

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 1st February, 2016

Present: Councillor A Robertson (Chair)
Councillors, Janet Eaton, Haworth, Hughes, Kenyon, McMahon,
Oakes, Sandiford and Steen

In Attendance: Stuart Sugarman, Chief Executive
Phil Seddon, Head of Finance and Property Services
Andy McGhee, Service Assurance Officer
Michelle Hargreaves, Committee and Member Services Officer

Councillors Ashworth, Essex and Marriott
4 members of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Lythgoe (Councillor Oakes sub).

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 16th November 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

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:

That the Council had added an additional Overview and Scrutiny meeting to the schedule, due to the number of items planned for the agendas between February and March. The additional meeting date would be on the 9th February and the agenda for this meeting had been published today.

At the last meeting the Head of Customer Services and ICT agreed to provide Council Tax collection rate figures. These had been circulated to members this evening.

In relation to agenda item D4, members were asked to note the additional three responses received which had also been circulated to members this evening, in relation to the response from the Department of Health via the MP, it stated that 'the Task and Finish Group was now proposing an alternative facility', this information was incorrect and it was actually the Trust that was proposing an alternative site and this was noted in the response letters at Appendix B and C.

The Chair agreed to amend the agenda as follows, item D1, D3, D2, D4 and D5.

7. COMBINED AUTHORITY FOR LANCASHIRE UPDATE

The Chief Executive outlined the purpose of the report to the committee which was to outline the Combined Authority devolution deal proposals, to raise awareness to the consultation process and to outline the changes that had been made since the report was published.

The following information was brought to the committees attention:

- It was noted that 'the Bill' had become an Act as of the 30th January, 2016.
- The public consultation process began on the 11th January across all of Lancashire (with the exception of Wyre Borough Council) and this would run until 19th February. It was encouraged that residents, businesses and council employees contributed to the online survey.
- The Act also provided other flexibilities such as the option of an elected mayor for the combined authority and the provision that this could also exercise the functions of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- Having a mayoral combined authority, would allow levying of council tax as a major precepting authority.
- There would also be a scrutiny function for a combined authority.
- A report that would be taken to Council in March would provide more information in relation to the consultation and in more detail what the authority would be asking for, who would be part of the combined authority and also what would be included within the devolution deal.
- It was noted that Leaders and Chief Executives had been meeting frequently to discuss what was required for the combined authority in more detail.

Members and members of the public discussed the report and the Chief Executive responded to queries:

- The option of Rossendale Borough Council joining with Greater Manchester combined authority. It was noted that talks had been and were continuing to take place with Greater Manchester about the potential of Rossendale being an associate of their authority at some point in the future.
- Ensuring Rossendale would get a fair share of the money being part of the combined authority. It was confirmed that the Leaders from each authority

would sit on an executive committee to ensure any monies would be distributed accordingly.

- With regard to the consultation, if education/training companies had been prompted to get involved and if there was a link between area based learning and the combined authority.
- At 6.2 of the report reference was made regarding the EU Referendum and depending on the outcome of this if the authority would still have income if we were to opt out of Europe. The Chief Executive noted that if a decision was made to leave the EU then funding would likely end at some point, however it was assumed that this would be a gradual transition.
- Concern in relation to Rossendale and if they would be forced out if Rossendale was to be part of the combined authority.
- Preference to combine with Greater Manchester.
- Concern raised with regard to devolving decisions to local level. The Chief Executive confirmed that his time spent on the combined authority was minimal and it was not impinging on his other duties. It was clarified that this report was to explain what a combined authority was, not to sell it as a model.
- Request for three benefits of being in the Lancashire Combined Authority.
- Reason Rossendale could not join Greater Manchester. It was noted that as Rossendale was within Lancashire, it could only at this stage join with an authority in the administrative area.
- The Better Homes Proposal and concern the combined authority would take over this.
- Clarification that Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen had started the consultation process.
- Concern that the Bill had already become an Act and the speed of this change.
- A timescale was requested on the process of becoming a combined authority along with additional information about joining Greater Manchester.
- More information was required in order to make an informed decision.

A member of the public asked if the option of an elected mayor would be made by a unanimous decision. It was confirmed that each council would have to agree this as an elected mayor could not be imposed on a combined authority without its agreement.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted.

8. COUNCIL TAX AND COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SANCTION AND PROSECUTION POLICY

The Service Assurance Officer provided members with an overview of the report and requested approval for the introduction of the Council Tax and Council Tax Support Sanction & Prosecution Policy.

The following information was brought to the committees attention:

- It was noted that Housing Benefit Fraud was previously the responsibility of each local authority and that this was gradually transferred to DWP throughout 2015.
- Council Tax Support (CTS) was introduced on 1st April 2013 following the abolition of Council Tax Benefit. Council Tax Support was a local scheme and following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the Department for Work and Pensions, fraud investigations were now a local authority responsibility.
- It was noted that the projected cost of the Local CTS Scheme for 2015/2016 to Rossendale Borough Council was circa £123,000.00 and this cost was not likely to reduce in the future. It was anticipated that by 2019/20 the council would have fully absorbed that cost of the CTS Scheme at a cost at around £800,000.
- It was clarified that the council currently had no policy in place and was unable to take action on a claimant if they had failed to declare a change in circumstances or claimed fraudulently.
- It was noted that the policy was to act as a deterrent and not as an income generation.

