

REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

This report summarises the business considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 January and 31 March, the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel on 3 March the outcome of the call-in meeting regarding Neighbourhood Plans and the findings of the Task Group relating to the Staff Sickness Absence.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 28 JANUARY 2016

Budget Scrutiny - Draft budget and summary budget position over the medium term 2016/17

Councillor Peter Wilson, Executive Member for Resources attended the meeting to give an overview of the draft budget proposals for 2016/17. It included a forecast for the following two years to 2018/19 and presented relevant proposals in respect of potential investment in the Council's Corporate Strategy priorities in 2016/17 that would increase draft budget resilience in the longer term, providing fund to support the transitional period of the fundamental service review being undertaken by Lancashire County Council, along with information about the budget consultation.

This is the fourth consecutive year that Council Tax will not be increased. Due to the successful implementation of the MTFs, budget efficiency savings totaling £0.214m had been applied to the budget to achieve a balanced budget position for 2016/17. This has mainly been achieved by the Council entering into a Business Rates Retention Pooling agreement within Lancashire effective from 1 April 2016.

In addition, contributions to the New Investment Packages for 2016/17, totaling £2.845m for both Revenue and Capital projects, the New Homes Bonus also provides an opportunity for the Council to invest in three other additional areas to protect public services within the borough and increase financial resilience given the revolutionary funding changes.

A budget of £0.500m would be available for the next two years to assist in the transactional period public services currently provided for and funded by Lancashire County Council and a £0.500m provision per annum to increase General Balances to mitigate against the financial risk of a core grant income shift to 100% local taxation sources. £0.603m was also available to be used to invest in projects that would provide income streams to the Council.

In regards to potential investment proposals; funding had been achieved by not building all the New Homes Bonus income received since 2013/14 into the base budget. An approach taken to enable the Council flexibility and resilience in order to address the volatile and variable nature of future core funding which continued to be under review by central government. The latest round of projects will bring the total new investment on the Council's corporate priorities to £12.008m since 2013/14.

Consultation on the proposed budget focused on obtaining feedback in key areas in order to help prioritise activity. It had also highlighted the impact of a reduction in Council funds and asked for residents' views on the proposed budget, the result of which were analysed and published for consideration as part of the budget finalisation.

The Committee asked a variety of questions which included the reasoning behind not reducing the forecast for Market Walk in light of the reduction of units available, and the 3% overspend in respect of Chorley Flower Show and what lessons had been learnt for the future.

Final Monitoring Report - Overview and Scrutiny Task Group (Adoption of Estates)

The final monitoring report was presented on the progress made against the recommendations of the Task Group review into the Adoption of Estates.

The final report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group considering the Adoption of Estates was presented to the Executive Cabinet on 20 June 2013, and detailed fourteen recommendations, all of which were agreed by the Executive Cabinet in its response on 24 October 2014.

The Committee was made aware of the adoptions that had been completed. Some of them are full developments such as Fairview; others are elements of particular streets for example Buckshaw and Gillibrand. However, a number of factors resulted in progress not being made as anticipated against some recommendations which included internal staffing issues and Lancashire County Council not being able to provide pre-application highways and transport related advice.

Members of the Committee welcomed the progress that had been made. However, concern was raised about the length of time it was taking for some areas to be adopted such as Lower Burgh Way. It was recognised that timescales were an issue. However, the Director of Public Protection, Streetscene and Community reiterated to members that the developer could choose not to transfer areas to be adopted by either the Borough or County Council and instead make their own arrangements, such as engaging a management company to maintain the development.

It was reported by the Director of Public Protection, Streetscene and Community that there is willingness from all parties involved to work together to progress adoptions of estates faster. It was made clear that a more co-ordinated response was required from the Council and its partners, in particular from Lancashire County Council and United Utilities, to help speed the process along by making their relevant inspections in a timely fashion.

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group (Single Front Office)

The Task Group was impressed by the work that the Council was currently undertaking to promote greater efficiencies against the backdrop of ever decreasing resources and commended the implementation of the Single Front Office. All members who took part in the review had learned a great deal about the work of the service and fully supported the aims that the Council were trying to achieve.

Members of the Committee discussed the final report and concern was raised about some officers not taking ownership of call backs. The Director of Customer and Advice Services confirmed that this issue had been raised with managers and staff and that heads of services were being tasked to make sure call backs were being undertaken..

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – THURSDAY, 31 MARCH 2016

PCSO deployment in the neighbourhood policing arena

Members of the Committee welcomed Inspector Charlie Cox to the meeting along with the Head of Health, Environment and Neighbourhoods to answer questions on PCSOs deployment in the neighbourhood policing arena.

