

To register a question for Public Question Time please email your question to democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk before 9am Thursday 27th January.

Meeting of: The Council

Monday 31st January 2022 at 6.30pm or at the conclusion of Question Time and Public Engagement whichever is the later.

***Venue:** Council Chamber, The Business Centre, Futures Park, Bacup. OL13 0BB



***Please note this meeting will be accessible in the Council Chamber for essential attendees only (elected councillors and supporting officers). All other access will be by remote observation as detailed below.**

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<https://zoom.us/j/95728023249?pwd=T1c5M3ZjVzNrdFVGdzRuUnRoTXdYUT09>

Meeting ID: 957 2802 3249

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Supported by: Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager Tel: 01706 252422

Email: democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk

ITEM		Lead Member/Contact Officer
A.	BUSINESS MATTERS	
A1.	Apologies for Absence	
A2.	To approve and sign as a correct record the minutes of 15 th December 2021.	
A3.	Urgent Items of Business To note any items which the Chair has agreed to add to the Agenda on the grounds of urgency.	
A4.	Declarations of Interest <i>Members are advised to contact the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting to seek advice on interest issues if necessary.</i> Members are requested to indicate at this stage, any items on the agenda in which they intend to declare an interest. Members are reminded that, in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000 and the Council's Code of Conduct, they must declare the nature of any personal interest and, if the interest is prejudicial, withdraw from the meeting during consideration of the item.	Clare Birtwistle, Monitoring Officer 01706 252438 clarebirtwistle@rossendalebc.gov.uk

The agenda and reports are also available for inspection on the Council's website <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/>. Other formats are available on request. Tel 01706 217777 or contact Rossendale Borough Council, Futures Park, Bacup, OL13 0BB

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B.	Communications from the Mayor, the Leader or Head of Paid Service To receive any communications from the Mayor, the Leader, or the Head of the Paid Service that they may wish to lay before the Council.	The Mayor, Councillor Oakes, The Leader, Councillor A.Barnes and Neil Shaw, Chief Executive 01706 252447 neilshaw@rossendalebc.gov.uk
C.	ORDINARY BUSINESS	
C1.	Our New Deal for Lancashire To consider the Our New Deal for Lancashire report.	Councillor A.Barnes/ Neil Shaw, Chief Executive 01706 252447 neilshaw@rossendalebc.gov.uk
C2.	LGA peer challenge To consider the LGA peer challenge report.	Councillor A.Barnes/ Neil Shaw, Chief Executive 01706 252447 neilshaw@rossendalebc.gov.uk



Neil Shaw
Chief Executive

Date Published: 21st January 2022

Re-published: 24th January 2022

COUNCILLOR JACKIE OAKES, MAYOR

MINUTES OF: THE COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF ROSSENDALE

DATE OF MEETING: 15th December 2021

PRESENT: The Mayor Councillor Oakes (in the Chair)
Councillors Adshead, Ashworth, A. Barnes, S. Barnes, Brennan, Cheetham, James Eaton, Janet Eaton, Essex, Foxcroft, Gill, Hughes, Johnson, Kempson, Kostyan, Lythgoe, MacNae, Marriott, Morris, Neal, Pendlebury, Powell, Procter, Rigby, Rooke, Serridge, Steen, Stevens, Thompson, Walmsley, Whitehead and Woods.

IN ATTENDANCE: Neil Shaw, Chief Executive / Head of Paid Service
Clare Birtwistle, Head of Legal Services / Monitoring Officer
Mike Atherton, Head of Planning & Building Control
Anne Storah, Principal Planner (Forward Planning)
Lauren Ashworth, Principal Planning Officer
George Taylor, Mayor's Attendant

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: By remote access: 12 public observers.
Karen Spencer, Head of Finance/S151 Officer
Jacob Landers, Planning Assistant (Forward Planning)

A short silence was held as a mark of respect for former councillor David Barnes.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received for Councillors L. Barnes, Haworth and Kenyon.

2. **Minutes**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th September 2021 be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

3. **Urgent Items of Business**

There were no urgent items of business.

4. **Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations were made:

- Councillor Marriott declared a pecuniary interest in minute 6 owing to a land/property interest and he left the room and did not vote on this item.

5. **Communications from the Mayor, the Leader or Head of Paid Service**

There were no communications from the Mayor or Head of Paid Service.

The Leader of the Council provided the following updates:

The Council had been awarded a Green Flag Award for Stubblelee and Moorlands Park, which was a real credit to the excellent staff in the park who make it so attractive for residents, and also a reflection of all the hard work that community partners have put into the park through the master planning group.

A very successful climate change conference had been held in November to coincide with COP26. The event engaged local businesses in the morning providing advice on support and a new grants scheme to reduce carbon. In the afternoon community groups came together to pledge their commitment to addressing climate change. The Council had committed £1 Million over four years which would help groups to reduce carbon as well as supporting initiatives such as the Rossendale Forest which would see over 6000 trees planted before spring next year. In addition, four refuse vehicles were running on Hydro treated vegetable oil, cutting emissions by 90 percent.

There was a continued challenge by a lack of HGV drivers, but refuse bins had been emptied through redeploying staff and working into weekends.

There were new electrical vehicle charging points in four car parks across the borough as part of a government funded scheme in partnership with the Council.

The Council was working with the other local authorities across Lancashire to see if it could develop a County Deal proposal to put to central Government. This was an exciting opportunity to seek the devolution of Government funding to Lancashire. If agreed, this would see decisions on major issues like town centre regeneration, housing, transport, early years support for families and improving the environment no longer being taken in Whitehall but taking place locally. It was early days in the development of a Deal but the early signs looked really interesting. The Council would not want this funding opportunity to pass by Rossendale and it was hoped this would lead to more money to improve our town centres and to address longstanding problems like flood prevention schemes. Details on the proposed Deal would be discussed formally by each council in Lancashire early in the New Year.

N.B. Councillor Marriott left the meeting prior to the following item.

ORDINARY BUSINESS

6. Adoption of Rossendale Local Plan

The Council considered the adoption of the Rossendale Local Plan.

In consideration of the item the follow comments were made:

- Leader's response to social media comments.
- The plan had been found sound by the inspectors.
- Concerns around infrastructure, access and housing numbers.
- The need to protect our green belt and greenfield land.
- Cost implications of non-adoption.
- Not being able to hold roadshows due to the Covid pandemic, which may have limited residents' involvement.
- Government could step in if the plan was not adopted and enforce a plan.
- Proposed developments would still need to go through due planning process.
- The plan would protect and control future development.
- The Local Plan Steering Group had been involved throughout the plan's development.
- Thanks to officers for all their hard work in delivering this plan.

Councillors Essex, Pendlebury and Serridge requested a named vote.

Members voted as follows:

Name	Vote
Cllr Adshead	For
Cllr Ashworth	For
Cllr Alyson Barnes	For
Cllr Samara Barnes	For
Cllr Brennan	For
Cllr Cheetham	Against
Cllr James Eaton	For
Cllr Janet Eaton	For
Cllr Essex	Against
Cllr Foxcroft	Against
Cllr Gill	For
Cllr Hughes	For
Cllr Johnson	For
Cllr Kempson	Against
Cllr Kostyan	Against
Cllr Lythgoe	For
Cllr MacNae	For
Cllr Morris	Against
Cllr Neal	For
Cllr Oakes	For
Cllr Pendlebury	Against
Cllr Powell	For
Cllr Procter	For
Cllr Rigby	Against
Cllr Rooke	For
Cllr Serridge	For
Cllr Steen	Against
Cllr Stevens	For
Cllr Thompson	Against
Cllr Walmsley	For
Cllr Whitehead	For
Cllr Woods	Against
For:	21
Against:	11
Abstentions:	0

Resolved:

1. To accept the recommendations contained in the Inspectors' Report dated 19 November 2021 and letter of 26 November 2021.
2. To adopt the Rossendale Local Plan (2019 to 2036) Written Statement and accompanying Policies Map.
3. To commence work on the Supplementary Planning Documents referred to in the Local Plan.

Reason for Decision

It is a statutory requirement to have a Local Plan in place and this will help meet the Borough's affordable and specialist housing needs, whilst providing other infrastructure including open space, education, etc.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

N.B. Councillor Marriott returned to the meeting for the remaining items.

7. Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22

The Council considered the Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22.

Resolved:

Full Council approve the Rossendale Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022/23 as set out in the report.

Reason for Decision

Adoption of the scheme by full council before 11th March meets the Councils statutory duty.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

8. Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) Borough Wide (2021)

The Council considered the Public Space Protection Orders report.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- Electric bikes were covered under the order.
- The PSPOs were welcomed and would assist the police.
- Need to ensure the orders do not lapse.

Resolved:

That following an 8 week period of public consultation and consideration of the same, the attached draft Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO's) are adopted by the Council.

Reason for Decision

The facilities and enjoyment of our towns, parks and open spaces should be open to everyone without fear, intimidation or harassment, and these measures will ensure that this is the case for the foreseeable future.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

9. Public Meeting Schedule

The Council considered the Public Meeting Schedule.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- Important to set dates and keep to them.

Resolved:

Council agree the Public Meeting Schedule containing dates of public meetings for 2022/2023 as detailed at Appendix A.

Reason for Decision

It is important to agree a committee schedule in order to ensure that the Council can effectively conduct its business.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET AND OTHER COMMITTEES

10. Appointment of External Auditors

The Council considered the Appointment of External Auditors report.

Resolved:

Council agree to opt into Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited, acting as the appointing person for the appointment of external auditors for Rossendale Borough Council.

Reason for Decision

The most cost effective and efficient option is for the council to opt in to the PSAA scheme for the appointment of the External Auditors.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

11. Constitution Review

The Council considered the Constitution Review report.

Resolved:

1. To approve the proposed Councillor Code of Conduct as outlined in Appendix 1 and recommend adoption of the said Code to Whitworth Town Council.
2. To approve the proposed additional changes and typographical amendments to parts 3, 4 and 5 as outlined in Appendix 2.

Reason for Decision

The Council is required by law to implement a Constitution and it is in the interests of the Council to regularly review and update the document.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

12. Rossendale – Our Health, Our Wellbeing, Our Place

The Council considered the Health and Wellbeing report.

In response to questions from members it was confirmed that:

- Work that Overview and Scrutiny had undertaken on suicide was being looked at across the county and hopefully other authorities would use this model template.
- Positive emphasis on health.
- Welcomed document.
- Ensure photos are local to Rossendale and our residents.
- Dentistry did not seem to feature and it would be appreciated to be considered at some juncture.

Resolved:

Council approve the new partnership Health and Wellbeing Plan for Rossendale – Our Health, Our Wellbeing, Our Place.

Reason for Decision

Our Health, Our Wellbeing, Our Place seeks to maximise the voice of Rossendale within the health sector and to also maximise our impact in improving wellbeing by bringing local providers and the community together.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

NOTICES OF MOTION

13. Notice of motion

Councillor Adshead moved the following motion, which was seconded by Councillor Alyson Barnes:

This Council notes:

*The Declaration by Parliament of an Environment and Climate Emergency in May 2019.
The Declaration of Climate Emergency by this Council in September 2019;
The Rossendale Borough Council (RBC) Climate Change Strategy and 10-year action plan published earlier this year (2021);*

The Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill before Parliament, which, if it became law, would ensure;

- The Paris Agreement is enshrined into law*
- The Leaders' Pledge for Nature is enshrined into law*
- The UK takes full responsibility for its greenhouse gas and ecological footprints*
- The set-up of an independent Climate and Nature Assembly in the UK to develop an emergency strategy.*

This Council therefore resolves to:

- A. declare an ecological emergency*
- B. support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill*
- C. inform the local media of this decision*
- D. write an open letter to Jake Berry and Sara Britcliffe (MPs) urging them to sign up to support the Bill*
- E. write to the CEE Bill Alliance, expressing its support for the Bill*

Councillors Alyson Barnes, Hughes and Serridge requested a named vote.

