

REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

GENERAL REPORT

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met on 15 February and 22 March 2010. This report summarises briefly the principal items debated and decisions reached.

15 February Meeting

2010/11 Budget principles

2. We received the report of the Director of Transformation advising Members of the current forecast position for 2010/11 based upon the latest available information and the aspirations of the Executive Cabinet in relation to the 2010/11 budget.
3. The budget framework to be adopted by the Executive in constructing its budget based on the following principles:
 - Containing Council Tax increases
 - Protecting businesses from the ongoing impact of the recession
 - Continuing to provide value for money
 - Protecting front line services
 - Preparing for the future and the uncertainty over public finances
4. We discussed the report in full and raised several points with the Executive Member for Resources (Councillor Kevin Joyce).

Review of free swimming scheme

5. We received the report of the Director of People and Places presenting the usage information the first six months of the free swimming programme.
6. The scheme started on 1 April 2009 and will be reviewed in 31 March 2011. Free swims are available for customers aged sixteen and under and sixty plus, during public sessions, but not lessons. Six months into the programme usage is currently up by 30,251 (50%) overall for swimming, with juniors having increased by 13,012 (56%) and adults having increased by 17,239 (47%).
7. Despite initial concerns across both centres, paying adults (17-59) year olds have increased by 1,412 (4%) since last year. We welcomed the positive initial findings.

Business Plan Monitoring Statements

Partnerships, Planning and Policy Directorate

8. The Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy reported progress against the key actions and performance indicators.
9. Representatives from the Equality Forum and town centre traders have attended the Town Centre Vitality task and finish group. We expressed concerns regarding the lack of enforcement on advertising boards and certain market traders who encroach onto the footpath. Officers advised that the Council was currently in discussion with Lancashire County Council regarding advertising boards. Members agreed that a balanced approach would be needed.

10. We noted that the use of bed and breakfast is well under control with the focus being on homelessness prevention. The introduction of a desk at Chorley County Court on a Tuesday, to give people information and represent them regarding housing possession, is proving worth while.

People and Places Directorate

11. The Director of People and Places reported progress against the key actions and performance indicators.
12. We noted that the action plan for allotments will be produced in the final quarter to take account of funding provision and ensure that allotments are provided where the demand is.
13. The targets surrounding graffiti removal will be revisited next year to make them more representative. The target had not been met this quarter due to machine malfunction and inclement weather.

Transformation Directorate

14. The Director of People and Places, on behalf of the Director of Transformation, reported progress against the key actions and performance indicators.
15. It is anticipated that the budget will be balanced by year end. The number of reported indicators will be reviewed prior to the next monitoring report.
16. The indicator relating to debts over 90 days was considered and it was noted that some of this was Section 106 monies.

Chorley Council Performance Monitoring report for the third quarter of 2009/10

17. The Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy presented a report setting out performance against the Corporate Strategy and the Council's National Indicators for the third quarter of 2009/10, 1 October – 31 December 2009.
18. The overall performance of the thirty-three key projects is excellent with 100% rated 'green' and progressing ahead of, or according to, plan by the end of December 2009.
19. At the end of the third quarter, fifteen national indicators were reported. All of the indicators have targets set and had been reported previously. Of these the majority (eleven) have matched or exceeded target and four have missed target by 5% or more. Action plans were considered for those indicators where performance is lower than anticipated.
20. Assurances were given that performance on "Time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events" will be on track by the end of the year.
21. The three other indicators related to litter, detritus and graffiti were below target. These are measured by surveys and issues have been encountered this quarter because of the season. There is a role for partners as their land is included in the survey. The performance usually improves in the final quarter.

Chorley Partnership performance monitoring report for the third quarter of 2009/10

22. The Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy presented the report updating Members on the performance of the Chorley Partnership over the last quarter, covering the period from October to December 2009.
23. Crime was down, on average, by 0.8% on this time last year, with an overall decrease in violent crime of 7.5% compared to this time last year. However, there had been an increase in acquisitive crime, in particular burglary dwellings and vehicle crime.
24. Members queried the unemployment figures and noted that after six months people could not claim Job Seekers Allowance. The unemployment benefit claimant count had fallen from 3.1% at the end of the second quarter to 2.9% at the end of the 3rd Quarter. The situation in Chorley was better than many other authorities.

22 March Meeting

This meeting followed a session which reviewed Scrutiny's work over the last 12 months.

Town Centre Vitality Task Group: Final Report

25. We received and considered the final report of the Town Centre Vitality task and finish group. The Chair delivered a presentation outlining the key findings and recommendations as part of the "Review of the Year" event.
26. The recommendations covered the key elements of the report:
 - Formulation of a comprehensive marketing action plan
 - Improvement of the Evening Economy
 - Develop and deliver a pavement café policy
 - Signage strategy
 - Car parking strategy
 - Town Centre living
 - Vacant property policy
 - Develop and deliver short term and long term action plans for the Markets
27. We accepted the report, subject to two alterations to the financial implications, and recommended it for approval by the Executive Cabinet in June.

Streetscene Issues

28. We received and considered the monitoring report of the Director of Places and People on the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Group in 2008. Members raised several queries and concerns and it was agreed to receive a further update report in six months.

Efficiency Gains

29. The Director of Transformation presented a monitoring report relating to the Efficiency Gains inquiry. We noted that good progress is being made, however, further work is needed on engaging with Members in this area.
30. We recommended that DCLG be requested to reconsider the revised 3 year target set and local target for 2009 / 10 as it includes a number of anomalies in relation to capital spend where the Council acts as banker.

Chorley Community Housing

31. We received and considered the monitoring report of the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy. We requested that CCH be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to enable them to provide evidence that changes to working practices and staffing levels arising from the restructure will not adversely impact on the delivery of the tenant promises.

Neighbourhood Working

32. We received and considered the report of the Director of Places and People providing a progress report on the first year's Neighbourhood Working, including the 2009-2010 Neighbourhood Action Plans.
33. An update report would be presented to Executive Cabinet later that week outlining funding allocation against Neighbourhood Action Plan projects for 2010/11.

Recommendation

34. The Council is recommended to note this report.

COUNCILLOR DENNIS EDGERLEY
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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There are no background papers to this report.