

## **Overview and Scrutiny**

1. This report summarises the business considered at the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26 January and 16 March 2023, the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel held on 9 March 2023, and an update on the Task Group Review of Empty Properties.

### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 26 January 2023**

#### **Health Scrutiny**

2. We welcomed Councillor Alex Hilton to provide a verbal update on the meetings of the Lancashire County Council's Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee that took place 2 November and 14 December 2022.
3. The Social Care Reform that was announced in September 2021 for October 2023 is delayed to 2025. New social care reforms are being considered to streamline the financial and need assessment. There are concerns, despite assurances, that those with complex needs will become disadvantaged.
4. The waiting list for low level needs assessments is currently six months.
5. The Chief Medical Officer of Integrated Care Board (ICB) attended and presented information about virtual wards. Virtual wards are means for patients to be monitored from their homes. With care provided through technology in partnership with various services including the ambulance and pharmacists.
6. Across Lancashire and South Cumbria, there are 746 virtual beds, and acute virtual trusts are responsible for patients. Protocols are in place to ensure only eligible patients, with suitable homes are placed in a virtual ward.
7. Recruitment continued, but there is an acknowledged concern about the levels of staff.
8. Sites are still under consideration for the new hospital programme.
9. We noted the update.

#### **Budget Scrutiny**

10. We welcomed Executive Member for Resources Councillor Peter Wilson to present the report.
11. The report set out the draft budget that had yet to be finalised. The proposed budget has been impacted by the rising cost of living, utility costs, staff wages and inflation. The budget deficit is report at £1.17 million.
12. We heard that the budget can be balanced without cuts to services or staff. The council is to prioritise in investing in the borough. Income has been gained from Market Walk, and prospects are good for Strawberry Fields and Strawberry Meadows.
13. There is uncertainty with the funding to be received from central government. Yearly income has decreased despite an increase in costs and pressure.

14. The budget proposes an increase of 1.99% in Council Tax, with the rise, Chorley will still have the second lowest rate of Council Tax in Lancashire. Special expenses will increase inline with the rise.
15. Revenues from the New Homes Bonus and Services Grant decreased, but the Minimum Guarantee Grant totals £1.1 million.
16. We heard that the 2% (£74,000) yearly return on investment for the Whittle Health Hub was positive, both financially, and for the residents that now have access to a new GP surgery.
17. We noted the report.

### **Community Safety Partnership/Crime and Disorder**

18. We welcomed Executive member for Early Intervention, Councillor Bev Murray, Lancashire Police Inspector Michael Moys and Head of Public Protection, Laura-Jean Taylor to present the report.
19. We heard background information about the Community Safety Partnership, its role, and purpose within the community.
20. We heard there is an overall decrease in anti-social behaviour, but there is a group of young people that are a cause for concern, with the ring leaders and key instigators identified. In local surveys, antisocial behaviour is cited as the greatest concern for the residents of Chorley. It is noted that teenage anti-social behaviour accounted for 22% of reported antisocial behaviour. Also grouped in this figure are the reported breaches of Covid restrictions, neighbour disputes, and noise complaints.
21. Civil orders and interventions are used to prevent key individuals engaging and encouraging anti-social behaviour. Support is available to direct and signpost young people away from that behaviour. Actions taken include banning an individual from the town centre, that a breach will result in their arrest, and at the end of January, a dispersal order was enacted.
22. The police are engaging with young people and their parents. Any evidence of parental failing, negligent oversight or safeguarding concerns will be referred to partner agencies as a child criminal exploration (CCE) concern.
23. There are good relationships between the partners which include the police, schools, and housing associations.
24. PCSO's and Neighbourhood officers are able to be dispatched to any area that will benefit from an increase in presence. Roadshows and engagement stalls are available on request.
25. Members raised concern that reports of drugs and anti-social behaviour has been met with 'there is nothing to be done about it' the inspector reiterated that there are things to be done about it, and any occurrence of that response should be raised with him.
26. The Community Safety Partnership meets regularly, and relies on voluntary, community and faith organisations. Work is currently underway with street pastors to provide support during the night-time economy.

