

MINUTES OF: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 13th November 2023

Present: Councillor S.Barnes (Chair)
Councillors D.Ashworth, Foxcroft, Gill (sub), Kenyon, Norton, Procter (sub), Rooke, Thompson, Whitehead and Co-opted Member J. Heaton.

In attendance: Clare Law, Head of People and Policy
Kelly Jenkinson, Housing Renewal Manager
David Smurthwaite, Director of Economic Development
Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager

Also Present: Councillors Ashworth, Lythgoe and MacNae
1 member of the public

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Coogan (Councillor Procter subbing) and Councillor McMahon (Councillor Gill subbing).

2. Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting on 25th September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

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 Two briefing notes had been circulated to committee members to provide an annual update on the Health and Well Being Plan and the Customer & Digital Strategy. Any questions relating to the updates were to be directed to the officers detailed on the briefing updates.

6.2 Since the committee last met, Cabinet had approved an amended Communications Strategy 2023-25, following the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

ORDINARY BUSINESS

N.B. Councillor Thompson entered the meeting.

7. Disabled Facilities Grant Policy Review

7.1 The Housing Renewal Manager informed members of the Disabled Facilities Grant Policy Review.

- 7.2 In response to members' questions the following clarification was given:
- There had been 68 grants, 58 of which were for under £10k and included, for example, stair lifts, hoists, fencing, ramps, intercoms.
 - £10-30k was the maximum for mandatory grants and included, for example, showers, garage conversions, kitchen alterations.
 - Over £30k grants mainly related to multiple adaptations.
 - Anything over £10k had a local land charge placed against the property and it was at the Council's discretion as to whether the grant was required to be paid back, depending on circumstances. This was looked at on a case by case basis.
 - The Changing Places WC followed an enquiry by the Economic Development Team, advice has been fed back regarding the funding options for this.
 - Handypersons grant could apply again at a later date. Anyone elderly or vulnerable could apply if they provided the materials.
 - At 4.1 there was a grant of £65k that was an in depth paediatric case. The maximum grant previously issued was £44k.
 - Regarding publicity, GP surgeries had agreed to put posters in the surgeries and leaflets would be going to Age Concern, Citizen's Advice and the AB&D Centre outlining the service offer. They had also spoke to the dementia nurses at Bacup who would relay information to the rest of the borough. It would also go on social media.

The Lead Member for Communities, Health and Wellbeing was delighted to see the policy and encouraged publicity. The Chair noted it was a really good piece of work and thanked everyone who had worked on it.

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Disabled Facilities Grant Policy Review and recommended Cabinet approval as detailed in the report.

N.B. Councillor Norton entered the meeting.

8. Quarter 2 Performance Management Report (July, August & September) 2023/24

8.1 The Head of People and Policy updated members on the Quarter 2 Performance Management Report (July, August & September) 2023/24. It was clarified that 6 employees has left the authority during this quarter, 11 employees cumulative for the year so far.

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

- When someone informed they were leaving the authority their line manager would have a conversation with them to discuss it. An Exit Interview Form was also completed. The form had been reviewed and this was now completed by HR to consider if there were any trends to staff leaving.
- As the authority was small, there was limited opportunity for progression. It was also difficult to compete with salaries elsewhere.
- The Council had been working more flexibly since 2021 and more changes were about to be made, such as removing the cap on the number of daily homeworking hours.
- Staff also had the opportunity to progress to management after doing courses such as ILM, if suitable posts became available.
- Where missed bins were reported, the back office system was being changed so they could look at live data and contact crews directly to pick up missed bins.
- The 50% target for recycling was a target of the Climate Change Agenda and was aspirational at the time.

- The Council was continuing to focus on localised campaigns which by their nature would be small with gradual impact.
- In line with local colleagues in Lancashire the Council was aiming to introduce food waste collections in 2025/26, subject to national legislation, which would deliver a significant increase in recycling rates.
- The Council would be engaging with members and other stakeholders to consider resizing residual waste bins or reducing collections to 3 weekly, which would also have an impact.
- It was important to compare collection rates with similar authorities with similar collection issues.
- The Head of Operations would be asked to attend for the next quarterly report update to provide more clarity.
- Sweeping rates had been impacted by staff vacancies and sickness. The Council had successfully recruited to 2 vacant posts and were confident in achieving the targets in the next quarter.
- In relation to the complaint letters, the issue had been resolved with the customer, but the closing letter had not been sent at the same time. It has been stressed to the staff members concerned the importance of sending the closing letter within the 10 day target.
- With member enquiries, the Council was measuring the right thing but the process of answering the enquiry was being revisited where the subject matter was complex or required a full investigation.
- Once a matter was allocated to an officer for investigation, the officer should outline the proposed action to the member within the agreed timescales and then the enquiry should be closed down on the system. The officer should then keep the member informed until the investigation is concluded.
- Cabinet had responsibility for monitoring financial performance. All members had access to the financial monitoring reports and were able to scrutinise. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee could ask questions about the reports and could also attend the Cabinet meetings to ask any questions they had on the monitoring reports.
- The Leisure Working Group considered the committee's recommendation in relation to the letter of assurance on 16th October and balanced this with the best interests of the Council. The group agreed in principle to issue the letter of support. The draft letter was circulated to members of the group and they were asked to respond by close of play the following day. Of those that confirmed, the response was unanimous. The letter of comfort purely reflected what was agreed by Council in May 2023.
- The key tools of the planning authority was to provide sufficient land within the Local Plan and maintain the 5 year land supply. At the end of 2023 more dwellings were built than the annual target. Usually housing completions took place after the New Year so the Council should see an increase.
- The Council was working with developers to achieve solutions to their planning proposals and discharging conditions as well as with Homes England to build better relations to allow support for larger sites and in particular brownfield sites.
- There was enough houses in construction to meet the target and developers had indicated it was still achievable.
- This was historically an annual target, but members had requested quarterly reporting.
- A sample of sites under development would be requested for inclusion in the next report.

- Council Tax new claims had slightly worsened due to a system reporting error. This was affecting all authorities that use NEC system for processing. This was ongoing and likely to impact Q3 reporting, but was currently under investigation.
- The Risk Management Matrix was in the Risk Management Strategy which was currently being updated. The risk matrix was a key tool used to analyse the probability and impact of a risk. Going forward the matrix would be included in the report for completeness to help understand the level of risk.

Thanks was given for including example of compliments in the report.

The Lead Member for Communities, Health and Wellbeing agreed to follow up the issue with the Council Tax claims system error at the next Capita Board meeting.

Resolved:

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

- For the Head of Operations to attend when the next quarterly report is presented to provide further clarity on member questions, particularly in relation to the next steps to improve recycled waste following the recent campaign.
- To provide examples in the next report of sites under development in relation to the new homes performance indicator.

N.B. Councillor Rooke left the meeting.

9. The Forward Plan

9.1 Members were updated on the Forward Plan and Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for January and member were asked for advance questions in relation to the annual crime update. Members suggested the following:

- Anti-social behaviour and dirt trial bikes
- Cars parked on pavements creating obstructions and restricting accessibility.

Resolved:

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

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 7.30pm)

Signed.....
(Chair)

Date