

**Minutes of** **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date** **Thursday, 27 January 2022**

**Committee Members present:** Councillor John Walker (Chair), and Councillors Sarah Ainsworth, Julia Berry, Terry Howarth, June Molyneaux, James Nevett, Aidy Riggott, Kim Snape and Jenny Whiffen

**Committee Members present virtually (non-voting):** Councillors Roy Lees, John Dalton, Hasina Khan and Samir Khan

**Officers:** James Thomson (Deputy Director of Finance), Irene Elwell (Public Protection Team Leader) and Matthew Pawlyszyn (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

**22.OS.46 Minutes of Meeting Thursday, 30 September 2021 of Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

**22.OS.47 Minutes of Meeting Thursday 28 October 2021 of Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel**

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

**22.OS.48 Minutes of Meeting Thursday 16 December 2021 of Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel**

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

**22.OS.49 Minutes of Meeting Thursday 13 January 2022 of Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel**

Correction raised by Councillor James Nevett, in relation to the time credits, it was in reference to members of the public, not staff.

**22.OS.50 Declarations of Any Interests**

No declarations were made.

## **22.OS.51 Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

## **22.OS.52 Executive Cabinet Minutes**

The Executive Cabinet minutes were noted.

## **22.OS.53 Notice of Executive Decisions**

In response to an enquiry about the purchase of Yarrow Valley, it was confirmed that the Council planned to plant trees and to develop habitats and biodiversity.

Members cited difficulties in the presentation of the Notice of Executive Decisions and queried if there was an alternative format to present them to the Committee.

## **22.OS.54 Health Scrutiny Update**

Councillor Margaret France provided an update from the 16 November 2021, Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Meeting.

The focus of the meeting was the vaccination programme. At the start of November 2021, 80% of eligible residents received their first dose, and 70% had their second. Vaccine uptake for those aged between 12 and 15 remained low at 31%.

Due to low uptake of the vaccine by those with protected characteristics, efforts had been taken to expand vaccination sites to schools, shopping centres, homeless centres, and Gypsy and Traveler sites. Improved efforts were also made to engage with the Caribbean and African Health Network.

All eligible care homes in the County were visited to deliver vaccinations.

The figures showed that Lancashire had one of the highest vaccination uptakes in the UK.

The Health Scrutiny Committee received the report of the Steering Group. The hospital programme was to be reviewed once the list of 10 options had to be reduced to a shortlist.

Mental Health had been added to the 2021/22 Work Programme.

Members expressed concern that the clinic in Adlington had been closed since the start of the pandemic, transport to other clinics involved time and cost, and rumors had spread across the village impacting moral. It was explained that the transition and change of the local NHS structure significantly impacted decision making. It was unlikely that a decision relating to the clinic would be made until July 2022.

At the Teaching Hospital Trust, Council of Governors meeting, it was said that there was the intent for a new hospital programme. A longlist had been drawn up, but it was warned that the process was likely to be long and drawn out.

There was no general Nightingale Hospital update, but the Royal Preston Hospital was expected to create temporary ward of 60 beds for non-Covid medical patients that were unable to be discharged. A significant number of care homes had policies in place preventing any admissions for 28 days after a positive Covid-19 case.

## **22.OS.55 Budget Scrutiny**

The Committee welcomed Peter Wilson, Deputy Executive Leader, and Executive Member for Resources and James Thomson, Deputy Director of Finance to present the report.

Funding had continued to decrease since 2016, uncertainty had created challenges. It was hoped that the Council would receive a three-year settlement figure but instead received a 12-month retention notice, which included Business Rate and New Homes Bonus.

The income stream for the Council was just over £14 million. Projected to be £12.5 million in 2023 and 12.6 million in 2024. This resulted in a deficit of £2.2 million for the year which would increase to £4 million in 2023 and £4.3 million in 2024. The Council intended to bridge the gap with a consistent approach to savings.

The Councils approach to efficiency had made financial savings, and Shared Services was expected to save both Chorley and South Ribble significant figures.

The Council had gained income through investment sites such as Market Walk, Primrose Gardens, Strawberry Meadows, and Logistics House. With future sites to include Tatton Gardens, and the Whittle Health Hub.

The combination of efficiency savings, and investment revenue significantly reduced the deficit to £281,000 for this year and up to £1.9 million in 2023 and £2.2 million in 2024.

It was proposed that Council Tax increased by 1.99%. The fair funding review had yet to be released, but the process would include an assessment of the Council's core spending power with an assumption of a 2% yearly increase in Council Tax. With the 1.99% rise, the average band D rate would still be the second lowest rate in the County.

Members expressed caution about the rise of 1.99% Council Tax and cited concern about the additional increases which caused the cost of living to increase for all residents.

The investment priorities for 2022/2023 included £1.5 million revenue investment and over £40 million in capital investment. The investments aimed to either support the local economy, support Council priorities, or to support local communities.

The investment package provided a broad overview that matched residents' priorities. The Council considered the future and understood the risk of investment. The General Reserve Fund contained £4 million, which was to rise to £4.4 million. The Equalisation Reserve, which was to protect against any potential downturn equaled £1.2 million. The budget was believed to be balanced finely between resident interest and fiscal responsibility.

