

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of Wyre Borough Council held on Monday, 4 September 2023 at the Council Chamber - Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee members present:

Councillors Cartridge, Baxter, Amos, Sir R Atkins, Bolton, Collinson, Fail, Higgs, Martin and A Walker

Absent- apologies received:

Councillors Beavers and Blair

Absent- apologies not received

None.

Other councillors present:

Councillors Bridge and Rendell

Officers present:

Daphne Courtenage, Democratic Services Officer
Mark Broadhurst, Head of Housing and Community Services
Rebecca Huddleston, Chief Executive
Kathy Winstanley, Head of Public Realm and Environmental Sustainability

Officers absent- apologies received:

None.

No members of the public or press attended the meeting.

Apologies procedure

The Chair reminded members of the proper procedure for tendering apologies, which could be found at part 4.01/5 of the Constitution. He asked that this be noted in the minutes.

14 Declarations of interest

None.

15 Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 17 July 2023 were approved by those in attendance at that meeting.

16 The Promotion of Self-Care and Social Prescribing in Wyre Task Group - final report

The Chair of the Promotion of Self-Care and Social Prescribing in Wyre Task Group, Councillor Rendell, submitted the task group's draft report and recommendations to the committee.

The Chair thanked Councillor Rendell and the members of the task group for their hard work.

Councillor Rendell reiterated these comments.

The committee agreed to submit the final report and its recommendations to Cabinet at the next available meeting.

17 Review of the implementations of the District Enforcement Pilot Task Group

The Street Scene, Parks and Open Spaces Portfolio Holder, Councillor Bridge, and the Corporate Director Environment, Mark Billington, submitted a report reviewing the recommendations of the District Enforcement Task Group and to update members on the new enforcement arrangements with Waste Investigations Support & Enforcement Ltd (WISE).

Councillor Bridge and Kathy Winstanley, Head of Public Realm and Environmental Sustainability, attended the meeting and took questions and comments from members.

Councillor Bridge introduced the report. He praised the good work of the task group and how its recommendations had fed into innovative solutions for the new enforcement contract.

Members raised questions on the contents of the report. These included:

- Communication and engagement with residents
- Lessons learned from the task group and the previous enforcement arrangements
- Education opportunities with young people

Councillor Bridge responded to the questions raised. He explained that he believed the task group's recommendations had been comprehensive and they were building on this work. He thought that young people were receptive to reasoned arguments, and on top of this a project would soon begin to look at going into local schools twice a month to raise awareness and engage with young people and they would have to wait to see its impact. He also referenced the possibility of a streetscene app for reporting issues such as littering and dog fouling which the team were looking into. This had originally been raised by Cllr Beavers at Full Council (similar to 'lovecleanstreets').

Councillors also raised a question on recommendation two, which was in relation to an official warning system for particular offences. They also raised concerns over recent comments on social media about the public perception of the WISE officers.

Councillor A Walker asked that it be minuted that Councillor Bridge acted promptly in regards to a constituency case.

Councillor Bridge responded that the original recommendation had not been feasible due to issues with consistency and how officers would monitor this. He was satisfied with the appeal process and believed this was a good alternative. He was keen for WISE to be seen as ambassadors of the council and that they ought to act as they should when in public. He also explained the appeals procedure for members.

The Chair thanked Councillor Bridge and Kathy Winstanley for their report and their attendance at the meeting.

18 Business Plan 2023/24, Quarterly Performance Statement (Quarter 1: April - June)

The Corporate Director Communities submitted a report which gave a quick reference to quarterly progress against the council's business plan projects and measures, along with commentary where issues had been identified.

The Chief Executive, Rebecca Huddleston, attended the meeting and introduced the report.

She explained to members that the business plan had last been refreshed in April 2023 as a short term refresh due to the all-out elections in May 2023. It was due for a more substantial refresh and this was hoped to come before committee at the next meeting in October. However, it meant that quarterly performance targets, including this one, would be measured against the previous business plan most likely up until quarter three. She told members that she was keen to set out corporate priorities and working towards these as soon as possible.

Members raised questions over the issues highlighted in the report, including the delays to the Local Plan review, town centre vacancy rates, the survival rate of small businesses and tourism in the borough.

The Chief Executive responded that delays to the Local Plan were owing to delays to legislation reforms and that officers were working on a revised timetable. In terms of business support, the council was using funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to commission support from Boost to work with local businesses to provide support, including training. In response to a question over the future of the local high street, she noted that there were distinct differences in the local economies in each area of Wyre, and each town centre needed to be looked at separately.

In response to a comment over the need for a dedicated Wyre tourism strategy, she said that officers were developing an economic development strategy for the borough, as well as a visitor and tourism strategy. She hoped these would play a key part in the new business plan.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for her attendance at the meeting.

19 Housing briefing note from Mark Broadhurst, Head of Housing and Community Services

The Corporate Director Communities submitted a report in response to a request for information from the committee regarding domestic gas and electricity consumption in Wyre.

