

Overview and Scrutiny – Report to Council

1. This report summarises the business considered at the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel held 7 March 2024; the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 March 2024; and an update on the Scrutiny Review Task Groups.

Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel – 7 March 2024

Performance Focus: Planning and Property

2. The Executive Member for Planning, Councillor Alistair Morwood, and the Executive Member for Economic Development and Public Sector Reform, Councillor Alistair Bradley, presented a report providing a performance update for the Planning and Property Update which included:
 - An overall directorate summary and budget position
 - An overview of key performance measures at quarter three 2023/24
 - An update on the Corporate Strategy projects.
3. The Directorate was noted to be unusual due to covering several Executive Portfolios.
4. Councillor Morwood referred to the Local Plan which had been moved from red to amber status since the Business Plan Update had been considered. Councillor Morwood explained that the Local Plan had previously been in red due to the delays in progress i.e. needing to be considered at the Local Plan Working Group and then Council. Now that the matter is moving forward it has been moved up to amber.
5. Councillor Bradley informed the Committee that he did not expect the significant overspend to be recurrent in future years as it was largely due to factors such as outstanding property repairs and utility costs (which are expected to be lower in subsequent years).
6. As regards bad debt provision, he explained that some businesses had built up bad debts during COVID and were still trying to get back on track. The Council's approach was to take long term view to encourage businesses to stay in the town centre. The council has a good record of dealing with debt recovery for both residents and businesses.
7. It was also noted that Levelling Up Funding and projects considered at the Development and Assets Working Group would be subject to scrutiny in future.
8. During the course of the discussion members raised the following queries / requests for information:
 - Town Centre Footfall – how is it measured?
 - No. voids in Union St Offices

- Query on Tables on pages 9/10 – variance should show underspend rather than overspend? * (see update paragraph 9 below).
- Development Assets Working Group – dashboard report from latest meeting to be circulated.

9. Following the meeting, Louise Mattinson, Director of Finance clarified the financial information in the report as follows:

Both Property and Major Projects have overspent.

From a general finance and accounting perspective brackets are used in 3 forms;

- To denote underspends.
- To denote income.
- Also to denote a reduction in expenditure or an increase in income.

She provided the tables with additional narrative to explain the figures as follows:

Property

Month 9 Provisional Outturn 2023/24	£
Original Budget 23/24 (net expenditure)	1,365,000
Agreed changes (a reduction in expenditure budgets and/or an increase in income budgets)	(534,000)
Amended Budget (net expenditure)	831,000
Forecast at 31/12/23 (net expenditure)	1,501,000
Variance (overspend - as forecast net expenditure is more than the net expenditure budget)	670,000

Major Projects

Month 9 Provisional Outturn 2023/24	£
Original Budget 23/24 (net income)	(5,142,000)
Agreed changes (reduction in expenditure budgets and/or increase in income budgets)	(7,000)
Amended Budget (net income)	(5,149,000)
Forecast at 31/12/23 (net income)	(4,405,000)
Variance (overspend as forecast net income is less than income budget)	744,000

10. At the end of the item the Committee noted the report and resolved that the Levelling Up Funding and projects considered at the Development and Assets Working Group to be included in the future Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

Chorley Quarter Three Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24

11. The Executive Member for Resources, Councillor Peter Wilson, and Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Member for Economic Development and Public Sector Reform, presented a report setting out the performance against the delivery of the Corporate Strategy and key performance indicators during the third quarter of 2023/24, covering 1 October 2023 – 31 December 2023.
12. Councillor Wilson indicated that the Council was in a good position and delivering on its Corporate Strategy.
13. He referred to the need to make leisure centres more sustainable and the lower than national average Employment Rate, which was initially queried on 11 January 2024 (Minute 12). He confirmed that the figure was correct and therefore needs to be addressed.
14. A query was made about the Household Support Fund. Jennifer Mullin, the Director of Communities and Leisure explained that Central Government were only going to provide funding for a further six months beyond 31 March 2024.
15. As regards the performance indicator for percentage of 16-17 year old NEETs (Not in education, employment or training), it was highlighted that there were several reasons for this post COVID trend, including increased mental health issues, however steps were being taken to address it via place/space/care partnerships, Chorley and South Ribble Partnership, and early intervention work for 13-14 year olds.
16. The Chair expressed concern about the Local Plan and timescale slippage but accepted that the position had now changed.
17. The Committee also discussed economic activity in Chorley, which was linked to NEETs. It was noted that apprenticeships were in decline, however Chorley was offering grants for apprenticeships.
 - i) At the end of the discussion the Committee noted the report and resolved that the following areas be included in the 2024/25 Overview and Scrutiny work Programme:
 - Local Plan
 - NEETs and Economic activity – October / November 2024.

