

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny

1. This report summarises the business considered at the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27 January 2022 and 17 March 2022, the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel held 10 March 2022 and an update on the Task Group Review of Select Move.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 27 January 2022

Health Scrutiny Update

2. We welcomed Councillor Margaret France to update the Committee from the 16 November 2021, Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny meeting.
3. As of the start of November 2021, 80% of eligible residents received their first dose with 70% their second. Vaccine uptake for those between 12 and 15 is low at 31%
4. Those with protected characteristics have low uptake, efforts were taken to expand vaccination sites to schools, shopping centres, homeless centres, and Gypsy and traveler sites. All eligible care homes in the County have been visited to deliver vaccinations. Figures show Lancashire has one of the highest vaccination uptakes in the UK.
5. The Health Scrutiny Committee received the report of the Steering Group. The hospital programme is to be reviewed once the list of 10 options is reduced to a shortlist.
6. Members are concerned that the Clinic in Adlington has been closed since the start of the pandemic, transport to other clinics involved time and cost, with rumours spreading across the village affecting morale. A decision is not likely to be made until July 2022.
7. A new hospital programme is to be created, however, it is warned that the process is likely to be long and drawn out.
8. The Royal Preston Hospital created a temporary ward of 60 beds for non-Covid medical patients that are unable to be discharged as a significant number of care homes has polices preventing admissions for 28 days following a positive Covid-19 case.
9. We noted the Health Scrutiny Update.

Budget Scrutiny

10. We welcomed Deputy Executive Leader, and Executive Member for Resources Councillor Peter Wilson, and Deputy Director of Finance, James Thomson to present the report.
11. Funding continues to decrease, the Council hoped to receive a three-year settlement figure but instead received a 12-month retention notice, which includes Business Rates and New Homes Bonus.
12. The income stream for the Council is over £14 million, projections estimate £12.5 million in 2023, and £12.6 million in 2024. The deficit of £2.2 million this year will increase to £4 million in 2023 and £4.3 million in 2024. The Council intends to bridge the gap with a consistent approach to savings. Shared Services is expected to save

both Chorley and South Ribble significant figures.

13. Income is generated through investment sites which include Market Walk, Primrose Gardens, Strawberry Meadows and Logistics House. Future sites include Tatton Gardens and the Whittle Health Hub. The combination of efficiency savings and investment reduced the deficit to £281,000 for the year, which results in £1.9 million in 2022 and £2.2 million in 2023.
14. Council Tax to increase by 1.99%. The Fair Funding Review assumes a 2% yearly increase. With the rise, the average band D rate is still the second lowest in the County. Members of the Committee express caution with the rise in Council Tax considering the rise in the cost of living for all residents.
15. The investment priorities for 2022/2023 include £1.5 million revenue investment and over £40 million in capital investment. The aims are to support the local economy, support the Council's priorities, and to support local communities.
16. The General Reserve Fund contains £4 million and set to rise to £4.4 million. The Equalisation Reserve, which is to protect against any potential downturn equals £1.2 million. The budget is said to be balanced finely between resident interest and fiscal responsibility.
17. The Council received £1.6 million of un-ringfenced grants to provide Covid-19 support, however, the money was put aside, when specific ringfenced support funding was received.
18. The leisure centre's budget is £600,000. Running costs have been overestimated and break-even is expected. Significant time was needed to reorganise staff contracts and to manage and implement Covid-19 restrictions. Confidence is high for profitability.
19. The Council seeks financial returns on assets in both the long and short term.
20. Covid-19 has altered the approach and attitude to work, and the Council continues to consider its need for premises and spaces.
21. We noted the report.

Community Safety Partnership

22. We welcomed Irene Elwell, Public Protection Team Leader and Chief Inspector Chris Abbott of Lancashire Police to provide an overview of the Community Safety Partnership.
23. The previous Crime and Disorder report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2020, and it states that the Council will actively engage with the Community Safety Partnership. The Partnership is made up of Chorley Council, South Ribble Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, registered social landlords, drug and alcohol services, the Citizens Advice Bureau as well as volunteer, community, and faith groups.
24. The last two years saw resources allocated to pandemic response. It is accepted that during the pandemic, the Partnership was reactive rather than proactive. At a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee an up to date report will be given.

