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# RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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**Thursday, 16th March, 2023**

**Present:** Councillors Carole Haythornthwaite, Andrew Clegg, Paddy Short (Vice Chair), Noordad Aziz and Terry Hurn, Judith Addison and Peter Edwards

**In Attendance:** Councillors Miles Parkinson and Joyce Plummer.

**Apologies:** Councillors Patrick McGinley, Doug Hayes, Dominik Allen, Ken Moss and Loraine Cox  
Co-optees Doug Hayes and Ken Moss

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## **323 Apologies for absence, Substitutions, Declarations of Interest and Dispensations**

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dominik Allen, Loraine Cox and Patrick McGinley. Councillor Judith Addison substituted for Councillor Dominik Allen. Councillor Peter Edwards substituted for Councillor Loraine Cox. Apologies were also received from Co-opted Members Ken Moss and Doug Hayes.

There were no declarations of interests or dispensations.

## **324 Minutes of Last Meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2023 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

The Chair raised a question. He said he had been sent a follow up question from a member of the public to a question they submitted to the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Budget Meeting. The Leader of the Council indicated that he would be happy to respond. The question and response are outlined below:

Co-opted member Ken Moss states that Hyndburn Leisure do not receive a management fee from HBC to provide services. Can clarification be sought as on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022 the sum of £235k was paid to Hyndburn Leisure titled a management charge?

The Leader responded. In 2009, the annual management fee paid by the Council to Hyndburn Leisure was £1.28 million. Around this time, the Council committed to reducing the management fee paid to the Trust gradually to zero. 2021/22 was the first year Hyndburn Leisure operated with no annual management fee from the Council. The year on year reductions to the management fee have provided cumulative savings for the Council of over £9 million. In December 2022, I made an announcement at Cabinet that due to the unprecedented increases in utility costs (in particular the costs to power a Leisure Centre and heat a swimming pool) the Council would provide Hyndburn Leisure with a one off £235k to help cover the increased utility costs. This would mean Hyndburn Leisure could avoid large price increases for its users, ensuring the burden of increased utility costs is not passed on to the residents of Hyndburn when using local leisure facilities.

The Chair indicated that there was also a second question, but as this related to the Levelling Up Project and we would refer this question to the Special Scrutiny Committee. The Chair thanked the Leader for his response.

The Chair proposed a minor amendment to the minutes of the meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> February. Co-opted Members Ken Moss and Paul Barton had not been included in the attendance list and were present at the meeting. He asked that the minutes be amended to reflect this.

**Resolved - That the minutes from the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2023 be approved as a correct record with the above mentioned amendment to the attendance list.**

### **325 Smart Working Strategy - Review of Progress**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Joyce Plummer and Kirsten Burnett, Head of Policy and OD to the meeting to present on this item. Councillor Plummer presented the report.

The Committee has asked to review progress on the Smart Working Strategy which was implemented in February 2022. The report provided will:

- outline current working arrangements;
- explain future plans to deliver the Smart Working Strategy; and
- consider the wider context around working trends.

During periods of the pandemic, the legal requirement for staff to work from home where possible, or comply with social distancing rules at work meant that staff had to adapt very rapidly. There were changes made across all teams. We all saw how the Council stepped up to not only continue providing essential services, but also additional help, such as working with the Hyndburn Hub or issuing vast amounts of new business support grants.

Like many organisations, we have looked at what lessons we can learn, how we can keep the “best bits” of those new ways of working. After working with a cross-party group of members, and asking officer and trade unions to develop the policies needed to underpin this, Cabinet agreed a “Smart Working Policy” just over a year ago. This sets out key principles.

This is not something that is finished – it is an ongoing piece of work, looking at how teams can work in such a way that responds to changing customer need, supports staff who are learning, promotes good communication, helps us recruit, and keeps us in a position where we could quickly step up to any emerging needs.

