

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 6th February 2017

Present: Cllr Kempson (Vice-Chair chairing this meeting)
Cllrs L. Barnes, Bromley, Janet Eaton Johnson, Kenyon,
McMahon, Robertson, P Steen, Walmsley and Ms Z Ali (Co-
opted Member)

In Attendance: Phil Seddon, Head of Finance and Property Services
Jenni Cook, Committee & Member Services Officer
Elizabeth Usher, Housing Options Officer
Inspector Pam Holgate, Lancashire Police
Cllr A Barnes
Cllr Marriott
2 members of the public
0 member of the press

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been submitted by Councillor Lythgoe (Councillor Walmsley substituting) and Councillor Roberts (Councillor Steen substituting).

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2017 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to it being noted that the minutes approved at that meeting were dated 5th December 2016, not 2017.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Walmsley declared an interest in Item D3 of the agenda – 2017/18 Corporate Priorities, budget, Council Tax and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (Item 9 of these minutes) as he was a Director of Rossendale Transport Ltd.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr John Atherton had submitted a question prior to the meeting regarding the Council's response to the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework Consultation. He had received a response to this question via email prior to the meeting.

The Vice-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. VICE-CHAIR'S UPDATE

- 6.1 Performance Management Task and Finish Group – the Group met on 26th January 2017 and from this meeting it was agreed that the performance management process needed to be looked at further. The Group would be meeting with the Senior Management Lead, Sam Plum on 1st March 2017 to discuss a way forward.
- 6.2 Communications Task and Finish Group – the Group met on 2nd February 2017 with the Head of Customer Services and ICT. An issues log would be sent to Management Team for a formal response and the Group would continue to work on this matter, reporting back to a future meeting.
- 6.3 A date of 28th February 2017 had been provisionally arranged for the Co-opted Member, Ms Ali, the HR Manager, Councillor Lythgoe and Councillor Essex to meet to consider Equality Impact Assessments and the Equality Policy. The HR Manager had been asked to confirm availability.
- 6.4 The Leisure Trust had confirmed that they would be providing copies of audited accounts. These would be circulated to the membership as soon as they were received.

7. UPDATE FROM HOUSING OPTIONS TEAM

- 7.1 The Housing Options Officer had been invited to the meeting to clarify figures raised in the Drug and Alcohol Task and Finish Group report tabled at the last meeting. She noted that the figure of 800-1000 homelessness cases each year was made up of people who approached the service, and not actual rough sleepers.
- 7.2 Clarification was provided on the reasons why someone may approach the homelessness service and the assistance given. The aim was to try to prevent as many people from becoming homeless as possible by use of various prevention measures, such as a bond scheme, rent in advance, discretionary housing benefit payments, liaison with Housing Benefit and landlords, and joint working with Environmental Health, etc.
- 7.3 The reasons for homelessness were discussed and the liaison with other agencies such as B-with-Us, Environmental health, STAR, the Police, NHS and the prison service was outlined.
- 7.4 Members and members of the public raised questions and discussed the update as follows:-
- The impact of future services with funding issues and benefit caps – it was noted that this was anticipated to have an impact and many users of the service did not make contact until they were at crisis point.
 - The reductions to benefits for young people were discussed and benefit changes that are due to take effect in April 2018.
 - The actual homelessness statistics were not available to members due to officer workload issues
 - Discussion took place on the B-with-Us housing allocation choices and the Officer outlined the issues and difficulties faced when re-housing.

- The temporary accommodation options were outlined and it was noted that the last resort of B&B accommodation was in the Blackburn area.
- The procedure for someone from outside the Rossendale area who was presenting as homeless was outlined and it was noted that Officers would advise applicants of their housing options including presenting to their own local authority housing options team if the applicant wished, or if it was appropriate. However the Officer advised that the safety of the applicants is paramount.
- It was noted that a Member Briefing would be useful on this matter.

Resolved:

That the update is noted and Committee and Member Services be asked to arrange a Member Briefing on this matter.

8. POLICE PRESENTATION – CRIME FIGURES

8.1 Inspector Holgate presented a report to the Committee which outlined the Rossendale Community Safety Partnership quarter 3 figures, as determined by the Partnership Analyst. The key findings and details for quarter 3 (compared the previous year’s quarter 3 figures) were outlined as follows:-

- A reduction in antisocial behaviour incidents with the highest incidents in October. Problematic areas and times were being targeted.
- An increase in domestic abuse offences with violent crime accounting for 70.5% of domestic abuse.
- An increase on non-domestic assaults, which in part was due to changes in recording practice. These incidents were mainly in repeat locations in town centres, being Bacup Road, Rawtenstall and Manchester Road (pubs and nightclubs).
- An increase in sexual offences against under-16s, with December seeing the highest number. Overall quarter 3 had seen an equal number on comparison with the previous year.
- Burglary dwelling offences had increased, with the highest number of offences being recorded in October.
- It was noted that harassment was now recorded under violent crimes and malicious communications.
- Road traffic collisions – there had been a 71.4% increase in serious injuries sustained.
- Further details were given on the increase in violent crime and non-domestic assault and repeat locations outlined.
- Discussion took place on substance misuse and hate crimes and inclusion in future reports.

8.2 Members and members of the public raised questions and discussed the update as follows:-

- Under-reporting incidents and the need to raise awareness of the importance of reporting and tackling apathy around reporting.
- It was clarified that ‘assault without injury’ was a change in recording practice whereby someone had made an allegation of assault, but there was no injury.

