

Minutes of **Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee**

Meeting date **Wednesday, 8 November 2023**

Members present: Councillors Will Adams (Chair), Michael Green (Vice-Chair), Will King, Nicky Peet, Haydn Williams and Angela Turner

Officers: Darren Cranshaw (Head of Democratic Services) and Ben Storey (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Guests: Councillor Aniela Bylinski Gelder (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Property, Assets, Commercial Services & Major Developments)), Councillor Paul Foster (Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member (Policy, Reform & Communications)), Councillor Matthew Tomlinson (Cabinet Member (Finance and Public Protection)), Chris Sinnott (Chief Executive), Kim Rennie (Interim Deputy Chief Executive) and Neil Halton (Principal Management Accountant)

Other members: Councillors Keith Martin, James Gleeson, Emma Stevens, Jacky Alty, Clare Hunter and attending virtually Councillors Caleb Tomlinson, Pete Pillinger, Phil Smith, Karen Walton, Damian Bretherton, Kath Unsworth, Jane Bell and Lou Jackson.

Other officers: Alan Coar (Head of Operational Assets), Hollie Walmsley (Head of Human Resources) Polly Patel (Performance and Partnerships Manager) and attending virtually Adam Nickson (Head of Property and Development)

Public: 0

21 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Howarth who was substituted by Councillor Angela Turner.

22 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Michael Green declared a personal interest in item 6 – Quarter Two Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24 as a current Cabinet Member of Lancashire County Council who administer some of the funding for various projects mentioned within the report, and also as a member of Active Lancashire Board.

Councillor Haydn Williams declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest in item 5 - Assets and Asset Management as he currently has a contract with the Council to provide bar services at events held at the Civic Centre and also leases a property from the Council.

The Council's Code of Conduct allows members to remain in the meeting and fully participate where a personal, and not a prejudicial or pecuniary interest, is declared.

23 Minutes of meeting Monday, 11 September 2023 of Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the minutes of the last meeting, held on Monday 11 September 2023, be agreed as an accurate record for signing by the Chair.

24 Scrutiny Recommendations Update

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the updates on previous recommendations of the Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee be noted and any completed actions be removed from the table.

25 Assets and Asset Management

The Chair welcomed the Deputy Leader of the Council and the Interim Deputy Chief Executive to the meeting and invited the Deputy Leader to present the report looking at the Council's assets and how they are managed.

The Committee heard a summary of the work the service are responsible for and heard about plans to maximise the Council's assets moving forward. A key part of this involved a new property management system which would enable better management of the Council's assets through more efficient processes around rents, utility usage, safety checks and monitoring of occupancy levels. Significant progress had been made to address the concerns highlighted in earlier audit reports with the service now fully staffed and a five year action plan now in place to drive improvements.

On progress with the Penwortham Masterplan, the Committee heard that the next stage would be to appoint a lead design consultant to develop the plan from RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) Stage 2 through to Stage 4 at which point construction can commence – a report is expected at the December meeting of Cabinet to undertake this.

The implementation period of the new property management system was queried and whether information gathered as part of the 2021 condition survey would be out of date. In response, Members heard that the survey had identified key pieces of work that would need addressing and that these were being addressed alongside the implementation of the new system, with both projects incorporated into the five year programme of work.

Health and safety concerns that had been raised in previous audit reports were highlighted and questions asked as to whether issues had been resolved with regards to the Council meeting their legal obligations. The Committee were provided reassurance that the legal responsibilities of the Council as landlords were being met, regular safety checks and maintenance work was being undertaken and welcomed confirmation of this and a further update at the next meeting. It was

anticipated that the new property management system would facilitate further improvements in managing all aspects of assets.

Members had queries over reducing rent arrears and the number of outstanding rent reviews. Whilst it was acknowledged that there was likely to be an uplift in revenue following rent reviews it was difficult to provide a timescale when this would be completed due to the ongoing and cyclical nature of negotiations. The Committee welcomed the offer to provide further information on rent arrears and the outstanding rent reviews.

