

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors Felicity Wilson in the Chair (Deputising for John Kane), Gwynneth Everett, Joseph Ghayouba, Sam Pollen and Doug Wilson

Officers: Rose Blaney (Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny)), Steven Brown, (Director of Financial Resources), Emanuel Flecken (Parks & Open Spaces Manager) and Emma Williamson (Social Inclusion and Community Resilience Team Leader).

OSC25 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors John Kane, James Date, Sam Meteer and Charles Maudling. Also, Sarah Pemberton and Stephanie Shaw.

OSC26 Declarations of Interests in Agenda Items:

No Declarations of Interest were made.

OSC27 Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2021

Councillors reviewed the minutes of the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) meeting.

Resolved – That, with a unanimous vote, the Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2021 were approved as a true and accurate record.

OSC28 Executive Forward Plan

The Committee reviewed the Executive Forward Plan.

Councillor Pollen asked for further information on the Fleet Renewal going to the Executive on 14th September 2021 and for further information regarding the Business Rates - Discretionary Rate Relief Policy and Moss Bay Enterprise Trust going to the Executive on 12th October 2021.

Councillor Wilson requested that the Portfolio Holder for Commercial Services be invited to the next Overview and Scrutiny Meeting on 7th October 2021 to

provide the Committee with an overview and further information regarding the Fleet Renewal.

Councillor Ghayouba proposed that a question be put forward in advance to the Portfolio Holder, to allow time for them to find the answer, asking what the ambition is for Copeland through the Fleet Renewal for Net Zero and possible using hybrid vehicles with the environmental impact being such a key issue.

The Scrutiny Officer agreed to invite the Portfolio Holder for Commercial Services to the next meeting and put Councillor Ghayouba's question to them beforehand. The Scrutiny also agreed to get some more information on the Business Rates - Discretionary Rate Relief Policy from the Director of Financial Resources to be presented at the next meeting. Then, the Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that the only information available at the moment was that the Moss Bay Trust Enterprise is currently confidential at this stage but that they will contact the report author to see what information may be shared with the Committee.

Resolved – That,

- a) With a unanimous vote for, the Committee agreed that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.
- b) The Scrutiny Officer will ask for an update on the Moss Bay Enterprise Trust to provide to the Committee

OSC29 2020-21 Finance Report - Q4

The Director of Financial Resources was present to answer the Councillors questions and cover the report.

Councillor Pollen asked how concerned should councillors be regarding the outstanding accounts and the section 24 sanction received. The Director noted that the section 24 came from the 2017/18 audit reports which was the cyber-attack year. There is a plan in place to get the 2018/19 financial statements up to date through effort and focus. The current timetable has been developed to fit with the External Auditors timetable and enable to council to provide any information the auditors' request.

Councillor Pollen then asked if councillors should be concerned with the reliance on reserves to balance the budget. The Director noted that it is not ideal to be relying on reserves to balance the budget but there are many local authorities having to use reserves to balance their budget. With LGR, the 2022/23 will be the last budget the Council will set.

Councillor Pollen asked for the Director to provide further information on the 'Exceptional Funding' the council received. The Director explained that in 2021,

with Covid, there were a number of councils seeking Government support to set their budgets. The Government provided emergency financial support throughout the past 18 months and following discussions with Copeland they gave a capitalisation directive of £1.5m in 2021/22 subject to an external review CIPFA is currently undertaking the review and the next stage is for the Secretary of State to approve once the review has been complete.

The Chair asked the Director if the council's finance team, with regard to the tight timeframe to deliver in-depth finances with constraints due to the cyber-attack, have the appropriate resources regarding creating the budget, LGR and shortfalls. The Director noted that the size of the team has increased but is in a state of ebb and flow (due to maternity leave, leavers, and new starters etc.). The Council face pressures due to the locality for talent and the Director noted that it is very hard to keep talented people. Finance is a critical area to the Chief Executive and the Mayor and there are resources available to help the team.

Councillor Pollen also asked for it to be noted that any comments and concerns are not directed at officers.

Councillor Doug Wilson asked for some context to be given regarding the section 114 (bankruptcy) that have been delivered by other councils and the overall trend of councils running at deficit in relation to Copeland. The Director noted that there has been an increase in numbers for those issuing section 114 notices. With the Fair Funding Review and the Business Rates Review there is uncertainty regarding future funding.

