

MINUTES OF: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 25th September 2023

Present: Councillor S Barnes (Chair)
Councillors D. Ashworth, Foxcroft, McMahon, Norton, Rooke and Thompson.

In attendance: David Smurthwaite, Director of Economic Development
Clare Law, Head of People and Policy
Jac Jordan, Account Manager - Viva PR
Samantha, Sandford, Chief Executive - Rossendale Leisure Trust (RLT)
Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager

Also Present: Councillors Ashworth, Lythgoe, McInnes and Oakes.
3 members of the public

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Coogan, Kenyon and Whitehead.

2. Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting on 12th June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Foxcroft declared a non-pecuniary interest in item E1 as he was as a RLT Board Member (minute 13).

4. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

5. Question Time

There were no public questions.

6. Chair's Update

6.1 In relation to queries raised at previous meetings, information had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting, which included the following:

- Two briefing notes had been circulated to committee members on Climate Change and Ease the Squeeze to keep members informed of progress.
- Two workshops had taken place to discuss task and finish group work. The topics agreed were Road Safety and Temporary Accommodation.
- A focus group would meet quarterly to undertake finance scrutiny and feed back its findings to the committee. A budget consultation briefing meeting had also been scheduled for Monday 20th November 2023 at 6.30pm and would be open to all members to attend.
- After the last committee several actions were followed up all of which had been completed and related to:
 - Providing an update on how long people were in temporary homeless accommodation and also the turnover, including how many were presented and how many had gone into accommodation compared with how many were waiting to move on.

- Providing information on the number of homeless people as a result of domestic violence.
- Providing the quarterly numbers for fly tipping over last 12 months.
- Circulating the Risk Strategy.
- Providing information on the recycling pilot.
- Providing information on the monitoring and ownership of the Climate Change Network Facebook group.
- Providing information on why the payment of invoices had suddenly turned to red RAG status.
- Providing an update on the enforcement contract.
- Bringing the Communications Plan to the committee, which had been circulated to members and was on this evening's agenda.

ORDINARY BUSINESS

7. Quarter 1 Performance Management Report (April, May and June) 2023

- 7.1 The Head of People and Policy presented the Q1 Performance report and noted the changes to the report format and the reviewed key performance indicators (KPI's). It was intended that tier 1 information would be presented in future reports and tier 2 information was intended for services managers. Members were asked to consider whether they would prefer just tier 1 information or both tier 1 and 2 in future reports.
- 7.2 In response to members' questions the following clarification was given:
- The Council has seen Government funding reductions of c£4m pa since 2010, over the same period staff numbers had reduced from 223 to 168.
 - Where engagements were referred to regarding the Visit Rossendale website, this was the number of people that had clicked onto the website.

N.B. Councillor Norton entered the meeting.

- Several Economic Development websites were currently under review until the new website was launched. A 'we are updating' holding message would be placed on the website whilst the reviews and updating was completed.
- The new Council website had more functionality in relation to the collection and use of data, for example, spikes would be able to be seen.
- Training on the new Council website would take place for Web Champions.
- Compliments were shared via the Communications Team internally, going forward these would be shared via email with all staff and councillors.
- Compliments in quarter 1 were mainly for Operations and Corporate Support, but also included a few more unusual compliments (which were shared with the committee).
- Individual town vacancy rates were calculated by the town centre regeneration officers. Each town had different needs and required a different approach. Rawtall had seen significant improvements and Bacup results were around 15%, which was 1% above the national average. With the ongoing work, the impact would be seen in Haslingden and Waterfoot in the future.
- The processing of requests and enquiries had transferred to Corporate Support during Q1. Reports on these were reviewed by Corporate Management Team monthly and by service managers weekly. A more robust approach would be taken to chase outstanding information. Where regular information requests were made, the Council would look to provide frequently requested information on the web site.
- The data regarding Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) has been misinterpreted. The DFG annual target for this year was 80, which equated to 20 per quarter. Quarter 1

performed above that by completing works relating to 4 grants. Lancashire County Council had put in place additional resources to reduce the Occupational Health assessment backlog and relieve the blockage for Local Authorities.

- The turn-around time from Rossendale Council receiving a referral to making contact with the customer was consistently less than 1 working day for DFG's.
- The DFG policy was currently under review to broaden the programme to achieve more of its spend.
- Each service area does a Business Continuity Plan and was expected to look at staffing and identify any gaps where additional resources were needed to mitigate staff leaving or retirement.
- Tier 2 information was used internally by managers at team meetings, particularly to have discussions around savings and efficiency.
- The new Council web site was expected go live on the 3rd October.
- With engagement there needed to be a way to measure sentiment, such as positive intentions by sharing or linking social media posts.
- Leaving feedback on web content was not possible but could apply to social media posts.
- The number of statutory indicators the Council was required to report on was relatively small. The rest of the indicators and information was provided to have good governance.

Several members commented that the new report was better presented and was easier to digest.

It was also requested to have status colours in written form, for those who could only access black and white report copies.

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the update on the performance of the Council and made the following recommendations:

1. To add a link in the performance report to where the savings information could be found in the Audit and Accounts reports for further information.
2. To put a covering message on the Economic Development websites to say that information was currently under review.
3. Regarding the demographic split on the ageing workforce, to link this back to risk 5 and reference what contingencies were being put in place as mitigation for this.
4. To review whether the performance measure *Engagements with the Visit Rossendale Website* was an effective measure for Priority 1 – A Thriving Local Economy.