Members and members of the public discussed the report and the Service Assurance Officer responded to queries:-

- How much it would cost the council to take action against someone. It was noted that it would be done in house.
- Potential additional costs to cover bailiffs. It was confirmed it would be in house recovery.
- It was a necessary policy for the council.
- Was there a policy for business rates. The committee was informed that there was currently no legislation to cover a policy for business rates.
- It was clarified that the policy was to tackle fraud and it was not about debt recovery.
- Option of varying costs charged.
- If information was readily available to the public informing them they need to inform the council of change. It was noted that this was included on the declaration that is a signed document.

Resolved:

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet to approve the Council Tax and Council Tax Support Sanction and Prosecution Policy
2. All future minor amendments to the policy be delegated to the Head of Customer Services and ICT in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

9. 2016/17 CORPORATE PRIORITIES, BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Head of Finance and Property Services outlined the purpose of the report which was the basis of a report to the February 2016 Cabinet on the 2016/17 Budget and

the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Overview and Scrutiny were asked to note the report and make any further recommendations to Cabinet.

The following information was brought to the committees attention:

- It was noted that looking forward at the council's deficit a four year settlement had been offered.
- The revenue support grant (RSG) would be reduced year on year in line with the latest settlement announcement and that would mean eventually all local authorities would be living off income generated within own boundaries.
- When setting the budget last year there was four key recommendations which included a pooling arrangement, extension of the of the capita contract, securing renewable energy (it was noted that this may be delayed for 2 years) and an increase of council tax.
- Previous updates to the MTFS had assumed an annual increase in council tax of 2% per annum.
- 1.5 of the report was blank in order for Cabinet to make recommendation to Council.
- It was advised that it was now time to start increasing council tax.
- The New Homes Bonus would now be considered as part of the core funding.
- Additional Taxi Licensing income expectations above the core budget had been reduced in anticipation of policy changes.
- In relation to fees and charges it was noted these had been inconsistent in the past and therefore a suggestion was made to increase these based on inflation or 1% whichever was the higher figure. This would create about £20,000 per annum.

Members and members of the public discussed the report and the Head of Finance and Property Services responded to queries:

- Taxi fees published appeared to be previous figures. These would be checked by the Head of Finance and Property Services.
- Pay award and the figure from last year. It was clarified that the figures were set by national agreement. It was assumed that it would be a 1% per year for the next 2 years.
- Pest control and if this service was still provided by Rossendale Borough Council. It was noted this service was outsourced by the authority.
- Clarification on the current reserves. It was confirmed that currently there was £10million earmarked reserves and £1million general reserves.
- Concern that if the local plan was not agreed then the new homes bonus funding would not be received.
- Cost of current waste recycling and disposal cost share arrangements that would cease as of 2018.
- The Head of Finance to find more information on the 4 year settlement offer if the council was not to accept it.

A member of the public addressed the committee and highlighted their concerns if council tax was not raised. It was stated that the amount of money received from garages the council rent out was minimal; it was asked what service the council

provided in relation to access, as it was assumed a garage could store a vehicle. It was noted that some garages were impossible to get vehicle access to. The Head of Finance and Property Services confirmed that the costs received were for ground rent only and there was no statutory service required to be provided by the council.

RESOLVED:

That, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report and make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- 1.1 That Cabinet considers the Council's Corporate Priorities and any further recommendation to Full Council:
 - **Regenerating Rossendale:** This priority focuses on regeneration in its broadest sense, so it means supporting communities that get on well together, attracting investment, promoting Rossendale, as well as working as an enabler to promote the physical regeneration of Rossendale.
 - **Responsive Value for Money Services:** This priority is about the Council working collaboratively, being a provider, procurer and a commissioner of services that are efficient and that meet the needs of local people.
 - **Clean Green Rossendale:** This priority focuses on clean streets and town centres and well managed open spaces, whilst recognising that the Council has to work with communities and as a partner to deliver this ambition.
- 1.2 That the Cabinet recommends to Council the additional cost and savings for 2016/17 as noted in 5.4 and which now form part of the Council's core budget.
- 1.3 That Cabinet recommends to Council the use of £200,000 from the Empty Homes reserve and £253,000 from the Business Rates Retention reserve to support the 2016/17 annual budget. Along with £60,000 of reserves to assist with legal costs in relation to Scout Moor Wind Farm.
- 1.4 As a consequence of the above, the Cabinet recommends to Council a net revenue budget for 2016/17 of £8,349,000
- 1.5 That the Cabinet recommend to Council to freeze Council Tax rate and that the B and D equivalent for 2016/17 remains at £253.40.
- 1.6 That Cabinet recommends to Council to increase Fees and Charges in line with inflation (CPR) or by 1%, whichever is higher to the nearest 10p.
- 1.7 That Cabinet accepts the Government's four year settlement offer.
- 1.8 That the Head of Finance and Property Services be instructed to prepare the technical resolutions necessary to give effect to these proposals.

10. TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT: NORTH WEST AMBULANCE SERVICE (NWAS) FOR ROSSENDALE

The Chair of the NWAS Task and Finish Group introduced the purpose of the report which was to inform the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the outcome of the groups work in relation to the NWAS report.

It was noted that the group went into great depth on the issues raised and it was felt that on concluding the report, there had been good recommendations and also responses received.

Members commented on the report as follows:

- Challenging task and finish group
- Support the report and recommendations
- Pleased CCG secured funding for first responders
- Very professional service
- Confident NWAS would do a better job than the previous organization
- Information in relation to the Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) needs to be improved and its important this facility stays in Rossendale
- Thanks to Pat Couch for her work on the group

Resolved:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the North West Ambulance Service for Rossendale Task and Finish Group Report.

11. 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.

Resolved:

That no policies were requested to be seen and that the forward plan be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.35pm

Signed
(Chair)

Dated