

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT TEAM
HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, NELSON
ON 18TH JULY, 2017**

PRESENT –

Councillor K. Turner – Chairman (In the Chair)

Councillors

*W. Blackburn
S. Cockburn-Price
D. Lord
B. Newman
S. Wicks*

Officers in attendance

<i>P. Mousdale</i>	<i>Corporate Director</i>
<i>S. Simm</i>	<i>Revenues Manager</i>
<i>L. Rowland</i>	<i>Committee Administrator</i>

(Apologies for absence were received from the Worship the Mayor (Councillor D. Whalley) and Councillors G. Adam, N. Ahmed, N. McEvoy and D. Whipp.)



The following persons attended and spoke on the item indicated –

<i>Mrs Laskey</i>	<i>Review Planning – Council Tax Enforcement Agent Fees and Charges</i>
<i>Mohammad Khan</i>	

13. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded of the legal requirements concerning the declaration of interests and that whipping declarations were also required.

14. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

15. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd May, 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Further to this item being deferred at the last meeting, Members were asked to consider the appointment of a Vice-Chairman of the Team for the municipal year 2017/18.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Wayne Blackburn be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Team for the municipal year 2017/18.

17. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Members considered a report from the Council's Lead for Community Safety on the work of the Community Safety Partnership over the last six months.

The report provided information on current crime and disorder trends; Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) – community protection and victim support; organised crime groups; road safety; scam awareness; community cohesion action and Prevent; and the Lancashire Victim Service (LVS).

An update was also provided on a review of alley gates in the borough; the new CCTV hub in Blackburn; and work to retain additional Domestic Violence Services for young people. Leaflets on the LVS's Domestic Violence and Nest Services (Young People's victim service) were circulated at the meeting.

Particular reference was made to the crime statistics which showed an increased number of crimes in all categories in both the three month period April to June 2017 and the 12 month period April to March, compared with the same periods last year. This was an area of concern for the Team.

A further concern was the continued problem with 101 response times and the chance that this could lead to crimes going unreported.

RESOLVED

That Inspector Andy Winter and the Council's Lead for Community Safety be asked to attend a future meeting of the Team to discuss the plans and priorities for policing in Pendle.

18. REVIEW PLANNING

Council Tax Enforcement Agent Fees and Charges

Further to a review of council tax enforcement agent fees and charges being included in the Team's work programme, the Revenues Manager presented a briefing note for consideration.

The topic had been chosen for review following a suggestion from Mrs Laskey, a local resident, whose work involved helping and advising those in financial difficulty. Mrs Laskey explained that, when council tax payments were missed, fees to enforcement agents increased the cost further, escalating the issue for vulnerable people. She acknowledged that the Council already did a lot to help those in difficulty, but hoped that more could be done. It was suggested that Attachments of Benefits (AOB) or Earnings (AOE) should be implemented to avoid unnecessary fees being incurred.

Mr Khan who worked in the same field, was of the same view. He was particularly concerned over those with severe mental impairment and other vulnerabilities, especially when the debt was referred to Enforcement Agents.

The report explained in detail the collection and recovery process in relation to council tax and non-domestic rate debts. This included information on the timescales, and payment options given prior to any enforcement action being taken. It was explained that accompanying leaflets were sent with reminders and summonses which promoted Council Tax Support and signposted customers to various advice agencies. This documentation was currently under review.

Details of the enforcement fees charged were also provided. These fees were set nationally in legislation and could not be changed by a decision of this Council.

In Pendle approximately 4% of cases had been referred to Enforcement Agents. Prior to this course of action, Attachment of Benefits or Earnings would be applied where practical and payment arrangements would be entered into where appropriate.

He explained that there was a cap on the amount that could be deducted via an Attachment of Benefits. The current amount was £3.70 per week, increasing by five pence every year. It was therefore not always practical to apply this remedy, particularly when the charge payer's weekly liability exceeded this amount.

The amount that could be deducted through Attachment of Earnings varied according to the net weekly or monthly earnings of the employee. Details of the percentage amounts deductible for each earnings bracket were attached as an appendix to the briefing note. Again, this was not always a practical method of recovery.

It was agreed that a more personal approach would be of benefit to many people, but it was accepted that there was no additional resources available to facilitate this.

It was suggested by Mrs Laskey that some councils had taken the decision to no longer use Enforcement Agents to collect council tax debt. Members of the Team had differing views on this. The Revenues Manager advised that it was not something he was aware of and agreed to make enquiries to see if that was the case.

RESOLVED

That the Revenues Manager be asked to submit copies of the existing and revised documentation to a future meeting of this Team to allow for comparison and comment prior to final publication.

19. POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE

Councillor D. Whipp, the Council's representative on the Lancashire Police and Crime Panel submitted an update on the work of the Panel, which had met once this municipal year.

He reported that new Chief Constable Andy Rhodes had given a short presentation to the meeting and referred to a review of the Neighbourhood Policing Model.

Issues discussed included the cost of officers being deployed to deal with fracking demonstrations on Preston New Road, the Fylde, Lancashire. It had been a significant drain on resources and was expected to cost £450,000 per month going forward. A joint letter with the Chief Constable was to be sent to the Home Office and it was predicted that the threshold for financial support from the Government would be triggered.

An increase in 999 calls and the time required for operators to deal with the calls had been an ongoing issue, as had problems with 101 response times. Concern had also been expressed about the review of front counter provision.

Future work included a review of the Commissioner's oversight of frontline policing, which was being led by Councillor Whipp.

RESOLVED

That a letter be sent to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government requesting that further consideration be given to allocating additional funding for the policing of the fracking demonstrations on Preston New Road, the Fylde, Lancashire.

20. LCC HEALTH SCRUTINY CO-OPTees REPORT

Councillor W. Blackburn, the Council's co-optee on the Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee reported that, due to the recent Parliamentary Election, the Health Scrutiny Committee had met only once in the last six months. This had been a workshop to discuss the plans for the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP).

The next meeting was scheduled for 24th July at which they would continue to look at the STP, as well as looking at how Chorley Hospital's Accident and Emergency Department was working.

21. HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

The draft minutes of a meeting of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel held on 21st June, 2017 were submitted for information.

22. WORK PLAN

The Team's work plan 2017/18 was submitted for information.

Further to the Team's review of youth engagement, the Chairman reported that he had been in contact with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kuorum, an organisation that had expressed an interest in helping the Council engage youth in politics. He proposed that the CEO be invited to the next meeting of the Team to do a presentation on its services. He advised that this would be at no cost to, or commitment from the Council.

Reference was also made to the Transport for the North programme which was looking at rail and road connectivity across the north of England. It was felt that this was an important issue for all members of the Council and, if not being discussed at the Executive, the matter be added to this Team's work programme for discussion at the next meeting.

RESOLVED

That –

- (1) if not scheduled for discussion at a future meeting of the Executive, the Transport for North programme be added to this Team's work programme and the CEO be invited to do a presentation on the proposals;

Scrutiny Management Team (18.07.2017)

- (2) the CEO of Kuorum be invited to the next meeting of this Team, to do a presentation on its services;
- (3) should it be agreed that the Transport for North programme be discussed by this Team, consideration be given to holding a special meeting to receive the two presentations referred to at (1) and (2) to which all Members be invited.

23. EXECUTIVE WORK PROGRAMME/FORWARD PLAN

The Executive Work Programme and Forward Plan for the four month period commencing 1st August, 2017 was submitted for consideration.

CHAIRMAN _____