

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL

MEETING DATE Thursday, 3 March 2016

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor John Walker (Chair), Councillor Hasina Khan (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Paul Clark and Alistair Morwood

OFFICERS: Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Customer and Advice Services), Rebecca Huddleston (Head of Policy and Communications), Jason Mills (Policy and Communications) and Chris Moister (Head of Governance and Property Services)

APOLOGIES: Councillor June Molyneaux and Debra Platt

OTHER MEMBERS: Councillor Alistair Bradley and Danny Gee

16.OSP.13 Minutes of meeting Thursday, 3 December 2015 of Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel

AGREED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting held on 3 December 2015 be confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

16.OSP.14 Declarations of Any Interests

There were no declarations of any interest

16.OSP.15 Performance Focus: Town Centre

Members of the Committee received a report which provided contextual information and initial questions for focus in respect of the town centre including Market Walk and future development plans.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Bradley, Executive Leader of the Council and Executive Member (Economic Development and Partnerships), Councillor Danny Gee, Chair of the Town Centre Team and Chris Moister, Head of Governance to the meeting who attended to answer questions in relation to Market Walk and the town centre.

Achieving a vibrant town centre was a key objective of the Council's corporate strategy under the priority of 'a strong local economy'. Performance in this area was currently strong both across the wider town centre and in respect of the Market Walk shopping centre, which was purchased by the Council in November 2013 and taken into internal management in April 2015.

The majority of key indicators for the town centre were performing above target at the end of quarter 3, 2015/16 (December 2015). Performance for floor space improved/created and vacant town centre floor space was excellent. The percentage occupancy of the covered market had decreased slightly compared to last year (95.7% against almost full occupancy of 99% for 2014/15) but remained above target of 95%.

Performance of Market Walk across September, October and November 2015, footfall followed a similar trend to previous years. However, there had been a significant increase of footfall in December 2015 of 13.5%, which was likely to be a result of a successful programme of creative marketing and PR over the Christmas period.

A range of improvement activity had been undertaken in Market Walk itself which had included new wooden bins, planters PA system and replacement paving in some areas.

It was reported that since coming under Council management in 2015, the centre had continued to generate revenue above anticipated levels and provided an additional income stream for the Council. A recent management report highlighted one vacant unit out of 35 which equates to 97% occupancy. However, there were a number of tenants with outstanding or part payments; this applied to approximately 9 units currently showing arrears.

The report detailed town centre marketing and PR for the Christmas period which attracted significant visitor numbers to the town centre due to key attractions including –

- Chorley's Christmas lights switch on – 5,000 visitors
- Santa Express from town centre to see Father Christmas at Astley Hall – 1,900 families
- Giant Ferris wheel – 10,800 rides

The report posed a number of questions to which answers were received -

Market Walk

How do existing Market Walk tenants contribute towards:

a) The wider marketing and promotion of the town centre?

There was no central fund for which tenants could contribute towards. However, tenants had provided prizes/incentives to encourage shopper engagement, and some tenants had also sponsored events.

b) Improvements and upgrades to the centre such as street furniture?

Tenants did not contribute directly. The Council, as landlord, provided improvements and upgrades which was usual practice. The street furniture in Market Walk had been integrated with the rest of the town centre to encourage shoppers/visitors to explore the whole of the centre of Chorley; this was one reason why tenants were not asked to contribute. It was intended that when the Market Walk extension was built it would offer the opportunity to look at the whole configuration of Market Walk and public realm areas to make improvements.

The Committee were informed that there were examples of street furniture within the town centre that was not the responsibility of the Council. One example was a coffee shop that rented space outside their premise in which they had placed tables, chairs and fencing.

The report identified a number of existing tenants in arrears. Why was this-the case and what action was being taken to address the situation?

The arrears totalled approximately £25,000, which equated to an average of just over 5 days of late payments. This was partly attributed to the way the national or larger retailers make their payments, which did not necessarily fall on the payment due dates (eg payments were often made on a particular day of the month, bi-monthly or even quarterly).

It was also explained that some tenants were still making payments to Deloitte (the company which had managed Market Street on behalf of the Council from its purchase to April 2015), and there was a delay in Deloitte sending the rents on. Tenants had been notified about paying the Council rather than Deloitte, but some had failed to update their records. Most of those tenants in arrears, had arrears worth less than £1,000. Members of the Committee were pleased to note that none of the tenants in arrears, where in that situation due to hardship.

Councillor Bradley advised that the figures for arrears needed to be reconciled and balanced, at the latest, six weeks following the closure of the financial year.

The purchase of Market Walk was expected to bring in additional revenue of £400,000 per year. What had been the return on this investment so far and was this forecast to be maintained in future years?

It was estimated that the Council should make £1 million on this investment but was making £150,000 more than anticipated. This was due to more units than expected being let, and which also allowed the Council to borrow less to finance Market Walk. Leases due to expire are being renewed by tenants due to the prospect of the Market Walk extension and the possibility of big name high street stores locating in Market Walk.

