

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Date of Meeting:** 16<sup>th</sup> November 2015

**Present:** Councillor A Robertson (Chair)  
Councillors Eaton, Haworth, Hughes, Kempson (substituting for Steen), Lythgoe, McMahon and Sandiford

**In Attendance:** Sue Taylor, Principal, Accrington & Rossendale College  
Andrew Buckle, Head of Customer Services and ICT  
Jenni Cook, Committee Officer  
Councillor Ashworth, Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Health  
Councillor Marriott, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance  
Councillor Morris  
Councillor Oakes

5 members of the public

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### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Steen (Councillor Kempson was substituting) and Councillor Kenyon.

### 2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

**Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meetings held on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the amendments below:-

Councillor Lythgoe raised issues regarding the minutes:-

- It should have been minuted that greater feedback was requested on the performance reports where those items were marked 'red' and an Action Plan was required.
- Councillor Lythgoe stated he thought a Task and Finish Group would be set up to look at business targets, not that it would be 'looked into'. The remit needed to be clearer and wider to look at the whole process for evaluating performance and measuring and monitoring targets. The Chair noted that the Scrutiny Officer would set this up and request members for this Group in due course.

Councillor Morris enquired how the public were being informed that STAN was not in operation at the moment. Councillor Ashworth stated that enquirers to the One Stop Shop were being told the situation and that referrals were made to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Hughes declared an interest in Item 7, as he was a Governor of Accrington and Rossendale College.

### **4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

There were no urgent items of business.

### **5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow the members of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

### **6. CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair informed the Committee of the following:

- a) That the minutes of the last meeting which asked that the Committee write to the Police asking why they could not send another representative to present the performance figures. Members were reminded that they had previously agreed to have a presentation in March to enable the new Police Inspector to settle in his role before he came along to a meeting to meet Councillors and present the end of year performance figures.
- b) At the last meeting Members asked if more people were going to the One Stop Shop given that STAN was temporary out of use. A copy of the footfall figures for the July-October 2015 were circulated to the Committee. It was noted that this gave an idea of what people enquired about in the One Stop Shop. The public toilet was under construction and would be open shortly.

### **7. PRESENTATION FROM ACCROSS**

Sue Taylor, Principal of Accrington and Rossendale College provided an update on the Stubblelee Vocational Centre and Rossendale's provision.

- The Stubblelee Vocational Centre had been relocated to the Accrington Campus due to small numbers, declining demand, travel to learn patterns and withdrawal of funding for adult courses. The College remained committed to providing courses in Rossendale and work discussions with partners were ongoing regarding this.
- The Rossendale provision was currently 400 adult learners and 75 apprentices with 31 Rossendale employers. There were 750 Rossendale residents on programmes at the Accrington campus.
- Apprentices were a priority for future growth.
- Future plans included a partnership with Jobcentre+, involvement in the 'Wonderful Things' project, the Bacup Townscape Heritage Initiative and developing the Stubblelee Centre.

Members and members of the public commented as follows and Sue Taylor responded to queries:-

- The Stubblelee Greenhouses were utilising some of the site in return for clearing Japanese Knotweed.
- The decline of adult learners was noted and whether these numbers declined around the same time that funding was withdrawn.
- Funding was being prioritised for Maths and English courses.
- Concerns were raised over the lack of publicity of closure of the Stubblelee Vocational Centre.
- Some learners sent to the Stubblelee Vocational Centre were mandated learners from Jobcentre+ and class numbers had declined.
- It was noted that there were at least 4 excellent colleges in the north west area and the market was very competitive.
- Higher level students would travel to learn and were more likely to take out loans to study, however it was noted that the L1 and L2 learners were less likely to do this.
- Almost all apprentices went on to obtain employment.
- The Maden Centre arrangement would go on to at least January and it was noted that the college was unable to enter into a 3-year lease.
- A joined up approach with other colleges was being undertaken with regards some courses. The college had a good relationship with Fearn's Community Sports College.
- The Wonderful Things project was clarified and it was noted that childcare students and volunteers would be involved in running school holiday events; the college was not delivering courses to 5-16 year olds.
- The college was continuing to lobby the government and the local MP and remained optimistic regarding the challenges it was facing.

Sue Taylor took note of the queries raised and would respond via the O&S Committee.

Sue Taylor was thanked for her presentation. It was agreed that she would be asked back annually for an update.

## **8. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SCHEME 2016/17**

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and ICT presented the Local Council Tax Scheme 2016/17, asking that Overview and Scrutiny recommend to Council its approval. The Council was required to have any revisions to the Scheme in place by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2016.

The Local Council Tax Support Scheme was replaced by a Local Scheme of Council Tax Support in April 2013. Whilst local authorities were able to set their own Council Tax Support Schemes, based on local circumstances and needs, all local authorities are required to provide pensioners with the same level of support received under the previous national Council Tax Benefit Scheme.

No changes were proposed to the current scheme. It was noted that the Council was likely to have to absorb costs of £123k however it was important to protect the most vulnerable residents.

Members and members of the public discussed the report and Andrew Buckle responded to queries:-

- Collection rates were discussed. Andrew Buckle agreed to provide figures to the committee. It was noted it would be useful to compare with other local authorities, however not all nearby authorities were keen to share their collection rates.
- It was noted that Rossendale was a difficult collection area and the use of bailiffs was carefully considered. Those in difficulties were sometimes less likely to engage with the Council to resolve the issue.
- There were approximately 3500 people who will be affected by the CTS within Rossendale.
- It was noted that the revenue support grant settlement to be announced before Christmas would have a financial impact, as would the reduction in working tax credit.
- CTS Council tax arrears were likely to increase year-on-year.
- It was noted that it was important that the Council continued to try and protect the most vulnerable residents.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Council the approval of the Local Council Tax Scheme 2016/17.

### **9. ICT PRESENTATION**

The Head of Customer Services and ICT provided members with an overview of the Council's ICT systems, the current arrangements, future arrangement and outlined the security measures that were in place.

The following points were made in the presentation:-

- Rossendale was one of the first councils to move to the 'cloud'.
- The servers would shortly move out of Hardmans Mill and this should put an end to the power outages which had been causing ICT issues.
- The Coventry Call Centre would shortly be moving to the One Stop Shop which would enhance the customer experience.
- Wyse devices were used instead of laptops and desktop machines. These were cheaper and less likely to be stolen as no data was contained on them.
- Extensive security testing took place.
- The ICT Team comprised of 3.75 FTE and support was provided to 10 sites.
- Office 365 trials had been successful.
- The number of attacks on the firewall during October were highlighted.

Members and members of the public discussed the report and Andrew Buckle responded to queries:-

- Capita and our partners were required to match our security standards.

- Data losses were discussed and it was noted that the biggest threat was manual data loss or user error.
- Strict security measures were enforced and it was noted that an Auditor had been refused entry to the Data Centre because they did not have their ID.
- Not all council systems were on the cloud.
- The Council did not sell customer details.
- Extensive security testing was clarified and the Council was regularly audited by LCC, Grant Thornton, DWP, PSN and 'penetration testing' was carried out.
- Steps were taken to keep ahead of ever changing threats.

A member of the public asked question regarding vacant property and he was advised to raise this query with the Head of Finance.

**Resolved:**

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the presentation received.

**10. FORWARD PLAN**

Members were asked to consider whether they wished to see any of the policies on the Forward Plan, prior to them going to Cabinet. No new items had been added since the last meeting.

It was confirmed that the Local Plan would be at December's Full Council.

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The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.30pm

Signed .....  
(Chair)

Dated .....