Councillor Ghayouba asked if the financial issues prevent the council from meeting statutory obligations to the public and, with LGR, are the council likely to continue to meet obligations. The Director commented that, to the best of their knowledge, the council is meeting their obligations to deliver statutory services.

Resolved – That, with a unanimous vote for, the Committee agreed that the 2020-21 Finance Report – Q4 be noted.

OSC30 Engagement with Schools Verbal Update

The Social Inclusion and Community Resilience Team Leader gave the Committee a verbal update on the engagement with schools' projects in relation to the Children's Charter created as part of the OSC Child Poverty Task & Finish Group. The Team Leader noted that there have been some delays due to Covid, but it has been started up again and large amounts of data have been received but due to time constraints, they have not been able to go through the date yet.

The Team Leader also commented that they are happy to work with councillors on projects and funding.

The Chair asked that the schools within South Copeland be included within this engagement as they had been missed in the initial project. The Team Leader noted that not all schools have been engaged with yet, but that the programme had only been started in May and put on hold for the summer. The Team Leader is working with the Beacon and their school sessions, so not all schools have been involved to date. However, the Team Leader highlighted that they would be willing to travel to South Copeland if they struggled to get to the Beacon to ensure that they were involved.

Councillor Everett highlighted that there had been a concern that the Children's Charter would be just words, so it was good to see some involvement. She then asked how the schools and teachers had reacted to the project. The Team Leader answered that most work well with the team, that there have been some odd issues but that it's all about creating opportunities. One obstacle is capacity and the time needed to go into schools and have a session, but that the team are working around the school's timetable.

Councillor Ghayouba noted their concern that, as a new councillor, the Children's Charter did look like just a bunch of words. However, he did note that it was good to hear about the progress made. Councillor Ghayouba wondered if there were any specific targets/metrics that were available to see if the Children's Charter would be met or if there are any areas of improvement. The Team Leader commented that they are currently undergoing coaching/training to help create a framework for any social inclusion project to be able to measure success. The Team Leader noted that while numbers/data are good to have, social inclusion needs qualitative and case study data, but the team are working on a way to measure success going forward. There is a UCLan report as to why the Children's Charter was created which will be sent to the Scrutiny Officer for circulation. The Team Leader noted that it is important to invest in young people.

Councillor Pollen thanked the Team Leader for their update and asked if there was anything to do to improve the Children's Charter. He also noted that councillors would be happy to help with this project and go into schools if there is an opportunity. Councillor Pollen also asked if there was an opportunity for further promotion of the project within the council and the community. The Team Leader noted that some of the key issues the schools have recently put forward revolve around environment and safety, which are not in the Charter, so there is an option to do a refresher on the Charter. The Programme of Events can be sent to councillors. The Social Inclusion report will be taken to Full

Council in December. Communication is key, but depending on the project, the team are unable to use the council's Communications team and there has been issues regarding recruitment for staff.

Councillor Doug Wilson brought a suggestion for asking the kids to identify objectives from the situations and ideas, for them to be the ones to set goals and identify targets to fund. To have something tangible come out of the Charter and look into ideas of ways of offer free time/fun without regulation. The Team Leader noted that this isn't just about free things and doing things for families. It was also highlighted that the responses from kids come from those as young as four years old, the information received from the adults will be a lot more in-depth. It's all about engaging 'them' to do things and to offer schools support as they are able to apply for their own funding.

Councillor Everett noted the two Health and Wellbeing Task & Finish Groups for North and South Copeland which will focus on Children's physical and mental health and wellbeing. The Team Leader noted that Cumbria County Council are in charge of health and wellbeing for the county and that the University of Cumbria went into schools and created a report based on speaking with 800 young people aged 11 to 18. The Scrutiny Officer will circulate the report following the meeting and noted that they will share the information received as part of the task & finish groups with the Team Leader.

Councillor Ghayouba asked what impact the cut to Universal Credit would have on Copeland's position on providing/delivering the Children's Charter. The Team Leader noted that there has been a rise in families visiting the food pantry with the cut proposed. The Team Leader noted that they have worked with the DWP Youth Hub in Mirehouse for young people with barriers (aged 18-24 years old) to help gather the data to monitor those issues. It was also noted that the team are constantly chasing funding as the services is not statutory.