Members asked for additional details around 'special expenses' and how the calculations were made. It was acknowledged that it was not ideal, and the 'special expenses varied by each ward, the alternative was to have a flat rate across the borough and the money equally contributed and distributed.

The Council received £1.6 million of un-ringfenced grants which was originally planned to provide Covid-19 support but had since been put aside due to additional Covid-19 ringfenced support funding.

The leisure centre had a budget of £600,000, the running costs were overestimated, and was expected to break even. Significant time was taken to reorganise staff contracts, while Covid-19 restrictions were implemented and adhered to. The leisure centre held high confidence for profitability.

The Council continued to seek financial returns on assets both in the short and long term. It was acknowledged that Covid-19 had changed the approach to work, with the continuation of hybrid working, ongoing consideration was given for the Council's premises and spaces.

## **22.OS.56 Community Safety Partnership**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomed Irene Elwell, Public Protection Team Leader and Chief Inspector Chris Abbott of Lancashire Police to provide an overview of the Community Safety Partnership.

The previous Crime and Disorder report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2020. Within, it stated that the Council would actively engage with the Community Safety Partnership. In addition to Chorley Council and South Ribble Borough Council, the Community Safety Partnership was made up of the County Council, registered social landlords, drug and alcohol services, the Citizens Advice Bureau as well as volunteer, community, and faith groups.

For the previous two years, resources had been allocated to pandemic response and its implications, in addition to reducing knife crime, antisocial behaviour and Prevent work. It was accepted that during the pandemic, the Partnership had become reactive rather than proactive. A further update was offered to be presented at a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A new three-year Lancashire Strategic Assessment was recently published which included how crime impacted on community safety. Efforts had been taken to strengthen the Partnership, and the Responsibly Authorities Group had been reestablished to meet twice a year.

A Monthly priorities meeting to be held which featured an analyst report, identifying hotspots for crime and antisocial behaviour. The first meeting to take place the week commencing 31 January 2022. One of the first priorities was to develop an action plan for serious and organised crime referrals. Other fixed items on the agenda included safeguarding and Prevent.

To reduce knife crime and anti-social behaviour, Operation Edge was ongoing. The JJ Effect had been expanded into Chorley and South Ribble high schools, the programme in cooperation with the police provided support and education to young people around knife crime, grooming and criminal exploitation. To combat violence

against women, Operation Night Guardian was underway with plain clothed officers in premises to quickly respond to reports spiking. Lancashire Talking continued in target areas that lacked perceived police visibility to address concerns raised.

Overall, there had been an overall decrease in reports of crime, and antisocial behaviour in Chorley.

Members raised concerns of cross border crimes from Greater Manchester, car crime and drug dealing. With accounts of drug dealers targeting schoolchildren. It was stressed that every instance should be reported in order to build a case. Efforts have been made to prevent criminals crossing the border from Greater Manchester into Adlington. Arrests had been made relating to burglaries and car crime, including the suspects responsible for 56 burglaries in a week in the Bolton area venturing into Adlington. Further intelligence gathering was ongoing across the Borough.

The Rural Task Group was raised by Members and the role they played. It was clarified that the task group was only 4 officers. The productive Task Group had recently received an award for recovering more stolen plant and farming equipment than any other force in the country. It was recognised that the 4-person Rural Task Group could not engage with all 3000 farmers at once but encouraged further engagement and communication.

#### **22.OS.57 Magistrates and Transport**

Irene Elwell provided a verbal update from the Director of Communities in response to a query raised in a previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee about residents that attending magistrates' courts across Lancashire since the closure of the Court in Chorley.

The Council did not have significant involvement with supporting residents to attend Magistrates Courts. Instead it was noted that support was offered by the Court Service. The Council did provide support to Community Transport Services such as Dial-a-Ride. Members raised that Dial-a-Ride was used primarily by elderly people to their day to day activities and had previously spoken at the Sustainable Transport Task Group and explained their difficulty in recruiting drivers and it was believed that the service unlikely to be offering trips to courts.

#### **22.OS.58 Reports from the Task and Finish Groups**

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Select Move, Councillor June Molyneaux updated and informed the Committee that the Task Group had scoped the review, with the aim to build upon the previous Task Group that was conducted in 2014. The most recent Task Group invited from non-Task Group Members to share their experiences with Select Move.

The next Task Group will feature Preston and South Ribble Officers and Members, to share experiences and to explore any potential shared issues. The Task Group will also formulate questions to ask in a survey/questionnaire.

## **22.OS.59 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme**

Members raised an outstanding recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Sustainable Public Transport, the Cycling Task Group. As Select Move was chosen to be the task group, further consideration would be taken to best decide the format of the item.

Members wished to explore 'special expenses' relating to the budget for further information and explanation.

Related to access to school places, more detail had been provided about strategy for places. Further concerns were raised, with consideration for an item to be brought to a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was considered for an invite be made to Councillor Adrian Lowe, Executive Member (Customer and Streetscene Services) to attend a future Overview and Scrutiny provide an update relating to grass cutting for the following year.

Chair

Date