Members voted as follows:

Name	Vote
Cllr Adshead	For
Cllr Ashworth	For
Cllr Alyson Barnes	For
Cllr Samara Barnes	For
Cllr Brennan	For
Cllr Cheetham	Abstain
Cllr James Eaton	For
Cllr Janet Eaton	For
Cllr Essex	For
Cllr Foxcroft	Against
Cllr Gill	For
Cllr Hughes	For
Cllr Johnson	For
Cllr Kempson	For
Cllr Kostyan	Against
Cllr Lythgoe	For
Cllr MacNae	For
Cllr Marriott	For
Cllr Morris	For
Cllr Neal	For
Cllr Oakes	For
Cllr Pendlebury	Abstain

Cllr Powell	For
Cllr Procter	For
Cllr Rigby	Against
Cllr Rooke	For
Cllr Serridge	For
Cllr Steen	Against
Cllr Stevens	For
Cllr Thompson	Against
Cllr Walmsley	For
Cllr Whitehead	For
Cllr Woods	For
For:	26
Against:	5
Abstentions:	2

Resolved:

Council resolves to:

1. Declare an ecological emergency
2. Support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill
3. Inform the local media of this decision
4. Write an open letter to Jake Berry and Sara Britcliffe (MPs) urging them to sign up to support the Bill
5. Write to the CEE Bill Alliance, expressing its support for the Bill

Reason for Decision

To support the motion.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

14. Notice of motion

Councillor Pendlebury moved the following motion which was seconded by Councillor Neal:

Scrutiny is the bedrock of a good council operation. It should form a critical friend and sounding board to support the executive in developing policy. Whilst some elements of scrutiny within the Council are good it was recently identified that this could be better at reviewing internal policies and decisions.

Therefore council resolves to:

- *Establish a new External Scrutiny committee to meet 4 times a year with a membership in line with political balance.*
- *Rename the existing overview & scrutiny committee to become the Internal Scrutiny committee.*
- *Give the leader of the largest opposition group the decision on the chairmanship of the Internal Scrutiny committee.*

An amendment was moved, seconded and accepted as follows:

Overview and Scrutiny is an important function in supporting the council's governance arrangements. An effective scrutiny function encourages constructive challenge and enhances the council's overall performance. This council notes the good work done by all members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and some of the excellent reports they have produced on issues such as holiday hunger and suicide in the borough.

The recent Peer Review has made comment that we could strengthen our Overview and Scrutiny function, something which we welcome, and we await the full report from the Peer Review Team. Council resolves to set up a cross party working group to consider any recommendations and look at how we can strengthen our Scrutiny process and make recommendations to be decided at a full council meeting.

Resolved:

Council resolves to:

- Set up a cross party working group to consider any recommendations of the Peer Review team report and make recommendations as to how we can strengthen our scrutiny process.

Reason for Decision

To support the amended motion.

Alternative Options Considered

The original motion.

15. Notice of motion

Councillor Cheetham moved the following motion which was seconded by Councillor Steen:

This Notice of Motion proposes that all new Roads, Streets, Avenues and Closes, in Rossendale, be named after any Service Person from the Borough (Ward Specific if possible), who lost their life whilst on Active Service.

The signs should incorporate a Poppy in one corner to signify to the World the individual served King and Country and made the supreme sacrifice of their life so other could live in peace and freedom.

If any extra costs are incurred by the Council, they would be infinitesimally small compared to the price paid by these men / women and their families.

An amendment was moved, seconded and accepted as follows:

Council notes the huge sacrifice made by those who have served our country in the Armed Forces, and firmly feels our street naming policy should acknowledge and respect those people of the former boroughs and urban districts which make up Rossendale. Council therefore moves to amend the current street naming policy to ensure primary consideration is given to acknowledging those Service Persons from the Borough (Ward Specific if possible), who lost their life whilst on Active Service in the naming of all new roads and developments in the borough.

Council also resolves to establish a new cross party working group which in future will decide the final names for new roads and developments in the borough.

Resolved:

Council resolves to:

1. Amend the current street naming policy to ensure primary consideration is given to acknowledging those Service Persons from the Borough (Ward Specific if possible), who lost their life whilst on Active Service in the naming of all new roads and developments in the borough.
2. Establish a new cross party working group which in future will decide the final names for new roads and developments in the borough.

Reason for Decision

To support the amended motion.

Alternative Options Considered

The original motion.

16. Notice of motion

Councillor S.Barnes moved the following motion which was seconded by Councillor Serridge:

Women and girls of Lancashire are suffering from misogyny, expressed in sexual harassment, domestic abuse and death. Lancashire women suffer a higher than average rate of deaths – the femicide census ranks Lancashire as 13th highest for female killings in a list of 42 police forces in the UK. There is evidence of a link between domestic abuse and terrorism: misogyny affects everyone, not just women.

We call upon the council to write to the Minister of State for Crime and Policing, Kit Malthouse, with the following requests:

- That he prepare legislation to make misogyny a hate crime, to be recorded as such by all police forces across the UK, and prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service with as much vigour as other hate crimes.*
- That police forces should be required to record all instances of femicide, the killing of a woman or girl by a man, with immediate effect.*
- That a task force be set up before the end of this year to assess the extent and impact of incel (involuntary celibate) groups both online and offline, and to work with voluntary groups and experts who have already begun work in this field.*
- That all incidents of domestic violence should be treated as violent assault or grievous bodily harm, to be prosecuted automatically without the victim being required to make a formal complaint.*
- That policing resources should be increased to ensure that police forces are able to deal with these new responsibilities. At the very least they should return to pre 2010 strength.*
- That resources be made available to further study the links between domestic abuse and the perpetrators of terrorist actions.*

An amendment was moved seconded and accepted as follows:

That in addition, Council resolve to set up a cross party working group with a view to assessing areas of concern regarding abuse, as it is not acceptable in any form.

Councillors Powell, Walmsley and Serridge requested a named vote.

Members voted as follows:

Name	Vote
Cllr Adshead	For
Cllr Ashworth	For
Cllr Alyson Barnes	For
Cllr Samara Barnes	For
Cllr Brennan	For
Cllr Cheetham	Abstain
Cllr James Eaton	For
Cllr Janet Eaton	For
Cllr Essex	For
Cllr Foxcroft	Abstain

Cllr Gill	For
Cllr Hughes	For
Cllr Johnson	For
Cllr Kempson	For
Cllr Kostyan	Abstain
Cllr Lythgoe	For
Cllr MacNae	For
Cllr Marriott	For
Cllr Morris	For
Cllr Neal	For
Cllr Oakes	For
Cllr Pendlebury	Abstain
Cllr Powell	For
Cllr Procter	For
Cllr Rigby	Abstain
Cllr Rooke	For
Cllr Serridge	For
Cllr Steen	Abstain
Cllr Stevens	For
Cllr Thompson	Abstain
Cllr Walmsley	For
Cllr Whitehead	For
Cllr Woods	Abstain
For:	25
Against:	0
Abstentions:	8

Resolved:

That the council writes to the Minister of State for Crime and Policing, Kit Malthouse, with the following requests:

- That he prepare legislation to make misogyny a hate crime, to be recorded as such by all police forces across the UK, and prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service with as much vigour as other hate crimes.
- That police forces should be required to record all instances of femicide, the killing of a woman or girl by a man, with immediate effect.
- That a task force be set up before the end of this year to assess the extent and impact of incel (involuntary celibate) groups both online and offline, and to work with voluntary groups and experts who have already begun work in this field.
- That all incidents of domestic violence should be treated as violent assault or grievous bodily harm, to be prosecuted automatically without the victim being required to make a formal complaint.
- That policing resources should be increased to ensure that police forces are able to deal with these new responsibilities. At the very least they should return to pre 2010 strength.
- That resources be made available to further study the links between domestic abuse and the perpetrators of terrorist actions.

That the Council further resolves to set up a cross party working group with view to assessing areas of concern.

Reason for Decision

To support the amended motion.

Alternative Options Considered

The original motion.

(The meeting commenced at 7.03pm and concluded at 9.15pm)

Signed.....
(Chair)

Date

Subject:	Our New Deal for Lancashire	Status:	For publication
Report to:	Council	Date:	31 January 2022
Report of:	Chief Executive	Portfolio Holder:	Leader of the Council
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required: No	Attached:	No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required: No	Attached:	No
Contact Officer:	Neil Shaw	Telephone:	01706 252480
Email:	neilshaw@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Full Council:

- 1.1. Support the outline "Our New Deal for a Greater Lancashire" at Appendix 1 as the initial draft basis for further discussion and development of a possible County Deal for the Lancashire area.
- 1.2. Agree the principles of governance as set out in Appendix 2 for any future deal.
- 1.3. Agree that the Leader of the Council continues to work with Lancashire Leaders in line with the principles agreed in recommendations 1.1 & 1.2 above, and note that any formal proposals will require approval by Full Council at the appropriate time.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Full Council with an update on work undertaken towards development of strengthened joint working, a long term strategic plan and a County Deal for the Lancashire area and seek agreement to progress this work.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The attached report is being considered by the Full Council of each of the fifteen local authorities in Lancashire, that is, the county council, two unitary authorities and each of the 12 district councils.
- 3.2. The intention is that this report sets out the general principles and high level priorities of a long term strategic plan and County Deal. As progress is made, more details about specific asks will be developed, and there will be opportunities for all of the partner authorities to contribute to and influence that, including identifying specific schemes and activities.
- 3.3. Full Council is asked to consider the report and the recommendations set out above.

4. A NEW DEAL FOR LANCASHIRE

- 4.1. Lancashire has a rich heritage, it is a diverse county which has opportunities for all and is home to globally leading firms and nationally significant assets. Its thriving £34bn economy was growing rapidly prior to the pandemic with the 4th largest aerospace cluster in the world helping achieve significant productivity gains. With a population of 1.5m people, Lancashire's 54,000 businesses generate 749,000 jobs across a range of important and emerging sectors from manufacturing and hospitality to cyber, digital and low carbon. A place of amazing beauty, its natural assets support the economy and workforce as well as providing a thriving tourism destination for visitors and an opportunity to support net zero and

cleaner energy ambitions.

- 4.2. Local government arrangements in Lancashire are complex with a county council, two unitary authorities and 12 district councils. However, over the last two years, the context of a global emergency response has created a platform to empower Leaders of all the 15 local authorities in Lancashire to strengthen relationships and partnerships with wider stakeholders. Whilst the pandemic has generated significant, bespoke impacts in Lancashire that have exacerbated longer-term underlying structural issues and inequalities, Leaders are using this foundation as a basis for recovery and to drive forward economic growth.
- 4.3. With a robust evidence base and utilising the strong local knowledge of elected representatives, Leaders are developing a vision and ambition for the future of Lancashire looking ahead to 2050 to recover, grow and decarbonise the economy, improving the place and the life opportunities of its people. Their plans to achieve this will not only realise opportunities for Lancashire and UK plc but in doing so, help address many of the structural deficits and level up across the county.
- 4.4. With the Government's much-anticipated levelling up White Paper on the horizon, the time is right for Lancashire to move forward together with a collective voice to make the case for more powers and investment for all of Lancashire.

Leaders have identified that the work is now at a stage where it is important to secure the engagement and support of all members. This report is therefore being presented to all fifteen local authorities.