27. In light of the concerns about the police station relocation, the inspector added that it was still early in consideration but a satellite office in the Town Centre could be established.
28. We noted the report.

### **Open Space, Sports and Recreation Strategy & Programme Update**

29. We welcomed Zoe Whiteside, Head of Spatial Planning and Lindsey Blackstock, Open Space Strategy Office to present the report.
30. The Open Space, Sports and Recreation Strategy was approved by the Executive Cabinet in 2021.
31. Delays to identified schemes are caused primarily by sourcing and securing funding.
32. We heard that the urban wildflower corridors provide no risk of spreading invasive species or damaging the local ecology.
33. The designs of open spaces came from the views of local residents that live near the area of open space. It is acknowledged that there is a greater need for more diverse and dynamic equipment for all ages, as the focus was on young children.

### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 16 March 2023**

#### **Chorley Leisure Company Update**

34. We welcomed Chris Moister, Director of Governance and Managing Director of Chorley Leisure Company to present the report.
35. The council bought the leisure facilities in house in 2019 following the withdrawal of the preferred bidder following the procurement exercise.
36. The Leisure Company was established April 2021, and operation commenced August 2021. The entity is separate from the council land holds its own objectives. The board of directors of the company are made up of directors from Chorley Council. The sole shareholder of the Leisure Company is the council and the functions are fulfilled by the Executive Cabinet.
37. To deliver the objectives of the Leisure Company, a single year business plan that reflects the priorities was adopted. Following this, a five-year business development strategy to be introduced with the objective for financial self-sustainability. Any surplus is to be reinvested into the company and facilities, but a surplus is not expected for the foreseeable future.
38. We heard that the Leisure Company face challenges financially. With the increase in the cost of utilities, and staffing, and the cost of living crisis. Membership increased 8% yearly, but not yet at the levels observed pre Covid.
39. Staff turnover is high, but in line with the leisure industry.
40. We heard that the best time to further scrutinise the performance of the Leisure Company was in the Communities Performance Panel.

41. All three buildings require investment and plans in place to make them more appealing. The renovations to Brinccall baths, which was allocated £600,000 is not yet underway as further surveys are required as issues may not be as extensive as first reported.
42. We noted the report.

### **Cycling Update**

43. We welcomed Matt Evans, Air Quality and Climate Change Officer to present the Cycling Update ahead of a full report to be given at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
44. The work completed aims to understand the views of cycling and to promote more cycling in the borough.
45. The consultation received 180 responses. The majority of the comments are constructive and favour additional cycling facilities and provisions. The feedback from the consultation will be used to formulate achievable objectives.
46. Cycle pods were installed at Bengal Street, but are being underused. It is theorised that this is due to the change in working patterns, their location, potential damage to the new ICT equipment in case of bad weather or accidents, and the lack of changing facilities in the town hall.
47. Work is underway with the County Council to ensure that Chorley is represented within the Lancashire Cycle Walking and Infrastructure Partnership.
48. The County Council wish to be more involved with the planning process and provide their views when a site or application is compatible with their active travel plans.
49. We noted the report.

### **Quality of Housing Provided by Social Landlords – Final Monitoring Report**

50. We welcomed Jennifer Mullin, Director of Communities to present the report.
51. Work is underway to ensure best practice is conducted. Learning sessions are completed by the Select Move Coordinator. Cooperation with various partners is to ensure the distribution of disability grants, decrease waiting times and streamline the process with housing partners.
52. The white paper is still outstanding and additional regulations are due by 2024. The customer satisfaction and quarterly performance was conducted, and the first results are due imminently.
53. There is rising concern about damp and mould for both private and housing association properties due to the publicity of the risks and dangers. A specialist housing officer was appointed to inspect properties owned and rented by Housing Associations.
54. We noted the report.

