

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the proceedings at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Bindloss Room, Kendal Town Hall, Kendal, on Friday, 16 August 2019, at 10.30 a.m.

Present

Councillors

Helen Chaffey (Vice-Chairman)

Pat Bell  
Brian Cooper  
Eamonn Hennessy

Hazel Hodgson  
Janette Jenkinson  
Susanne Long

Doug Rathbone  
Mark Wilson

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Vicky Hughes (Chairman) and Anne Hutton.

Officers

John Davies	Case Management Officer
Linda Fisher	Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer)
Dan Hudson	Strategy Lead Specialist
Adam Moffatt	Case Management Officer
Claire Read	Finance Specialist
Helen Smith	Finance Lead Specialist (Section 151 Officer)
Josie Smith	Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist
David Sykes	Director of Strategy, Innovation and Resources
Simon Rowley	Director of Customer and Commercial Services

Also in attendance were Councillors Robin Ashcroft (Economy, Culture and Leisure Portfolio Holder), Jonathan Brook (Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder), Andrew Jarvis (Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder) and Dyan Jones (Climate Emergency and Localism Portfolio Holder).

### **O&S/14 MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the Chairman be authorised to sign, as a record, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12 July 2019.

### **O&S/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

RESOLVED – That it be noted that no declarations of interest were raised.

### **O&S/16 DECLARATION OF THE PARTY WHIP**

RESOLVED – That it be noted that no declarations of the party whip were raised.

### **O&S/17 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUDED ITEMS**

RESOLVED – That it be noted that there are no excluded items on the agenda.

### **O&S/18 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

RESOLVED – That it be noted that no questions, representations, deputations or petitions have been received in respect of this meeting.

**O&S/19 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN**

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist, introduced the latest version of the Forward Plan and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's 2019/20 Work Programme.

At this point, Councillor Doug Rathbone provided a verbal update on his dialogue with Northern Rail, as agreed at the 12 July 2019 Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. He informed the Committee that while there had been little movement following the previous meeting, there were now new trains operating on the Lakes and Furness lines that provided new facilities and new lengths for trains in the district. Councillor Rathbone requested agreement from Members for him to maintain liaison with Northern Rail so that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could continue to hold them to account, particularly on punctuality, which had been a considerable issue across the district. He also highlighted a celebration event arranged on the 21<sup>st</sup> August at 11 a.m. with Northern Rail regarding new trains.

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer) suggested that inviting Northern Rail back to the Committee's January meeting for their representative to provide an update to Members. She also undertook to circulate details of the upcoming Northern Rail event.

Councillor Mark Wilson provided an update on an event in Ulverston with Northern Rail and the Safety Group.

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer) informed Members that a request for expressions of interest in the Task and Finish Group on Health and Wellbeing Strategic Review were still required, as only four members had returned an expression of interest to date.

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer) also provided an update on the Locality Working Task and Finish Group. Due to annual leave and work commitments of those officers involved, the date for the first session was fixed as 10 October 2019. Members were informed that the meeting would be a focused session, with all Members being invited to provide input into the localities discussion. The next meeting would involve stakeholders.

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer) answered questions from Members. She undertook to provide them with a list of those who had expressed an interest in taking part in the Health and Wellbeing Task and Finish Group. A question having been raised by a Member with regard to bringing forward the date of the Private Water Supplies Task and Finish Group, it was explained that this would not be possible, due to the Committee's large work programme, and therefore the Task and Finish Group would be held in January 2019.

**RESOLVED – That**

- (1) the latest Forward Plan published on 13 August 2019 be received;
- (2) Councillor Rathbone be authorised to continue with his efforts in liaising with Northern Rail; and
- (3) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's current work programme be noted and updated to include an invitation to Northern Rail to attend the January 2020 meeting.

**O&S/20****COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 1 2019/20**

The Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder introduced the Council Plan Performance Monitoring report for quarter one of 2019/20 on behalf of the Leader and Promoting South Lakeland Portfolio Holder. The report highlighted areas of significantly good or poor performance relating to the measures of success set out in the current Council Plan. The report also included the latest Strategic Risk Register and benchmarking information using the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Nearest Neighbours Model.

The Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder answered questions raised by Members. With regard to a question on the access to housing for those recently released from prison, he informed Members that the Homelessness Reduction Act had placed extra duties on the Authority to help those in circumstances such as these, and that as a result, prisons were sending advanced warning of release so that Local Authorities were able to provide options for those individuals. The Portfolio Holder stated that he was not sure if this was occurring regularly but that he would look into the matter further. He added that the Council represented one link in a complex chain but that efforts should be continued to reduce homelessness in the district.

The Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder referred to the Case Management Officer to answer a question on the definition of the term jobs used within the report as well as a request to provide data on the survival rate of start-up businesses in the district.

The Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder answered a question on the number of affordable homes to buy in the area and how the Council could be helping local young people to gain access to the housing market. He informed Members that while the work the Council had carried out so far had met the targets set, he felt that more could be done to provide a route to entering the housing market for young people in the district, with modular housing being a viable option for the future.

The Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder briefly answered a question on the reputation of Planning and Planning Applications at South Lakeland District Council, before referring to the Director of Strategy, Innovation and Resources who provided a more detailed answer, referring to the transitional period of the Customer Connect Programme which had had an impact on the Planning Department. Following on from this answer, the Director of Customer and Commercial Services provided a further response with regard to the Locality Team and the potential for collaborative working with the Planning Team.

The Director of Strategy, Innovation and Resources then answered a question on the relationship between the Planning Department and the public, agreeing that a better explanation of the outcomes was needed in order to provide a higher level of transparency on Planning applications.

Councillor Helen Chaffey then requested an update on Brexit. The Strategy Lead Specialist informed Members that he had recently been appointed as the Council's Brexit Officer and advised that he would provide Members with updates as new information was received.

Members requested an update to the October 2019 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the following be noted:-
  - (a) the Summary of Performance, as detailed within the report;
  - (b) the detailed risks information contained within Appendix 1 to the report; and
  - (c) the benchmarking information within Appendix 2 to the report; and
- (2) that an update on Brexit be presented to the October 2019 meeting.

## **O&S/21**

### **CORPORATE FINANCIAL MONITORING QUARTER 1, 2019/20**

The Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder introduced the Corporate Financial Monitoring report for Quarter One of 2019/20. The report highlighted the revenue budget which had the target of being balanced over the year, including a Customer Connect savings target of £740,000 and a vacancy savings target of £593,000. Further to this there was an amount of £510,000 from carry forward requests which had been approved by Cabinet in April. The Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder then moved on to inform Members of a reoccurring saving of £582,000 per annum resulting from the first phase of Customer Connect. He then highlighted a full year projection of a £104,000 departmental overspend and a further £158,000 in savings as a result of Customer Connect activity which was yet to be delivered which gave a current over-spend projection of £262,000 but the Management Team had been tasked with closing this gap.

The report also highlighted the Council's position on the Capital Programme. The Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that the total capital expenditure for the year amounted to £16.4m with the spend profile of all key projects being challenged.

The Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder provided an update on Treasury Management for the quarter. He began by informing the Committee that there was nothing major to report with the Council holding £26.2m of investments, and continued to achieve an average return of between 0.15% and 0.2% ahead of the benchmark Bid Rate. Alongside this he outlined progress on collection of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates, with Council Tax collection rates having continued to improve compared to non-domestic rate collection, which had suffered due to the choice of businesses to pay over twelve instalments. The Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder then informed Members on the collection of debts, highlighting the 2017/18 period of 99% of debts being recovered and the 2018/19 period having 2% of debts still to be recovered.

In concluding his report to the Committee, the Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder followed up on questions raised at the 12 July 2019 Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting regarding 2018/19 outturn report focusing on Housing Benefit overpayment and Building Control. Furthermore the Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder wished to thank the Finance Team for their work.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

## **O&S/22**

### **PORTFOLIO HOLDER REPORT - HOUSING AND INNOVATION**

The Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder presented his annual report on progress made and plans for the future within the portfolio area. As he had already covered several of the topics in the report earlier in the meeting he provided a brief overview of the Housing and Innovation report.

The Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder highlighted the impact of Customer Connect on the Housing and Innovation Portfolio, with the Digital Platform being developed to allow the public to access their accounts. He then made reference to the size of the project that was underway and thanked Officers for their continued efforts during a difficult time.