25. A new three-year Lancashire Strategic Assessment has been published and includes the impact of crime on community safety. The Responsibility Authorities Group is back to meet twice a year.
26. A monthly priorities meeting takes place with an analysis report, highlighting hotspots for crime and antisocial behaviour. The first meeting takes place 31 January 2022. One of the first priorities is to develop an action plan for serious and organised crime referrals.
27. Operation Edge is ongoing to reduce knife crime and antisocial behavior. The JJ Effect is expanding into Chorley and South Ribble secondary schools. The Programme in cooperation with the police, provides support and education to young people around knife crime, grooming and criminal exploitation.
28. Operation Night Guardian is underway to combat violence against women with plain clothed officers in premises to quickly respond to reports of spiking.
29. Lancashire Talking continues to operate in targeted areas that lacks perceived police visibility.
30. There has been an overall decrease in reports of crime and anti-social behaviour in Chorley.
31. Members voiced concerns with cross border crimes emanating from Greater Manchester, including car crime and drug dealing. Accounts include school children being targeted by drug dealers. It is urged for every incident to be reported to the police.
32. Arrests were made including a suspect responsible for 56 burglaries in Bolton and Adlington. The four Officer, Rural Task Group received an award for recovering more stolen plant and farming equipment than any other force in the country.
33. We noted the update.

Magistrates and Transport

34. 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 attending Magistrates' courts across Lancashire since the closure of the Court in Chorley.
35. The Council does not have significant involvement in supporting residents attending Magistrates Courts. Instead, support was offered by the Court Service. The Council does support Community Transport Services such as Dial a Ride, but it is noted that Dial-a-Ride does not have capacity for such services and has difficulty in recruiting drivers.
36. We noted the update.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 17 March 2022

Notice of Executive Decisions

37. We agreed that on the first of every month, all Members would receive a copy of the executive decisions, and we noted the Notice of Executive Decisions.

Health Scrutiny Update

38. There is consideration for a joint health/local hospital scrutiny between Chorley and South Ribble, and a Member Learning Session is to be held in June 2022.
39. We wish to express a view and to be involved with the new hospital programme, and with the Community Mental Health Transformation Programme.
40. We noted the update

Grass Cutting and Verge Update

41. We welcomed Executive Member Customer and Streetscene Services Councillor Adrian Lowe and Director of Customer and Digital, Asim Khan.
42. The mini meadows and wildlife corridors project began in April 2020. There are 52 wildflower meadows, and 16,000 wildflower bulbs planted. Residents view the mini meadows favourably.
43. The wildlife corridors are maintained as required, and any issue identified is actioned. The grass cutting season runs from April to October, and weather dependant is cut every three weeks. Any instance of missed cuttings should be reported to the Streetscene team.
44. In 2021/22
 - 40% reduction in grass related service requests totalling 127. There were 304 in 2016/17
 - 4 complaints have been made about either ground maintenance, grass cutting or wildlife corridors.
 - 722 general enquiries made, 6 relate or refer to grass cutting or the operation of the wildlife corridors.
 - An analysis of social media comments reveals that 115 were complimentary and 29 complained.
45. Members agree that the mini meadows and wildlife corridors present a great opportunity for community engagement and that they demonstrate tangible initiatives of the green agenda.
46. We noted the report.

Sustainable Public transport Second Monitoring Report.

47. We welcomed Zoe Whiteside, Service Lead – Spatial Planning to present the Second Monitoring Report.
48. A Cycling Task Group was recommended, but it was proposed that instead, a project of work is to be undertaken to achieve key objectives and to gain a wider

understanding of cycling within the borough. Social media will be used to raise awareness of cycling, and information to be shared including updates to the highway code while encouraging cycling for all ages.