- 4.5. This report covers:
 1. **Lancashire 2050**, which sets out the headline themes which could be included in a long term strategic plan and ambition for Greater Lancashire.
 2. **Our New Deal for a Greater Lancashire**, which sets out an initial scope and is a first phase of work that could begin to frame a set of devolution asks as part of a County Deal.
 3. **Governance**, which sets out information about the governance options to oversee the long-term plan and deliver the deal, and the principles agreed by Leaders for any governance arrangements.
- 4.6. It is important to note that the Government's anticipated Levelling Up White Paper will influence to a large extent the shape and substance of a County Deal that Lancashire authorities will be able to pursue. The information, advice and proposals in this paper may therefore, need to change to reflect the white paper. This report and recommendations seek to position Lancashire so it is better placed to commence early County Deal discussions with Government.

5. DEVELOPING A LANCASHIRE PLAN

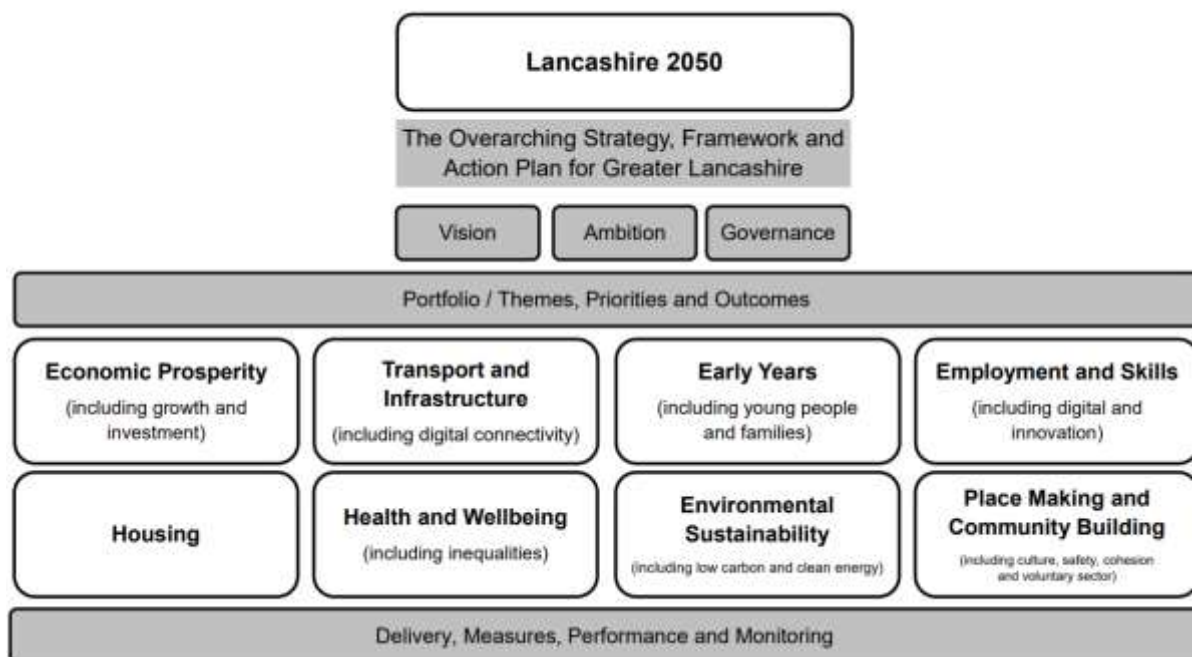
- 5.1. Significant work has taken place across Lancashire to gather evidence that will shape an overarching vision, strategy and plan for the whole of 'Greater Lancashire'. This work has helped inform the scale of ambition and the development of robust key priorities within the scope of what Our New Deal for a Greater Lancashire could look like, together with the governance principles described in this report.
- 5.2. Once fully developed and adopted, in tandem with a devolution deal, Lancashire's overarching strategic plan will be forward looking and take a long term view, setting the vision and ambition over a 20-30 year period. Approaching this strategic framework in this

way will ensure that the scope of Lancashire's devolution proposals addresses both the immediate priorities and longer term ambitions.

5.3. Hence, an overarching strategic plan that looks to Lancashire in 2050, would need to describe a broader ambition beyond the immediate priorities framed by the four themes set out within the scope for Our New Deal for a Greater Lancashire, attached as Appendix 1. Developing the strategy and priorities this way also ensures that policy areas overlap to tackle cross cutting opportunities such as skills, health and the environment, avoiding any unintentional policy silos. For example, tackling priorities that are currently included in the devolution scope around early years, housing quality, employment and skills, will also address some of the wider determinants of poor health as part of a longer term ambition for Lancashire, even though health priorities are yet to be agreed and fully set out working with our partners in the NHS through the Lancashire and South Cumbria integrated health and care system.

5.4. As a result, in addition to the four themes identified within Our New Deal for a Greater Lancashire, additional policy areas within the Lancashire 2050 strategic plan could include themes such as health (including inequalities, improvement and wellbeing) and community building (including crime and public safety), see Diagram 1 below. Work to shape and consult on Lancashire 2050 will continue in tandem with work on Our New Deal for a Greater Lancashire over the coming months and report through to Leaders and Councils and ultimately through any new governance arrangements adopted.

Diagram 1 Lancashire Plan Scope Illustration

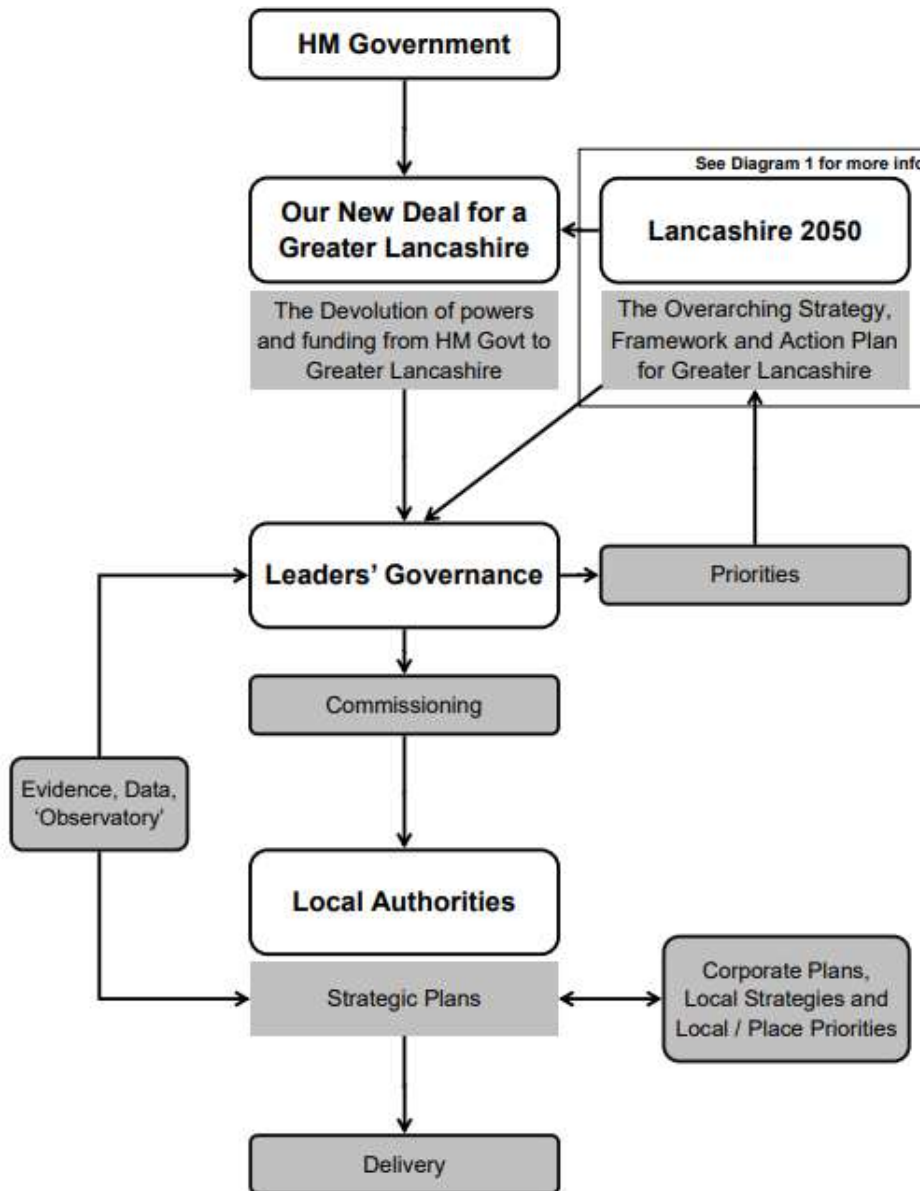


5.5. **Our New Deal for a Greater Lancashire (Appendix 1)**

With a long term strategic plan in place, our ask of Government through a county deal, would be for the devolved powers, flexibilities and funding to accelerate the delivery of the immediate priorities set out in the plan, see Diagram 2, overleaf. Based on the experience of other areas which have secured devolution deals, our ask could be in the order of £5bn investment into the wider Lancashire area to address local needs and priorities as determined by and in Lancashire over the next 5-10 years. This would be across four core themes of:

- Economic growth and investment
- Transport, connectivity and infrastructure
- Early years, education, adult skills and employment
- Environment, climate change and housing quality

Diagram 2 Our New Deal for a Greater Lancashire Illustration



6. RISK

6.1. Governance

As the detail of the governance body has not yet been resolved, the exact governance risks will need to be further clarified. One of the agreed principles is that Rossendale's current services, including statutory functions and discretionary services, would not be included in any county deal arrangement without the express agreement of this council. This mitigates a risk of loss of control of existing council functions to the new governance structure without agreement and this is important in the final deal. The outline Deal makes provision for individual councils to leave the Deal and the decision-making body

arrangements.

6.2. Financial

There is currently no direct risk to the council's existing financial resources. However, the council will have to have close regard to any future financial demands for support to the future governance body or the projects it initiates.

6.3. Reputation

The Deal presents a good opportunity to secure significant new resources for Lancashire. Failure to agree to participate in the Deal is likely to have a negative impact on the reputation of all the councils in the county.

6.4. The Deal reflects Rossendale's priorities

The outline Deal reflects many of the council's agreed priorities and is likely to enable more resources to be secured to boost the economy, improve transport, housing and the environment. However, the council must continue lobbying to ensure key priorities relating to rail connectivity, early years support, support for the housing market and flood prevention are reflected in the final deal proposal.

7. **FINANCE**

As progress is made, consideration will need to be given by Leaders and councils to support and resource options to manage and deliver any agreed Deal. Local authorities will need to consider a fair way for each partner authority to contribute. It is also the intention to seek capacity funding from Government as part of the negotiation process for a new Deal. The scale of financial support being sought from Rossendale BC is still to be clarified but for 2022/23 indicatively this is likely to be in the region of £20k, which will be budgeted for in the councils' 2022/23 Medium Term Financial Strategy.

8. **LEGAL**

8.1. The full legal implications of signing up to a future governance body have yet to be determined. These issues will be worked through and will be clearly outlined in a final report which will be provided for the consideration of Full Council.

8.2. The new governance body will be founded on a set of principles outlined in full in Appendix 2. Rossendale's current services, including statutory functions and discretionary services, would not be included in any county deal arrangement without the express agreement of this council.

9. **POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

A county deal would have significant positive implications in major policy areas like the economy, transport and the environment. The exact implications will be better known in the the finalised deal which will be considered by Full Council in the future.

10. **CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

In order for Lancashire to move forward with a strong collective voice, the engagement and support of all councils will be extremely important. This will give Leaders a mandate to collectively move forward on the issues set out in this report, and to engage with government to develop and deliver a great deal for Lancashire, for presentation back to each Full Council in Lancashire to consider and decide.

