

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING Tuesday, 14th September 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Holly (in the Chair); Councillors Anstee, Brett, Kelly (for Bamford), Donna Williams and Wraighte.

OFFICERS: A. Ibrahim (Assistant Director – Legal, Governance and Workforce/Monitoring Officer), J. Rooney (Assistant Director – Information, Customers and Communities), S. Smith (Deputy Chief Finance Officer), D. Brierley (Head of Communications), C. Goddard (Head of Revenues and Benefits), S. Knowles (Head of Internal Audit) and P. Thompson (Resources Directorate).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Besford, Councillor Emsley and one member of the public.

10 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ali Ahmed, Bamford, Joinson, Nolan, O'Neill, Rana and Robinson.

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Further to the Council's Code of Conduct, Councillor Kelly declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 7 (Call-in: Pennines Township Funds 2021/2022) as he is a Member of Pennines Township Committee, the Committee that originally considered this matter, on 15th July 2021, and he vacated the room during the consideration and determination of this agenda item.

12 MINUTES

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held 22nd June 2021 be approved as a correct record and that the actions list, appended thereto, be noted.

13 CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/2022

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme for 2021/2022, which detailed the programme of reports to be presented during the 2021/2022 municipal year.

Resolved:

That the Committee's Work Programme 2021/2022 be noted.

14 NOTES OF A MEETING OF CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Resolved:

That the notes of the informal meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee members, held 12th July 2021, be noted.

15 CALL IN: PENNINES TOWNSHIP FUNDS 2021/2022

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Resources which presented details of a decision that has been made by Pennines Township Committee, at its meeting on 20th July 2021 (minute 7: Pennines Township Funds 2021/2022), which had been called-in by Councillors Emsley and Paolucci.

Councillors Emsley and Paolucci had called-in this item for the following reasons:

- i. There is not enough information on which to make a decision;
- ii. An alternative policy option or options has/have been insufficiently explored;
- iii. The reason(s) for rejection of alternative policy options had been insufficiently explained;

Councillor Emsley added that ...”the bands had requested £5,000 (PTC/02/21 Milnrow) and £11,650 (PTC/06/21 Wardle Anderson) respectively. They were awarded a flat rate £5,000 which was 100% of Milnrow’s request and less than 50% of Wardle Anderson’s request. These were the only award made that evening that was less than requested. Both bands make considerable contribution to the community and I do not feel that this was fair and equitable, I feel they could have both been awarded a percentage of what they were asking for, not a ‘flat’ rate.

Wardle Anderson Brass Band, drew many of its players from local schools, there is a tradition of tuition from Wardle Academy being offered in the feeder Primary Schools: Kentmere, St Andrew’s, St James’s, Smithy Bridge, Holy Trinity and Littleborough. This meant that the membership of this band was based in the Pennines Township, specifically in the wards of Smallbridge, Wardle, Smithy Bridge and Littleborough. They should be given a fair decision by the Committee.”

Councillor Besford, Vice Chair of Pennines Township Committee (who was in the Chair during consideration of Minute 7) addressed the Committee with regard to the call in.

In considering the report, Members of the Committee were satisfied that Pennines Township Committee had followed the correct procedures in reaching their decision. It was noted that there was a preponderance of brass bands in that locality, which seemed to be historical and cultural, related to the geographical position of Pennines Township being so relatively close to West Yorkshire and Saddleworth. Pennines Township therefore received a relatively large number of funding applications from brass bands. It was suggested that the Cabinet investigate the feasibility of a separate fund being established from which brass bands could make applications to.

Resolved:

1. That the matter be referred back to the Pennines Township Action Committee, for further consideration at the next available meeting

2. That the Cabinet be requested to investigate the feasibility of a separate fund being established from which brass bands, based across the Borough, can make applications to.

16 UPDATED COMMUNICATIONS PLAN/STRATEGY

The Head of Communications provided Members with a presentation on the updated corporate Communications Plan/Strategy. The presentation outlined the work and roles of the Communications Team at Rochdale Borough Council which included raising the profile and reputation of the Borough, supporting local businesses and helping to attract new ones, developing and enforcing communications standards, including branding, internal communications, design materials, managing social media accounts, public relations and media enquiries and promoting events in the Borough.