The Committee sought further information on what procedures are in place to ensure positive relationships with tenants are achieved. Officers had been proactive in providing excellent customer service for tenants, with good communication and feedback key elements. Regular maintenance and safety checks in addition to a programme of improvement work in properties was also hoped to satisfy the needs of tenants and strengthen relationships.

Utility management had been improved with the recent procurement of a managed utility supply contract that had a number of benefits in managing providers, reducing costs through economies of scale and better monitoring of usage to inform the Council's climate targets. Following on from this it was confirmed that there was a stipulation that green energy be used with aspirations to procure energy directly from green energy providers such as wind and solar.

Clarity was sought over the use and purpose of a flexible procurement of commodities contract. Members were advised that this had been introduced to seek professional advice as to how best mitigate risks of a volatile market to ensure best value for money.

Following questions, confidence was expressed that the new Civica property management system would be completed within the 18 month timeframe. Although this would be the time expected for the transfer to the new system to be fully completed, it would still be operational as different modules are added and properties are transferred to it so the benefits would be seen on a gradual basis throughout the implementation process.

Responding to questions on performance indicators within the report, the Committee heard that the figures were targets. Income generation from the Civic Centre was currently on target but work was planned to enhance this through additional advertisement and a new booking system to support a better customer experience.

The Committee sought further information on the future strategy of the service and what the short, medium and long term plans were. In response, the Committee welcomed the offer of an update report in the next six months.

It was subsequently;

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee:

1. thanks the Deputy Leader and Interim Deputy Chief Executive for their detailed and well presented report and answering its questions;

2. is grateful for the offer of a further update on assets, including rent arrear data, rent review programme and progress on performance; and
3. feels re-assured that the previous health and safety issues identified had been addressed and requests that confirmation that our assets and estate a legally complaint is provided to the next meeting of the Committee.

26 Quarter Two Performance Monitoring Report 2023-24

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council, supported by the Chief Executive, to the meeting to present the most recent quarterly performance monitoring report.

The Committee heard that overall performance had been pleasing with the majority of projects and targets discussed within the report on or above target. Three key areas were highlighted, firstly the performance of Gateway had improved in the last quarter. Secondly, whilst the Leyland Town Deal project was rated as amber, a full update report, including decisions around procurements and land acquisitions was expected at Council in January. Confidence was expressed that the project would be delivered within current deadlines with the Council in a more favourable position than many other local authorities developing a Town Deal scheme. Finally, the Committee's attention was drawn to the demands around homelessness due to a number of factors including shortages of suitable accommodation. There had been a significant overspend in this area with options being explored on how to address the issue given limitations around resources.

The new social prescribing service was highlighted by the Committee, with questions asked about uptake and feedback since the team was established earlier in the year. Members heard that despite only being in place for a few months the social prescribers had had a positive impact in complementing the work of other teams, notably demonstrated in supporting those either presenting as homeless or threatened by homelessness around wider issues such as support with finances, employment or mental health. Referrals to the social prescribing team were received via the council's customer services team or through partner organisations such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau as well the through the Chorley and South Ribble Partnership. The Committee noted that discussions where ongoing with the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the Credit Union to increase availability of their services as demand rose. On a separate point, it was confirmed that the Household Support Fund was ready to be distributed as and where required.

Queries were raised whether there was funding available to deliver the Holiday and Food (HAF) programme in future years. It was acknowledged that there was uncertainty over central government funding for this scheme but if it were required then the Council would look to utilise its sports development and other teams to deliver its on Holiday Hunger scheme.

Following a question as to the current situation with the Family Wellbeing Centre, it was confirmed that despite the need for some additional refurbishment work, the centre was on track to open in January 2024.

In response to a query on what the Property and Asset Development Plan was, Members were informed that a plan was put in place for each service that became shared and covered areas such as aligning systems and procedures and integrating new teams.

