

MINUTES OF: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 10th February 2025

Present: Councillors Barnes (Chair), Neal (Vice Chair), Ashworth, Belli, Harrison, McMahon, S Smith and Co-opted member Heaton

In attendance: Chris Warren, Director of Resources
Kimberly Haworth, Head of Finance
Clare Law, Head of People and Policy
Hannah Callan, Executive and Democratic Services Officer

Also Present: Councillor Walmsley and Councillor Lythgoe

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received by David Smurthwaite. There were no other apologies.

2. Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting on 13th January 2025 be approved as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Smith declared an interest in the Leisure Trust Board.

4. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

5. Question Time

There were no public questions.

6. Chair's Update

At the previous meeting a recommendation was made to delegate minor amendments made to the draft Adoption of the Local List of Non-Designated Heritage Assets to Ward Councillors as well as the Head of Planning and Lead Member prior to consultation. The consultation went live and letters were sent out to all owners/occupiers of the properties and other assets that have been identified to ensure they are aware that their property/asset is being considered for inclusion on the Local List of Non-Designated Heritage Assets.

ORDINARY BUSINESS

7. Corporate Priorities, Budget, Council Tax and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy

7.1 Members considered the Corporate Priorities, Budget, Council Tax and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which would be going to Council in March.

7.2 In response to members questions the following clarification was given:

- Some savings have been already been delivered, some have been removed that were found to be undeliverable and some that have been built back in.
- The largest savings target that was removed was in relation to salary vacancy savings from staff turnover and long-term vacant posts which have now been built into service level budgets as part of this years process and the central savings proposal has been removed.

- It was clarified that the report referred to 2025.
- Savings and income growth are incorporated into later years and represent a potential budget gap should the council lose focus on the need to deliver commercial income or efficiency savings.
- Identified savings to be shared with members at a future Committee.
- It was clarified that it is normal practice for members to submit questions in advance of the meetings, however, on this occasion it was agreed that questions did not need to be submitted in advance.
- In relation to other commercial rent opportunities it was clarified that this relates to income deriving from the proposed development of Scout Moor 2 wind farm and this has been included as it is a realistic possibility.
- The net costs to the Council after the refund for the Employers National Insurance increase is £80k.
- The figures for the statutory spend verses the non-statutory spend will be reported back on to members.
- It was clarified that the proposed use of reserves is £574k.
- The intention was and is to keep the Council Tax within the referendum limits.
- The statutory recommendation is expected to be removed as part of the 2023/24 annual statutory accounts acceptance. At the current time it is understood that the discrepancies were drafting errors rather than underlying accounting errors.
- There is a need for members and the RLT board to have a discussion on the future strategic direction for the Trust and its management arrangements with the Council. RLT are facing significant challenges and work is ongoing between officers and RLT and meetings are taking place between RLT Chief Exec and members.
- It was clarified that some of the fees and charges are set by statute and some have been set by heads of service working with the finance team to look at near neighbours in bench marking the fees and charges before putting the proposal together. It was also confirmed that this is to be uploaded on to the Council's website once Council have approved.
- It was confirmed that the Council are looking at acquiring properties to reduce the spend on temporary accommodation. It was also confirmed that the Housing Options team are actively working on preventing and reducing the risk of homelessness.
- Maintenance and works on playgrounds and pathways have historically been externally funded.
- It was clarified that if Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) does happen then the Waste Transfer Station (WTS) redevelopment will contribute to the wider aims of Lancashire's waste disposal strategy and would be an asset for this geographical area regardless of the entity responsible. It was agreed that a wider view from Cabinet would be sought in relation to this and a question will be submitted by Councillor Smith.

Resolved:

The committee noted the report and recommended Cabinet to approve recommendations as detailed at 1.1, 1.2 and 1.4 and recommended an amendment to 1.3 to change the proposed use of reserves to £574k.

8. Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2025/26

8.1 Members considered the Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2025/26, which would be going to Council in March.

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

- It is a budget assumption that the LCC will contribute to the WTS. It fits within the wider Lancashire Strategy, discussions are ongoing and LCC have also contributed to other authorities WTS's in the past and therefore it is felt to be a reasonable budget assumption at this stage.
- If LCC did not contribute it would increase borrowing and the impact of that is currently 4.5% on revenue cost.
- It was clarified that RBC borrow from the Public Works Loan Board and we have treasury advisors who advise RBC in relation to interest rates and the best options for borrowing.
- Following a strategic review of RLT operating strategy, borrowing will be considered should investment be deemed necessary.
- In relation to asset receipts it was confirmed that £900k was brought forward as unused balance from prior years and the Council is currently estimating it will receive £1.6m of capital receipts in the coming financial years from the sale of land at Park Avenue, Haslingden.
- It was clarified that if RBC ceases to exist as a legal entity as a result of Local Government Reorganisation, any debt would be consolidated into whichever new entity arises under the new structure. The interest would be payable by RBC in the interim regardless.

Resolved:

The committee noted the report and recommended Council to approve the Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2025/26.

9. Valley Plan 2025-29

9.1 Members considered the Valley Plan 2025-29 which would be going to Cabinet in March.

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

- It was confirmed that officers are aware of the complaints in relation to Whitworth Cemetery and that they are actively working to resolve this.
- It was clarified that the priorities will be delivered through outcomes, which are supported by Council Strategies and Annual Action Plan and this will then filter down to operational plans for departments. It was confirmed that RBC carry out an Annual Service Business Plan and then that will go down within the performance reporting.
- Wording is expected to be complete by Friday and this will be shared with members of the Committee.
- It was clarified that concerns over road safety would be under the remit of LCC and the Police. It was highlighted that within the Valley Plan it does state that RBC will work with partners to ensure a strong sense of community safety.

Resolved:

The committee noted the report and recommended Cabinet to approve the Valley Plan 2025-29.

10. Forward Plan

10.1 Members were updated on the Forward Plan and Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. Members were encouraged to submit their questions in advance in relation to items on the next agenda and suggest services to attend future meetings in relation to the performance report which would be distributed when it had been published for Cabinet.

Resolved:

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

(The meeting commenced at 6:30pm and concluded at 8:04pm)

Signed.....

(Chair)

Date