

CUMBERLAND SHADOW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Shadow Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 21 December 2022 at 10.30 am at Flensburg Room, Civic Centre, Carlisle, CA3 8QG

PRESENT:

Cllr T Allison
Cllr R Betton
Cllr M Eldon
Cllr J Ghayouba
Cllr J Grisdale
Cllr M Hawkins (Chair)
Cllr L Jones-Bulman
Cllr L Patrick
Cllr S Pollen
Cllr A Pratt (Vice-Chair)
Cllr G Troughton
Cllr H Tucker

Officers in attendance:

Mr A Seekings	-	Interim Chief Executive for Cumberland Council
Ms C Nicholson	-	Interim Section 151 Officer for Cumberland Council
Ms H Younger	-	LGR Programme Manager (Cumbria County Council)
Ms L Davidson	-	ICT Programme Manager (Cumbria County Council)
Mr Robinson	-	Assistant Director for Transformation (Cumbria County Council)
Ms R Jones	-	Policy and Scrutiny Officer (Carlisle City Council)
Mr J Rasbash	-	Policy and Scrutiny Officer (Cumbria County Council)
Miss R Blaney	-	Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (Copeland Borough Council)

Councillor Lisa Brown (Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Portfolio Holder for Governance and Thriving Communities), Councillor Barbara Cannon (Portfolio Holder for Financial Planning and Assets) and Councillor Chris Southward (Portfolio Holder for Digital Connectivity and Customer Focus) were also in attendance.

PART 1 ITEMS CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Mallinson and H Davison and T Boustead.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

18. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the press and public not be excluded from the meeting for any items of business on this occasion.

19. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20. FINANCE UPDATE

The Committee considered a verbal update and presentation from the Cumberland Chief Executive, Cumberland Section 151 Officer, the Deputy Leader (Statutory) and the Portfolio Holder for Financial Planning and Assets on the proposal harmonisation of Council Tax, the proposed question for consultation and key principal increases.

A member asked if using the middle, rather than the highest or lowest position, had been investigated. It was confirmed that, as per legislation, the highest and lowest were investigated to form an average.

Members had a discussion regarding the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, agreed by the Cumberland Shadow Executive, to protect the most vulnerable residents. As well as evaluating the average Band D, keeping in mind the Cost of Living Crisis, as proposed for harmonisation from day one with Council Tax increasing by 4.99% in the following years.

A five minute break allowed time for the Section 151 Officer to calculate what the proposed average would look like in other Bands.

On resumption of the meeting, it was agreed that the Section 151 Officer would send out a briefing note following the meeting with all the discussed information,

including the estimate for how many properties are in the lower bands and other areas future income could be provided from.

A member asked what the Executive and Senior Leadership Team were doing, apart from reviewing Council Tax, for Cumberland's finances. The Chief Executive confirmed that they are constantly reviewing the budget, with a process in place for once Directors and Assistant Directors are appointed to allow them to balance their budgets appropriately, with help from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the district finance teams. The aim being to deliver on savings, maximise savings, deliver on efficiency and maximise service delivery.

A member asked about extra help being offered to residents in addition to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Deputy Leader confirmed that Cumberland would be following the current sovereign authority approaches, such as the support for Free School Meals and the No Child Goes Hungry Scrutiny Review by the County, with the aim of identifying best practice in terms of providing people with early help in the future.

Members discussed the budget and possible issues with it being highlighted that the Executive are working on the budget, with further information to be provided from the consultation responses and an in-depth look into the provided settlement, with the budget proposals coming to Scrutiny in February.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the officers and Portfolio Holders for their update.

RESOLVED that,

- a) The proposed consultation option of harmonisation from day one for year one is agreed.
- b) The Section 151 Officer provide the Committee with the agreed additional information via the agreed upon briefing note.

[Councillor T Allison left the meeting at 11:37]

21. LGR PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT

The LGR Programme Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the report and highlighted the main points of the report, including staff allocation, the ICT focus, additional pressures and the Implementation Reserve. The Assistant Director for Transformation and ICT Programme Manager then provided a further in-depth ICT update.

A member asked about staff allocation and if there had been any concerns raised, either individually or via a union representative. The LGR Programme Manager noted that discussions were being and individual views sought. The County Council's Assistant Director for Transformation highlighted the position for his team and the Interim Chief Executive noted that there had only been a handful of appeals against allocation decisions, between ten and twenty out of 9,000 staff but also commented that they were aware that some staff were accepting of the decisions

even if they were not happy about it and that it would be an ongoing effort of the Senior Leadership Team to make sure staff are supported appropriately.

A discussion was had regarding the Implementation Reserve Budget, including; the amount in the budget (£18.92m), the amount allocated to services (£18.6m), the amount already spent (£5.6), the ongoing pressures, the process for reviewing the allocation to account for the pressures, the challenge and check process and how comfortable the team are with being able to achieve all the necessary elements with the reserve budget with the LGR Programme Manager assuring the Committee that the Budget is constantly under review and all aspects will be provided within the budget.