8. Equality Report and Workforce Profile

8.1 Members noted the update report on the workforce profile.

8.2 Members had been provided with the following clarification in advance of the meeting:

- All job descriptions were reviewed for each vacancy to ensure the criteria and qualification were still relevant. If possible, the qualification would be amended to request equivalent experience.
- Human Resources (HR) discuss with Managers the most appropriate place to advertise and attract potential applicants depending on the role. All roles were advertised via Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Job Centre, social media, other local government job sites including Greater Jobs, and voluntary and community groups (via the Communities Team).
- All adverts include the salary details.

- The Council was currently developing an employee wellbeing strategy which would include menopause guidance for staff and managers. This was in addition to already circulating any information, training or workshops available.
- There were no roles within the Council that preclude women, 50% of the Council's workforce was in Operations, and there were female workers in traditionally male occupied roles e.g. Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) driver, waste operative, town centre caretaker and gardener roles.
- All application forms were redacted at shortlisting stage for age and gender.
- All managers receive recruitment and selection training, and if possible, a HR officer would be part of the recruitment and selection panel.
- Equality and diversity training was delivered periodically to staff and new starters.
- Currently there were no local trade union representatives and the Council was working with the regional representative. There was a productive relationship with the trade union.
- Current equality monitoring forms include categories for Male/Female/Other. Including a question - Do you currently live in the gender you were given at birth? Yes/No/Prefer not to disclose. The guidance within the Public Sector Equality should reflect the Census 2021 questions and only ask if an employee is Male or Female, and therefore we have only reported on Male and Female statistics. In addition, there is a recommendation in the Census 2021 to ask a gender identity question whether an employee's gender is the same sex as registered at birth. This is a voluntary question.
- It was confirmed that congratulations would be passed on regarding the Council's success with Public Sector Equality Duty.
- HR would include the image from [Interaction Institute for Social Change - Artist: Angus Maquire](#) in future training sessions.

In relation to follow up questions, the following was clarified:

- Job adverts were placed in the usual places including with the job centre, on the web site, distributed via the Communities Team to partners and voluntary groups and on social media. In addition to this, where relevant, managers were also consulted on any professional or specialist publications for specifically qualified roles.
- The Council was also working with Rossendale Works to see if there were opportunities to support those accessing the programme as well.

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the Equality Report and Workforce Profile and recommended to continue to monitor the Council's progress on equality.

9. Ombudsman's Annual Letter Annual Council Complaints Review

9.1 Members noted the annual update report.

Resolved:

the report on the different types of feedback received by the Council, in addition to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) enquiries and complaints for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023.

10. Communications Strategy 2023-25

10.1 The Head of People and Policy and Account Manager, Viva PR presented the Communications Strategy 2023-25.

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

- The Council had a contract with local PR firm Viva PR to carry external communications, media relations, and reputation management.
- The contract was tendered in May 2022, for a 4 year period, reviewed on an annual basis.
- The contract manager was the Head of People and Policy.
- The Account Manager at Viva PR worked closely with the Council's Digital Marketing Apprentice to support social media and internal communications.
- Viva PR worked closely with officers and supported the development of the 2023-24 Communications Strategy, action plan and schedule, which would support the work plan for the next 2 years and support the delivery of the Valley Plan 2021-25.
- The Viva PR Account Manager supported officers in writing write press releases and acted as a press office for media enquiries.
- They also helped to create, develop and design corporate campaigns, such as *Rossendale Forest* and *Check Before You Chuck*.
- Social media figures were gathered from each platform and recorded by the Digital Marketing Apprentice.
- All media coverage was monitored and picked up by Viva PR and reported monthly to the Chief Executive and Council Leader.
- The report could be amended to make it clear that the Council was working with an external provider for external communications.
- An extra column on the action plan could be included for members to show what was going to be delivered.
- The Council previously had communications support from Blackburn with Darwen Council.
- A number of Viva PR staff were available to provide 24/7 support, but the Account Manager was the main point of contact.
- Work aimed to raise the Council's profile and be more proactive rather than reactive.
- Hyperlinks could be added where reference was made to other reports, so they could be read together.

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report and recommended the Communications Strategy 2023-25 to Cabinet for approval with the following recommended amendments:

1. To make it clear in the report that the Council was working closely with an external provider and to ensure that reference was made to how the decision was made to use an external company.
2. To provide information about what provision we asked for when the service was contracted out.
3. To share the additional column of information to the action plan to show the detail around the delivery of each action.

11. The Forward Plan

- 11.1 Members were updated on the Forward Plan and Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for November and were encouraged to submit their questions in advance in relation to items on the next agenda.

Resolved:

The Forward Plan and Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme items were noted.

12. Exclusion of Public and Press

Resolved:

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that it involves disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) under Part 1 Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

13. Rossendale Leisure Trust Business Plan Update

13.1 Members discussed the update from the Leisure Trust.

Resolved:

The committee noted the update and asked for the Leisure Trust to consider their suggestions.

Members thanked the Chief Executive of Rossendale Leisure Trust for attending and for providing the informative update.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 8.30pm)

Signed.....

(Chair)

Date