
COMMUNITIES AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 13th December, 2023

Present: Councillor Peter Edwards (in the Chair),
Councillors Dominik Allen, Carole Haythornthwaite, Scott Brerton,
Heather Anderson and Caroline Montague (Vice Chair)

Cooptees: June Harrison and Joan West

In Attendance: Councillor Steven Smithson

Apologies: Councillor Colin McKenzie and Jean Battle (Co-optee)

231 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

There were apologies for absence from Cllr Colin McKenzie and Jean Battle, co-optee.

232 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations.

233 Minutes of Last Meeting

To receive the Minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th September for approval as a correct record.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.

234 Chair's Update

The Chair provided a verbal update. This item is to update the committee on any matters previously sent to Cabinet, Council or elsewhere for consideration, or any other relevant matters the Chair wishes to raise.

There was one update which is to inform the Committee that in November, Full Council appointed June Harrison, Jean Battle, Joan West and Stewart Eaves as co-optees to this committee. The Chair welcomed them to the committee and informed members that co-optees have all the same rights as members except for voting rights.

The item was noted.

235 Citizens Advice

The Chair welcomed David Oglaza, Chief Executive and Nick Pilling, Vice Chair of the Board of Citizens Advice East Lancashire.

Mr Pilling spoke initially and informed the committee of the recent merger of local Citizens Advice services to form Citizens Advice East Lancashire. He assured the committee that

local branding and location will remain the same and there has been little impact on the community due to the merger. Mr Pilling was hopeful that the merger will help with future project funding. He also highlighted the importance of local authority funding for the service and thanked the Council for their grant. Although local authority funding only makes up 20-25% of their total, it helps leverage additional funding to keep the service running.

Mr Pilling ended by highlighting how the Council grant to Citizens Advice is used to help meet some of its own corporate objectives, including reducing costs associated with homelessness and helping people meet their Council tax obligations.

Mr Oglaza summarised the report and highlighted the following:

- 1642 Hyndburn Residents Advised (1832 Rossendale)
- Benefit gains - over £250,000 of additional income brought into Hyndburn via new benefit claims, winning appeals, successfully challenging decisions
- Debts written off via insolvency options - £302,114
- Debt Repayments rescheduled - £93,105
- Social Value - For every £1 invested in Citizens Advice, we've delivered over £14 in public value, through economic and social benefits. We save government and public services money by helping stop problems occurring or escalating, we reduce pressure on public services like health, housing or out-of-work benefits.
- Launched a dedicated food and fuel voucher line in October 2022 and receive over
- 200 calls a week from Hyndburn & Rossendale residents wanting help with food or a fuel voucher

The Committee asked the following questions, and the answers given are provided.

1. Do other Council's contribute to the service?

Answer – Yes. Rossendale, Pendle and Burnley Council's provide similar grants. In addition, until recently Rossendale Council provided office accommodation. Ribble Valley Council also provide a small grant.

2. I'm concerned regarding the 2000 residents who were unable to get through to the service. Why is this?

Answer – The simple answer is there is too much demand for the service. There is a new system in place which is helping and residents can also use the website.

3. Are people aware of the opening hours of the service and is there demographic data of those service users?

Answer – We publicise the service and this is something also that Councillors can help us with. We do have some demographic data, some of which was included in the report. PIPs is the most frequent area of advice given.

4. Can Councillors be provided with some info that they can share with residents?

Answer – Yes, I will provide info to the Scrutiny Officer for circulation amongst Councillors.

5. The social value added seems excellent value. What more could the Council do to support the service.

Answer – Firstly, the current grant is essential and we would be hopeful that the Council continue to provide this. We would also welcome other opportunities of working together, perhaps in terms of accommodation.

6. Could additional funding help?

Answer – Additional funding would help and could potentially be used to train more volunteers.

Cllr Scott Brerton proposed two recommendations, which were approved by the Committee.

