

**MINUTES OF: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meeting:** 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**Present:** Councillor S.Barnes (Chair)  
Councillors D.Ashworth, Foxcroft, McMahon, Procter (sub), Rooke,  
M.Smith (sub), Thompson and Whitehead

**In attendance:** David Smurthwaite, Director of Economic Development  
Karen Spencer, Chief Finance Officer  
Clare Law, Head of People and Policy  
Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager

**Also Present:** Councillors Ashworth, Lythgoe and Oakes  
1 member of the public

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**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Coogan, Councillor Kenyon (Councillor Procter subbing) and Councillor Norton (Councillor M.Smith subbing).

**2. Minutes**

**Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**4. Urgent Items of Business**

There were no urgent items of business.

**5. Question Time**

There were no public questions.

**6. Chair's Update**

6.1 A briefing note had been circulated prior to the meeting to keep members informed of the work of the Bacup Credit Union and members noted the update.

6.2 In response to actions and queries from previous meetings the following updates were also noted:

- A message had been added to the Invest in Rossendale website stating that the site would be undergoing updates and maintenance throughout February 2024. Updates had also been completed on the Visit Rossendale website.
- The performance measure *Engagements with the Visit Rossendale Website*, had been removed following review.
- Information on savings was available through the Financial Monitoring Reports that went to Cabinet. These were available on the Council website and a link was sent to all members when the agendas were published.
- The age demographics of the workforce were reviewed as part of the annual business planning and continuity process. Plans were developed to mitigate any risks that impact on staffing levels, including monitoring age profile within the service, recruitment and selection monitoring data, planned retirements etc.

- When someone ceased to be a councillor, their email and IT accounts were deleted, meaning that they would no longer be able to access any information previously available to them as a councillor, regardless of whether it was being accessed from a Council device or a personal device.
- The following sites were under development and the Planning Manager would include this information in any relevant future performance summary updates: Reeds Holme on Burnley Road; Johnny Barn Close, Dark Lane, Station Road in Facit and Spring Mill in Whitworth.
- The error previously reported on the Council Tax application system affected management information only and not claimants' entitlement. The issue would be fixed with the next software release.

## **ORDINARY BUSINESS**

### **7. 2024/25 Council Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy**

7.1 The committee considered the 2024/25 Council Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy report, which was presented by the Chief Finance Officer. Members were provided a detailed explanation of the information contained within tables 2, 3 and 4 of the covering report.

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

- At 3.4 the graph showed a small increase in the revenue support grant, but this was still lower than in 2016/17. It was explained that the funding had increased at 4.2.
- The government core spending assumption assumed that our Council Tax growth would have been more. After the 2.99% Council Tax increase had been applied this would mean Core Spending Power would only increase by 4.71%.
- The budget was set at a moment in time based on the assumptions, and would always be a best estimate and subject to change. The efficiency savings element was costed up and monitored quarterly and plans were put in place to ensure the savings could be achieved.
- Regarding the savings report in June, not all the savings had filtered through, but the HVO savings had. If the costs of HVO fell within 15p per litre, this option would be reconsidered as opposed to diesel.
- There would be movement in the budget.
- The consultation on the budget went live at the same time as publication for Overview and Scrutiny.
- There was a typo in 11.6 and the 2023/24 average pay award increase was 6.21%.
- There was consensus between officers at the Lancashire Chief Finance Officers Group to assume a 5% pay increase for next year, as inflation was going down.
- The consultation commenced in January after also consulting with Cabinet in January. There had been earlier consultation, such as the briefing for members in November and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) going to Cabinet in December. As the government settlement was not out till December it made the timeframe impossible to bring consultation on the budget any earlier.
- With single year settlements it was difficult to make any long term plans, and resources were used to bridge the gap. 2022/23 nearly had a balanced budget but inflation had impacted on that.
- The result of funding not meeting inflation would be that reserves would be used to bridge the gap. This is not sustainable.
- At the moment the Council was not in danger of a S114. Prices were still going up, but utilities were coming down and government funding had increased. It would still force a decision on Council Tax increases, and when government were setting the funding, they expected Councils to increase Council Tax by the maximum amount.

- It wasn't always good to sell assets, but it was best to sell assets that cost money and maximise the return on any other assets owned.
- The ultimate decision on the budget was for councillors to make and officers just made a recommendation.
- Rossendale received 14% of the Council Tax collected.
- The £100k for temporary accommodation was additional. It was unknown whether this would be realistic as the call for temporary accommodation was unknown but was increasing. The Council was looking at other options to assist.
- The information in table 3 concerning *Finance not required in year*, was in relation to the cost of us borrowing. This was due to slippage on the Capital Programme. If the Capital schemes had spent to budget we would have had to borrow to finance the expenditure. This is not a saving just reprofiling. We will have to borrow at some point.
- In relation to vacant posts, the Council was looking at doing things differently, including looking at the Capita contract.
- In relation to the New Homes Bonus, we now get a flat rate for each property over a threshold.