The Chair noted that this is a key and pertinent issue, even though not statutory. And she commented that a letter to all councillors for contact details for schools in their ward to help ensure the entire borough is involved.

Councillor Pollen noted that this service is important to all councillors and looks forward to the report in December.

The Team Leader noted that the Children's Charter will not just be a document on the shelf and the results will be driven by the community and will be continuously implemented.

Resolved – That the Scrutiny Officer will provide the Committee with the reports requested and noted within the minutes.

The Open Spaces Manager gave an overview of the report, highlighting the key parts of the report including the effects of costings, working to get all lights under Copeland's authority ahead of LGR for an easier transition, suppliers, and LED lights. The Committee were then invited to ask questions.

The Chair thanked the Open Spaces Manager for the report, including the involvement from the officer who has since left the council, and noted the cost of officer hours involved to determine who owned what lighting.

Councillor pollen noted commented that all councils within the borough would be supporting this report and developing partnership working. He then noted three concerns: health and safety, anti-social behaviour and the condition of pathways. Also commenting that passing responsibility back to Copeland may cause a loss of control, especially if there is a cut to funding.

Councillor Wilson noted that this report was welcome as the street/footway lighting has been an issue for nearly two years as the asset register was out of date noting that the inventory check carried out will be of a real benefit. He noted that all possible solutions to avoid anyone not recognising their responsibility should be considered. The environmental and efficiency changes through new lighting would be welcome and support was offered should it be needed.

The Chair noted that when some of the rural councils were replaced by the borough council the transition of responsibility for the lighting was not clear and that LGR could make that worse if the work is not done correctly.

Councillor Ghayouba asked, in term of the budget and the shortfalls, will taking on extra lights for a smoother transition through LGR have a negative impact. The Open Spaces Manager noted that there are 1200 lights in the borough and that a cost could be saved by investigation the electricity providers and looking at possible better prices. The inventory of lights has now been implemented on the GIS system, so now instead of going through the County Council to find the light, the teams can now go through the inventory. The Open Spaces Manager also noted that some of the lights throughout the borough are out of date and the cost to replace them would be excessive. Those lights would need to be fixed in the old ways and there are legal implications involved, and costs could reach £15K.

Councillor Ghayouba also commented that upgrading to LED lights would reduce the carbon footprint and forecast a possible saving. The Open Spaces Manager noted that this saving has been looked into and there is a possible double saving

as the team can combine the inspection of the lights and the installation of LED lights into one cost.

Councillor Wilson asked if there was a method of identifying lighting on the unit themselves and a method of reporting issues. The Open Spaces Manager noted that the lights have numbers on them which have been recorded on the GIS system and to report issues people can email the open spaces department email.

Resolved – That, with a unanimous vote for, the Committee agreed to note the Footway Lighting report and to have the feedback reported back to the Executive.

OSC32 Scrutiny Officer Updates

The Scrutiny Officer gave the Committee updates on the Work Programme and gave updates on the Task & Finish Groups.

The Scrutiny Officer noted that the current work programme is out of date following the training that took place on 18th August 2021. The Committee reviewed the items scheduled for October 2021 and confirmed that the Q1 Finance Report and Performance Plan reports and the Law Centre presentation will be on the agenda, as will the information requested during agenda item four, once agreed by the Executive. The rest of the work programme will be discussed at the next informal meeting and then confirmed at the 7th October meeting with councillors asked to consider possible topics ahead of time.

Clarification was also given as to the reason behind the presentations coming to OSC and ways to move forward including the presentations being member briefings and reports coming to OSC.

Questions were asked by councillors as to what topics would be allowed for OSC to consider for their work programme. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that any topic can be brought forward for consideration, the Officer will then go away and create a mini scope for each topic for the Committee to then consider and discuss at the informal meetings.

The Scrutiny Officer confirmed the current states of the Task & Finish Groups as detailed within the agenda including highlighting that the final recommendation from the Recycling Task & Finish Group Report being taken back to the Executive for further clarification to gain approval.

OSC33 Date and Time of Next Meeting:

The Chair informed members that the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held on Thursday 7th October 2021 at 2pm in the Copeland Centre.

The Meeting closed at 4.10 pm

Chair