Background Papers	
None	

Purpose

This document sets out an initial scope and is a first phase of work that could begin to frame a set of devolution asks as part of Our New Deal for a Greater Lancashire – through which potential powers and responsibilities would be devolved to Lancashire from Government – in order to support delivery of Lancashire's overarching strategic plan (Lancashire 2050). The initial scope of the deal is focused on the key priorities agreed by Leaders, having considered the available evidence, on four key themes which require devolution from Government:

- economic growth and investment
- transport, connectivity, and infrastructure
- early years, education, adult skills, and employment; and
- environment, climate change and housing quality.

Within each theme, initial funding asks have been identified varying from single figures to suggested multi-year settlements over a range of time periods. **The total indicative value of the request of Government for these initial proposals is in the order of £5.6billion over a seven year period.**

Theme 1 - Economic Growth and Investment

Overview

The scale and importance of the Lancashire economy cannot be overstated, being the second largest in the North West behind only Greater Manchester. A thriving Lancashire remains one of the pre-requisites to a successful economy in the North of England. It is a location which can continue to build on existing clusters of excellence, whilst embracing the opportunity offered by new and emerging technologies and challenges such as cyber, low carbon and clean energy.

The focus of our work will be to ensure that proposals are aligned to supporting fast and sustainable economic recovery and onwards to long-term growth. It will focus on protecting existing employment and economic activity, whilst also driving up productivity, accelerating the commercialisation of low carbon technologies and seeking out new opportunities through stimulating innovation and developing collaborative partnerships. Climate action and mitigation will be key in relation to reducing energy emissions from housing and driving up technological skills. The future role of our towns will also be key and the part they play as places to live, work, study and innovate, consume, and visit. In doing so, this will help to reverse the major impacts of the pandemic on the Lancashire economy, its employers, its workforce and address the wider determinants of health across the communities in which they live.

Strategic objective:

To strengthen, grow and diversify our economy to extend the existing pockets of UK leading productivity across Lancashire as a whole and maximise the value of our people, land, and business assets. We will deliver growth through investment and manufacturing/innovation accelerators in town centres and local economies, unlocking strategic sites and focusing on jobs, skills, low carbon, health innovations, clean energy, and renewables, maximising our assets and strengths in manufacturing, cyber, digital, and the visitor economy.

The total annual indicative value of the request of Government for the Economic Development and Investment theme is in the order of £200million per annum.

Theme 2 - Transport, Connectivity and Infrastructure

Overview

Lancashire's economic geography is complex and spatially polycentric. Connectivity - both physical and digital - is unequally distributed and under-provided. This is holding back Lancashire's full potential and that of the North as a whole. There are compelling reasons to want to improve both East-West and digital connectivity in Lancashire to tackle some of the worst climate, health and socioeconomic outcomes; provide employers with a larger pool of workers to draw from, enabling the development of more highly specialised sectors, increasing productivity through agglomeration; and integrating Lancashire's divided economy into one.

Strategically positioned between the rural areas of Cumbria and Pennines and the major cities of Leeds, Manchester, and Liverpool, Lancashire's best transport connectivity runs North-South, but most people live East-West in a central corridor stretching from Pendle and the Yorkshire borders to Blackpool and the coastal economies. Improving links East-West across the county allows residents to access the major North-South connections more easily maximising opportunities such as high speed rail (HS2). The focus for these links will include bus, renewables-powered electric heavy and light rail, and active travel (walking and cycling).

Lancashire is 80% rural and does not have one major settlement which everywhere looks towards. Rather it has groupings of small cities, large towns and freestanding medium-sized towns within urban areas. Those urban areas are better served by digital connectivity. Improved digital connectivity will support the people, businesses, rural and coastal economies and associated natural environment to achieve their significant economic potential, help level up health and wider inequalities and achieve demanding environmental ambitions.

Furthermore, aligning investment in transport and digital infrastructure and utilities with investment in major development and strategic priorities will unlock the economic potential of Lancashire. The high-speed digital cable into Blackpool; the Pennine Industrial District connected by the M65 Manufacturing Corridor; and strategic road and rail connections including cross borders to the major cities of Leeds, Manchester, and Liverpool, will maximise potential across Lancashire and the north as a whole.

Strategic objective:

To level up transport infrastructure along the east-west growth corridor and connect people, business, jobs, education, and investment through improved transport supported by active travel, bus, cycling and walking and full fibre broadband unlocking major development and employment investment

The total annual indicative value of the request of Government for the Transport, Connectivity and Infrastructure theme is in the order of £150million per annum.

Theme 3 - Early Years, Education, Adult Skills and Employment Workstream

Overview

Skills investment is arguably one of the most important priorities for the country (and county) to level up – creating places attractive to higher productivity businesses and increasing social mobility and improving life chances, health outcomes and opportunity for all Lancashire's 1.5million residents.

Through skilling up the population, Lancashire aims to build a talent pipeline aligned with the needs of the economy, enhancing productivity, tackling climate change and, by connecting the workforce to good quality jobs, open up opportunities for career progression, higher wages and improved standards of living. This theme will cover an increased focus on preparing children in the early years of life (0-5) for school readiness as well as focusing on upskilling and improving outcomes for young people and adults (post 16) and those in their working years. This will include working with businesses to improve skills utilisation, job quality, wages, and recruitment.

Most places in Lancashire have a very low skills base with 23% of residents with either no qualifications or NVQ1 qualifications and there is a major skills deficit at NVQ Level 4 when compared with the North West and UK averages.

Strategic objective:

To increase focus on preparing children in the early years of life (0-5) for school readiness and to 'level up' the skills of the working age population, by ensuring that Lancashire residents are able to effectively access high quality skills provision and compete for employment opportunities which enables them to secure a higher quality of life and maximise the existing and emerging strengths in Lancashire's economy including climate change, clean energy, cyber, digital and data.

The total annual indicative value of the request of Government for the Early Years, Education, Adult Skills and Employment theme is in the order of £260million per annum.

Theme 4 – Environment, Climate Change, and Housing Quality

Overview

Tackling climate change and reducing our greenhouse gas emissions is one of the biggest challenges facing our society and significant action is needed across Lancashire to achieve government targets set to reach net zero by 2050. Working together will improve the resilience of Lancashire to the impacts of climate change, such as flooding, on communities, businesses and the wider economy. There is a need for locally led, place-based approach to energy solutions such as decarbonising heating systems, improving energy efficiency and local renewable electricity generation to meet current and future growth needs. Much of Lancashire's housing stock falls severely below standards and is energy inefficient – domestic gas is the second biggest contributor to emissions in Lancashire, after transport. Beyond the environmental and health benefits of reducing emissions, there are significant economic opportunities locally and nationally in the transition to low carbon energy technologies with growth in new high-value industries and more productive, higher paid jobs.

Very poor housing quality is a prominent feature of many of Lancashire's urban centres with some areas having significant volumes of stock over 120 years old and others having very low volumes of houses built to more modern quality standards over the last 20 years. Poor quality and condition including cold, damp and energy inefficient housing, contributes to high CO2 emissions and fuel poverty. This poor-quality housing – typically older, private sector rented stock – plays a crucial role in driving some of the worst health outcomes in England and plays a key role in constraining efforts to regenerate the county's most deprived places. Existing powers are not effective in delivering strategic change and reversing cycles of decline. Intervention in these areas of chronic housing failure will create a platform for better social outcomes, supporting regeneration and economic growth. Benefits include the creation of new jobs, skills and training in construction as well as tackling climate change through installation of cooling and heating systems and mitigating future risks from increased flooding. Improving the quality of housing stock will help to provide residents with attractive, spacious, appropriately heated homes with affordable bills, which are better adapted for life long living. In turn, this will contribute to the strength of the workforce and health of the population as a whole. Devolution presents an

opportunity to bring forward new powers and resource that can tackle the challenges and create more balanced, better-quality housing that can stabilise and transform lives in the areas of greatest opportunity in Lancashire.

Strategic Objective:

To level up green action and investment in Lancashire to achieve our pathway to net zero carbon emissions, protecting our natural environment and neighbourhoods, investing in carbon reduction measures and transforming housing quality. This will include a specific focus on developing a skilled workforce and business supply chain, delivering large programmes to drive improvements in the energy efficiency and quality of homes.

The total annual indicative value of the request of Government for the Environment, Climate Change, and Housing theme is in the order of £200million per annum.

GOVERNANCE

The governance structures for delivering the strategic plan priorities and accelerating that delivery through a County Deal would need to be designed with two aims in mind:

- to create the best arrangements to deliver the priorities within the strategic plan and the Deal itself
- to ensure decisions are made democratically and with all partners having an equal voice.

To this end, Leaders have agreed a set of core principles which should be applied in the establishment of any governance arrangements for joint working and delivering a County Deal. The principles set out below will form the basis of a negotiation with Government including the implications of any white paper:

- Lancashire authorities do not collectively support a Mayoral Combined Authority or local government reform
- Each authority would be represented on the decision making body by their Leader
- Each authority's current services, including statutory functions and discretionary services would not be included in any county deal arrangement without the express agreement of that authority
- The voting principle is one council, one vote, with a two thirds majority required for any proposal
- Each council will have a veto if any proposal is in their area, if their money is required or if they can reasonably demonstrate that it is reasonably likely to have a material impact on their area unless there are special circumstances to proceed (e.g. policy, legal, public safety reasons).
- Individual councils will have the right to leave the Deal and the decision making body arrangements
- It would initially be chaired by Lancashire County Council which will also act as the accountable body (under some governance models an Accountable Body may not be necessary)

Initial discussions with Leaders have started to consider a range of possible options for more formal joint working and to govern the delivery of a devolution framework and a county deal. A number of options are being explored, including joint committees, statutory boards, non-statutory boards, a local authority owned company and other informal working arrangements. This may also be largely dependent on the contents of the White Paper and any specifications it makes for the governance of County Deals.

Whatever the arrangements identified as best suited to the Lancashire area, each individual Local Authority's Full Council would need to give approval to its participation

As the governance arrangements are developed further, a number of important issues will need to be addressed, such as managing possible conflicts of interest, providing indemnitees to members against liabilities, borrowing and funding arrangements and the detail of meeting processes. Each governance model option may require different solutions to these kinds of issues. A representative working group of officers including several Monitoring Officers has already begun work on these issues.

Resources

As progress is made, consideration will need to be given by Leaders and councils to support and resource options to manage and deliver any agreed plan and Deal. Local Authorities will need consider a fair way for each partner authority to contribute. It is also the intention to seek capacity funding from Government as part of the negotiation process for a new Deal.

Subject:	LGA Peer Challenge	Status:	For publication
Report to:	Council	Date:	31 January 2022
Report of:	Chief Executive	Portfolio Holder:	Leader of the Council
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required:	No	Attached: No
Contact Officer:	Neil Shaw	Telephone:	01706 252480
Email:	neilshaw@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Full Council:

- 1.1. Consider the findings and recommendations of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge.
- 1.2. Agree the action plan to address the challenge's recommendations.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide feedback from the LGA peer challenge which took place in November 2021 and explain the council's response to the challenge's recommendations.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. Peer challenge is a process voluntarily commissioned by a council and involves a team of local government officers and councillors spending time at the council as peers, facilitated by the Local Government Association, to provide challenge and share learning. Peer challenges are managed and delivered by the local government sector for the sector. They are improvement focused and the scope is agreed with the council.
- 3.2. The peer challenge is pitched at a broad organisational level and does not include in-depth service reviews. There is a core component that looks at issues of leadership, governance, corporate capacity and the council's financial position. In addition, the council selected two areas of focus:
 - Tackling climate change, including:
 - a constructive critique of the council's current plans to tackle climate change
 - how the council can more strongly influence local businesses and residents to play a bigger role in delivering practical action to tackle climate change
 - Becoming a more commercial council, including:
 - identifying approaches to generate more external income for the council
 - how the council can embed commercial skills and ethos across its workforce

4. THE PEER CHALLENGE

- 4.1. The peer team found that the council should be '...rightly proud of its achievements...'. The challenge recognised the significant number of things the council has achieved over a number of years. It also acknowledged that the council has an ambitious agenda with much it would still like to achieve. A copy of the peer challenge report is attached as Appendix 1.

