

MINUTES OF: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 1st February 2022

Present: Councillor Johnson (Chair)
Councillors Cheetham (sub), Eaton, Foxcroft, Kenyon, Morris, Procter and Woods (sub).

In attendance: Karen Spencer, Head of Finance
Clare Law, Head of People and Policy
Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager
Dawn Vear and David Whatmough, First Choice Credit Union
Eileen Goodwin, Bacup Credit Union
Jenny Duthie and Nick Pilling, Citizens Advice (CA)

Also Present: Councillors Lythgoe and Walmsley
By remote access:
Councillors Ashworth and Pendlebury
Mandy Lewis, Director of Economic Development
Craig Finn, Finance Manager
Co-opted member Z. Ali
2 members of the public

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Gill, Kempson, Rooke and Thompson. (Councillors Cheetham and Woods subbing for Councillors Kempson and Thompson), and also John Doherty, Bacup Credit Union.

2. Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Procter declared interests that she was trust member of CA and a member of the First Choice Credit Union and would not be participating in these items (minutes 7 and 8).

Councillors Cheetham, Johnson and Kenyon declared non-pecuniary interests that they were members of the credit union (minute 7).

Councillor Foxcroft declared an interest that he was the Council's representative on Rossendale Leisure Trust (minute 9).

4. Urgent Items of Business

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

5. Question Time

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

6. Chair's Update

- 6.1 At the last meeting Lancashire County Council Highways (LCC) had agreed to look into repair issues at 3 specific locations which were raised by Councillor Foxcroft. A response had been received and forwarded to Councillor Foxcroft for information.
- 6.2 The committee had also requested that full Council commend RAFT on their 10th anniversary for all their hard work. The Chair was glad to report that Council commended RAFT at the January meeting, and the Mayor would be arranging to visit RAFT and present a certificate of achievement.
- 6.3 Councillor Foxcroft noted that the LCC response failed to answer why the flooding had worsened at Tup Bridge and how quickly it would be rectified, and also the number of schemes behind schedule compared with the rest of Lancashire. It was agreed to contact LCC to follow this up.

ORDINARY BUSINESS

N.B. Councillor Procter did not participate in the following two items.

7. Credit Unions

- 7.1 Eileen Goodwin provided members with an update on the work of the Bacup Credit Union including:
- Current staffing levels and number of volunteers.
 - The number of members and young savers, including membership through the schools.
 - Loans and debts.
 - Pressures of covid and governments schemes on loan payback.
 - Updating back office facilities as well as looking into phone apps and online membership.
- 7.2 In response to members' questions the following clarification was given:
- A campaign to pick up people who currently had their pension paid into the Post Office seemed a good idea. However, there would be no remuneration to pick this work up (as there was with the Post Office).
 - A lot of people had their benefits paid into the Credit Union.
- 7.3 Dawn Vear provided members with a handout and an overview of the work of the First Choice Credit Union over the last year, including:
- The number of staff, volunteers and directors who were also volunteers.
 - Update on membership, details of savings and loans.
 - Doing more things online and using mobile phones to keep the service going and working with less people during covid.
 - Debts were spiralling and it was not classed as priority debt.
 - Courts had not been working during covid so it was not possible to chase up debts via wage reduction.
 - A new marketing programme was being launched for borrowing with incentives to borrow wisely.
 - Proper checks were made before loans were agreed.
 - They also did community support with groups such as RAFT and the Hospice Penny Appeal.
 - Savings had kept growing over the last 2 years and 50% was out on loan, but it was difficult as no interest was being made on current savings.
- 7.4 In response to members' questions the following clarification was given:

- The library in Ramsbottom had stopped being used as there were no attendees, but there was a lot of online facilities being used in this area.

Resolved:

The committee noted the updates, and the Chair thanked them for the support they provided and their hard work.

8. Citizens Advice (CA)

8.1 Jenny Duthie and Nick Pilling gave a presentation and update to members, which outlined the work of Citizens Advice (CA) in Rossendale, including:

- How Citizens Advice was funded and key outcomes.
- Value for money and how this was calculated.
- Support had been provided throughout the pandemic and they worked in partnership with the Gas Energy Trust, for example.
- Council funding helped to attract funding for other projects.
- Funding was higher than normal with the short term funding available during covid.
- The profile of Rossendale clients was shared as well as a case study.
- Advice provided was higher than normal with more people needing to access benefits during covid.
- Easing pressures on Council services such as homelessness and payment of Council Tax.