In concluding his report, the Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder informed the Committee of the £2.36m Community Housing Fund that had been designed to help tackle the problem of high levels of second home ownership within the District. He updated the Committee on the community led schemes coming forward, also highlighting the £6m loan arrangements with South Lakes Housing as well as work taking place on modular homes, all of which would contribute to the delivery of affordable homes.

In responding to questions raised, the Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder informed Members that they could help to manage the level of empty homes across all wards in the district by informing the Empty Homes Officer of any properties that appeared to be empty. The Empty Homes Officer would then investigate and work with the owners to help to bring homes into use, using a variety of tools including advice on selling the property and empty homes grants.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

## **O&S/23**

### **GREEN TEAM PROGRESS**

The Environment Portfolio Holder presented a report on the work of the Green Team. She began by updating the Committee on the work being carried out to coordinate the Council's activity to combat the effects of Climate Change and promote Biodiversity following the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency. The Environment Portfolio Holder then gave an overview of the report, first informing Members that, both in terms of overall CO2 emissions and in terms of SLDC's own carbon footprint, emissions were falling. However emissions from transport were fluctuating and had risen again more recently. She then moved on to inform Members on the 25 point plan which aimed at dealing with a range of Climate Change related factors, including an updated policy on flood mitigation, a comprehensive energy audit and the Council's declaration on biodiversity. The Environment Portfolio Holder concluded by informing the Committee of the actions that had already been completed and the Council's desire to maximise green space activity across the district.

In responding to a comment on the varying results on emissions reduction, the Environment Portfolio Holder stated that it was a good idea for dual-hatted Members to discuss environmental issues at both District and County Council meetings, giving the argument that to effectively mitigate and solve the issues arising from Climate Change, there would need to be collaboration and co-operation across districts and counties. She then went on to respond to a question on dealing with idling engines across the district, particularly with commercial vehicles (bus, taxi and haulage companies) and referred to ongoing discussions before asking the Strategy Lead Specialist to provide further details. The Strategy Lead Specialist confirmed that discussions had taken place but was unsure of the impact that these discussions had made.

The Director of Customer and Commercial Services added to the responses on the impact of idling engines in Kendal and the measures that had been put in place to monitor and react to the pollution problems. He then drew attention to the fact that a steering group had been set up with Cumbria County Council and other external partners which had

highlighted a number of measures to be put in place to assess and improve the air quality in Kendal and in particular within the Air Quality Management Area.

The Strategy Lead Specialist responded to a request to see specific targets put in place to monitor and reduce the usage of energy, informing Members that it was the aim of the Green Team to set such targets and the focus of work at the present time was on setting the baseline against which targets could be set.

The Environment Portfolio Holder, alongside all present, then expressed her wish to recognise the continued hard work of Officers and Members on issues surrounding sustainability and biodiversity.

The Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder then responded to a question on the potential to develop a series of policies on planning to improve the sustainability of future projects. He began by informing Members that this had been discussed at various meetings with several ideas having been floated. The Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder then informed Members that it was necessary to consider the impacts of new policy requirements, sustainability of buildings on the viability of development and risks to affordable housing delivery.

The Strategy Lead Specialist then responded to a question on a potential biodiversity audit to match the energy audit by informing Members that Natural England undertook a broad biodiversity survey but it would be incredibly difficult for the Council to do this in great detail. He then informed Members that the Council was in contact with Natural England amongst other organisations to monitor the biodiversity of the area.

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the draft Biodiversity policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be supported.

## **O&S/24**

### **CUMBRIA HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE**

Councillor Helen Chaffey highlighted the organising of visits from local healthcare executives to local facilities across the district in order to assess the situation and level of care. These were taking place in Grange, Kendal, Maryport and Workington. Councillor Chaffey was pleased that these integrated car meetings would be taking place, this being due to requests from South Lakeland District Council.

Councillor Mark Wilson took the opportunity to provide a verbal update on the significant changes that were underway in the local healthcare sector. He also wished to invite Members to a Tea and Talk event in Ulverston where there would be a unique opportunity to speak to and question the CEO at University Hospitals Morecambe Bay. He requested that the documents from a recent County Council health meeting be circulated to all Members.

RESOLVED – That the updated be noted.

The meeting ended at 12.22 p.m.