The Committee was informed that the strategic objectives of the Communication's team included;

- Improving perceptions and the reputation of the Borough and of the Council;
- To promote the Council's Core objectives – people, prosperity and place;
- To promote Rochdale Borough as a destination – for commercial, tourism and residential purposes;
- To change behaviour – save money, deliver better services;
- To help attract inward investment – jobs and investment;
- To position the Council as a key and integral part of Greater Manchester.

Resolved: that the updated Communications Plan/Strategy be endorsed.

17 RESOURCES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS DIRECTORATE PLANS 2021-22: QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Committee scrutinised a joint report of the Director of Resources and the Director of Neighbourhoods detailing the progress at the end of Quarter 1 2021/2022 (30th June 2021) towards achievements of targets contained in the Resources Directorate Plan 2021/2022 and in the Neighbourhoods Directorate Plan 2021/2022.

In considering the report, Members were updated on the actions that were still outstanding at 30th June 2021 and which had received an 'amber' rating.

Resolved:

That the Resources and Neighbourhoods Directorate Plans 2021/2022 - Quarter 1 Performance (April – June 2021), be noted.

18 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNT FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Chief Finance Officer that was seeking approval from the Council, on 13th October 2021, to amend the criteria for the 100% council tax discount scheme that existed for care leavers who resided in the borough, and who were aged 18 to 25, with effect from 1st November 2021.

On 1st March 2017, the Council had introduced a 100% council tax discount scheme for care leavers who lived in the Borough and who were aged 18 to 20 years. On 12th December 2018, the Council extended the scheme to care leavers who lived in the Borough and who were aged 18 to 25 years. This reflected the Government change to extend the Council's corporate parenting responsibility to 25 years.

The Committee were informed that this report would be presented to the Cabinet on 21st September 2021, prior to its submission to the Council on 13th October 2021.

Resolved:

That the Committee endorses the proposals contained in the report and recommends that the recommendations contained therein, be approved by the Council at its meeting on 13th October 2021.

19 BUDGET 2022/23 TO 2024/25 - GUIDELINES, TIMETABLE AND BUDGET UPDATE

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Chief Finance Officer which outlined the proposed corporate budget timeline 2022/2023 to 2024/2025 including assumptions and principals. In considering the report the Committee was mindful that the Council is legally obliged to set a balanced budget.

The Committee was advised that this report had previously been submitted to the Cabinet, at its meeting on 27th July 2021, where the recommendation contained therein were approved.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

20 3RD & 4TH QUARTER CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

The Assistant Director (Information, Customers and Communities) provided the Scrutiny Committee with a summary of corporate complaints and compliments received during the third and fourth quarters of 2020/2021 (September 2020 – March 2021). The Committee was reminded that part of the Council's performance management process was to ensure the Authority's ambition to continuously improve services was realised.

It was reported that in total, 282 new complaints were received during the second half of 2020/2021, across all services. The majority of the complaints were resolved at 'Stage One', with only 17 escalating to 'Stage Two' and two complaints being dealt with at 'Stage Three'. A total of 119 compliments were received during this reporting period.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

21 FINANCE UPDATE REPORT QUARTER 1 2021/2022

The Committee received the 'Finance Update' report that had been prepared by the Chief Finance Officer, which outlined the Council's forecast 2021/2022 financial position as at the end of June 2021. The report covered corporate financial activity during the first quarter of 2021/2022 (April – June 2021)

The Committee was advised that the Cabinet had previously considered this report at its meeting on 31st August 2021.

The Finance Update report contained details of the following:

- a. The forecast Revenue outturn position, which is a break even position. The General Fund pressure relating to Covid-19 is £14,346k, and is offset by the use of government funding and reserves.
- b. Savings plans of £1,167k ongoing and £8k one off were included in the 2021/2022 budget, as part of the 2021/2022 Estimates process. These are currently forecast as achieved, on target or to be achieved through mitigating actions. In 2020/2021 unachieved savings of £150k were reported which continue in 2021/2022; these will be met through the use of Government Grants and through mitigating actions.
- c. An update on the Health and Social Care Pool Fund opening position. A detailed report is to be presented to Integrated Commissioning Board's meeting held on 31st August 2021.
- d. Forecast Capital expenditure of £107,328k; this is net of: brought forward balances from previous financial years of £94,703k; re-phasing of £56,258k into future years, mainly relating to work that has been completed to review and re-profile the Capital Budget; and capital budget increases of £11,697k.
- e. The forecast 2021/2022 Collection Fund position of a deficit of £6,062k, which will be mitigated by additional Government Section 31 grant of £9,498k, leaving a residual surplus of £3,436.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.