Market Walk extension

Please provide an update on the current position in regard to Market Walk phase 2.

The Council was in a position that if an 'A' grade retailer signed a tenancy agreement, progress would be made relatively swiftly as a significant amount of preparation work had already been completed. The Council was waiting to hear from a big name retailer about locating in Chorley.

The next stage was giving consideration to the design, and whether the design should be prepared earlier than expected in anticipation of retailer sign up. Whatever the design, it would be up to the expected standard for an A grade retailer. All details would be brought before Council for approval, and if members were happy with the recommendations, work could commence reasonably quickly.

How will the Market Walk phase 2 development impact on:

a) Existing Market Walk tenants?

There had been more interest from tenants wanting to stay in Chorley. One retailer was not entirely happy with the proposals, due to the potential loss of car parking and increased competition. The Council had made certain commitments in relation to car parking, and was trying to help the retailer, but that it would not be to the detriment of the rest of the town centre.

b) The wider town centre?

Since Market Street reopened there had been a significant increase in trading. The public realm areas had been improved and the majority of Market Street repainted. There had been a decrease in empty properties, and three out of the four units at the old McDonald's site had been leased. There was a possible tenant for the fourth unit but they had pulled out. However, there was no intention to fill the empty unit with the first interested party as the occupier had to compliment the other units and not detract from them.

A number of retailers/landlords to premises towards the top of Market Street had successfully secured Council grants to make improvements to shop floor and shop fronts. This had improved the look and feel of that part of Market Street substantially.

It had been noted that the night-time economy had increased without any interventions from the Council.

In response to questions raised by the Panel, it was confirmed that the Town Centre Master Plan included questions posed to residents about the type of retailers/entertainment venues they wanted to see in the town centre. The results were fairly consistent with residents wanting big named stores, cinema and leisure opportunities. It was anticipated that on the completion of the Market Walk extension, which was proposed to include a cinema and leisure activities it would encourage visitors to extend their stay and explore the rest of the town centre, including Market Street.

What are the risks for the town centre and have mitigating actions been identified?

There were some public realm areas, the responsibility for which lay with Lancashire County Council; that showed signs of deterioration. It was felt that due to the anticipated service cuts by the County Council this was likely to worsen and that pressure was needed to be put on Lancashire County Council to ensure the areas are maintained.

The Panel was interested to know what impact the Asda superstore had on Market Street. The impact from the superstore was unknown as no study/survey had been completed. However, it was thought that there had been an increase in footfall in that area. This could be credited due to a number of factors which included the increased parking available following the Fleet Street work.

As well as Market Street improvements, it was reported that retailers round St George's Street had got together to make their own improvements.

Members of the Panel discussed various aspect of the report, including the activities which took place over the Christmas period which contributed to the level of footfall.

Due to the planned extension for Market Walk and other town centre improvements, members of the Panel enquired if consideration had been made to possible improvements to alleviate congestion at the Hartwood roundabout. It was recognised that at peak times traffic flow was slow. However, it was not considered that the congestion was so severe that it warranted changes to the road network.

The planned development of Botany Bay was still at planning stage, but it was expected that there would be a mix of housing and retail opportunities. It was important that the retail at Botany Bay did not duplicate the town centre.

The Chair thanked Councillor Bradley, Councillor Gee and Chris Moister for attending the meeting after which they left the room.

AGREED – That the report be noted.

16.OSP.16 Monitoring of the Organisational Plan 2015/16

Members of the Panel considered a report of the Chief Executive which provided an update on the performance of the Organisational Improvement Plan 2015/16 which included 18 key corporate priority projects set out in the Council's Corporate Strategy. It was reported that overall performance of the Corporate Strategy projects was good with 83% of projects rated green or complete.

The report also provided an update on all the Corporate Strategy and local performance indicators which could be reported at this time. Performance was good with 83% of the 92 indicators achieving or exceeding their target with a further 9% performing within the 5% threshold; 8% of these indicators were below target and outside the 5% threshold.

The Organisational Improvement Plan for 2015/16 contained all priority improvement activity to be undertaken during the year by the organisation. This included the key projects as set out in the 2014/15 Corporate Strategy. The Plan also set out a number of business improvement, budget growth items and neighbourhood priority projects that had been agreed in 2015, and were due to run until the end of the financial year, and in some cases for larger projects into 2016/17 and beyond.

All projects were recorded in the MyProjects system along with detailed milestones and milestone tasks so that progress could be monitored and managed throughout the year.

The Corporate Strategy 2015/16 included 18 key projects. At the end of January 2016 overall performance of key projects was good with 83.3% of the projects either completed or on track. Six projects had been completed; nine projects were rated green; two projects were rated amber, and one project had been closed.

One project which was to 'Deliver Improvements to Market Street' had been closed off as progress had been made over the past year on the concept design for the town centre public realm to incorporate the Market Walk extension, Youth Zone and High Street projects.