8.2 In response to members' questions the following clarification was given:

- The income graph showed the NET income.
- Figures were merged with Hyndburn.
- The CA had a rental arrangement at Stubblee Hall.
- In the past funding had previously been based on £1 per head of population.
- Payment was required to trade under the CA name.
- The CA provided the systems and training and each CA organisation paid into it.
- Hyndburn Council funded more community organisations.
- More people were coming for employment and debt advice.

Resolved:

The committee noted the updates, and the Chair thanked them for the support they provided and their hard work.

N.B. Councillor Procter re-joined the meeting for the remaining items.

9. 2022/23 Council Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy

9.1 The committee considered the 2022/23 Council Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy report, which was presented by the Head of Finance.

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

- Each service area had done their own benchmarking exercise regarding Fees & Charges.
- This was an ongoing process and would be refreshed every year.
- Benchmarking had been done across similar size authorities in the local area.
- The target of £200k savings from vacancies was a realistic target and the Council was on target to achieve this for this year. This was savings made from the time a post became vacant until the time the next person started in post.
- There was 500k in Capital for renovations and £300k to fund revenue costs regarding covering liability for the empty homes scheme.
- The £1 million which is the current estimate of funds that will be added to the transitional reserve at 2021/22 year end would be from grants not yet used.
- Septic tanks near private water supplies were the responsibility of the owner.

- There was a lot of uncertainty in future years due to the single year financial settlement.
- The general fund should not be touched at all, but if future years funding remains at the level forecast and the Council did nothing to bridge the funding gap the transitional fund would be exhausted before the end of the current forecast.
- Some government grants had been paid up front and surplus would need to be paid back to government.
- Business rates deficits would be funded from the business rates reserve.
- The Council had low borrowing as identified in the Peer Review.

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendations of the report and made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. To consider the proposed revenue budget for 2022/23 of £8.991m, as detailed in the report.
2. To consider the proposed council tax rate for Band D for 2022/23 of £290.80.
3. To consider the proposed use of £56k from the Transitional reserve to support the 2022/23 revenue budget.
4. To consider the proposed the fees and charges at Appendix 1.

10. Capital Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Capital Programme 2022/23

10.1 The committee considered the Capital Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Capital Programme 2022/23 report, which was presented by the Head of Finance.

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

- The increase of £25k on the Empty Homes scheme was due to slippage from previous years underspends.
- Where there was an underspend in the previous year this has been slipped forward into the current year.

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendations of the report and made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. To consider the council's Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2025/26.
2. To consider the council's capital programme for 2022/23 and associated capital expenditure of £5.02m.

11. Quarter 3 performance report and RIPA update

11.1 The committee considered the Quarter 3 performance report and RIPA update, which was presented by the Head of People and Policy.

11.2 In response to members' questions the following clarification was given:

- The number of licenced premises inspected noted in the performance indicators would be looked into.
- In relation to bin collections the Council was still in recovery with HGV driver shortages and with people working from home the number of parked cars preventing collections was still problematic. Re-visits were taking place and staff were being re-deployed from other areas within Operations to assist.
- An exercise was being undertaken to look at agency staff and see if they were being used effectively.
- Staff turnover rates were comparable with other similar local authorities.
- As it was a small authority a small number of people leaving or going off sick would make a big impact on the figures.

- Staff support was being provided, including for mental well-being and anxiety during covid, and the Council was in the process of establishing an Employee Assistance Programme with a 24/7 number that staff could ring.
- The Health and Safety action plan included the development of well-being champions.
- A *Your Voice* staff group has been established with members from all service areas to support effective communications.
- Short courses and training were also being provided for staff as well other apprenticeship and degree opportunities.
- Disabled facilities works had been impacted on by covid and staffing vacancies, but posts had now been recruited to.
- A new system was in place for fly tipping, but bin collections were currently being prioritised.
- There was a process that needed to be followed for enforcement issues.
- Service requests from members of the public needed to be directed to Corporate Support via the 01706 217777 number or using the online form. This would ensure they were logged and allocated correctly and included in the reporting figures.
- The query regarding the date to review the work on the Growth Corridor Masterplan would be checked and reported back.

The Chair confirmed that missed bin collections would be re-visited if it was still showing red in another 12 months.

N.B. Councillor Kenyon left the meeting.

Resolved:

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the update.
2. It was agreed a response would be provided to the query on the Growth Corridor Masterplan and also on the number of licenced premises inspected.

12. The Forward Plan

Members were updated on the Forward Plan.

Resolved:

The update was noted.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 8.20pm)

Signed.....

(Chair)

Date