Resolved - That Cabinet considers the following recommendations of the Committee.

- (i) That Cabinet agrees to include a minimum grant in line with the previous year for Citizens Advice East Lancashire in its 2024/25 budget proposals (Note that actual approval of the grant will be subject to Council approval of the 2024/25 Revenue Budget); and;**
- (ii) That Cabinet considers an increase in the grant to Citizen’s Advice East Lancashire in its 2024/25 budget proposals due to the current demand on the service from Hyndburn residents.**

236 Household Support Fund Update

The Chair welcomed Lyndsey Sims, Chief Executive of Hyndburn Leisure to present this report. She informed the Committee that Hyndburn Leisure delivered this service on behalf of the Council and that she had requested to bring this report to Scrutiny.

Lyndsey summarised the report and highlighted the following:

- Delivery of the service and administration
- Alignment to other hardship funds and services
- Eligibility
- Application process
- Priority applicants
- Support provided
- Food
- Energy and water
- Essentials linked to energy and water
- Other essentials
- Housing costs
- Advice services
- Grants to Community, Voluntary and Faith Sector
- Evaluation of the scheme
- Community feedback

The Chair thanked Lyndsey for the report. The following questions were submitted by the Committee and responded to.

1. Did community organisations apply for funding and how was this promoted to them?

Answer – Yes. Availability of funding was promoted extensively, particularly through the Community Action Network.

2. How are people paid the grants?

Answer – This varies. Energy bills are often paid directly to the supplier. Food is generally provided via supermarket vouchers.

3. Could money be spent more locally by not limiting food payments to vouchers from two supermarkets?

Answer – If there is another round of funding, it is something that could be looked into.

The Chair thanked Lyndsey for the report.

The report was noted.

237 Holiday Activity Fund Update

Lyndsey Sims introduced this item. The Holiday Activity Fund went through open procurement via LCC and Hyndburn Leisure were appointed to deliver the service, which is moving into the final year of the current contract.

The Chair welcomed Aisha Brotherton, Business Development Manager at Hyndburn Leisure to present this item.

Aisha presented and highlighted the following:

- Funding allocations
- Eligibility criteria
- Programme outcomes
- Application process
- 2023 HAF providers and provider standards
- Budget allocation
- Attendances

The Chair thanked Aisha for the presentation and invited questions from Committee members. The following questions were asked and responded to:

1. Can academies refer eligible students into the scheme?

Answer – Yes, through the same channels as local authority managed schools.

2. Use of the scheme is lower than I would have expected, are there any reasons for this?

Answer – Signups are usually very high and the scheme is close to capacity, however, as is often the case with free activities, no shows or last minute drop outs can be high which affects the numbers.

3. How do providers register for the scheme?

Answer – There is a process which must be followed and we promote this widely to organisations across the borough.

The presentation and responses to questions were noted.

238 Update on the Council's Pest Control Service

The Chair welcomed Cllr Steven Smithson and Craig Haraben, Head of Environmental Services to present this report.

Cllr Smithson thanked the Committee for the opportunity to present, and informed the Committee that this report was its request approximately one year ago. Cllr Smithson drew attention to the following highlights:

- Since the changes to charges for dealing with rodents were made, the waiting list has reduced from 5 weeks to 2-5 days
- There has been a reduction from 40% to 2.3% “no access” appointments
- The service has received excellent customer feedback, including from tenants in the rented sector who are advised to contact their landlords
- The service has received national recognition

The Committee asked questions on the following topics and Mr Haraben and Cllr Smithson responded:

- Use of bait for catching rodents
- Responsibility for £30 fee if rodents are specially spotted on a property
- Comparison of the number of jobs carried out with previous years
- Any evidence of growing rat problems in the Borough
- Issues with problem landlords

The Chair thanked Cllr Smithson and Mr Haraben for the report and responses to questions.

The report was noted.

Signed:.....

Date:

Chair of the meeting
At which the minutes were confirmed