The scope had been widened beyond Market Street to include the whole of the town centre, with Market Street likely to accommodate the Flat Iron market during the redevelopment of the Flat Iron site. This had been incorporated into a new project to 'improve the look and feel of the town centre' which was considered and approved as part of the Corporate Strategy refresh in November.

The report also provided a breakdown of organisational plan projects by Corporate Priority, as of the end of January 2016. 59 projects made up the Organisational Plan for 2015/16, consisting of Corporate Strategy projects, business growth items and business improvement projects. In addition to these projects was a further 24 neighbourhood priorities.

Data on the current position of projects, not including the individual neighbourhood priorities, as at the of January 2016 showed –

- 14 projects being completed

- 39 projects rated green
- 6 projects rated amber
- 0 projects were rated red

A breakdown of organisational plan projects by Corporate Priority was provided for the Panel. Where projects had been rated amber an explanation about the issue(s) and action(s) that were being taken to address them was provided.

The report provided the latest position as the end of quarter 4 approached –

- There were 14 completed projects
- 11 projects due to be completed by 31 March 2016
- 3 projects which would be carried over in to 2016/17 in order to complete
- 14 projects receiving new funding for 2016/17
- 17 projects which would carry over into 2016/17, as they had existing investment and were schedules to complete over multiple years

The 24 neighbourhood priorities was determined by the neighbourhood area meetings in January and February 2015, and agreed by Executive Cabinet in March 2015. From this –

- 13 priorities were rated green
- 10 priorities had been completed
- 1 priority (Euxton, Astley, Buckshaw – Balshaw Lane Ponds and not been started.

On noting that the 'Deliver the Steeley Lane/Gateway project was on hold, Councillor Khan enquired if that included the installation on CCTV as there was a lot of vandalism and anti-social behaviour. It was explained that that CCTV was not part of the project, and it was thought that the possible delay was due to the relocation of the CCTV team in the police station. Councillor Khan asked if an update could be provided.

In response to queries raised by members of the Panel in regards to the School Place Projections, it was confirmed that the Council liaised with Lancashire County Council on behalf of schools in the area, instead of approaching schools for information directly.

Members of the Panel were informed that in relation to school growth the County Council were invited to include schools on the CIL 123 list. Although the County Council did add some new schools to the list, extensions to existing schools to meet demand had not been put forward by the County Council.

The 123 list was expected to be reviewed in the next twelve months, and that this was a good opportunity for parish/town councils, ward councillors and chairs of governors to feed in to the process.

The Director Customer and Advice Services explained that from September 2014, CIL money for Chorley was payable for new development schemes. For those developments in parished areas, that particular parish would receive 15% of CIL monies, with no limitations as to how the money was spent. It was reported that some parish councils had already started to receive CIL money. Council's however, were only permitted to spend CIL monies on infrastructure on the 123 list.

Members of the Panel noted that the performance indicator for those people who regularly participated in volunteering was below target at 21% (the target being 25%). This indicator measured the proportion of the adult population who said that over the last 12 months they had given unpaid help once a month or more to any groups, clubs or organisations. 14% of residents said that they had given unpaid help to groups, clubs or organisations at least once a week, with 7% saying they had given unpaid help less than once a week but at least once a month. The Head of Policy and Communications advised that the indicator, which had come from the residents' survey, did not match with what was known about the success of the Time Credits Scheme within Chorley. The 2015 evaluation report regarding Time Credits

suggested that between August 2012-December 2014, 21,000 hours had been given by 1081 people through a network of 103 local groups and that 72% of Chorley Time Credits volunteers gave their time at least once a week. The additional corporate strategy indicator for Volunteering; 'CS 1.07% increase in the number of volunteering hours earned' also returned a 36% increase at its last bi annual return (31/12/2015)

The level of avoidable contact continued to be a result of customers having to contact the Council to follow up on a service request that had not been fulfilled or had been closed off prematurely. This was primarily an issue for high volume, transactional services such as waste and Streetscene and related to a proportionately small number of cases. There were a number of systems in place to enable managers to monitor service fulfilment and technology was being continually updated to ensure effective management of service requests. Regular performance monitoring was undertaken through Strategy Group and remedial action communicated to relevant managers and officers.

In response to questions raised by members of the Panel, the Head of Policy and Communications advised that the figures were monitored weekly, if not daily by the Contact Centre for the wider Council. The figures included employees not responding to call-backs. It was also about making sure someone was responding to tasks on behalf of colleagues who were absent from work due to leave or sickness.

There was a discussion in regards to the percentage of remittances to suppliers by electronic means, and the increasing popularity of cheques being issued the Council had re-introduced printed remittance advice as an additional control on the accuracy of supplier bank account details.

Members of the Panel discussed the performance of various projects.

AGREED – that the report be noted, and that an update on CCTV installation in the area of Steeley Lane be provided to Councillor Khan.

Chair

Date