The Committee noted that data for PCSO activity, particularly in neighbourhoods could be gathered in a variety of ways including through intelligence reports, the reduction in youth

referrals, the number and types of incidents attended, community engagement, problem solving and early intervention initiatives.

Inspector Cox confirmed the outcome of the recent restructure of the PCSO which is to be reduced to 19 from 21. Of that number, eight have been deployed to deal with early action intervention initiatives. They will be responsible for delivering the majority of projects and initiatives including working with schools, working with vulnerable callers and the cadet system all of which was previously the responsibility of all the PCSOs. The Committee were informed that by having a dedicated team dealing with early intervention work allowed more consistency in approach while continuing to link in with neighbourhood officers. The change also allows the remaining PCSOs to concentrate on working in their neighbourhood and be more visible to the community.

The Committee were informed that each of the neighbourhood areas has been indexed based on risk, threat and vulnerability. This calculation determined how many PCSOs would be allocated to each neighbourhood. The majority of incidents which occur are still attended by PCSOs for that area. However, if the PCSO is not available or if it is felt the situation would be better attended by a different PCSO who was more specialised, a deployment would be made accordingly. It is acknowledged that from time to time resources may need to be increased in an area based on risk and threat. Although this meant taking some PCSOs away from their beat, the Committee is reassured that it would not be for more than one day at a time.

Inspector Cox reassured the Committee that all money provided by the residents of Chorley is being spent in Chorley. The Head of Health Environment and Neighbourhoods, Public Protection Streetscene and Community confirmed, that in previous years, the number of days lost due to vacancies or staff sickness of PCSOs have resulted in the Council receiving a refund of monies or a reduction for the following year for the difference. However, in the last two years, there had been no overall loss.

The Committee was informed about the recruitment process. Any vacancies are expected to be filled once the new recruits have completed the necessary training.

Discussion also led to the value of PACT meetings, and the need for PCSOs to be more visible in their neighbourhood area, which could also include them attending community events and parish/town council meetings.

Final Monitoring Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group (CCTV Provision and Infrastructure)

The Committee considered the final report from the Director of Public Protection, Streetscene and Community which gave information on the progress made against the recommendations of the Task Group review on CCTV Provision and Infrastructure.

A procurement exercise was undertaken in 2015, to identify a contractor who could deliver the necessary upgrade to the CCTV equipment in terms of a new monitoring suite and state of the art CCTV cameras to replace old and obsolete cameras at existing sites. The Committee noted that the upgrade does not include new sites provision for CCTV cameras.

Following a competitive tendering process in October 2015, Technology Solutions was awarded the contract and we are in year one of a three year delivery plan. Recent progress had been focussed on the relocation and equipping of the monitoring suite at Chorley Police Station, and by the end of 2016 it is envisaged that the majority of CCTV camera heads would have been replaced with upgrade units. In addition, the upgrade is seeking to utilise

low cost wi-fi camera communication and this has been achieved where sight lines and connectivity allowed.

The Committee was informed that the delivery of the infrastructure upgrade was a corporate capital project, and as such was subject to regular monitoring reports and budget control. It is anticipated that the full upgrade would be delivered earlier than anticipated and within budget.

First Monitoring Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group (Neighbourhood Working)

The monitoring report detailed the Task Groups recommendation and the progress made. Most of the recommendations have either been implemented or were in the process of being implemented. However, the recommendation that the Council explore with the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) as to how the VCFS could use resources provided by the Council to improve networking needed to be progressed.

It had been reported that during the scrutiny review, members of the Task Group had been impressed with South Ribble Borough Council's approach to neighbourhood working and in particular the forums. Members of the Committee were informed that this approach was very resource intensive and will not necessarily be the best option for all the neighbourhoods. It is proposed that the matter be discussed at the next round of Neighbourhood Area meetings in June/July 2016.

Health Scrutiny

As part of their work next week the Committee are tasking the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel to monitor Lancashire County Council's Health Scrutiny work plan.

Final report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group (Staff Sickness Absence)

Members of the Committee considered the final report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Staff Sickness Absence. As Chair of the Task Group, I presented the group's findings and drew members' attention to the recommendations to be considered by the Executive Cabinet details of which can be found later in this report.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL – 3 MARCH 2016

Performance Focus: Town Centre

The Committee welcomed the Executive Leader of the Council and Executive Member (Economic Development and Partnerships), Chair of the Town Centre Team along with the Head of Governance to the meeting who attended to answer questions in relation to Market Walk and the town centre.

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 the target of 95%.

Performance of Market Walk across September, October and November 2015, had been comparable to previous years. However, there had been a significant increase in 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.

Since coming under Council management in 2015, Market Walk 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. The Committee was informed of the initiatives undertaken by the Council to improve the aesthetics of Market Walk and town centre.