Following a comment regarding the accommodation working group, the Committee heard that discussions were ongoing to look at how best to use the space in the Civic Centre, whether a reconfiguration could provide greater opportunities both in a commercial sense and in cost savings through more efficient use of the building.

The rationale behind the shared data and intelligence dashboard was to collate information gathered by the various partner organisations of the Chorley and South Ribble Partnership to better inform a strategic approach to targeting areas where a need was identified. The data include a wealth of information on a ward by ward basis covering areas like inequalities, health provisions and numbers of children in receipt of free school meals. The Committee were grateful for the offer of a demonstration of the data and intelligence dashboard.

The Committee welcomed improvements in performance around calls answered within 90 seconds and sought reassurance that this could be maintained during busier periods. Performance of Customer Services was being closely monitored with improvements linked to the team now being fully staffed. There would be challenges with increasing demand for council services but improvements had been made in how residents can access services online through self-service channels which would provide an efficient alternative to, and alleviate pressures of calls coming through the customer services. The Committee were thankful for the offer to include detailed customer service performance information with every other quarterly performance report.

On plans to expand the South Ribble Skills Factory, work was currently focused on building a wider network with businesses and other learning providers with the Council aiming to fill any gaps that may be identified. Specific mention was made to the number of 'green jobs' in the borough and how the Council could support opportunities in this area.

A number of questions were asked about measures in place to mitigate issues affecting neighbours in the vicinity of work being undertaken as part of the Leyland Town Deal project. A lot of engagement work had taken place throughout each stage of the work with officers taking a flexible approach in accommodating tenants and seeking to minimise disruption as much as possible. There had been changes to the proposed work that helped in this regard, was more cost effective and allowed tenants to operate as work progressed.

Despite the challenges presented by recent poor weather conditions, there had not been an impact on work progressing on the Jubilee Gardens development.

Falling numbers of health check screenings was highlighted by the Committee. It was reported that the Council had delivered what Active Lancashire had expected but as the funding available for the health screening scheme was being withdrawn it was unlikely this performance indicator would improve in future quarterly reports. Following further discussion, it was agreed that potential funding sources to extend

the health check screening programme be investigated and provided to the Committee.

Meeting the challenges of homelessness, increases in the number of people currently in temporary accommodation was highlighted. The Committee heard there was an increasing demand on the Council in this area and presented a significant challenge in how to tackle it. In addition, further demand was anticipated upon the imminent closure of hotels accommodating asylum seekers, with one such hotel in the borough. Members were grateful for the offer of including the numbers of people presenting as homeless within future performance reports. The Committee were keen to focus on addressing issues of homelessness and recommended the establishment of a scrutiny task group to explore the challenges of homelessness and temporary accommodation in the borough.

The Committee sought reassurance that given the collection rates for both council tax and business rates were off target, there would not be an impact on the Council's budget plans. The Council endeavoured to collect as much council tax and business rates as possible through the Fair Collection Charter policy but acknowledged that with issues such as higher utility costs and increased inflation this had had an impact on finances for residents and businesses.

It was subsequently;

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee;

1. thanks the Leader and Chief Executive for their report including the additional customer service performance information and answering its questions;
2. welcomes the initial feedback on the new social prescribing service;
3. is grateful for the offer of a demonstration of the partnership's data and intelligence dashboard;
4. requests that the detailed customer service performance information be provided to the Committee every six months;
5. asks that information be provided on any potential funding sources that could be used to continue the health check screening programme;
6. creates a task group to explore the challenges of homelessness and temporary accommodation in the Borough;
7. suggests that the Community and External Scrutiny Committee look at how our housing partners and others are working together to reduce housing waiting lists in South Ribble; and

8. asks that the council tax and business rate collection rate performance is reviewed and include trend information and comparisons with others.

