT review and that steps are being taken to resolve these.
7. We asked what measures were being taken to improve these services and it was explained that an additional £1.2 million had been allocated to improve IT hardware and that extra resourcing within Gateway had recently improved the call waiting time to an average of 1 minute.
8. We suggested undertaking joint scrutiny of shared services with Chorley Council's Scrutiny Committee, which the Leader supported.
9. Whilst we welcomed confirmation that a review of management capacity was underway, we queried capacity at other levels and assurances were provided that this is constantly monitored through business planning, monthly Directorate Management Teams (DMT) meetings and weekly Senior Management Team meetings.
10. We questioned which services were earmarked for the next phase of shared services, to which the Leader and Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that no decision had been made on this yet.
11. We noted that all risks within the Shared Services Risk Register were marked as either amber or green and queried whether this was realistic given the significance of the programme. In response, we were advised that the Risk Register reflected the view of the Council's Risk team and that amber represented a medium-level risk.
12. We thanked the Leader of the Council and the Deputy Chief Executive for their report and attendance.

Urgent Decisions

13. We received a report of the Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer which outlined a number of urgent decisions taken since 7 January 2022 in accordance with the urgency procedures outlined within the Council's Constitution.
14. We noted that 6 urgent decisions had been submitted during this period.
15. We queried why 3 decisions on Mutual Agreements had been taken under the General Exception Procedure and it was explained that this was due to the confidential nature and personal information contained within the report, but assurances were provided that such process is lawful and is discussed with union representatives.
16. We reiterated concerns made previously over the number of urgent decisions taken and requested information on the use of urgent decisions at other authorities.

Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel – 21 March 2022

Corporate Strategy Quarterly Monitoring Report – Quarter 3

17. The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive presented a report which outlined the Council's performance against the delivery of the Corporate Strategy projects and objectives during Quarter 3 (October-December 2021).
18. We noted that overall performance of the projects and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) was good.
19. The report referred to a digitisation review within the Planning department and we queried whether this had already been done with the Planning Portal system. It was clarified, in response, that the digitisation review would incorporate a different software to the Planning Portal to enable tracking and management of applications.
20. We also raised issues around being unable to access the Planning Portal to view and make representations on planning applications and asked that an update be provided on the technical issues outside of the meeting.
21. We noted that the delivery of the joint digital strategy was identified as amber/delayed queried if this should be marked instead as red or off-track. It was explained that the rating of project performance is the judgement of officers and that fundamental changes in resourcing and progress would be reported in the next quarter, which we looked forward to.
22. We also requested that further ICT training be made available to Members.
23. We sought clarification on the impact of self-service channels on the number of telephone calls and in-person visits to Gateway. Although the call abandonment rate had recently improved to 4%, more detailed customer service performance data would be included in the next quarterly report, which we welcomed.
24. We noted that many of the projects within the 'Thriving Communities' corporate priority related to young people and queried what support and programmes were available for the

wider population. We were assured in response that the My Neighbourhood Community Hubs provide a range of support to their wider communities and that this would be identified in a Cabinet update report on the Hubs.

25. We also expressed a desire for future quarterly performance reports to provide examples of successes from across the Borough.
26. Our discussion focused around the Community Wealth Building programme and we queried the tangible benefits of the programme. We were advised that a social value portal for procurement had been established, training delivered to officers and suppliers and that a credit union had opened in Leyland. We felt that clarification was needed that the Council had established a credit union branch in Leyland and asked that the report be updated to reflect this.
27. We also requested that further consideration be given to communicating the roles of the county council and district council and the service they provide to ensure clarity amongst residents.
28. We commended the Council's efforts in bringing the management of leisure centres in-house and in forming the leisure company.
29. We thanked the Leader and Chief Executive for their report and attendance.

Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Quarter 3

30. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets and the Chief Executive presented a report which provided an update on the Council's revenues and reserves forecast as at 31 January 2022.
31. We queried if the Council had the capacity and resources to deliver the activities allocated for in the reserve accounts and some issues with capacity were acknowledged but the Corporate Strategy was felt to be realistic.
32. We welcomed assurances that agency staff were being recruited and some employees redeployed to minimise impact on services where there were significant underspends, such as IT, Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits and Neighbourhoods.
33. We thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets and the Chief Executive for their report and attendance.

Capital Budget Monitoring Report Quarter 3

34. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets and the Chief Executive presented a report which outlined the overall financial position of the Council in respect of the capital programme as at 31 January 2022.
35. We queried the Cabinet Member's confidence in the delivery of the capital programme and were advised that they remained very confident in the council's current ability to deliver projects.
36. We also asked why the parks and playgrounds budget had been reprofiled and the delivery delayed to next year and it was explained that this was due to a variety of reasons, including consultation feedback.

37. We thanked the Cabinet Member and the Chief Executive for their attendance and report.

Recommendation(s)

That Council note the report.

Councillor David Howarth
Chair of Scrutiny Committee

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