49. Lancashire County Council is the responsible body for cycling, and the Council aims to engage to gain a greater understanding of the plans, schemes, and improvements and to lobby for funding and focus. As part of the new Local Plan, there will be an emphasis on active travel and cycling. Cycle pods have been ordered for Bengal Street, it is uncertain if they have arrived and installed.
50. The cycling project will be Officer led, however, progress may be reported at the Climate Change Working Group, and allow Member input and oversight, but as it is a Working Group, it will not be open to the public. To prevent overlap with the Climate Change consultation, the cycling consultation will begin in the summer.
51. The County Council feel strongly that the franchising and regulation of buses shall remain a County power, and that as Chorley is not a combined authority it is not appropriate to consider franchising and that the Enhanced Partnership is the way forward.
52. Dial-a-Ride is limited financially, and runs trips into town, supermarkets, and to appointments. Their greatest issue is the shortage of volunteers. Every Parish Council is encouraged to promote the service.
53. We noted the report.

Developing the Council's Green Agenda – Monitoring Report 3

54. We welcomed Sally Green, Climate Change Programme Officer to present the report.
55. There are 23 recommendations from the Task Group.
 - 13 are completed,
 - 3 completed and awaiting approval
 - 7 are long term and ongoing, some of which are part of the draft Climate Strategy.
56. Of the recommendations completed some noted are
 - In 2019, the Town Hall's carbon footprint was mapped, and the baseline provided is 1,662,632 kg CO₂e.
 - The new 'Air Quality and Carbon Officer' is now in post.
 - The Business Engagement Team has developed a 'green plaque' scheme to identify buildings in the borough with strong green credentials.
 - A wide variety of renewable energy sources are being explored to decarbonise the Town Hall.
 - Networking groups are being established in the community, these range from local schools, local businesses, and the Youth Zone.
57. Following a query from Andy Hunter-Rossall officers agreed to set up a meeting to discuss the ongoing work at Chorley Council with Green Living Chorley.
58. Members agree that the Council should be available to support community projects, act as an intermediary, offer advice and to be transparent about its activities. Grant information and support is to be provided to local businesses and institutions to become more 'eco-friendly'. Due to the success of the Climate Change Business

Event in November 2021, another has been organised for November 2022.

59. Members questioned for the wording used to describe Chorley's geographic location as a 'rural area of the north' due to its proximity to major metropolitan areas.
60. We noted the report

Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel - 10 March 2022

Performance Focus – Commercial and Property

61. We welcomed Executive Leader, Executive Member for Economic Development and Public Services Reform, Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Member for Homes and Housing, Councillor Peter Gabbott and Director of Commercial Services, Mark Lester to the Committee.
62. The Performance of the Directorate is in four parts
 - Development
 - Property
 - Markets and Town Centre
 - Accommodation
63. Of the 45 projects
 - 39 (81%) are classified as green or completed,
 - 4 (8%) are put on hold and,
 - 5(10%) are rated amber.
64. The spending of the directorate is slightly over budget, although it is understood that generated income can differ yearly. The greatest expense is staffing, while the reduction of income is in part due to the decrease in the collection of market rents and the removal of car park charges prior to Christmas 2021.
65. There remain difficulties in recruitment and gaps in the structure are a cause for the underperformance of some indicators.
66. Rent collected from Digital Office Park is below target due to Covid-19. The Council allowed those behind on commercial rent to recover and clear their arrears. Each case is dealt with on a case by case basis. There is guidance for enforcement and Officer discretion allowed.
67. Businesses that requested grants or funding provided the Council with their finances, and the Council learnt the sustainability of a number of businesses and has been able to offer advice and support.
68. Outstanding voids in the covered market are temporary that the Council created to reorder the units. In areas in the town centre that excludes Market Walk, is below target at 14.7%, signs indicate that the target of 7.5% will be met and exceeded, as long-term empty units started to return to the market.
69. The Town Centre vacancy rate is at 11.2% with a target 8%. No single reason provided for the CCTV rate within 5 days but is a mix of uncontrolled variables.
70. The Council intends to engage and support the reopening of Community Centres. The current occupancy rate is 44.15% under the target of 51%. Prior to Covid-19, the figure

was 60%.