27 Capital and Balance Sheet Monitoring Report - Quarter 2 2023/24

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member (Finance and Public Protection), supported by the Principal Management Accountant, to the meeting to present the most recent quarterly monitoring report on the Capital Programme and Balance Sheet. The Cabinet Member also introduced the subsequent item, Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Quarter Two 2023/24 and presented this concurrently.

The Cabinet Member highlighted several points in the report, noting that the Council's current debt position remained at zero, spending for some of the large projects was likely to be moved into the next financial year's budget and reassured the Committee that the collection rates for council tax and businesses rates was not a significant concern.

Queries around the reprofiling of the capital programme were raised. In response, Members were informed that main area of slippage was the two key projects, Jubilee Gardens and the Leyland Town Deal work. Although delays had been encountered there was optimism that both projects were now progressing. Responding to further concerns over reprofiling and slippage, the Committee heard that although it was disappointing not to be able to progress projects as planned, it did present opportunities for the treasury management team to utilise funds still in the Council's accounts to accrue interest.

In relation to the Penwortham Masterplan, Members heard that some spending had been allocated in this year's budget but the majority would move to the 2024/25 budget. The Committee welcomed the offer on an update of timescales for the procurement of consultants to progress the Masterplan to RIBA stages 3 and 4.

Recommendations for this agenda item are incorporated within the recommendations for the subsequent item, Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Quarter Two 2023/24.

28 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report - Quarter 2 2023/24

The Cabinet Member (Finance and Public Protection) highlighted positive changes in the revenue position since the last quarter with a predicted overspend reduced to circa £59,000. Other key points noted included overspends across all directorates with regards to staffing costs with the recent pay award being agreed, significantly higher costs for waste collection services and around homelessness than budgeted for. Grant funding of over £200,000 had also been received in quarter two which had helped to mitigate the overspends, as had around £100,000 additional revenue from the fleet maintenance contract with Chorley Council.

Increases in staffing costs as a result of the recent pay award referenced within the report was raised. It was acknowledged that the pay award had presented challenges to setting a budget, however a 5% increase had been budgeted for which placed the Council in a much better position to facilitate than many other local authorities. In relation to costs associated with agency staff – it was noted that this

can often be the best solution to complete bespoke pieces of work where specialised expertise may only be required for a short period of time, or as a short-term solution to recruitment challenges in the current environment.

Responding to concerns raised over meeting the demand for support around homelessness, a number of areas were noted in looking to address the issue, such as the Select Move system and working with housing providers in the borough but it was acknowledged that more needed to be done.

On the risk of funding from external grants needing to be returned, Members welcomed the offer to provide a list of grants and any deadlines to the Committee.

A key reason for costs increasing in the waste service was a result of incomplete information being provided at the time the contract was brought in-house, with staff wages higher than had been budgeted for. In addition, an increase in full time contracts and better terms and conditions was also a factor.

It was confirmed to Members that Worden Hall was now fully open and occupied following a period of renovation which would provide a revenue stream for the Council moving forward with several events already having been held in recent weeks. The Committee heard that the vision for the Hall included community use in addition to commercial use.

Further clarification was sought over the Covid recovery reserve. The Committee were informed that the £150,000 for the Music in the Park would be transferred to the 2024/25 budget. The £16,000 remaining in the Community Hub reserve had not been allocated and was expected to be carried forward to the following years Community Hub fund.

It was subsequently;

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee;

1. thanks the Cabinet Member and Principal Management Accountant for presenting the report and answering its questions;
2. asks for an update on the timescales for the next stage of the Penwortham Masterplan be provided to the Committee;
3. is grateful for the offer of further information being provided on the external funding budgets that are at risk of being returned and steps being taken to spend the budget; and
4. looks forward to more detailed information being provided on the COVID recovery reserve.

30 Meetings and training attended by Scrutiny Committee members

It was agreed that this item be deferred.

30a Cultural Strategy Task Group

It was agreed that this item be deferred.

31 Cabinet Forward Plan

It was agreed that this item be deferred.

32 Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

It was agreed that this item be deferred.

Chair

Date