- Concerns were expressed regarding the overall rise in crime figures and the actions being taken to tackle this – including working with the public, agencies and working in target areas.
- Further detail was given on the increase in sexual assaults on under-16s and this was a mix of family members, historic and named persons.
- Inspector Holgate agreed to circulate a list of PCSOs and noted that this information was also available on the Lancashire Police website. PACT meetings were also discussed and it was noted that although these no longer took place in some areas, the Police were looking at how different areas preferred to work and liaise.
- Discussion took place on the perceived difficulties and obstacles when reporting crime and it was noted that where possible people should be able to access the station at Waterfoot, however sometimes it would be necessary to go to Burnley. Difficulties with contacting the 101 service were being looked at by the Police and Crime Commissioner, with recruitment taking place. The importance of reporting crime and ensuring an accessible service from the Police was emphasised.
- It was clarified that the intelligence used to create this report had concentrated on the 3 priorities set by the Community Safety Partnership and future reports could be amended to suit Members' needs.

8.3 It was agreed that future breakdowns should include:-

- Substance misuse and related crimes.
- Hate crimes and breakdown of such crimes
- Positive outcomes

Resolved:

That the update is noted.

9. 2017/18 CORPORATE PRIORITIES, BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

9.1 The Head of Finance and Property Services introduced the report which outlined the proposed recommendations to be taken to Cabinet on 15th February 2017. The report outlined the revenue budget and level of council tax for 2017/18, together with implications for the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). In addition, the Cabinet would be asked to consider the appointment of external auditors via a national procurement exercise and the pre-payment of pensions for 3 years to create a saving.

9.2 The Head of Finance and Property Services highlighted the base budget and the key assumptions and issues:-

- Risks regarding the pooling arrangement for business rates, cost-share agreement with Lancashire County Council and the New Homes Bonus revisions.
- There had not been a council tax rise in several years and the Government revenue support grant was declining to zero.

- A key assumption was income from renewable energy sources, should the Scout Moor Windfarm expansion not go ahead. It was noted that this was now subject to a further delay with the Secretary of State.
- Changes to the base budget were outlined, with employment costs rising as a result of a 1% pay award and increments.
- Savings were outlined which included re-financing of leisure assets, savings on printing costs following a procurement exercise, staffing, and treasury management.
- The key changes to the base budget were highlighted as being the reduction in the Revenues and Benefits contract cost, the professional fees paid out as a result of the Scout Moor Inquiry, the new Director post, estates income, benefits subsidy and various miscellaneous costs.

9.3 It was noted that the other precepting authorities would set their council tax rates during February 2017 and that of that total, only 15% of that income came into Rossendale Borough Council.

9.4 The Head of Finance and Property Services outlined the 2017/18 settlement and implications for the years beyond this. It was noted that the retrospective changes to the New Homes Bonus would have a significant effect on the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

9.5 The Cabinet would be asked to consider an increase of fees and charges by 1% or by Consumer Price Index rises (rounded up to the nearest 10p). It was noted that the court fees were missing from the current report and this would be added to the report to Cabinet and Council.

9.6 The 2016 pension valuation work was outlined and the Cabinet would be asked to pre-pay 3 years of pension costs to effect £100k of savings per annum, as opposed to 0.4% rate from the bank at the current time. Risks around this proposal were outlined. It was also noted that the Council was the guarantor for the Rossendale Transport Limited and there was currently a £220k surplus. Officers were recommending that this surplus be transferred to the Council and the advantages of this were outlined, including the potential to improve Rossendale Transport Limited's credit worthiness.

9.7 The Head of Finance and Property Services drew Members' attention to the Risk Analysis report which he was required to report on. The document provided an analysis to inform members of the financial risks facing the council, as well as supporting the robustness of the budget and adequacy of reserves.

9.8 Members' attention was drawn to the final section of the committee report which outlined the challenges facing the Council in terms of funding gap challenges and resources and the key messages outlined therein, amongst other:-

- Considering the rate of council tax
- Securing the renewable energy income
- Financial planning to reduce costs and/or increase revenues.

9.9 Members and members of the public raised questions and discussed the update as follows:-

- It was noted that the retrospective changes to the New Homes Bonus would have a large impact on the budget.
- The Head of Finance and Property Services clarified the pooling arrangement for business rates and the benefits and risks of this.
- It was noted that savings and reductions would have an impact on residents and in particular grass roots and protected groups. The Head of Finance and Property Services outlined the consultation groups and process.
- It was noted that Rossendale did not have many large areas of brownfield sites to attract large business networks, with the new development near Pilsworth in Bury cited as an example.
- It was noted that should New Homes Bonus funds retrospectively removed from local councils be used to plug the adult social care gap, this would be a mere drop on the ocean to what was required.
- It was noted that the Housing White Paper due to be released in February 2017 may provide some information and assistance.

Resolved:

That Overview and Scrutiny recommends the following to Cabinet:-

1. That Cabinet recommends to Council a 1.99% rise in the 2017/18 Council Tax rate.
2. That Cabinet recommends to Council the use of £199,000 (subject to the rate of Council Tax) from the Transitional Reserve and £700,000 from the Business Rates Retention reserve to support the 2017/18 annual budget.
3. That the Cabinet recommends to Council a net revenue budget for 2017/18 of £9,440,000.
4. That Cabinet recommends to Council a 1% rise in any changes to Fees and Charges as noted in Appendix 1 of the committee report.
5. That Cabinet recommends to Council the transfer of the Rossendale Transport Limited pension surplus (c£220K) to Council.
6. That the Head of Finance and Property Services is instructed to prepare the technical resolutions necessary to give effect to these proposals.

10. THE FORWARD PLAN

- 10.1 The Committee noted the information within the Forward Plan and agreed that there were sufficient items on the agenda for the next meeting, being the Quarter 3 performance report and an update from Rossendale Transport Limited.

Resolved:

The information was noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.25pm

Signed: _____

Date: _____