

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 5th March 2018

Present: Cllr Lythgoe (in the Chair)
Cllrs Bromley, Cheetham Janet Eaton, Johnson, Kenyon,
Morris, Procter, Robertson and Stansfield

In Attendance: Clare Law, HR Manager
Mick Coogan, Strategic Housing Manager
Phil Morton, Public Protection Manager
Jenni Cook, Committee & Member Services Officer
David Whatmough, Treasurer - Credit Union
Dawn Vear, Secretary - Credit Union

Also Present: Cllrs Essex, Haworth, Lamb and Walmsley
4 public
0 press

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Councillor McMahon (Councillor Procter substituting) and Councillor Kempson (Councillor Cheetham substituting).

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5th February 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 Councillors Procter, Robertson and Cheetham declared both pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in Item 7 - Credit Union update.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

- 4.1 There were no urgent items of business.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

- 6.1 Following the first meeting on 23rd February 2018, the Excess Winter Deaths task and finish group would be taking place on Friday 9th March 2018.

7. CREDIT UNION UPDATE

7.1 The Credit Union circulated an update to the Committee as follows:-

- Key performance indicators (KPIs) were highlighted in terms of actual figures for 2016/17, actual figures at February 2017 and the 2017/18 forecast.
- There were currently 1,500 members with loans ranging from £50 to £15k. 22% of loans were backed by members' shares.
- The different types of savings accounts were clarified and all savings were covered by the FSCS compensation scheme.
- All income was generated in the Rossendale area.
- The level of reserves available was that required by the Bank of England, being 10% of total assets. Bad debts were at 2%.
- A selection of case studies were highlighted and discussed.
- There were 40 volunteers and 4 staff, and 4 of the volunteers had been assisted in obtaining their AAT qualifications, enabling them to gain employment in other companies or in the Credit Union. The Credit Union were national living wage employers.
- Work was undertaken with the Citizens Advice and Christians Against Poverty.
- Payroll deduction services were available.
- Work experience students were accepted from Accrington and Rossendale College.
- The Credit Union expressed gratitude for the grant funding provided by the Council, along with business rates relief.

7.2 Members and members of the public discussed the update as follows:-

- Account opening criteria was governed by the Bank of England and JMLSG regulations.
- The Ramsbottom area was included in Rossendale Credit Union Membership. Membership links could also be retained via families.
- Loan sharks were still an issue within the area and the Credit Union were working to promote their services rather than doorstep lenders.
- The Credit Union offered loans on availability only and would not lend if it was felt that the debt could not be repaid. Debts were chased and it was important that they were not seen as a 'soft touch'.
- Credit Union Membership did not affect credit scores either positively or negatively.
- It was noted that more volunteers were always required and always welcome.

Resolved:

1. The update was noted and the Credit Union was thanked for their work and presentation.

8. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT (OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2017)

8.1 The Chair noted that the report was an ongoing project and the format was improved. A target column starting on page 15 had been omitted; however this would be included in the next quarter. The HR Manager updated members on the performance report for quarter 3 which covered the period October to December 2017. Reporting Officers for the actions and Performance Indicators that were showing a red RAG (red, amber, green) rating status at the end of quarter 3 had been asked to either attend the meeting or provide an update report to update the meeting. The Head of Operations post was currently vacant therefore no representative from Operations was available for this meeting. An Officer would, however, be requested to attend at quarter 4 reporting.

8.2 Public Protection Unit (PPU)

The Public Protection Manager provided members with an update on the unit which had been formed 2 weeks ago. This would provide more resources for enforcement and a more co-ordinated approach. With regards to fly-tipping, this target's RAG status was red and it was noted that the target was currently a cleansing target, not an enforcement target. It was currently taking 33 working days on average to remove fly tipping, with the council's target being 10 working days. As the new PPU evolved, work would be carried out to look into increasing the capacity of the Enforcement Officer and ensuring less duplication of work. Activity was planned to raise the profile of fly tipping with the use of fixed penalty notices, public space protection orders, prosecutions and CCTV. However, it was noted that education and prevention was also key. Members and members of the public commented as follows:-

- Covert filming was subject to RIPA regulations and often overt CCTV cameras worked just as well.
- A co-ordinated approach with nearby local authorities and other authorities such as the Environment Agency and the Police was essential.
- More aggressive monitoring of hot spots was discussed, with members giving specific examples in their wards. The effect of fly-tipping on the environment and livestock was noted.
- Bulky waste collection charges were discussed and it was noted that there was a cost to the council to dispose of items and any proposal to reduce these costs would have to be looked into more thoroughly by Finance.
- The PPU Unit was 2 weeks old and the Manager would be looking into initiatives currently in place and new ideas to engage and educate.
- It was noted that references to 'days' in the report referred to working days.

8.3 Housing

The Strategic Housing Manager provided Members with an update on the target to 'Increase the supply of affordable housing units in the borough'. This RAG status was currently red and clarification was provided regarding this, in that the target reflected the current Local Plan target; however this figure would vary from year to year due to site completion dates. It was noted that it was important to ensure that targets were challenging and not 'too easy'. Engagement had recently taken place

with Developing Registered providers to encourage the delivery of new affordable housing either through Homes England grant funding or Planning Obligations.