The report outlines some of the actions that have been taken since the Smart Working Strategy was agreed, and what else is planned. It includes feedback from staff and elected members, and data showing how we deal with customer contact.

In terms of hybrid working, where some of our staff are able to work part of their week from home, the feedback is generally positive, with a number of benefits, such as a perception of increased productivity. There are also a number of points where this brings a risk, and managers are having to ensure that there is no detriment to team dynamics and customer service.

Future technology improvements, such as having desk phones routed to laptops more widely, will all help.

Hybrid working in particular is still a fairly new way of working for many organisations, especially in local government, although it has long been around in some places, such as Lancashire County Council and many government departments. As research and good practice examples emerge, it will be important for us to keep learning and adapting.

The Smart Working Strategy Group welcomes suggestions from the Committee to help inform its future work.

Kirsten Burnett then spoke and drew attention to the following:

- Home working
- Home working in other organisations being ongoing since well before the pandemic
- Impacts of the pandemic
- Discussions with elected members
- Investment in technology to facilitate smart working
- Recruitment difficulties
- Use of agency workers where vacancies cannot be filled

Kirsten said that the Smart Working Group meet regularly, respond to any issues and adapt quickly if and when necessary. She welcomes the committee asking to scrutinise this item and is open to any feedback.

The Chair thanked Councillor Plummer and Kirsten Burnett. He said he is in full support of a flexible working approach and knows that it has almost become essential in order to recruit staff into the sector. He also highlighted the environmental benefits of remote working.

Councillor Judith Addison said some members of the public have had issues contacting officers. Kirsten said that there should be no difference in customer service no matter where the officer is working, so this should not be an issue. She also said that issues with certain departments did not mean there was an issue with customer service as a whole. Different departments across the Council have different service needs and will face differences in adapting to the smart working policy, but any issues are identified via the Smart Working Group.

IT are also working on a phone system which will route calls through officer's laptops.

**Resolved - That the Smart Working Strategy be noted.**

### **326 Leisure Transformation Update**

The Chair welcomed Lyndsey Sims, Chief Executive of Hyndburn Leisure who would be presenting a report on Leisure Transformation. The presentation slides were included in the agenda and covered the following topics:

- History of Hyndburn Leisure
- Refocussed work streams on non-leisure activity including Hyndburn Hub, HAF and Sport Development
- Close working with partners
- Integrated health and care
- Increases in participation across swimming and fitness
- High number of young/local employees
- High outside commissions and grants achieved including HAF, which distributes over £300k to other organisations
- Workforce development

- Decarbonisation and Hyndburn Leisure Centre now operating with no gas.

Lyndsey then focussed on current progress on the Leisure Transformation projects, which is split into phases 1-4.

Phase 1 included the capital works at Clayton Civic Hall, funded with a range of external grants and now complete, providing a home for the successful Clayton Amateur Boxing Club. The decarbonisation of Hyndburn Leisure Centre was also in phase 1. The £2 million scheme funded from the Public Sector Decarbonisation fund is now complete, removing outdated gas boilers and replaced with 2 air source heat pumps and 560 PV solar panels. She also referred to close working at 2 schools, Accrington Academy and Hyndburn Academy. In addition, phase 1 included beginning to develop a vision for the future use of Mercer Hall.

Phase 2 is now in progress, the first element of which was to apply to Sport England's Strategic Facility Fund. The EOI was submitted in September 2022 and a full application has now been submitted, which the outcome expected imminently. Initially, Sport England were encouraging bids for £1.5 million for the planned new centre and £0.5million towards the redevelopment of Hyndburn Leisure Centre. However, Sport England's interest now lies mainly with the new centre and they have encouraged a £2 million bid.