Members asked about risk of redundancies; the LGR Programme Manager assured the Committee that there are currently no plans for either compulsory or voluntary redundancy, until after the TUPE process and there is a policy in place, although the Interim Chief Executive did note that redundancy prior to 1st April 2023 is possible under exceptional circumstances.

A member asked about disaggregation of staff from hosted services and if there was a register of possible grants available for people to see. The LGR Programme Manager noted that they were balancing the concerns of nervous/anxious staff and the need to still provide good services that are safe and legal from day one. The LGR Programme Manager advised that a colleague would be able to collate a list of grants which could be circulated, the Scrutiny Officers agreed to follow this up.

Members discussed the individual risks highlighted within the report, with the LGR Programme Manager noting that some risks had been completed since the report had been compiled and updated the Committee on their state.

A member asked about difficulties with senior manager recruitment and possible incentives. The LGR Programme manager commented that they were unable to say much due to the recruitment of senior managers currently taking place but the Portfolio Holder for Digital Connectivity and Customer Focus did note that there was currently multiple external applications showing interest in various posts.

Members discussed the previous cyber attack in Copeland and potential risks for Cumberland. The Assistant Director for Transformation noted that there is a risk for Cumberland, but as highlighted by the Interim Chief Executive, cyber-attacks are the single biggest corporate risk for any council. The committee were also informed that there is a report on cyber security going to the Chief Executives in January and that the Assistant Director for Transformation would bring it to Scrutiny in February with the LGR Update.

[The Committee took a ten minute break and Councillor M Eldon left the meeting at 12:36]

The Committee discussed the budget for ICT, the issues regarding system suppliers, licenses, the amount of technical work still to be done and how the outstanding ICT risks are mainly highlighted in red on the risk matrix to show that they are still a priority but that they are all progressing and all missed deadlines

have been due to either unforeseen circumstances, such as imported equipment being held at customs, or because the initial register deadline date was created as a general idea rather than a guarantee.

[Councillors S Pollen and R Betton left at 13:35 and 13:41 respectively]

A member asked about the whether staff email addresses would need to change after 1 April, so that they identify as being from 'Cumberland'. The Assistant Director for Transformation explained that technical work is being done to allow for staff emails to be shown as 'Cumberland' while the official email identity is being created. In the meantime, he added that they are working to make sure that emails to staff using their old addresses will still get through.

[As the meeting passed the three hours mark, the Chair took a vote on suspending standing orders and continuing the meeting which was seconded by Councillor Ghayouba and agreed by the rest of the Committee]

A member asked if LGR caused a vulnerability with systems, if lessons had been learnt from other councils that had undergone the process and what should be done regarding old equipment from sovereign councils. The Assistant Director for Transformation noted that there were risks and that the main lesson learnt was to not rush the process and that work is being done with the National Cyber Security Centre to help with that. As for the equipment, the Assistant Director for Transformation explained that any unused/old equipment should be returned to the sovereign councils and they will be reused appropriately and that transitional work is being done to get to one set of equipment per person (staff or councillor).

A member asked about Liquidlogic software. The Assistant Director for Transformation explained that they were in discussions with the supplier and seeking legal advice to get the best system possible so that it will be practical, safe, and legal for day one with back up plans being put in place to cover all circumstances and to ensure that there are no data breaches or issues for day one.

RESOLVED that,

- a) The report details and key points included within section 3 of the report be noted.
- b) The Scrutiny Officers contact the relevant officer to circulate the grant list as requested.
- c) The cyber security report be brought to Scrutiny in February.

22. SCRUTINY OVERVIEW AND WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered a report by the Scrutiny Officers which provided an overview of matters related to the Committee's work, together with the current version of the Scrutiny Work Programme.

A member requested that a copy of the draft calendar of meetings for 2023/24 be provided with the draft constitution. Scrutiny Officers agreed that an example of the

draft calendar of meetings for 2023/24 could be brought to the meeting for the Committee to review and discuss.

The Committee discussed working on the future work programme at the next meeting, looking at post-Vesting Day, with being more informed about the structure of Scrutiny moving forward as the current programme stops in March 2023.

RESOLVED that,

- a) The items on the most recent Forward Plan of Key Decisions be noted
- b) The updated on Scrutiny Arrangements for Cumberland Council be noted
- c) The current work programme, work planning activity and comment on the programme, in particular items for the next Committee meeting be noted.
- d) An example of the draft calendar of meetings for 2023/24 be added onto the agenda for the next meeting.

23. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 1 February 2023 at Allerdale House, Workington, CA14 3YJ

The meeting ended at 2.07 pm