## **Period Poverty Update**

55. We heard that there is good provision of products available across the borough, including schools. It is acknowledged that there are gaps in what is provided in council owned buildings for staff and visitors.
56. We raised that there is work outstanding within some communities to raise awareness, education and to provide information where a culture of honour and shame are prevalent.
57. We are surprised that Morrisons is the only supermarket that provides free products in the area. We noted that there are a range of groups and services that provide support and products
58. We noted the report

## **Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel – 9 March 2023**

### **Performance Focus – Planning and Development**

59. We welcomed Executive member for Planning and Development Councillor Alistair Morwood to present the report.
60. The directorate is said to be unusual as it covered the portfolios of three Executive Members.
61. Financially, there is an overspend of £37,346 due to the increase in costs of professional fees, statutory notices, legal fees, and staffing. The legal fees that are required to defend planning decisions are £147,000.
62. There is a reduction of income from the building control plan fees, inspection fees, and due to the suspension of the pre-application advice service, the budgeted £17,000 was not received. The decision to suspend the service came due to the pandemic, and in its place, improvements were made to the planning portal and the supplementary guidance provided.
63. Recruitment is still a challenge for the council. Numerous failed recruitment efforts require the use of agency staff. All duties are exercised at maximum capacity, but at greater expense. At present, there are no plans to recruit and install a Director of Planning and Development.
64. We heard and discussed the performance indicators within the report.
65. We heard that in relation to the local plan and developments within the borough, the council is below its indicators. For a large development, the average build rate was 30 – 50 units a year. It was added that towards the end of the Local Plan, fewer allocated sites remain, and allocated sites may yet to be developed. We heard that the council is currently negotiating with a developer to purchase a number of affordable homes in its role as a registered provider.
66. The consultation for the new Local Plan ended 24 February 2023, 1200 online and 270 written responses were received. Over 500 people attended sessions across the

borough, and external parties, including the School Planning Team and Highways have provided feedback which resulted in additional work.

67. We heard that there are between 1000 and 1200 planning applications made a year, with the majority decided by delegated decisions. Most appeals are dismissed, and those that go to appeal are statistical outliers. The time taken for appeals to be heard and resolved are substantial due to resourcing issues at the Planning Directorate.
68. Two of the three projects, 'to work with partners and residents to improve local play and community facilities across the borough', and 'lead activity to address climate change including tree planting' are on track. The project 'to deliver affordable housing within the borough' is slightly off track.
69. The projects for the 2023/24 municipal year are to 'deliver the local plan', 'to deliver natural green initiatives', and to 'develop the use of green energy in the borough'.
70. The project to 'deliver affordable housing' remains a corporate project, however it is to be placed under the Director of Change and Delivery.
71. We noted the report.

### **Business Plans Update 2022/23**

72. We welcomed Howard Anthony, Interim Head of Policy and Performance to present the report.
73. We heard that the business plans are set by the services within the council, some are small and simple, others are large and complicated. It is the responsibility of the service to deliver the project and to provide updates throughout the year.
74. There is an average of five projects per service. Overall, performance is positive with 73% of projects green or completed. It is expected that all projects are to be completed by the end of Quarter 4.
75. Notable achievements within the year include the launch of the People Strategy and the new Customer Access Charter.
76. Two projects are red and considered off track, these are the 'flood defence work to Earlsway, Euxton', and 'evaluate a rent management system for housing stock'. The flood defence work is complex due to a combination of high costs and land ownership issues, which will require a review of its feasibility. The delay to the rent management system is due to staffing and capacity issues.
77. 34 projects are rated amber and considered slightly off track, the reasons varied, but a common theme is capacity and resources.
78. 13 projects are currently on hold and subject to review to determine next steps. The primary reason given is capacity and resources. In a number of cases due to project managers departing the council, projects have been placed on hold to provide time for their replacements to review and move forward in due course.
79. The projects that are on hold or delayed within public protection have no impact on the statutory duties delivered. The on-hold projects that relate to health and safety are awareness campaigns, not policies.

80. We noted the report.

### **Overview and Scrutiny Task Group Update**

81. The Task Group held a World Café Event that featured officers from Enforcement, Public Protection, Housing, Customer Services and Revenues, and Legal.

82. The Task Group intend to have an informal meeting with the Executive Members for Homes and Housing, and Planning and Development ahead of the final report being presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July.

### **Recommendations**

83. To note the report.

Councillor John Walker  
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

MP