- 4.2. The team made recommendations to drive further improvement and these are contained in Section 1 of the appended report. The council has been quick to address the findings of the challenge. It has developed an action plan, attached as Appendix 2. The plan identifies clear actions the council will be taking over the coming months to address each recommendation.
- 4.3. The council had already undertaken work to address some of the issues which arose during the challenge, including:
- Prioritising partnership engagement and activity – in 2020 Corporate Management Team (CMT) agreed a stronger focus on a smaller number of partnerships. This resulted in a CMT lead being allocated to each of these partnerships and a schedule of pre-meeting briefings for partnership elected members and more regular CMT attendance at these key partnership meetings. We will build on this prioritisation and have identified further activities summarised in the action plan.
 - Review the scrutiny function – in December Council agreed to set up a cross party working group to make recommendations as to how we can strengthen our scrutiny process. A new CMT lead has been allocated to support Overview & Scrutiny (the Director of Economic Development) in order to drive this improvement. We will build on this and have identified further activities summarised in the action plan.
 - Accelerate the asset review – in 2020 the council appointed a new additional Property Officer on an ‘invest to save’ basis to undertake more of the asset review. We will build on this and have identified further activities summarised in the action plan.
 - Increasing corporate capacity - the council is currently examining how it can increase the capacity of the Finance function by Rossendale Leisure Trust undertaking its own finance function in the future (releasing capacity within the Finance function) and increasing the accounting function within the service.

Members of the peer team will re-engage with the council within six months of the original visit, to examine and constructively challenge how the council has addressed their recommendations.

5. RISK

Failure to address the recommendations in the peer challenge would be likely to have a negative impact on the reputation of all the council. An action plan has been developed to monitor the implementation of actions addressing the challenge recommendations and progress on this will be considered by Full Council at least annually until they have been fully addressed.

6. FINANCE

One of the recommendations in the challenge has specific revenue budget implications - building more corporate capacity to fulfil council ambitions. The council is currently examining how it can increase the capacity of the Finance function by Rossendale Leisure Trust undertaking its own finance function in the future (releasing capacity within the Finance function) and increasing the accounting function within the service. This will be built into the council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy (2022/23).

7. LEGAL

The report has no specific legal implications.

8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

The report has no specific policy or equalities implications.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The peer challenge provided an honest and accurate understanding of the council's current position and performance. The council has achieved much over a number of years, particularly given its size and scale of resources. The challenge identified a number of key areas in which the council should be looking to improve.

The report recognised that the council had a good level of awareness of the challenges it faces and key issues it must address. We have already been looking to address a number of these. The action plan puts in place a proposal to clearly explain how the recommendations will be addressed. Progress on the implementation of the actions will be considered by Full Council. A copy of the LGA challenge report and the action plan will be published on the council's and LGA's websites.

Background Papers
The LGA peer challenge: https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/peer-challenges/peer-challenges-we-offer/corporate-peer-challenges

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Rossendale Borough Council

16 – 18 November 2021

Feedback report



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1. Executive summary

Rossendale is an area with a proud industrial heritage, beautiful countryside and unique towns and villages. Amongst all North West district councils, Rossendale is better than average for the proportion of the working age population qualified to level 2 or higher, new business registrations and for health outcomes across a range of indicators including dementia, cancer and alcohol related hospital admissions¹. Those who spoke to the peer team are proud of the local area and its strong community ethos.

Similar to other areas across the county, the area has challenges including pockets of deprivation; 13.95% of Rossendale's Lower Super Output Areas are amongst the 10% most deprived in England. The Borough of Rossendale has obesity, suicide and teenage pregnancy rates which are worse than the average of North West district councils and for English councils².

The Council clearly cares for its local communities and has a vision, outlined in its Corporate Plan (2021 – 2025) to *“have a thriving economy, built around our changing town centres, creating a quality environment for all and improving the life chances of all those living and working in our borough”*. The Council has identified four strategic priority areas: a thriving local economy, high quality environment, healthy and proud communities and to be an effective and efficient council.

The Council has responded well to the COVID-19 pandemic whilst maintaining day to day service delivery. The peer team found a council which is pro-active and ambitious to do more in spite of the financial challenges ahead.

The Leader is valued and well respected amongst members, staff and partners and the Cabinet is seen as cohesive. Member and officer relationships are generally positive. The Council's Chief Executive is well regarded and is bringing new ideas to the Council. Together with the Corporate Management Team, they are beginning to shape a new approach to the management of the Council including employee engagement, project governance and organisational culture.

The workforce are committed, responsive and adaptable and are keen to share their ideas to support on-going improvement. Staff generally enjoy working at Rossendale Borough Council with a staff survey undertaken in 2020 finding that 85% of respondents enjoy working at the Council.

The Council has a good level of self-awareness of its challenges, opportunities and areas where improvements are needed. This is reflected within its own selfassessment and in conversations the peer team had with a range of members and officers. These challenges include a future annual funding gap of c£445k up until 2024/25. They also include managing the legacy arising from the East Lancashire Empty Homes project which was originally set up to bring around 400 empty homes back into use (see below). The Council became the accountable body in 2015. To date the Council has incurred costs of £7.1m and the project will continue to have a negative financial impact approaching £1m per annum until December 2024/25. The Council also needs to close the accounts from 2017/18 onwards.

There is also a need to improve recycling rates for the Borough. The Council has the third lowest recycling rates amongst statistical nearest neighbours and the fifth lowest rate amongst all district

¹ LG Inform

² LG Inform

councils in the North West (2020/21)³. The Council have identified this as a priority service action for this year and set themselves a target to recycle up to 50% of household waste by 2025 (rate for 2020/21 is 34%).

Moving forward, the Council needs to consider how it can build more corporate capacity to fulfil its ambitions. The delivery of the ten-year savings programme has led to some officers and services taking responsibility for additional functions and, in some cases, feeling too stretched. For a relatively small Council, there is a lot to do and partnership working will be key to this. The Council should continue to harness the energy, positive relationships and new ways of working developed during the pandemic to further strengthen partnership working around key strategic priorities and programmes including climate change, tourism, health, housing and digitalisation.

Further work with partners on the Corporate Plan, to develop a clearer shared narrative about Rossendale as a place, its future and the Council's role within this, will help strengthen partnership working on these key strategic priorities and programmes. Looking ahead, the Council should seek, where possible, to engage stakeholders at the earlier 'design' stage of future key plans and strategies to strengthen shared ownership and increase buy in to the delivery of priorities.

There is a strong commitment from the political leadership, Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team to grow future income opportunities. Over the past few years, a number of initiatives have been implemented which provide the foundations upon which to build. These include a 10-year partnership with Capita, agreed in 2019, to provide the revenues, benefits and One Stop Shop Service (on track to deliver £2m savings over the lifetime of the contract). To build on the work to date, it will be important for the Council to be clearer about what developing a commercial approach means in practice to them and what they are trying to achieve in the short, medium and longer term.

The peer team heard how the Council is in year one of a strategic property asset review. The Council should accelerate this review to increase the understanding of assets and how they can best be used to maximise income and savings. The Council should also consider further opportunities to benchmark its fees and charges against those of statistical neighbours.

Scrutiny can play an important role in driving improvement. There are some examples of good scrutiny work including two 'scrutiny in a day' reviews in 2019/20. There is an opportunity to review the scrutiny function to strengthen its role in holding the Executive to account and informing both policy development and providing service performance challenge. There are also opportunities to review the Council's approach to councillor queries to ensure greater consistency in response across services.

The Council has recognised the climate emergency and developed an overarching strategy and action plan to act. Proposed actions over the next 10 years are focussed on efficient energy consumption, sustainable transport, including work with local public transport providers and Lancashire County Council, waste collection and the wider environment. The peer team found that priority actions agreed for 2021 have been implemented including an assessment of the Council's carbon footprint and establishment of a £1m carbon reduction fund (over four years). This fund will be used to support carbon reduction projects both within the Council and with community groups and businesses. Building on this work, the Council should now use the outcome of the carbon audit to agree clearly defined targets for carbon reduction and use these to prioritise allocation of the fund. The Council should continue to strengthen climate change leadership at all levels through staff and member engagement. Principles of co-design should underpin future work with both staff and local communities on this agenda.

³ LG Inform

To support the delivery of the Council's ambitions, consideration should be given to the development of a strategic communications plan. This should help to create the story, narrative and voice for the Council and the Borough.

Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

- 1.1. **Develop a clearer, shared narrative about Rossendale as a place, its future and the Council's role within this.** This can help build shared ownership and understanding of the vision and priorities for Rossendale.
- 1.2. **Prioritise partnership engagement and activity to focus on the things that can have the greatest impact.** There are opportunities to work with partners to build further ownership, understanding and buy in to the Corporate Plan, vision and priorities for Rossendale. In doing this, it is important to be clearer about what the Council wants from key partnerships and vice versa.
- 1.3. **Work with partners to bring a renewed focus and thinking on tourism within Rossendale.** There is strong energy and willingness from partners to develop and promote the tourism offer in the borough.
- 1.4. **Consider how to build more corporate capacity to fulfil ambitions.** In particular, building capacity around key corporate priorities, programmes and services including the visitor economy, climate change, health, housing and digitalisation. Partnership working will be key to this.
- 1.5. **Consider how best the Council can set out and deliver its strategic housing ambitions for Rossendale in support of the new Local Plan⁴.** This should set out where the Council will focus its energy and resources to deliver its housing ambitions and how it will work with partners and stakeholders to do so.
- 1.6. **The Council should continue to prioritise work with the auditors to ensure closure of accounts from 2017/18 onwards.**
- 1.7. **Review the Council's approach to councillor queries** to ensure greater consistency in response across services.
- 1.8. **Review the scrutiny function to ensure it has maximum impact. This includes how it holds the Executive to account and its role in informing both policy development and providing service performance challenge.** This review should help to bring a renewed focus on the leadership of scrutiny across the Council.
- 1.9. **Develop a strategic communications plan including how the Council can make best use of social media channels to engage audiences and promote the work of the Council.** This should be

⁴ [Adopted on 15 December 2021](#)

aligned to work with partners to develop and agree a clearer, shared narrative about Rossendale as a place and future ambitions.

- 1.10. **Strengthen climate change leadership at all levels of the organisation.** More work should be undertaken with staff on the overarching climate change strategy. This should aim to build confidence in integrating climate action into their roles and service areas including how they work with residents. The communications plan (outlined above) will need to reflect this.
- 1.11. **Ensure climate action initiatives are co-designed and co-created working alongside local communities.** This should include the development of local climate change community networks.
- 1.12. **Agree what developing a commercial approach means for the Council in the short, medium and longer term.** The Council should consider setting out the parameters and principles for commercialisation, being mindful of HM Treasury's view through the Public Works Loans Board review earlier this year and the revised CIPFA Prudential Code. Authorities should report on and clearly distinguish investments for treasury management, service, and commercial purposes.
- 1.13. **The Council should accelerate the property asset review.** This will help increase the understanding of assets and how these can best be used to maximise income and savings.

The peer team also identified a number of 'quick wins' to consider as follows:

- I. To expand the capital strategy for the new financial year (for approval at Council) to include non-treasury investment monitoring for both service and commercial purposes, ensuring associated risk is proportionate within the financial capacity of the Council.
- II. To consolidate quarterly financial monitoring update reports to Cabinet with quarterly performance monitoring updates.
- III. Include a climate change 'check' on Council report templates.
- IV. Set up a 'commercial/income generation' inbox to encourage all employees to contribute ideas as to how income can be generated.