The Chief Finance Officer agreed to make minor changes to clarify the point at which members were consulted on the budget.

**Resolved:**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendations of the report and made the following recommendations to Cabinet subject to the minor changes regarding the budget consultation clarification:

To recommend Council to approve:

1. The proposed revenue budget for 2024/25 of £10.623m, as detailed in this report.
2. The proposed increase of 2.99%, to the Council Tax rate for a Band D property for 2024/25, increasing the Council Tax rate for a Band D property from £299.49 to £308.44, an increase of £8.95 pa.
3. The proposed use of £688k from reserves to support the 2024/25 revenue budget.
4. The proposed fees and charges attached as Appendix 1.

**8. Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2026/27 and Capital Programme 2024/25**

8.1 The committee considered the Capital Strategy 2022/23 - 2026/27 and Capital Programme 2024/25, which was presented by the Chief Finance Officer who detailed the programme and the new schemes and funding streams.

**Resolved:**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendations of the report and made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

To recommend Council to approve:

1. The capital programme for 2023/24 – 2027/28 and associated capital expenditure of £11.064m.
2. The Capital Strategy 2024/25 attached at Appendix B.

**9. Quarter 3 Performance Management Report (October, November & December) 2023/24**

9.1 The committee considered the Quarter 3 performance report, which was presented by the Head of People and Policy.

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

- The three Town Centre Officers had conducted the field work for the Resident Survey and were active throughout the duration of the survey eg Bacup and Haslingden Library, Rawtenstall Market and any resident engagement sessions held within the period of the survey.
- Recycling was challenging, there were changes coming in and tight budget restrictions. Whilst the Check before you Chuck campaign was a well recognised campaign, it only focussed on small areas with dedicated material. The Council was being careful not to invest in new materials when new requirements for food waste were due to be introduced. Instead the Council was focussing on engaging schools with recycling.
- The quarterly figures reported for new homes only contained figures with regard to those houses that had been completed where the Council's Building Control service had been used, but many housing developers used Private Building Inspectors. The full completion figures would come through after the year end from the National House Building Council (NHBC).
- Corporate Support periodically chase officers to respond to complaints or MP enquiries. Officers were now aware to respond and close down a complaint or enquiry once the action had been agreed and not to wait until the action was completed.
- All the complaints and enquiries were responded to within 30 days and more work was being done with officers to ensure responses were more timely and within the agreed 10 days deadline.
- The complaints at 4.13 related to Capita, but there was no underlying reasons for these.
- Work was ongoing to update and maintain the websites and an action plan was in place. The Visit Rossendale landing page had been updated and Invest in Rossendale had a temporary holding message displayed whilst the website was updated.
- Missed bins for an entire street would be reported back as there would be an underlying reason, such as access issues, and these were already captured on the system, however it didn't report through to customer support. The new system would capture this information to keep residents updated if they phoned in to report a missed bin.
- The number of missed bins reported would be looked into to see if it was accurate, for example if a whole street had been missed, was the system classing it as one missed bin?
- Where an entire location was missed because of inconsiderate parking, it was not classed as missed if the collection managed to take place at a later time.
- The new system was more interactive and flags could be put on the system for certain areas and issues and the collectors would need to confirm collection before moving on.
- New bin requests were also integrated into the system and would be easier to manage.
- Communicating bin collection points for new residents would be looked into.
- It was confirmed that the new system would provide a collection history for houses and streets, making it easier to find where there were recurring issues and it would help keep residents better informed.
- Compliments were only recorded through the formal complaints and compliments process, and informal feedback was not collected.
- Councillors were also able to submit compliments in the same way as members of the public.

- Sweeping side roads was done on a 9 week cycle and included roads that weren't classed as main roads. The new system would be in by September and would be GPS tracked. If a resident rang in, the customer centre would be able to inform of the next sweeping date. Recent issues had been staff related, but the service was now fully staffed and catching up.
- The waste transfer station was in the early stages of design and a consultant would do the first stages of RIBA stages 0-3 site testing. This would give an indication of the budgets. The second stage would look at consultation, however it was still at the feasibility stage at the moment.
- There would be a 6 month window for the building element and at the moment the current site was being considered.
- The Council was looking at its social media presence including the websites, and work was ongoing to identify the right media platforms. Discussion were ongoing regarding the Visit Rossendale and Invest in Rossendale websites.

**Resolved:**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the update on the performance of the Council and made the following recommendations:

- To review and rationalise the Council's websites after considering customer use and place an "under review" message on any sites not fully up to date.

**10. The Forward Plan**

10.1 Members were updated on the Forward Plan and Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for March.

**Resolved:**

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

**(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 7.50pm)**

Signed.....

(Chair)

Date .....