Pre-construction works have begun and the planning application submitted. As part of phase 2 and application is also being made to the Community Ownership Fund for Bank Mill Centre. The remainder of phase 2 is as follows:

- Develop and submit a capital funding application to the Youth Investment Fund for Hyndburn Leisure Centre – Application being prepared to submit in June 2023.
- Develop and submit a capital funding application to the Football Foundation for Wilson Playing Fields – at early stages of identifying investment opportunities
- Work with Hyndburn Academy to identify opportunities to develop the sport & leisure facilities at the Academy – new gym opening in April 2023
- Establish a task group to develop a vision for the future of Mercer Hall – in progress

Lyndsey thanked the committee for inviting her to present and said that she welcomed any questions.

Councillor Judith Addison asked about a cultural strategy for Hyndburn Leisure. Lyndsey responded that culture and heritage will have a section in Hyndburn Leisure's overall strategy, and the Council has committed to a borough wide culture strategy which Hyndburn Leisure will support.

Councillor Noordad Aziz said that the latest information from the planning portal is that Sport England have objected to the planning application for Wilsons, and wanted to know if this effected the potential £2million bid. Lyndsey said they are aware of the objection, this is a separate department of Sport England and she was confident they could resolve this objection, along with the other objections to the application.

The Chair praised the work carried out by Lyndsey and her team, and welcomed the new facility development which will benefit many residents from across Hyndburn. He said he was particularly supportive of the green aspects of the building, which is planned to be carbon neutral.

The Leader of the Council said he understood there was disappointment over Mercer Hall but committed to repurposing it and was hopeful of some local ideas coming forward. He will be attending a local CAG meeting soon.

**Resolved - That the report be noted.**

### **327 Transparency Code Report**

Councillor Joyce Plummer and Martin Dyson, Executive Director for Resources presented this item. Councillor Plummer highlighted the following:

- Local Government Transparency Code 2015 requirements
- The quarterly information published by the Council in compliance with the code including expenditure over £500 (The Council actually publishes over £250), procurement card transactions, invitations to tender and the contracts register
- Annual information published in compliance with the code including land and housing stock, grants to organisations, organisation chart, trade union time, parking, senior salaries, constitution, pay multiple and counter fraud work

Councillor Plummer explained that the Council decided to publish expenditure over £250 rather than £500 to be more open and transparent. Data is extracted from the Council's financial management system of all payments to suppliers for goods and services within a chosen month. For data protection reasons, the data is reviewed and personal data is excluded. The code specifies the data fields which must be published and the Council is compliant with this.

Councillor Plummer also provided an explanation of the procurement card information which must be published quarterly. There is also a specific section on procurement, where the Council must publish details of every invitation to tender for contracts to provide goods and/or services, and any contracts awarded, with a value that exceeds £5,000. The Council's finance system does not currently allow for this to be produced automatically and therefore the Policy Team collate the information on a quarterly basis from service managers before publishing this data.

The Chair thanked Councillor Plummer for the report and invited committee members to ask questions.

Councillor Judith Addison said that the published expenditure over £250 can often be difficult for the public to understand and asked if it could be published in a more meaningful way. Martin Dyson responded. He said that the information we publish is compliant with the transparency code. Publishing information beyond this for the thousands of transactions the Council makes would require a significant amount of manual input. If members of the public cannot find the information they are looking for, they can follow the Council's Freedom of Information process to request more specific information.

Councillor Caroline Haythornthwaite asked why the Council publishes expenditure over £250 rather than the mandatory £500. Martin Dyson responded, and said that publishing expenditure over £250 was best practice.

A question was asked regarding the costs of agency staff, some of which can be seen in the appendix. Kirsten Burnett responded. She said she wished to assure the committee that the Council only use agency staff were it is absolutely essential. There is a difficulty in local government recruitment at present.

Councillor Judith Addison asked how we account for section 106s monies. Martin Dyson explained that this was not part of the transparency code. The Leader of the Council said this information can be requested from the Chief Planning Officer.

The Chair thanked Councillor Plummer and Martin Dyson for the report, and all those who contributed to the discussion on the item.

Signed:.....

Date: .....

Chair of the meeting  
At which the minutes were confirmed