

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 13th September 2021

Present: Councillor Johnson (Chair)
Councillors L.Barnes, Janet Eaton, Gill, Kempson, Kenyon,
Morris, Procter, Rooke and Thompson.

In attendance: Clare Birtwistle, Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer
Ian Walker, Service Assurance Team Manager
Carol Walker, Fraud and Compliance Officer
Clare Law, Head of People and Policy
Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager

Also Present: Councillor Hughes
By remote access – Councillors Ashworth and Walmsley
2 members of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE & SUBSTITUTIONS

1.1 There were no apologies for absence.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

4.1 The Chair confirmed that there were no urgent items of business.

5. QUESTION TIME

5.1 The Chair noted that she would allow questions to be asked on each item as it was discussed.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

6.1 The Chair noted that since the last meeting the Corporate Plan had been approved by Full Council.

6.2 Lancashire Highways had agreed to come to the meeting on the 20th October to update members on road maintenance as well as preparations in advance of the winter season. Advance questions had been requested from members.

- 6.3 A GP Appointments task and finish group would be starting shortly and committee members would be kept updated regarding this work.

ORDINARY BUSINESS

7. SANCTION AND PROSECUTION POLICY [COUNCIL TAX AND COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT]

- 7.1 The Fraud and Compliance Officer outlined the revised policy and the Service Assurance Team Manager noted that at 3.5 the covering report mentioned signposting to Citizens Advice or similar debt advice agencies in line with relevant debt recovery protocols. This wording was also being added to the policy prior to Cabinet approval.
- 7.2 In response to members' questions and comments the following clarification was given:
- If funding support to Citizens Advice or similar debt advice agencies changed, then the policy wording would need to be revisited. Any decision around financial support would be taken by members at budget setting.
 - Claiming benefits can provide evidence that someone is ill, as detailed at section 4 of the prosecution section.
 - Terminology would be changed relating to pregnancy, hearing impairment and damage to employability.
 - Each case was considered on its own merits.
 - Fraud only occurred in a minority of cases and genuine mistakes were picked up early in the process. Relevant checks and balances were in place.

Resolved:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend Cabinet to approve the updated Sanction and Prosecution Policy in respect of Council Tax and Council Tax Support with the amendments to the terminology and inclusion of the information detailed at 3.5.

8. RIPA (REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000)

- 8.1 The Head of Legal Services outlined the revised policy.
- 8.2 In response to members' questions the following clarification was given:
- RIPA had not been used since the criteria had changed. It could only be used for serious crime where there would be a minimum of 6 months imprisonment and the majority of the Council's work would not carry such a penalty e.g. littering and dog fouling.
 - Previously RIPA had been used for benefit fraud, but prosecutions now fell under the Department for Work and Pensions.
 - If RIPA was used it has to meet the serious crime threshold, be for the detection of crime, and also be reasonable and proportionate.
 - There was a RIPA course available for staff and it would be reviewed to see if it would also be useful for councillors.
 - RIPA was not required for CCTV or in taxi cabs, RIPA was only for covert surveillance.
 - Further clarification would be provided to members regarding section 7.3 on page 11 regarding under 16 and under 18 juvenile sources.

- References to his/him would be replaced with “they/them.”

Resolved:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend Cabinet to approve the updated RIPA policy with the amended terminology.

9. QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT (APRIL, MAY & JUNE) 2021-2022

9.1 The Head of People and Policy introduced the report which outlined the Council’s performance during quarter 1 (April-June 2021).

9.2 In response to members’ questions the following clarification was given:

- The Director of Communities had been providing weekly updates to members on the collection of refuse.
- Corporate Support were working with Operations to provide clear messages to members of the public regarding late bin collection.
- Four existing members of staff were being trained for their Large Goods Vehicle licence to assist with the bin collections.
- There were plans to look into litter bins in public spaces.
- Staff had now come back into the office and were working within the requirements of the flexible working policy. Phones were diverted home whilst homeworking and Corporate Support staff had calls transferred to their laptops.
- Some services had a backlog of work which was currently being cleared including Disabled Facilities Grants and Building Control.
- A customer service review was taking place which included a mystery shopper exercise as well as process mapping the customer experience.
- The best way to resolve an issue was to get it logged with Corporate Support who were triaging calls on the general phone number 217777 and logging work for the relevant teams.
- If a member had ongoing issues they should escalate it to a relevant member of the Corporate Management Team.
- Compliments were regularly reported to management team and disseminated to staff via their team meetings, and also through the staff briefing sessions which took place 2-3 times a year. Nominations could also be made for the staff recognition/award scheme which would be run bi-annually.

Resolved:

The report and performance levels were noted.

10. EQUALITY REPORT AND WORKFORCE PROFILE

10.1 The Head of People and Policy introduced the Equality Report and Workforce Profile for 2020-21.

10.2 In response to members’ questions the following clarification was given:

- Work had started on the action plan and the Head of People and Policy had been communicating with the Member Champion for Equalities and they would be meeting to progress this work further.
- The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Co-opted member would also be invited to the meeting.

- Actions would include encouraging people to apply for jobs from under-represented groups.
- Completion of the equalities form was optional and the wording of the questions was being reviewed.

Resolved:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report and continue to monitor the Council's progress on equality and sufficient publication of equality information in line with current legislative and best practice requirements to ensure that the Council is operating fairly and equitably.

11. ANNUAL COUNCIL FEEDBACK REVIEW AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO) ENQUIRIES

- 11.1 The Committee and Member Services Manager introduced the Annual Council Feedback Review for 2020-21.

Resolved:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the Annual Council Feedback report.

12. THE FORWARD PLAN

- 12.1 Members were updated on the Forward Plan.

Resolved:

The update was noted.

The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 8.00pm

Signed: _____

Date: _____