

REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

This report summarises the business considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 June, the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel held on 14 June and includes an update on the task group review.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 28 JUNE 2018

Youth Zone update

We welcomed Janine Blythe, Chief Executive of Inspire, who gave an update on the first few weeks that the Youth Zone has been open.

Inspire Chorley Youth Zone is part of a Network of similar independent youth organisations that all share the same principles developed by the charity OnSide Youth Zones.

Chorley Council are supporters of the Youth Zone and were instrumental in the facility being built in Chorley. The aims are to support the young people of Chorley and the purpose-built facility, for the borough's young people aged 8 – 19, and up to 25 for those with disabilities, opened on 5 May.

The Chorley Youth Zone is the first time OnSide have built a facility in a smaller area like Chorley, usually they are in larger towns, like Blackburn and Wigan. The sessions are “Junior Zone” aged 8 – 12 and “Senior Zone” aged 12 – 19. Sessions will be adapted for young people with additional needs to enable anyone to access them; including young people with a variety of different needs from mild learning difficulties to more complex needs such as visual impairment and physical disabilities.

Over 15,000 young people aged 8 -19 live in Chorley and, eight weeks in, 3,600 young people are members, which has exceeded the annual target for membership numbers. This exceeds the membership numbers at this point for other Youth Zones and proves that there is a need in Chorley for this type of facility.

The town centre location means excellent transport links and neutral ground for the young people. In advance of the opening staff from the Youth Zone visited schools and partners, such as Parish Councils, to raise awareness of the facility and explore barriers for young people. Young people from Adlington, Croston, Rufford and Lostock Hall have attended sessions. In the next few months staff will analyse attendance and target any pockets of areas with low attendance.

Around 30% of the young people registered have additional needs. Usually the figure is between 10 and 12%. This is a challenge as it is important for all young people to have a fantastic time at the facility. Each young person with additional needs has an orientation visit which lasts about an hour. Not all those registered with additional needs have had their orientation tour, but some additional staffing resources are being facilitated. There are plans to employ an inclusion worker and work is ongoing to access external funding to secure this.

Additional provision for bike storage is being investigated as this is a popular form of transport for senior members. Work is ongoing with public transport providers as young people are finding this mode of transport expensive.

Staff have already been in touch with social services and the Police with safeguarding issues. The Police are in touch, but no issues have been reported. There is a firm and consistent approach to discipline which is proving effective.

Activities have been arranged in relation to the World Cup, Chorley in Bloom and holiday club for the summer break. A homework room is available – this was requested by young people.

Janine invited Members to visit the Youth Zone to see the facility for themselves. We thanked Janine for her presentation and congratulated her on the achievements of the Youth Zone so far.

Executive Cabinet Minutes

Councillor Walker expressed concern about the ongoing dip in performance relating to staff absence. We noted the Attendance Policy is currently being reviewed. This may be a future topic for scrutiny.

Councillor Walker noted the decision in relation to Duxbury Golf Course. He requested that information be shared with him, as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, prior to the Executive Member Decision on the matter.

Notice of Executive Decisions

We considered the Notice of Executive Decisions for June 2018 which gave notice of key and other major decisions Executive Members are expected to make.

The Notice is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it is up to date and fit for purpose.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

We considered the draft work programme and requested several additional topics.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL – 14 JUNE 2018

Performance Focus - Customer and Digital Context

We received a report from Asim Khan, Director (Customer and Digital), which outlined an update on the performance within the Planning team, an update on the newly created Enforcement team and an update on the ICT strategy.

Planning

Councillor Paul Walmsley, Executive Member (Public Protection), explained that the performance indicators in relation to Planning for 'Major', 'Minor' and 'Other' are all 100%; this includes extensions of time, which is excellent. There have been a number of staffing changes this year.

We queried if the current staffing levels are sufficient to deal with the case load and noted that staffing levels were in line with national comparators for caseloads. Staffing levels are reviewed as cases come in and, if required, contractors can be utilised, both at busy times, and when a specialist opinion is required.

We noted that a new team is currently being recruited to undertake the Central Lancashire Local Plan Review. This team sits within the Business, Development and Growth Directorate. A Member Learning Session will be held in July on this topic.