It was reported that rent arrears totaled approximately £25,000, which equates to an average of just over 5 days of late payments. The Committee were informed that the arrears were mainly due to administration issues and we are reassured that no tenant is in arrears due to hardship.

It was estimated that the Council should make £1 million on this investment. However, it was noted that the Council was making £150,000 more than anticipated.

The Committee also noted a number of retailers/landlords with premises towards the top of Market Street have successfully secured Council grants to make improvements to shop floor and shop fronts. This has improved the look and feel of that part of Market Street substantially. It is reported that the night-time economy has also increased without any interventions from the Council.

Discussion at the meeting also included details of where tenants are making strides to improve their area of the town centre and other areas that require substantial investment by Lancashire County Council for the highways repairs. The Committee was also informed of the consultation processes used to ascertain what residents and shoppers of Chorley wanted in the town centre.

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 is 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 authority. This includes key projects as set out in the 2014/15 Corporate Strategy. The Plan 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.

Members of the Panel were informed about school growth and the expected review of the CIL 123 list due to take place within the next twelve months.

Other matters discussed included –

- The level of avoidable contact
- The number of people volunteering

- % of remittances to suppliers via non electronic means.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the call-in request: Community Action Plans – 2 March 2016

The Committee considered the call-in request regarding the decision made by the Executive Cabinet on 18 February 2016 in relation to Community Action Plans.

The Executive Leader of the Council and Executive Member (Economic Development and Partnerships), expressed in the strongest terms that it was in his opinion that the decision of the Community Action Plans should not have been allowed to be called-in. Arguments were put forward by parties opposing the call-in and those who initiated the call-in. I reminded the Committee that the validity of the call-in request was not open for debate, and that it was in my gift to decide whether or not a call-in request was valid. It was however, the role of the Committee to decide if the decision made by the Executive Cabinet on Community Action Plans should be referred back to the next Executive Cabinet meeting for further consideration.

The application was made on the grounds that the Community Action Plans, overall, failed to be consistent in its approach or fairness. It was also stated that the Community Action Plan for Astley Village had missed an opportunity to make a serious impact on the community and the lives of individuals in the area. The proposed Action Plan/Proposals for resources was not good enough or had/would make a real impact on long standing issues.

I invited both parties to present their case. The Committee where informed that the Community Action Plans are being piloted in four areas (Chorley East Ward, Clayton Brook, Astley Village and Rural).

Reasons for the call-in were put forward and mainly amounted to the lack of consultation with councillors, residents and community groups, in respect of the Action Plan for Astley Village, which was contrary to the development of the other three Action Plans. There was agreement in the priorities for Astley Village but that the data used to identify community priorities have been reflective of the whole demographic of Astley Village, but instead would be the opinion of a minority of residents.

The Executive Member (Community Services) who was also present at the meeting; reminded the Committee that this was the first year that the Action Plans had been piloted and it had been important that each area went about developing them in different ways to see which is best. The process will be reviewed to find out what went well and what did not. Once the findings were known, changes to the process would be implemented for the future.

The Executive Leader reminded the committee that this was a project of the administration, and therefore it was felt there was not a need to consult all ward councillors, but the concerns raised had been noted.

In conclusion, the Committee is satisfied with the explanation put forward in the development of the Action Plans and the call-in request was dismissed.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task Group – Staff Sickness Absence

In light of the number of staff sickness absence for 2015/16 increasing compared to previous years, I wanted to hold a short review to ascertain if there is an explanation for this increase and identify possible trends.

The Task Group held two meetings and we welcomed representatives from the Council HR and OD section, the Branch Secretary for Unison and a representative from Staff Matters.

From the data received by the Committee it is felt that there is no underlying cause for concern with the increase in staff sickness absence. The Committee also felt the Council's current Sickness Absence Policy and approach to short and long term staff sickness absence was fair and proportionate to manage staff sickness effectively. The range of health and wellbeing initiatives and interventions available to staff to help maintain a healthy workforce is also welcomed.

Members of the Committee noted that a lot of work had taken place to reassure staff that the Staff Sickness Absence Policy was to help and support those members of staff suffering short or long term sickness and, it was felt that those members of staff who had been through the processes had generally felt supported.

A consistent approach throughout the Council is essential, and the Committee recommended that managers undertake refresher training on applying the policy and in particular how to support staff through the sickness absence procedures which would improve staff confidence in the Council being a caring and supportive employer.

Finally

We said goodbye to the Director of Customer and Advice Services for her support and commitment to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the last two years and wished her well for her retirement from Chorley Council.

**COUNCILLOR JOHN WALKER
CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**