2. Summary of the peer challenge approach

2.1. The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Jason Gooding, Chief Executive, Carlisle City Council
- Councillor Sir Stephen Houghton, Leader of Barnsley Council
- Councillor David Renard, Leader of Swindon Council
- Louise Branford White, former Director of Finance and Commercial (s151), Hambleton District Council and now Associate Director, Link Group

- Amanda Smith, Training Manager, Centre for Alternative Technology
- Cindy Lowthian – Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

2.2. Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils’ performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the Council’s priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the Council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the Council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the Council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the Council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to provide feedback on:

- **Tackling climate change** – providing a critique of current plans and how the Council can more strongly influence local businesses and residents to play a bigger role in delivering practical action to tackle climate change.
- **Becoming a more commercial council** - including identifying more external income opportunities and how the Council can embed commercial skills and ethos across its workforce.

2.3. The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent three days onsite at Rossendale Borough Council, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 41 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 106 people including a range of Council staff together with members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the peer team’s findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.

3. Feedback

3.1. Local priorities and outcomes

Rossendale Borough Council is rightly proud of its achievements including the £15m New Hall Hey development, £5m Spinning Point development, Futures Business Park in Bacup, Rossendale Works which has placed over 130 into employment and a £1.1m Heritage Action Zone in Bacup.

Both members and officers clearly care for Rossendale’s communities and the Council has a strong ambition to improve outcomes for local people. This is reflected in the Corporate Plan ‘Our Place, Our Plan’ (2021 – 2025) which sets out an overarching vision, along with four strategic priorities, focused on ensuring a quality environment and improved life chances for all those living and working in the Borough. The process to develop the new Corporate Plan was inclusive, particularly considering the challenges associated with facilitating engagement and consultation during a pandemic. This process involved the development of a draft Corporate Plan, with input from Cabinet and consultation with opposition group members, public and wider stakeholders including Rossendale Leisure Trust, East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group, Lancashire County Council, Rawtenstall Chamber of Commerce and voluntary sector partners. It was then discussed by the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee before approval by Council in September 2021. Whilst generally a positive process, the peer team heard from some stakeholders that they would welcome more active involvement at the earlier ‘design’ or ‘visioning’ stage of future plans and strategies.

The peer team were pleased to learn that Rossendale Borough Council commits to undertaking an equality impact assessment for all new strategies to understand their impact on protected equality groups. The equality impact assessment for the new Corporate Plan was published alongside the Plan for consideration by members.

The Council’s performance framework has also been revised to reflect the Corporate Plan and corporate projects for 2021/22. There are 42 performance indicators, relevant to the local context and these are used to provide quarterly updates to members via the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The annual service planning process has also been refined, shaped by the Corporate Plan, including the approach to target setting, ensuring targets are more challenging in the required service areas including recycling of the borough’s domestic waste (e.g. target was increased from 45% to 50% by 2025).

The peer team heard how the Corporate Plan has been aligned to the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy (2020/21 – 2024/25). A report to Cabinet in November 2021 gave an update on the MTFs and highlights the importance of ensuring budget resource allocations continue to drive delivery of the new priorities.

The peer team found a mixed level of awareness of the new Corporate Plan amongst those they met with and the Council’s self-assessment acknowledges that there is more work to do in this regard. There are opportunities to work with partners to build further ownership and understanding of the vision and priorities for Rossendale. This should involve developing a clearer, shared narrative about Rossendale as

a place – which involves partners being given the opportunity to contribute to the narrative about their area and its future ambitions.

It is also the view of the peer team that the Council has an ambitious agenda with much it would still like to achieve. Significant ongoing programmes of work include the Climate Change Strategy/Action Plan, Digital Strategy, Visitor Strategy and Economic Development strategy; the latter includes projects and programmes within each of Rossendale’s town centres. The Council is also looking to extend its leadership role in relation to health and wellbeing alongside the development of a Rossendale Health and Wellbeing Plan.

It is important therefore, given the level of ambition and activity that the Council ensures its ambitions are matched to its capacity to deliver. Further work with partners to build the shared narrative for Rossendale should help build a shared approach of the Council’s vision and priorities and help build partnership capacity around the delivery of the Corporate Plan. This should help inform prioritisation of key projects and programmes, supported by partners.

The Council compares strongly and/or around the average of CIPFA nearest neighbours in relation to the time taken to process housing benefit change events, number of households in temporary accommodation, processing of both major and minor planning applications within target timescales and new business rate registrations.

The Council’s most recent performance update to members shows how 71% of performance indicators (PIs) are performing on or above target and those performing below target (9.5% or 4 PIs) have action plans with measures in place to improve.

The peer team found the Council is aware of the areas in which it needs to improve and has plans in place. This includes recycling where the Council has the third lowest recycling rate amongst statistical nearest neighbours and the fifth lowest rate amongst all district councils in the North West (2020/21). The peer team heard about the challenges facing the Council in relation to collections including the topography of the borough. The Council has developed an action plan to address these challenges including the piloting of a new approach in parts of the borough. Although this pilot was initially delayed due to the national shortage of HGV drivers, work is due to commence over the coming months. The Council is also working hard to process a backlog of applications relating to the Disabled Facilities Grant which built up last year due to resource issues within the team.

3.2. Organizational and place leadership

The Council is taking a lead in shaping the future of Rossendale as a place, spearheading the regeneration of its three town centres and delivering major projects including the £15m New Hall Hey development in Rawtenstall, £5m Spinning Point development in Rawtenstall and a £1.1m Heritage Action Zone in Bacup. The Council recognises the huge potential in the place which occupies a strategic location both into Lancashire, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. The area has a beautiful rural environment, strong industrial heritage and good motorway links.

Rossendale’s Economic Development Strategy (2018-2033) outlines the economic ambitions for the borough. Priorities are underpinned by an understanding of the social, economic and geographical characteristics of Rossendale. These include better than average for the proportion of the working age population qualified to level 2 or higher (in the North West), 2,700 active businesses⁵ in 2021 (an increase

⁵ Rossendale District Profile, Lancashire County Council

of 220 from 2020) and a pre-Covid unemployment rate of 3.3% which is lower than the national average at 3.9%. The Strategy also recognises the socio-economic differences across some areas of the borough and has actions identified to address these including ongoing work to transform town centres, support business and attract new investment.

The Council are using their place leadership role to lead a bid to restore the rail link to Manchester via Bury. In November 2021, the Council was invited to produce a strategic outline business case, with funding from the Department for Transport and Lancashire County Council. The aim (subject to the bid being successful) is to create an integrated heritage and passenger railway, enabling local commuters quicker access to Manchester and boosting the local economy.

Increasing the number of quality new homes and associated infrastructure to support healthy communities is a strategic aim within the Corporate Plan. The Council has identified the development of a Housing Strategy as a corporate project for 2021/22. The peer team heard how work on the Housing Strategy has been delayed due to capacity issues. The Council needs to consider how best it can set out and deliver its strategic housing ambitions for Rossendale in support of the Local Plan for Rossendale. This should set out where the Council will focus its energy and resources to deliver on its housing ambitions including how it will work with partners and stakeholders.

The Council's Visitor Economy Strategy, covering the next 10 years, recognises the huge potential in Rossendale. It aims to harness the power of Rossendale's heritage, arts, cultural and leisure assets to support economic growth. There is strong energy and willingness from both business and voluntary sector partners to work with the Council to bring this strategy to life. In particular, how they can work with the Council to bring a renewed focus and thinking on tourism within Rossendale.

The Council are rightly proud of the work they have undertaken, with partners, to manage the impact of the pandemic whilst maintaining day to day front line service delivery. The Council moved at exceptional pace to enable nearly all office-based staff to work from home whilst ensuring a large proportion of services remained available via telephone and online. Most front-line Council services such as waste collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance, continued to be delivered with minimal disruption. The work of the Council's communities' team was re-directed to mobilising and supporting the Rossendale Connected Hub; a partnership of voluntary and community sector organisations developed to support the most vulnerable. To date, the Hub has been in direct contact with over 3000 local people to offer support.

The Council's response also involved the allocation of 1476 grants to local businesses⁶ and they were the first in the county to appoint to a new post of Covid Business Advisor to support local businesses.

Business and community groups view the Council as a well-respected and valued partner. This includes the pivotal role they have played to shape the vision for each of Rossendale's town centres. The Council's partnership work with the Leisure Trust is helping to support its longer-term sustainability. Partnerships with the voluntary sector are also strong including the Rossendale Connected Hub, Rossendale Civic Pride and Bacup Pride who have a collective body of over 100 volunteers working to improve public spaces across the borough. The Council also facilitates Community Partnerships within each of Rossendale's towns to help further promote engagement and partnership working at the community level.

The peer team heard from members and officers at Rossendale Borough Council who welcome a renewed drive, from the County Council, for closer partnership working at county level. This includes on-going discussions about a potential county deal for Lancashire.

⁶ Small Business Grants Fund and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Continuity Fund (BEIS)

The Council should continue to harness the energy, positive relationships and new ways of working developed during the pandemic to support delivery of the Corporate Plan. As outlined above, this should help strengthen the capacity of the Council in relation to key strategic programmes including climate change, tourism, health and housing.

An example of where this approach is already working is in relation to the Council's 'Our Place, Our Wellbeing' plan for the borough. This has involved work with Rossendale Connected and health partners to co-design the plan. It is clear that Rossendale Council has a genuine ambition to shape the delivery of core functions including leisure, parks and green spaces to improve health and wellbeing. This includes addressing levels of adult and childhood obesity where the borough has some of the highest rates amongst North West district councils and statistical nearest neighbours.

3.3. Governance and culture

The Council has a good level of self-awareness of its challenges, opportunities and areas where improvements are needed. This is reflected within its own selfassessment and in conversations the peer team had with a range of members and officers.

These challenges include managing the on-going financial impact and legacy arising from the East Lancashire Empty Homes project. In 2015, the Council assumed responsibility for this scheme as the legally accountable body, designed to bring back into usage over 400 empty homes following the collapse of the renovation company.

A report published by the Council's internal audit provider in November 2015 highlighted corporate failure of risk management and governance at the Council relating to commissioning, procurement approaches, corporate oversight and programme design/implementation.

The Council immediately accepted the findings, and an improvement plan was implemented to address the issues raised. However, the project continues to have a negative financial impact approaching £1m per annum on the Council's budget until 2024/25 and the Council has incurred costs of £7.1m to date. A more recent update report to the Council's Audit and Accounts Committee in July 2021 shows how the learning from the project is continuing to shape the approach to project and programme governance across the Council. This includes work to bring greater rigour to the management of corporate projects through the Council's Programme Board including project governance, risk and financial controls. The peer team noted that, as part of the 2020/21 internal audit programme, the Council has committed to rechecking the actions from the 2015 internal audit to provide ongoing reassurance on controls and processes.

The Council has a backlog of closure of accounts from 2017/2018 and recognises the importance of working closely with auditors to get these closed as soon as possible. The latest opinion on Rossendale's accounts is for 2016/17 (reported to the Audit and Accounts Committee in July 2020). This issued an unqualified opinion on the accounts and a qualified 'except for' Value for Money conclusion confirming the Council did have appropriate arrangements in 2016/17, except for the previously identified deficiencies (highlighted above) in relation to the Empty Homes Programme.