Enforcement

Councillor Walmsley explained that enforcement services are now together under one Enforcement Team which will be in operation from July 2018 onwards. This will include Building Control, Licensing (including Long term empty properties), Planning Enforcement and Neighbourhood Officers (including dog fouling and fly-tipping).

Enforcement performance is mixed, with positive results against long term empty properties targets. For planning enforcement complaints during quarter two and three there has been a focus on working to close historic cases. Whilst this has reduced the outstanding caseload it has resulted in a dip in performance for this period. Efficiency gains are anticipated through utilising case management software in the future.

We noted the positive move in bringing enforcement officers together and the improvement in communication and service this should bring.

We queried the Council Tax discounts given to empty properties. There are many factors which contribute to a long term empty property, including probate. In addition to the enforcement officer, Council Tax have two inspectors who monitor empty properties.

We discussed the difficulties in securing convictions for dog fouling as enforcement officers have to catch perpetrators in the act. We noted that, if the Council were delegated the power to enforce on street parking the same officers could also enforce against dog fouling.

ICT Strategy

Asim Khan explained that in 2017 the Council had agreed an ICT strategy to deliver improved and efficient digital services to the residents and businesses of Chorley. This has required a significant amount of planning to protect the day to day running of the Council and to plan for migration to the new data centre and infrastructure. Staff, members and residents rely heavily on ICT for the provision of services.

We queried several points relating to the new hyper converged data centre and network which will future proof the Council and enable use of cloud services. The fibre infrastructure within the town centre has been replaced, but it is planned that the redundant corporate network fibre will be reused for CCTV in the future.

We noted that the current thin client desktops do not facilitate voice over IP, but the new devices will and that the software used within Customer Services is not fully integrated, but ICT are aware of the issues and are working to resolve them.

Asim Khan highlighted that the Council have won the SOCTIM Pioneer Challenge for innovation in embracing cloud technology. The funds received in relation to this will be used to test the disaster recovery plan.

Quarter Four Performance Report

We considered a monitoring report from the Director (Policy and Governance) presented at the Executive Cabinet on 21 June. Cath Hudspith, Performance and Partnerships Manager advised that the report sets out performance against the Corporate Strategy and key service delivery measures for the fourth quarter of 2017/18, 1 January – 31 March 2018.

Overall, performance of key projects is good, with nine (75%) of the projects rated as green and one (8%) is currently not started. Two (17%) projects are currently rated amber and actions plans for each of these projects are set out in the report.

Performance of the Corporate Strategy indicators and key service delivery measures is also good. 85% of Corporate Strategy measures are performing on or above target and 80% of key service delivery measures are performing on or above target or within the 5% threshold. Those indicators performing below target have action plans outlined with measures to improve performance within the report.

On the priority of 'Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all' we noted the positive performance in relation to volunteering and the bid for Heritage Lottery funding to develop Astley Hall, Coach House and Park.

The 'Clean, safe and healthy homes and communities' priority includes the delivery of Primrose Gardens. The construction contract is on programme and the operational and strategic aspects are progressing well. Work has continued to manage minor delays due to bad weather, with action plans in place to manage any slippage and completion remains to be expected for March 2019. Work around seeking expressions of interest regarding potential café operators has resulted in a number of interested parties and site visits have been arranged.

The Youth Zone is now open and has had fantastic reviews. The indicator in relation to the number of young people taking part in 'Get Up and Go' activities is better than the target.

The 'A strong local economy' priority has two projects rated amber: 'Bring forward key sites for development' and 'Market Walk Extension'. We noted the action required.

In relation to Key Service Delivery Measures we noted that 'Average working days per employee (FTE) per year lost through sickness absence' is performing worse than target, and outside the threshold.

The overall employment rate is 86.5% which is excellent.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Quality of housing provided by social landlords

The Chair, Councillor Matthew Lynch, reported that the survey had now closed and a draft report has been received.

Members have interviewed a representative from Places for People and will be interviewing a representative from Jigsaw in July.

COUNCILLOR JOHN WALKER
CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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