Councillor Aidy Riggott

Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel 7 March 2024

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 14 March 2024

Water safety – Doing it for Dylan Campaign

18. Beckie Ramsay from the “Doing it for Dylan” Water Safety Campaign gave a presentation about the campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of swimming in open water. The campaign had been inspired by the tragic death of her son, Dylan in 2011 who had decided to go swimming in a local quarry.
19. The presentation included a short dramatization showing two young characters, one of whom drowns after attempting to swim in open water. Beckie explained that this film was shown at schools at which she had given talks about water safety. It highlighted that anyone, even a strong swimmer, could get into difficulties in open water.
20. Her campaign had been mentioned at World Drowning Prevention Day in Australia and she has travelled all over the world to promote awareness of water safety including Kenya. She had won awards for her campaigning including from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA).
21. Beckie stressed that she was not against swimming in open water – she wanted to tackle lack of awareness of the dangers. Her approach would be “No lifeguard, no swimming”. The presentation demonstrated the importance of wearing protective clothing in open water as worn by rescue services.
22. Beckie informed the Committee that there had been no national public announcements from the Government on water safety since the 1970s. Open water often contained dangerous chemicals and she gave an example of one water source tested which had a PH of 11.6 (bleach is 12.2).
23. She indicated that since Dylan’s death thirteen years ago, annual drowning statistics have remained static i.e. 600 deaths a year, of which 400 were accidental. Beckie felt that there was a lot more which could be done to promote public awareness and improve water safety.
24. Some of Beckie’s proposed recommendations were:
 - Improved warning signage at open water sites
 - Councils engaging with landowners e.g. on adequate fencing and lighting
 - Signage with suicide prevention information and locator apps for people at high risk
 - Measures for water safety equipment nearby open water – e.g. rope– to be a designated bright colour so easily identifiable if stolen (trialled in Scotland);and to tackle theft and vandalism of equipment e.g. lifebuoys
 - Locating high risk sites and raising public awareness
 - Promoting awareness of water safety via schools, local media
 - Encouraging the public to sign up to the “What3Words” locator app

- Installing Number Locator Boards every 50 metres along open water to help rescue services (this was trialled in Liverpool and rescue times were reduced from 23 to 9 minutes)
 - Greater accountability for landowners to ensure water safety measures are in place
 - To create a Lancashire wide approach so that Lancashire can lead on the issue.
25. Beckie also spoke about a voluntary organisation called “Beneath the Surface” which carried out private searches for missing persons once police resources had been exhausted. They use a piece of technology called “Aqua Eye” which was an underwater camera making it easier to locate people underwater.
26. Chief Inspector Chris Abbott, Lancashire Constabulary informed the Committee that he was already part of a water safety advisory board in West Lancs and that he would be willing to be involved in setting up a similar body here in Chorley. He acknowledged that funding in this area was an issue for both Lancashire police and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service however it was important to do as much as possible.
27. The Committee thanked Beckie for her excellent and informative presentation, particularly as it was a subject which had affected her personally. It was agreed that the Council should do everything it can to assist the campaign and take the proposed actions forward.
28. It was recommended that:
- i. That a water safety action group be formed – the Council can help with setting up e.g. a Constitution and applying for grants
 - ii. Councillors Michelle Brown, Michelle Beach and Sarah Ainsworth expressed interest in being involved in the group.

Community Safety Partnership/Crime and Disorder

29. The Director of Communities and Leisure, Jennifer Mullin presented a report providing an overview of the work of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).
30. Chief Inspector Chris Abbott, Lancashire Constabulary and Laura Jean-Taylor, Head of Public Protection were also in attendance.
31. The report demonstrated the resilience of the CSP and its capability to provide a dynamic response.
32. The report included The Strategic Assessment 2022 (Appendix A) and then further broken down into Local District Profiles – (Appendix C), highlighting the key issues and risks across Lancashire.
33. Utilising the information contained with the strategic assessment, local knowledge and intelligence and the Lancashire Talking survey the CSP had

drawn together a Chorley and South Ribble Community Safety Partnership Action Plan (Appendix B). The plan detailed the established key priorities and the commitment of the Responsible Authorities towards each priority. A partnership event was held on 21 July 2023, which was a great success with great attendance and engagement across the partnership and Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector organisations.

34. The report gave details of a number of police activities. Chief Inspector Chris Abbott indicated that Operation Centurion for example, launched by the Police and Crime Commissioner in July 2023 targeting ASB hot spots areas, had successfully targeted locally based issues and that overall crime figures were lower across the board.
35. Councillor Pauline McGovern made some suggestions to improve how information was presented in the report which were noted by Jennifer Mullin.
36. The issue of road safety was highlighted by Councillor Christine Heydon, in particular the need for additional signage on a single track lane which had recently been refused. Laura- Jean Taylor agreed to take this up through the appropriate channels.
37. A request was made for follow-up data on convictions. Chief Inspector Abbott agreed to provide the information.
38. It was requested that councillors be informed when PCSOs are moved to a different area.
39. The Chair referred to the drop in crime statistics in November 2022. Inspector Abbott suggested that this was likely due to a drop in social activity post COVID, which has since resumed.
40. The Committee resolved –
 - i) That the report be noted;
 - ii) That the requests listed above be actioned.

Second Monitoring Report - Select Move Overview and Scrutiny Task Group Oct 2023

41. Councillor Terry Howarth, Executive Member (Homes and Housing) presented a report providing the second update of the work undertaken to deliver the 18 recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group for Select Move.
42. The report also gave details of two Select Move Customer Surveys which were completed between 14th November to 13th December 2023. One survey was sent to applicants where Chorley Council was managing the application, and the

second survey was sent to applicants whose applications were managed by any other partner.

43. Councillor Howarth explained that one of the key recommendations, simplifying the banding, had been addressed in the Select Move Policy Review. The new policy had now been signed off by all three Local Authorities, (Chorley, Preston and South Ribble). The policy implementation has been delayed due to lack of CIVICA (IT software provider) capacity, however CIVICA will now start work developing updates to the housing management system. They have committed to a new “go live” date in September 2024.
44. Councillor Howarth indicated that he was very pleased with the report and the progress made.
45. The Committee resolved –
 - i) That Councillor Howarth be thanked for his attendance;
 - ii) That the report be noted.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

46. The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2023/24 was presented for information and noted.

Update on the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Suicide Prevention and Bereavement

47. The Committee was informed that so far, three members had expressed interest in the Task Group: Councillors Michelle Beach, Samantha Martin and Christine Heydon.
48. It was noted that the issue was a Council priority and of particular concern in Chorley which had a high suicide rate.
49. The Committee resolved that the initial scoping meeting be open to all members on a no commitment basis to find out more about the topic.

Councillor Roy Lees

Vice Chair in the Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 14 March 2024