It was reported verbally to the Audit and Accounts Committee (November 2020) that two factors were contributing to the delay in signing off of the 2017/18 accounts; the valuation of Property, Plant & Equipment (PPE) and the treatment of the Bus Company (previously owned by the Council and sold in 2018). These issues had also been raised in respect of 2016/17. The Council's self-assessment also says

that some of the delays can be attributed to COVID-19 related delays and a change in auditor. The Council should continue to prioritise work with the auditors to ensure closure of accounts from 2017/18 onwards.

Staff, members and partners consistently spoke highly of the Leader of the Council and Cabinet members are well respected. The Chief Executive is also well regarded and is bringing new ideas to the Council. A number of new appointments to the

Corporate Management Team (CMT) have been made including Director of Communities, Head of Finance and, more recently, Director of Economic Development. Together with the Chief Executive, the CMT are shaping a new approach to the management of the Council including employee engagement, project and programme governance and organisational culture. A staff survey undertaken in 2020 shows over 70% of respondents agree CMT are leading the Council well.

Staff generally enjoy working at Rossendale Council and are positive about the future. A Staff Leadership Survey undertaken in 2020 found 85% of respondents enjoy working at the Council.

Member and officer relationships are generally positive with mutual trust and respect between councillors and officers. However, there was frustration amongst some members about inconsistencies to the way member queries are dealt with across some service areas. The Council should review the approach to member queries to ensure greater consistency in response.

There are some examples of good scrutiny work including two 'scrutiny in a day' reviews in 2019/20 focussed on suicide prevention and holiday hunger. Clear terms of reference were agreed, both reviews engaged wider partners including voluntary and community group representatives and both led to a series of recommendations being agreed. Example outcomes following these reviews include training for Members on suicide awareness in February 2020 and delivery of a holiday hunger project, working with 6 primary schools, in the summer of 2019.

Building on this work, as the Council drives forward its ambitions for the next four years, there is an opportunity to review the scrutiny function to ensure it has maximum impact including holding the Executive to account and informing both policy development and providing service performance challenge. This review should help to bring a renewed focus on the importance of scrutiny across the Council including the relationship between scrutiny and the Executive and opportunities for more pre-decision scrutiny.

3.4. Financial planning and management

Similar to other councils, Rossendale has faced significant financial challenges over the past ten years having faced an overall budget reduction of around 40%. The Council has risen to this challenge and managed to deliver significant savings whilst still delivering major economic development projects and maintaining day to day service delivery.

However financial challenges remain. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, which covers the period up to 2024/25⁷, presented to Council in February 2021, indicates a future annual funding gap of c£445k up to 2025 and the use of £606k from the Local Business Rate Retention reserve to ensure a balanced budget for 2021/22. Although the Council's first quarter update report shows how utilisation

⁷ [Agendas, reports and minutes | Rossendale Borough Council](#) – Council 24th February 2021 – 2021/22 Council Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy

of Covid grant support will now help reduce this call on the business rates reserve (down to £0.014m for 2021/22) the Council still faces an ongoing annual funding gap.

The peer team considered assumptions in the 2021/22 budget and identified, from the experience of the previous 5-year financial outturn reports, that actual past performance was at the very least on target with the budget. Past performance is no guarantee for the future, but consideration could be given to a revised budget and outturn position for 2021/22 where projection is again that outturn will meet the targeted budget. This could potentially release £0.150m into the revenue budget on an ongoing basis and would assist in the Council’s ongoing annual funding gap.

The Council has a five-year capital spending programme up to 2024/25 of c£26.7m. This includes three major on-going projects including phase 2 to the Whitaker Park Museum, Bacup Historic England Project and Futures Park. So far, the Council’s investment property is valued at £0.55m with a yield of 4.55%. The peer team heard how a new £1m funding stream has been agreed (over the life of the current capital spending programme) to support carbon reduction projects, from 2021/22.

The peer team found a good level of self-awareness of future financial challenges facing the Council amongst both the senior political leadership and corporate management team. There is recognition of the need to continue to close the gap between income and expenditure and reduce the reliance on reserves (as outlined above) and they also understand the need to prioritise work to close Council accounts from 2017/18 onwards (also outlined above). An increase in corporate resources specifically in the finance team would support these financial objectives.

The peer team found the Council has a willingness to implement new ways of working, including alternative delivery models, to generate income and achieve efficiencies. For example, a 10-year partnership with Capita to provide the revenues, benefits and One Stop Shop Service, agreed in 2019, aims to deliver a £2m saving over the life of the contract. As outlined later in this report, the Council is keen to set out a new commercial/income generating approach and increase the awareness of this across both officers and members, with staff focus groups being used to generate new ideas.

The Council’s relatively new chief finance officer (who joined the Council in March 2020) is well respected and regarded and, together with the Chief Executive, is helping to ensure resources and risk are factored into policy and strategy development. Looking ahead it is important that the Council continue to apply this rigour and consistency to the allocation of resources to corporate priorities.

The Council should also consider consolidating quarterly financial monitoring update reports to Cabinet with quarterly performance monitoring updates (the latter shared with scrutiny only) to ensure Cabinet members have both the financial information and wider performance information together to inform decision making.

Due to the impact of COVID-19 on the Council owned leisure facilities (closures etc), their future viability has been identified as a corporate risk. The Council have been proactive in their response including facilitating the consolidation of all Council owned leisure assets under the Leisure Trust to maximise efficiency. The Council have also supported the Trust through government COVID-19 revenue funding (£100k), a lease payment holiday until March 2023 and rescheduling of debt repayment over a tenyear period to 2033. The quarter 2 update report says the financial projects are now much improved when compared to February 2021.

3.5. Capacity for improvement

The Council has a workforce of 164 Full Time Equivalent (FTE), equally split (approximately) between office-based services at Futures Park and the Operations Team based mainly at the Henrietta Street depot. The peer team found staff to be committed, loyal, flexible and adaptable. Staff adapted quickly to new ways of working during the pandemic and have helped to ensure services to residents have operated as close to normal as possible, with minimum disruption. The Council's 2020 staff survey found that 85% of respondents enjoy working at the Council. Most staff who met with the peer team are keen to contribute their own ideas to support delivery of priorities and savings.

The peer team found Rossendale's councillors, across all parties, to be committed to Rossendale as a place. They have a clear pride in the borough with a unique local knowledge of their wards and neighbourhoods.

For a small Council these are significant programmes of work to achieve on top of day-to-day service delivery. The Council's self-assessment identifies resilience in some services as an ongoing challenge. The peer team heard from a number of staff who had picked up new functions and responsibilities in addition to their main role. This has led to some feeling over stretched and has the potential to impact both accountability and the pace of delivery.

The Council has begun to examine capacity in some areas and has made some small alterations to staff structures as a result of this. This includes the creation of a new Property Officer role and COVID Business Support role, a reshaped HR Manager role and some changes in parts of the Planning service. As outlined earlier in this report, the Council needs to continue to ensure ambitions are matched to their capacity to deliver, ensuring clarity over specific priorities and recognising that everything can't be done at once. Consideration should also be given to building capacity/resources in corporate services e.g. finance. A new Organisational Development Strategy (2021/25) has recently been agreed. This builds on initiatives that have been in place over a number of years including a structured member and officer development programme, appraisal process (where over 85% of staff have had an appraisal) and a series of service briefings for members.

The new strategy sets out on-going commitments to how staff will be engaged, empowered, supported and developed including a commitment to agree a new set of values for the Council. It is important that staff at all levels are involved in codesigning the new values to ensure they are jointly owned and form part of the day-to-day ways of working and organisational culture, at all levels.

As part of the new approach to organisational development, the Council have introduced some new approaches to staff engagement. These include quarterly staff engagement events, new middle managers group and a 'Rising Stars' development programme for aspiring senior officers in 2021. An example of staff engagement relates to the review of the flexible working policy; staff told the team that they felt their views were heard. An outcome of this is the introduction of a new approach which will see a greater proportion of staff working from the Business Centre, whilst affording them some degree of flexibility to work from site or home (Covid-19 guidance permitting).

The results from four staff surveys undertaken between 2020 and 2021 were shared with the peer team. These will be repeated periodically to ensure feedback is acted upon. Whilst these have been undertaken in the context of a challenging year (due to COVID-19), they do highlight potential areas for further improvement; in particular just under 50% of respondents agreed that the way they had been managed had improved in the last twelve months.

Staff turn-over for 2021/22 appears higher than previous years at 16.67% to the end of September 2021/22. The Council have recognised this within their corporate risk register and continue to monitor this. The most recent quarter 2 update states that the main reason for officers leaving the authority is career progression and salaries. Challenges have also related to the national shortage of HGV drivers. The peer team heard how the Council have reviewed and stress tested their business continuity plan in relation to the national HGV driver shortage and fuel shortage.

A partnership arrangement, with a neighbouring authority, for the management of communications came to an end in March 2020. The Council are now working with an external company in support of their communications functions. Given the scale of ambition for Rossendale, there are opportunities to strengthen the approach to communications through the development of a communications plan, including how the Council can make best use of social media channels to engage audiences and promote the work of the Council. This should be aligned to work with partners to develop and agree a clearer, shared narrative about Rossendale as a place and future ambitions.

As outlined above over the past year, the Council has further strengthened its approach to the management of projects and programmes. This includes strengthening the role of the Council's programme board to ensure greater consistency in managing major projects and service performance. The programme board meets quarterly to monitor performance relating to eleven agreed corporate projects. Officer leads are required to follow robust project management methodology including risk management. The Council's latest quarter 2 performance management report (ending September 2021) shows how accredited project management training has been completed by all project managers responsible for corporate projects. The peer team met with project leads who described the programme board as both challenging and constructive.

Building on this, the team met with both officers and members who are committed to ongoing improvement in relation to the customer experience. This includes the management of customer enquiries, performance, compliments and complaints in a consistent, timely way. The Council monitors a range of performance indicators including the target turnaround times for dealing with customer complaints (current average response time is 16.1 days against a target of 10 days). The peer team heard how an action plan is in place to improve performance against this target and that progress will be closely monitored.

As part of the commitment to on-going improvement in relation to the customer experience, the Council developed a Digital Strategy (July 2021). This strategy recognises that many of the digital improvements to date have been internally focussed (e.g. Microsoft Office 365, introduction of remote working systems). The strategy sets out a longer-term vision that puts Rossendale residents and businesses at the heart of digital transformation including a commitment to tackle digital exclusion. As part of the strategy, a digital roadmap has been agreed which sets out the key projects to support delivery. The Council should continue to ensure capacity and resources are in place to support the implementation of the strategy. The key projects outlined within the strategy can assist the Council in strengthening its corporate capacity to deliver priorities through simpler, faster and more cost-effective services.

3.6 Climate Change

The Council declared a 'Climate Emergency' in September 2019 and agreed a tenyear climate change strategy and action plan, agreed in July 2020. This includes a 'priority action plan' covering the first year of the strategy.

The strategy aims to make the Council’s activities net zero by 2030 and for the Council to work in partnership to reduce carbon emissions for the whole of Rossendale. Proposed actions over the next 10 years are focussed on efficient energy consumption, sustainable transport (e.g., promoting walking and cycling), waste collection and the wider environment as well as working together in partnership.

Priority actions agreed for 2021 have been implemented including the commissioning of an assessment of the Council’s carbon footprint. The Council have committed to repeating this audit annually to monitor progress on carbon reduction and to account for solar energy production and offset activity. The Council should ensure the audit is used to agree clearly defined carbon reduction targets. The peer team heard how a further full energy audit is underway for all Council buildings.