71. Accommodation figures are positive. There are lower rates of voids at Primrose Gardens and Cotswold House. Some delay in the payments relates to housing benefit and by Quarter Four, it will be rectified. During the Winter, the Cotswold facilities that were not in use due to Covid-19 were used by the Winter Watch Service to shelter people from the street.
72. The reopening of Primrose Gardens and its facilities is at a more cautious pace due to the vulnerability of the residents. The performance targets for Primrose and Cotswold are based on business models although can be impacted by uncontrollable matters. It is proposed that Members are to be given a tour of the facilities to gain a greater understanding of what the Council has to offer communities and Community Groups.
73. Alker Lanes' name has changed to Strawberry Meadows and is part of one of the four corporate strategy projects. 60% of the units have been let. The larger units are to be rebranded and targeted to potential tenants. Strawberry Fields is expected to break even for the first time, although as it was originally conceived as hotdesking space, it is to be repurposed to create more fixed offices in response to new attitudes towards hybrid and home working. It is not yet known if the project will return to Council for additional investment.
74. There is a single unit remaining at the new Market Walk, there is no rush to fill it, as options are being considered. The unit is being used on a temporary basis by various charitable organisations to store collected aid for Ukraine.
75. Footfall is increasing in the town centre, and it is acknowledged that it will take time to get over the issues caused by the two years of Covid-19, restrictions, and lockdowns.
76. £1,000,000 is being invested in Bengal Street, the issues at the Tatton Care Scheme have been resolved and the programme is on track to be opened throughout 2022 and 2023.
77. The Whittle GP Surgery and Community Centre is due to open 17 March 2022.
78. Mark Lester told of the benefit of hybrid working across two organisations. Expertise, capacity, and resources can be shared, and Shared Services is allowing both Councils to build and maintain strong working relationships and submit stronger grant and funding bids.
79. We noted the report.

Business Plans Progress Update 2021/22

80. We welcomed Victoria Willett, Shared Service Lead – Transformation and Partnerships to present the report. The report is an end of year document and planning is underway to set the priorities for the coming year.
81. There is a total of 170 projects
 - 84 (49%) of projects are green,
 - 18 (11%) amber,
 - 55 (32%) are completed,
 - 9 (5%) on hold and,

- 4 (2%) not started.
82. The graph in the report represents the progress of each project, and for every project that is not green, the reason and planned action to correct the project is provided. Most of the amber indicators are related to the ongoing Covid Recovery, capacity and staffing, ICT and other projects that are prioritised, in addition to other external factors that are outside the control of the Council.
 83. Highlighted achievements include the resident satisfaction survey results, the 2021 events programme, delivery of climate change action, Astley Hall, the new Volunteering Policy, the Chorley and South Ribble Partnership and the Market and Town Centre improvements.
 84. The full list of projects is to be checked and monitored for any errors. The projects went from 'not started' or 'red' in the previous update to completed is likely due to an additional resource, such as external consultancy to accelerate and complete certain projects.
 85. Recruitment to key roles is critical when considering capacity to deliver projects. The Council wants to recruit internally to enable opportunities and pathways for staff development, but this does impact the time it takes to fill all vacancies. The Council updated its method of recruitment, moving from an in-house system to a new recruitment platform that saw applications rise on a specific vacancy from 7 applications to nearly 80, providing a wider and broader range of candidates.
 86. The Council intends to develop a People Strategy for workforce development and succession planning through targeted markets, or to grow and develop staff in house through apprenticeships and graduate schemes.
 87. Due to IT completing substantial work, the Council's information infrastructure is in a far more secure position and was more resilient to recent security risks. The focus is now on front end technical support across the organisation.
 88. We noted the report.

Reports from the Task and Finish Groups Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Select Move

89. At the meeting held 15 February 2022, Officers and Executive Members attended from Preston City Council and South Ribble Borough Council to share their views, and to contrast and compare each experience with Select Move.
90. At the meeting held 15 March 2022, representatives attended from Jigsaw Homes and Progress. Answering questions and sharing their views and experiences of being part of the Select Move Partnership.
91. The future task groups are to invite the Select Move Coordinator when in post, Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP. The Task Group is presently awaiting the results of a Select Move customer survey.

Recommendation

92. That the report be noted

Councillor John Walker
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
MP