Mark Broadhurst, the Head of Housing and Community Services, attended the meeting and introduced the report.

He told the committee that the report set out reporting done by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and outlined the estimated mega wattage consumption of both electricity and gas in the borough.

He then highlighted the work done in regards to improving the energy efficiency of the Boroughs homes through the Cosy Homes in Lancashire (CHiL) initiative, and the work of the enforcement teams in ensuring that private rented properties in the borough met the domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Regulations.

Members asked questions regarding the CHiL initiative, how it was advertised and whether residents and their landlords were contacted directly. They also queried how residents, who did not feel empowered to go to their landlord directly, might apply for a CHiL grant.

The Head of Housing and Community Services explained that Government had provided funding for CHiL to procure a PR firm, through which they had commissioned high profile adverts including on the local radio. Officers had also arranged for areas of the Borough to be leaflet-dropped for example across our off-gas areas and specific areas that had populations on higher levels of means tested benefits, including Fleetwood.

He said that contacting landlords directly was sometimes difficult and that landlords were generally difficult to engage in the energy efficiency agenda. Instead awareness of the initiative to date was through letting agents and via the public advertisement of the scheme.

He told members that any Lancashire home, which met the eligibility requirements, could apply and that this was a way to promote energy efficiency measures in the community. This also included a new scheme specifically for off-gas areas such as Over Wyre. He praised the work of the partnership and that the initiative was leading nationally; representatives from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero would be visiting Lancashire to view an installation of an air source heat pump in Out Rawcliffe.

In response to a question over the eligibility requirements for the initiative and the percentage of people in the borough that could qualify for the scheme, Mark told members that he was not sure of the specific number. The potential high percentage of houses in the borough not meeting the highest energy efficiency standards was a reflection of an older housing stock. These issues were common to most local authorities. Nonetheless he was confident that any eligible resident who applied for a grant for eligible works and who could pay their contribution to the scheme would receive a grant..

A question was raised over the social housing in the borough managed by Regenda and the influence of the council over the energy efficiency ratings of social housing. Mark explained that the council had a partnership board with Regenda, and was pleased that they had been able to successfully complete the upgrade of 114 homes using funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. They had been due to roll out phase two which would have extended the scheme, but this had been stalled due to funding issues. If there were issues with energy efficiency ratings in social housing, the council had the same enforcement powers on social landlords as they did private landlords but he was confident in the work of Regenda in addressing such issues without the need for enforcement action.

A question was raised on whether tenants were experiencing section 21 evictions if they reported their landlord over not meeting energy efficiency standards.

Mark explained that the council received relatively few complaints from tenants unless there was a serious problem; he believed that tenants were generally cautious in terms of their tenancy security.

The Chair thanked Mark Broadhurst for his attendance at the meeting.

20 Updates to the Overview and Scrutiny Article and Procedure Rules

The Corporate Director Resources (and Section 151 Officer) submitted a report informing members of updates to parts 2.10 and 4.05 relating to the Overview and Scrutiny in the Constitution.

The Democratic Services Officer, Daphne Courtenage, introduced the report. She explained to members that following the commissioning of the Climate Change Sub-Committee, officers noticed that sections of parts 2.10 and 4.05 were out of date in terms of relevant legislation, and also wanted to enshrine the procedures for future sub-committees.

Councillor Fail asked that the wording on the call-in request form be amended as he felt the use of “objection” was too strong. The DSO agreed to amend the wording.

The committee otherwise approved the suggested updates and agreed to recommend it to Full Council for approval at the next available meeting.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2023/24 – update report

The Corporate Director Resources (and Section 151 Officer) submitted a report updating the committee about the delivery of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2023/24.

The Democratic Services Officer, Daphne Courtenage, introduced the report. She gave verbal updates on the items that members had raised at the previous meeting.

She explained that due to matters outside the council's control, the paused work on the Poulton to Fleetwood railway line as well as the Tourism Strategy review were being recommended to be taken off the paused work list as it was unlikely that the committee would receive any updates on these in this municipal year. However, there was to be an update at the next committee meeting on the Leisure Activity Provision.

The DSO also recommended to the committee that they move the Integrated Health and Care system items from the October meeting to January, to allow for more time to formulate questions to the invited guests but to also allow for more time to be dedicated to the refreshed Business Plan expected at the next meeting.

She also reminded members that recommendation 2.1 of the report asked members to consider their desired areas of work for the remainder of 2023/24.

Following discussion, three topics were suggested for future reviews:

- Citizens Advice Lancashire West contract
- Housing options
- Tourism

The DSO agreed to take the suggested topics and gather more information to present to the committee and bring a draft scoping document to a future meeting.

The committee agreed to move the Integrated Health and Care systems items to the January meeting and to remove the Poulton to Fleetwood railway and Tourism Strategy reviews from the paused work list.

The meeting started at 5.59 pm and finished at 7.23 pm.

Date of Publication: 11 September 2023