The peer team found that there is strong support across the Council, driven by both the senior political leadership and Corporate Management Team, for the climate change agenda. A climate change member champion has been appointed who works alongside the relevant portfolio holder. The member champion is well regarded and is using her passion, interest and knowledge to support climate change action. A working group has been established to help oversee delivery of the strategy, supported by a larger corporate group of officers. A Climate Emergency Network involving local residents, schools and local farmers has been developed. The Council is also engaging with local business leaders. The Council is harnessing strong links with local voluntary groups like Rossendale Civic Pride, Bacup Pride and Whitworth In Bloom who work hard to create beautiful public open spaces. A dedicated Climate Change Programme Officer has been appointed to be responsible for the development and delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan and support the development of climate-positive projects and behaviours

A number of initiatives have been implemented which provide a good foundation upon which to build. These initiatives include the provision of electric vehicle charging points across several different locations in the borough. They also include moving most of the council’s Operations vehicles onto hydrotreated vegetable oil to reduce vehicle emissions. Work has commenced on a major tree planting scheme with a commitment to plant a minimum of 16,000 new trees across Rossendale, during the life of the strategy. The peer team would encourage the Council to continue to engage local communities to agree sites in advance of tree planting activity.

In February 2021 the Council allocated £1m, over four years, to a Carbon Reduction Capital Fund. The intention is to use this fund to support carbon reduction projects including work within the Council, work with community groups and work with small businesses. A climate change Fund Panel, involving members and officers, will govern allocation of the funding. The peer team would encourage the Council to use the outcome of their carbon audit to set clearly defined targets for carbon reduction and to use these to inform relevant decisions on the allocation of the Carbon Fund.

The peer team heard how a Climate Change Conference in November 2021 has helped to raise awareness about the fund and local climate change action. The day was split with a breakfast event for businesses in the morning and a session for individuals and community groups in the afternoon.

Building on this, the Council is keen to accelerate the work on climate change. Actions have been progressed, but it is important that the council maintains momentum.

The Council’s action plan outlines a range of future initiatives and ongoing commitments including the procurement of green energy contracts, the development of a climate change officer champions network, commitments to work with housing associations, private sector landlords and developers to increase home insulation and other energy efficiency initiatives and the development of sustainable transport solutions. Waste and the wider environment are a particular area of focus including targets to increase the borough’s recycling rates and become a single use plastic free Council and community by 2025. It is important that the Council continues to use the action plan to agree clear, smart targets for the

prioritisation and delivery of these initiatives. The 2020 – 2030 action plan shared with the peer team has some dates that still need populating.

To further maintain momentum, there are opportunities to harness the strong partnerships developed during the pandemic to support work on climate change. Opportunities to co-design and co-create climate change action and solutions led by local communities should be explored. This should include the development of local climate change community networks.

There are also opportunities to strengthen climate change leadership at all levels of the organisation. The aim should be to ensure climate action is seen as everyone’s responsibility. More work should be undertaken with staff to build confidence in integrating climate action into their roles and service areas. This could include carbon literacy/carbon awareness training for both staff, members and community groups.

Consideration should also be given to using staff engagement groups to embed climate change thinking across middle managers, team leaders and front-line officers. Given their frontline role with residents, businesses and communities, they can help identify emerging opportunities as well as support the implementation of practical change on the ground. The peer team found both staff and front-line members are keen to share their ideas to support climate change action.

A quick win would be to include a climate change ‘check’ on Council report templates. Alongside the legal, risk, finance and policy/equalities implications, this would encourage officers and members to consider the climate change impact when taking decisions and encourage thinking on climate action at the design stage of projects.

Opportunities to strengthen collaboration and lobbying with other councils across the county should also be explored. This could build on work to develop a wider borough-wide assessment of carbon emissions, in partnership with Lancashire County Council, which is already planned.

The LGA has a [Climate Change Hub](#) which highlights a wide range of support and case studies to support councils address climate change including:

- Greenhouse Gas Accounting Tool – facilitating the benchmarking of emissions with other councils
- Bio-diversity e learning (for officers and members)
- Pass the Planet – the LGA campaign to promote good practice and shared learning moving on from COP 26
- Podcast series on engaging local communities on climate change

3.7 Becoming a more commercial council

There is a strong commitment from the Leadership, Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team to grow future income opportunities. The Council’s selfassessment shows the Council is self-aware of the challenges faced including the identification of viable sites (flooding challenges etc), a relatively high number of properties in council tax band A (50.7%) and, as a small council, the corporate capacity to deliver schemes.

Over the past few years, a number of initiatives have been implemented which provide the foundations upon which to build. These initiatives include income generating assets, a commercial property rent

review, wilding (to reduce grounds maintenance costs), success in some external funding opportunities, introduction of pre-application planning advice fees and trade waste services. In 2013 the Council jointly set up Rossendale Together Barnfield (RTB) to deliver a number of regeneration projects. In delivering these initiatives and projects, the Council have recognised the need to ensure robust project governance processes are in place, including a willingness to source external legal and finance expertise when required.

To build on the work to date, it will be important for the Council to be clearer about what developing a commercial approach means to them and what they are trying to achieve in the short, medium and longer term. The Council should consider pulling this detail together in a document and need to be mindful of the recent CIPFA consultation in this area and the revised CIPFA Prudential Code and Treasury Management Code (released on 20 December 2021).

The LGA's [Enterprising Councils](#) guide is a resource that can support councils in doing this. It highlights a number of key strategic and operational questions that should be considered when developing a commercial focus including the extent of political drive to be commercial, key drivers, risk appetite, organisational culture and capability.

Building a commercial ethos across the workforce through staff development and staff engagement will be key. There are already examples of staff groups being engaged in the identification of potential efficiencies and savings. The Council should continue to ensure the development of commercial/income generating skills and thinking is embedded in both officer and member development programmes. Consideration could also be given to establishing a new 'income generation' email inbox to help facilitate the sharing of ideas from all employees and raise awareness.

The peer team heard how the Council is in year one of a strategic property asset review. The aim is to review assets across four Council wards each year. The Council should consider building further capacity to accelerate this review and deliver it at a faster pace and in a shorter time scale. It is the view of the peer team that this work will bring tangible benefits to the Council by increasing understanding of their assets and how these can best be used to maximise income and savings.

The Council should explore opportunities to benchmark its fees and charges against those of statistical neighbours. This will help to determine whether the Council's existing fees and charges are proportionate when benchmarked against others. It also has the potential to highlight areas for the introduction of new fees and charges.

There are also opportunities to consider best practice and learning elsewhere. The LGA's [commercialisation web pages](#) bring together guidance and case studies for councils on income generation, including how to become involved in the work of the Advanced Commercialisation Group – a forum for councils already advanced in their thinking on approaches to commercialisation.

4. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a six-month check-in meeting. This will be a short, facilitated session which

creates space for the Council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

In the meantime, Claire Hogan, Principal Adviser for the North West region, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Claire is available to discuss any further support the Council requires at claire.hogan@local.gov.uk

ACTION PLAN

No.	Peer challenge recommendations	Actions	Accountable officer	Completed
A. Corporate				
A1	Develop a clearer, shared narrative about Rossendale as a place, its future and the Council's role within this.	Viva PR to work with the members, partner organisations and CMT to develop a clear narrative	Neil Shaw	Q4 21/22
		Use the narrative in council communications and staff engagement sessions to explain service performance and the rationale for key projects	CMT	Q1 22/23
A2	Prioritise partnership engagement and activity to focus on the things that can have the greatest impact.	Ensure member briefings are undertaken ahead of Board/partnership meetings	CMT	Ongoing
		Review how the council engages with communities with a focus on identifying where the council should be focusing its community engagement energy	Adam Allen	Q1-2 22/23
A3	Work with partners to bring a renewed focus and thinking on tourism within Rossendale.	Review how the Visitor Economy Strategy can be driven more effectively in partnership with tourism stakeholders	Mandy Lewis	Q1-Q2 22/23
A4	Consider how to build more corporate capacity to fulfil ambitions	Cabinet/CMT roundtable discussion to agree 2022 key projects to better manage capacity across the council	Cabinet/CMT	Q4 21/22
		Use the service planning process to manage the key priorities for each service year annually	CMT	Q4 each year
		Cabinet and CMT to jointly 'gate keep' potential new projects to ensure there is sufficient capacity before commencement of new projects	Cabinet/CMT	Ongoing
A5	Consider how best the Council can set out and deliver its strategic housing ambitions for Rossendale in support of the new Local Plan	Review housing statistical information, housing demand data and engage with Housing Associations and landlords	Ged Gallagher	Q4 21/22
		Develop a new Housing Strategy with early input from the portfolio holder and Overview & Scrutiny	Ged Gallagher	Q4 21/22 to Q2 22/23
		Agree the Housing Strategy	Ged Gallagher	Q3 22/23
A6	The Council should continue to prioritise work with the auditors to ensure closure	Agree final position with Grant Thornton on 17/18 accounts	Karen Spencer	Q4 21/22

	of accounts from 2017/18 onwards.	Work with Mazars on the audit of the 18/19, 19/20 and 20/21 accounts to enable closure	Karen Spencer	Q1-Q3 22/23
A7	Review the Council's approach to councillor queries to ensure greater consistency in response across services	Democratic Services to survey all members on current views on response to member enquiries	Carolyn Sharples	Q4 21/22
		From the survey identify specific actions/approach to improve response time	Clare Birtwistle	Q4 21/22
A8	Review the scrutiny function to ensure it has maximum impact. This includes how it holds the Executive to account and its role in informing both policy development and providing service performance challenge.	Ensure all new strategies are considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee at an early stage to enable identification of strategic priorities for the strategy to be developed appropriately	Relevant Head of Service	On-going
		Assign new CMT lead to support Overview & Scrutiny	Mandy Lewis	Q4 21/22
		Undertake development work with Overview & Scrutiny members to enable clearer focus on strategic issues to support strategy development	Mandy Lewis & Clare Law	On-going
		Quarterly performance reports are scheduled at Cabinet meetings alongside financial monitoring reports	Cabinet/CMT	Q4 21/22
A9	Develop a strategic communications plan including how the Council can make best use of social media channels to engage audiences and promote the work of the Council.	Agree annually four quarterly comms campaigns	Viva PR	Q1 each year
		Reflect council successes in staff engagement/comms more consistently	CMT	Q3 21/22
		Produce the annual 'Key Achievements' video	Kaya Payne	Q4 21/22
		Publicise more 'good news' stories to the public on an ongoing basis including social media	Viva PR	Ongoing
B. Tackling climate change				
B1	Strengthen climate change leadership at all levels of the organisation.	Integrate climate change actions/responsibilities into new job descriptions where relevant	Kelly Forrest and all managers	Q4 21/22
		Embed climate change objectives within appraisal objectives for key officers starting in 2022/23	All managers	Q1 22/23
		Include climate change heading on the committee report template	Carolyn Sharples	Q4 21/22
		Introduce climate change champions in each service area	CMT	Q4 21/22
		Following each carbon audit, clear targets for projects	Adam Allen	Q3 22/23

		and the programme will be set		
B2	Ensure climate action initiatives are co-designed and co-created working alongside local communities.	Build on the existing climate emergency network (of community members, a headteacher and pupils) to build a wider virtual network online	Adam Allen	Q2 22/23
C. Being a more commercial council				
C1	Agree what developing a commercial approach means for the Council in the short, medium and longer term.	Produce a clear statement on the council's commercial approach as part of the MTFS each year	Neil Shaw & Karen Spencer	Q4 each year
		Review fees and charges annually including statistical neighbours and East Lancs authorities	Karen Spencer	Q4 each year
		Undertake commercialisation training for middle managers based on the LGA development offer	Clare Law	Q2 22/23
		Run 'Dragons Den' activity with middle managers to identify income generation business ideas	Adam Allen	Q2 22/23
C2	The Council should accelerate the property asset review.	Review Property Officer fixed term roles using 'invest to save' principles	Lucie Greenwood	Q4 21/22
		Model the income generation opportunities for developing out Plots 3 and 4 at Futures Park	Mandy Lewis	Q1 22/23