

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 24th June 2013

Present: Councillor J Oakes (Chair)
Councillors Ashworth (substituting for Creaser), Bleakley,
Hughes, Milling, Pilling and Procter

Keith Pilkington (co-opted Member)

In Attendance: Helen Lockwood, Chief Executive
Fiona Meechan, Director of Customers and Communities
Emma Hussain, Principal Policy Officer
Martin Kay, General Manager, RLT
Councillor Barnes, Leader, RBC
Councillor MacNae, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism
and Leisure
Councillor Marriott, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources
Councillor Lamb, Portfolio Holder for Operational Services and
Environmental Health
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

6 Members of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Creaser.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS

Policy Scrutiny Committee on 10th February 2013 and Performance Scrutiny
Committee on 24th February 2013

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the two above meetings were agreed as a correct record and
signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There following Members declared interest as follows:

Councillor Hughes declared an interest as he was a Trustee on the CAB
Councillor Procter declared an interest as a Director of the Credit Union
Councillor Ashworth declared an interest as Trustee of Bacup Consortium
Keith Pilkington declared an interest as Director of Rossendale Leisure Trust

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 member of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

The Chair informed the Committee that a written question had been submitted in relation to recommendation 1.4 of the Haslingden Pool report which read:

“Do the Committee agree that a decision of this significance is a decision that should properly be made in public and that the right place for any decision to close Haslingden Pool should be at a meeting of the Full Council and not under delegation to the Chief Executive and one Portfolio Holder”.

In considering the above question the Chief Executive amended recommendation 1.4, which was circulated to everyone at the meeting.

A member of the public indicated that she did not think there had been a full options appraisal and that there was still a third option, which was to find funding and build another pool, which the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure responded, indicating that a full appraisal was undertaken last year and reported to Cabinet in November 2012.

6. CHAIR’S UPDATE

The Chair asked for Members’ agreement that any future Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, known as RIPA, which has to be reported to Scrutiny on a quarterly basis can be included within the Chair’s update if there was nothing to report.

If the Council has had to use RIPA, then an Officer from the Legal Department would attend the meeting to explain in detail the need for using RIPA.

Members agreed to with this course of action.

7. HASLINGDEN SWIMMING POOL

The Chief Executive presented an update to the Committee on the work to continue identifying a preferred partner.

The Chief Executive indicated that the report identified two expressions of interest from the private sector and an expression of interest via the Community Asset Transfer procedure from the Friends of Haslingden Baths.

Since the report had been published the two private sector parties had withdrawn their interests, but the Council were continuing to support the community led group and the Chief Executive was in regular contact with the group.

The group are expected to submit their business case by 9 August and due diligence will occur thereafter.

Since the work had started in June 2012, the Council had worked with the pool panel group who had interest in the pool to find opportunities and work around what can be done with Haslingden Pool, looking at options available and mechanisms to consult.

At this point, the Chief Executive asked that thanks be recorded to the Pool Panel for the time and effort they had put in, which had at times been a challenge.

An assessment panel had met comprising Rossendale Leisure Trust Officers, Board Member, Rossendale Council Officers and Members to identify which options were viable and able to go forward for public consultation. Two options were identified for public consultation and the panel used the evidence which had been reviewed and considered by the pool panel. This information was submitted to overview and scrutiny and Cabinet in November 2012. The consultation process ran from January – March 2013.

A review of the public consultation has been undertaken by the Internal Audit service as part of the 2012/13 Internal Audit Plan, which involved assessing a sample of consultation material against the consultation principles set out by the Government and the Council's internal practices and procedures. The internal audit assessment of the consultation did not identify any significant issues for actioning and it was confirmed that the process followed was in line with the established best practice principles and internal procedures.

The Chief Executive indicated an amendment within the report in that redundancy costs would be in the region of £80k and asked for this to be amended.

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure indicated that the Council are committed to keeping the pool open, but tough decisions have to be made. The Council cannot spend £140k per year to keep the pool open. The concept of the pool, as in the KKP report, was prior to all the budget cuts that the Council has had to make.

A question was asked about whether either of the two private sector parties could support the Friends of Haslingden Pool in any way. The Chief Executive agreed to contact the private sector party who had recently withdrawn their interest to ask if there was potential to support the Friends of Haslingden Pool in any way.

In relation to the £200k which the Council have agreed to commit to support either of the chosen options, a member of the public asked if the Council could commit that money to keep the pool open for a further 18months to 2 years, which the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure indicated that the £200k was to make it more viable and hopefully draw in additional funding.

Further questions were asked by both Members and the public, which the Chief Executive and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure responded. At this point a member of the public handed written questions to the Portfolio Holder, asking him to respond direct.

Resolved:

1. That Corporate Scrutiny notes the work done to date in order to identify a solution for Haslingden Pool and note the detailed consultation undertaken.
2. That Corporate Scrutiny note the expressions of interest received.
3. That Corporate Scrutiny receive a further report confirming if the process for identifying a preferred partner had been successful.
4. That Corporate Scrutiny recommend that should a preferred partner not be confirmed as noted in 1.3, that Haslingden pool will close at a date to be confirmed and agreed by Full Council.
5. That Corporate Scrutiny recommends the sum of up to £200k to support either of the chosen options.

8. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT Q4 (January- March 2013)

The Principal Policy Officer presented an overview of the Council's performance for Quarter 4, indicating that all actions were on target or above target and shows an increase in performance in comparison to quarter 3 and quarter 4 from the previous year.

Members focussed on the action plan for every indicator not achieving target levels of performance, which provided details of corrective action being taken and an estimate of the likely impact. As detailed below.

PI L182bi - % of household waste composted – this indicator was not achieved in quarter 4 due to seasonal variations in temperature and precipitation. Also the reclassification of leaves from the public highway to general waste has impacted on this indicator, as in previous years this material was composted but is now sent to landfill. It was agreed to re-look at this target.

CS6 - % of abandoned calls – Coventry Call Centre. Due to recent welfare reforms there had been an increase in calls and in the first five months of the year over 900 more enquiries were made than in 2012/13. Calls during March and April were also high due to the issuing of Council Tax bills. This indicator will continue to be monitored by the SAT Team and Revenues Manager.

L112 – working days lost due to sickness absence – the target was slightly missed by 0.64 days. Due to the small staff numbers a small amount of sickness could skew the figures.

76C – Number of Investigations - The Council is not receiving the referrals that were received previously due to changes with DWP and uncertainty surrounding the new 'single fraud investigation service' which is a central government change. It was agreed that this indicator be removed temporarily until more is known as to whether the Council will receive future referrals and how it will work with the single fraud investigation unit going forward.

A question was asked about who was responsible for identifying benefit fraud and was the information previously provided no longer available. The Chief Executive indicated that the Council was still involved with cases and interviews are held under caution. The Council were working on a strategy around fraud. It was suggested that a further report be brought to the next July or September committee on the exact role of a District Council and the type of performance information that can be reported to the committee as a result on changes once implemented centrally, to ensure that Members are confident that there is still a robust procedure in place.

STAN1 – Number of people accessing STAN – It was noted that this was not an underperformance for Rossendale. Whilst the joint partnership target was not met, Rossendale's individual target for 2012/13 was exceeded (510 compared to the target quota of 480 for each partner that period). It was suggested that the Council amend the way it captures its performance figures to reflect just Rossendale performance, while the whole partnership performance would continue to be captured in the notes.

LI64 – Number of private sector vacant dwellings that are returned into occupation. It was noted that this was not an under performance. This is not a national requirement for reporting; therefore no target was set for 2012-13. Due to reduced resources within the service area, there was no longer an officer to carry out the pro-active work.

Reporting is available on performance of a three-year Pennine Lancashire Empty Homes project, of which Rossendale is the lead authority. The project has been successful in gaining £4.8million Homes and Communities Agency funding to tackle empty homes. The target for Rossendale within this particular project is 30 units in 2012/13, 40 in 2013/14 and 50 within 2014/15. The outturn for 2012/13 was 34, therefore exceeding the target.

It was noted performance information in relation to NI155 'Number of affordable homes delivered' derives from two sources – new builds and properties brought back into use for affordable housing. This is an annually reported indicator and is not target bearing – it is a 'measure' for monitoring trend. The data was not available at the time the report was published. The outturn for 2012-13 is 51 units.

A number of questions were raised which the relevant Officer and/or Portfolio Holder responded.

Resolved:

1. That the Corporate Scrutiny Committee notes the level of performance and risks detailed in the report.
2. That the Corporate Scrutiny Committee continues to monitor performance of those Actions and Indicators that are underachieving targeted levels of performance and request if necessary, further information from the relevant Head of Service and if appropriate inform Cabinet of those underperformance targets.

3. That Corporate Scrutiny Committee approve the amendments as agreed within the PI Action Plans of Section 6 of the Q4 Integrated Performance Report.

9. REFUSE, RECYCLING AND STREET CLEANSING REVIEW

The Director of Customers and Communities updated members on the actions proposed and taken as a result of the recommendations of the Street Cleansing Task and Finish Group and to seek their views as part of the consultation process on the potential changes.

A detailed explanation was given on each of the recommendations and action being proposed or taken. The reason for not bringing the report earlier was due to the sensitivity around some of the recommendations around staffing.

Background work and engaging with staff had now taken place and further consultation was due to take place on future changes.

Information would be sent to all Members on the proposals around the reduction in the number of litter bins to enable them to feedback their comments to the Director of Customers and Communities. Also, the Citizen's Panel would be contacted as part of the wider consultation.

The Task and Finish Group was established at the request of Cabinet as part of the savings review.

Concern was raised by a Member of the Task Group as to how to inform the media and public that not all members of the group were happy with the recommendations.

The report formed part of a wider piece of work undertaken following a report that went to Cabinet in June 2012, when the Council needed to find £1.5m of savings.

In relation to a question about the reduction of a small sweeper and possible reduction of one of the large sweepers, the Council was now working more closely with Lancashire County Council.