Members and members of the public discussed the report as follows:-

- The Council's targets included rented affordable tenures (Social Rent or Affordable Rent) and Affordable Home Ownership tenures (e.g. Shared Ownership).
- Clarification was provided on the report and information released by Shelter. The Strategic Housing Manager noted that Rossendale's information had been based on the end of quarter snapshot which showed 1 household in Temporary Accommodation containing 8 people. Within the last 3 years the figures had actually been between 0-3. It was noted that it was important to look behind statistics published by other organisations.
- In terms of housing, two bedroomed houses were the most needed, followed by 3 bedroom houses and 1 bedroom flats for general needs, whilst older people's bungalows were also in high demand. When Section 106 Agreements are agreed with developers, or Registered Providers propose grant-funded sites, they should reflect these needs and demand which is largely obtained by analysis of the housing register.
- The policy framework for affordable housing was within the local plan and once finalised, a supplementary planning document could be produced. This fell under the remit of the Planning Department but Housing would be consulted to help inform the document.
- The discussion covered the lack of Shared Ownership properties available, and it was explained that this tenure was more suitable in parts of the borough where house prices were higher, especially one with good commuter links to the M66.
- It was noted that National Planning Policy had, that day, been released to try to stop developers 'sitting' on land. This was an issue nationally and would hopefully make a positive difference once more detail had been released.

8.4 Staff Absence

The HR Manager noted that the RAG status of staff absence was currently red. The Council had a relatively small number of staff (160) and therefore a small level of sickness could have a massive impact on figures. The level of sickness in Operations was higher than that of the office staff, however it was noted that the council did not have zero hours contracts; therefore the figures could look worse than other councils who did. Work was undertaken to manage absence, with managers being trained, regular reports to management team, phased returns and reasonable adjustments implemented where necessary. Members and members of the public discussed the report as follows:-

- It was noted that corporate projects were now included in the report and the Chair confirmed that he had requested this. The officer lead on this was Sam Plum.
- Quarter 4 would contain a breakdown into long-term and short-term sickness and Operations/office staff breakdowns.
- Restructures had been completed and a staff survey would be undertaken in July. The HR Manager attended Operations Team Meetings. There were no trends regarding sickness which would give rise to concerns about low

morale. Reasons were varied, such as operations, road traffic accidents, viruses etc.

- It was suggested that the Operations staff be encouraged to have the flu vaccination.

8.5 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

The Head of Finance had provided the HR Manager with an update on the MTFS, as the RAG status for this target was currently red. Members had received regular briefings on the MTFS via member briefings and council committees. Officers were working on a number of matters including support to non-statutory services, the quality of statutory service provision, exploiting and maximising the commercial potential of assets and transformation and innovation in the way council services were delivered. Members were aware of the council's finite resources and this was a situation that was also faced by the vast majority of councils across the UK. Members and members of the public discussed the report as follows:-

- In terms of empty homes, it was noted that an external investigation had taken place, reports had been to committees (Audit and Accounts) and a police investigation was ongoing. It would be repetitive and inappropriate to bring more reports, nor would it be appropriate to arrange a special O&S committee in this municipal year to look into this again. However, that situation may change once the police investigation had concluded. This matter had also been discussed at Full Council on 28th February 2018.
- When looking into changes to council services, it was important to ensure that cross-party working groups were set up.
- Financial challenges were being faced by almost all UK local authorities.

8.6 The HR Manager, Strategic Housing Manager and the Public Protection Manager were thanked for their informative reports and detailed answers to questions.

Resolved:

1. That the update is noted.
2. That thanks are noted to the Operations staff for their work during the recent winter weather.

9. EQUALITY POLICY

9.1 The Chair noted that this Policy had been delayed due to staff changes, however the document presented to the committee was clear and coherent. The HR Advisor noted that the policy had been refreshed as a result of the work of the Equalities Task and Finish Group in 2017. The previous policy had been introduced in 2012 and required some minor changes to bring it up to date, including building in equality impact assessments and changes to terminology. Once adopted by Cabinet in July 2018, refresher training would be carried out for all staff. The new Learning Pool programme would be utilised. More work would be carried out regarding equality impact assessments to ensure that these were being done, and done correctly.

9.2 Members and members of the public discussed the report as follows:-

- The Learning Pool was not the only method of training that would be used.
- As at August 2017 there were 104 male staff and 57 female staff.
- A citizens panel would be established.

- Consultation and consideration of equalities was a necessary process.

Resolved:

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that Cabinet approves the revised Equality Policy and its appendices.
2. That all future minor amendments to the policy are delegated to the HR Manager in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

10. THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee and Member Services Officer updated as follows:-

- The Forward Plan had not been published since the publication of the agenda and there was no update to give.
- Overview and Scrutiny training would take place on 14th May 2018 and those members whose training was due to expire would be contacted.
- The next meeting of the new municipal year would be 18th June 2018.

Resolved:

The information was noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and finished at 8.25pm