

REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

GENERAL REPORT

1. This report summarises the principal matters considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 5 September 2006.

Capital Programme, 2006/07 – Monitoring Report

2. We received a joint report of the Executive Director – Corporate and Customer and the Director of Finance on the progress of the 2006/07 Capital Programme which had been presented to the 24 August meeting of the Executive Cabinet.
3. We were advised that the Executive Cabinet had approved the recommended increase of the Capital Programme by £1,921,100 to £14,081,420 and agreed the recommendations of the Capital Programme Board to revise the capital budget allocation for a number of projects and to include a new 'Category C' scheme on the appropriate reserve list.
4. The Committee was reminded by the Director of Finance that the programme was continually monitored through the assessment and performance control mechanisms in place and the report generated a lengthy debate on the anticipated availability of sufficient resources to fund the programme.
5. At the conclusion of the Members' discussion, the Committee agreed to request the Executive Cabinet to clarify the action it proposes to take to mitigate the potential risks to the delivery of the Capital Programme should the expected capital receipts not be realised as anticipated. We have also identified in our list of potential new overview and scrutiny topics or issues for future examination a review of the strategic relevance of the Capital Programme, with a view to ensuring that the programme reflects the Council's corporate and community strategies. In addition, the Director of Finance has been asked to show likely variances in addition to target and performance statistics in future Capital Programme monitoring reports.

Revenue Budget, 2006/07 – Monitoring

6. We considered a report of the Director of Finance monitoring the performance of the 2006/07 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account which had been submitted to the Executive Cabinet on 24 August.
7. The report revealed that the situation with the General Fund continued to improve, with the forecast overspend having been reduced from £82,000 to £66,000 over the past monitoring period. Further savings will be pursued and a number of areas (eg agency staff costs, income streams from the Development and Regeneration Directorate; increased refuse collection; concessionary travel and benefits costs) will need to be monitored closely over the remainder of the year.
8. We accepted the report with the proviso that the Council supports the abandonment of the use of smart cards in relation to concessionary travel passes.

Forward Plan

9. The Committee received the Council's Forward Plan setting out details of the key executive decisions expected to be taken between 1 August and 30 November 2006 and was asked to identify the items it wished to examine in advance of consideration by the Executive.

10. In response, we indicated that we would wish to have sight of the reports on the following matters, and discuss them with the appropriate Executive Members and Directors, before firm decisions are taken by the Executive:

- Chorley Town Centre Strategy;
- Play Strategy for the Borough;
- Terms for acquisition of property required to construct the Gillibrand Link Road;
- Selection of service provider for the Property Services and Market functions.

Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan

11. The Committee received the revised and updated Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan, which lists all the actions required to ensure that scrutiny improvement plans are kept on track in order to assist the delivery of the Council's performance agreement and corporate strategy.

12. In particular, our attention was drawn by the Assistant Head of Democratic Services to the approach made to a number of external local government bodies to ascertain their likely interest in undertaking a review of the current Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit and taking forward Member training and development on the overview and scrutiny function.

Overview and Scrutiny Panels – New Inquiries

13. We were presented with, and endorsed, the Scoping Documents that had been compiled by the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the Panels' respective scrutiny inquiries into 'Contact Centre Efficiencies and the Partnership with the Lancashire County Council' and 'Neighbourhood Working'.

Chorley Council logo

14. In response to my inquiry, the Chief Executive explained the reasons for and the circumstances under which the Council's logo had been altered from 'Chorley Borough Council' to 'Chorley Council'.

15. The decision to alter the logo, which will not affect the Authority's formal Borough status, had been taken in consultation with the Executive Leader during the Council's summer recess.

16. The Chief Executive intimated that the principal aim of the exercise had been to modernise the brand name of the Authority and to create a logo that should become more conspicuous. It was important for local residents to be able to recognise the Council as a major service provider in the Borough.

17. The Chief Executive also emphasised that the transition will not incur any additional costs. All existing vehicles, equipment and stationary will continue to be used and will only be replaced with items containing the new logo as and when necessary.

Review of Single Person Discount

18. At my request, copies of a letter requesting information from claimants of the 25% discount on Council Tax payment that had been sent to a large proportion of properties in the Borough was circulated at the meeting. The letter had caused much local controversy and anxiety.

19. The Chief Executive clarified that the letter had been sent as a partnership exercise to households in Chorley, Lancaster, Preston and South Ribble, in conjunction with an external agency. The letter aimed to target only those people who were claiming unlawfully the single

person discount. It was, however, conceded that reference in the letter to the external agency had been inappropriate.

20. The Chief Executive also stated that the exercise would be followed up by a cost/benefit analysis to ascertain the extent of the ultimate cost savings achieved.

Future Meeting Dates

21. I drew the Committee's attention to the fact that the next four scheduled meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee between October 2006 and January 2007 will conflict with meetings of the Chorley Community Housing Shadow Board. As a number of Councillors are members of both bodies, we accepted the expediency of altering the dates of the next four meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. I agreed to liaise with the Assistant Head of Democratic Services to identify suitable alternative dates, which will be notified accordingly to Committee members.

Recommendation

22. The Council is recommended to note this report.

COUNCILLOR D EDGERLEY
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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There are no background papers to this report.