The Director of Customers and Communities agreed to send out detailed information on proposals around the reduction in the number of litter bins to Members as part of the consultation.

Resolved

That the Corporate Scrutiny Committee note the actions proposed and taken as a result of the recommendations of the cross-party Street Cleansing Task and Finish Group.

10. ROSSENDALE COUNCIL AND NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM GRANTS

The Director of Customers and Communities provided an update on the consultation to be carried out in relation to the future of Rossendale Council and Neighbourhood Forum Grants.

In June 2011, the Council announced that the Rossendale Council Grants pot of £115,650 per annum would be allocated with a commitment of three years funding, which ceases in 2013/14. All grant recipients have been informed of this and have been asked what the impact may be on them if they did not receive funding from Rossendale Borough Council beyond 2013/14. All groups have also been informed of the need for Rossendale Borough Council to cut its budget by c£1.5m in accordance with the medium term financial strategy.

Given the scale of the savings challenge which faces Rossendale Borough Council, it is proposed that the amount of money made available for Rossendale Council Grants be reviewed and reduced, and that clear expected outcomes are set by Rossendale Borough Council in advance of the application process.

Domestic violence and child sexual exploitation are key priorities for the Community Safety Partnership and the Children's Trust, which both have funding to allocate. In addition, as per point 1.4, a robust process for commissioning domestic violence services has now been developed by Lancashire County Council. It is therefore proposed that Rossendale Borough Council commit to the annual contribution of £6,000 which will facilitate the generation of c£210,000 of domestic violence support services in Rossendale

The Director of Customers and Communities informed Members of an amendment to Appendix 1 – 1.5 of her report, which should say

In addition, the CAB has received £250,000 National Lottery and Cabinet Office funding for partnership development via Advice Service Transitional funding, over a two-year period. This was achieved by partners working together and was led by CAB.

In addition to the Rossendale Council Grants, in 2011/12 a sum of £70,000 was allocated to Neighbourhood Forum Grants annually for a period of three years. Because this pot of funding was drawn from an external grant which came to Rossendale Borough Council, once it is fully allocated this funding would cease and would no longer be in the revenue budget beyond the current year.

The Council were moving more toward the Commissioning model and would look at what is needed and decide the best way to deliver the service. Therefore, the Council need to understand what it needs to commission.

Resolved

1. That Corporate Scrutiny note and approve the consultation process to be used.

2. That a consultation response group, through the scrutiny process, be established to respond formally to the consultation.

11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

The Scrutiny Support Officer presented the Annual Report for 2012/13, which was a combined report of the work of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Task and Finish Groups and other relevant scrutiny information.

The Scrutiny Support Officer indicated that the report would be presented to the Full Council meeting on 17th July 2013.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/13 be noted.
2. That the report be presented to Full Council in July for approval.

12. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14

The Scrutiny Support Officer asked Members to consider and approve the ideas put forward by members of the public, elected members and Council Officers.

The projects for inclusion in the 2013/14 Work Programme were agreed as follows, taking into consideration the financial position of the Council.

Public Transport: This suggestion was put forward by two Councillors. It was agreed that a meeting be arranged with two Scrutiny Chairs and the two Councillors who put the idea forward and Rossendale Transport, to discuss accessibility for young and older people.

Patient Transport: This suggestion was put forward by a Councillor and it was agreed that North West Ambulance Service be invited to give a presentation on their role to a meeting in September.

Footpaths - LCC function: This suggestion was put forward by a member of the public and it was agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to look at this further. This piece of work would commence in July.

Road Maintenance – LCC function: This suggestion was put forward by a member of the public and it was agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to look at this further.

Polling Districts and Stations: This suggestion was put forward by an Officer. It was agreed that a 'light touch' review be undertaken to coincide with the national review taking place.

Dog Warden: This piece of work was on the work plan last year and will continue to be monitored.

Housing – multi occupancy: This suggestion was put forward by Officers. It was agreed to keep as a ‘reserve’ item, time permitting.

Rogue Landlords: This suggestion was put forward by Officers. It was agreed to keep as a ‘reserve’ item, time permitting.

Taxis: This suggestion was put forward by the public and it was agreed to ask Corporate Scrutiny to look at Licensing Policies.

Fear of Crime in the Borough: This suggestion was put forward by the public. It was agreed that this would be monitored through the Neighbourhood Forums/Partner Scrutiny, with a view to undertaking a review if required.

Welfare Reforms was an ongoing piece of work, carried over from last year.

RESOLVED:

That the Work programme, as above, be approved and sent to Full Council for information.

13. CORPORATE SCRUTINY TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Scrutiny Support Officer presented the Committees Terms of Reference, which had been approved at the Full Council Meeting in February 2013.

RESOLVED: That the Terms of Reference of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee be noted.

14. FORWARD PLAN

The Scrutiny Support Officer commented on the Forward Plan which sets out the details of key decisions which the Cabinet or Officers expect to take.

The Scrutiny Support Officer had circulated at the meeting a list of policies/strategies which were due to be brought before the Committee in the coming months.

Resolved

That the information be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.40pm

Signed
(Chair)

Date