



CORPORATE SELECT COMMITTEE AGENDA

Date: Monday, 10 June 2019

Time: 6.30 pm

Venue: Octagon Lounge, Pavilion Gardens, Buxton

Please find below an additional report which was unavailable when the agenda was published.

6. Bite Size Briefing (**Pages 3 - 18**)

**SIMON BAKER
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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Corporate Select Committee

“Bite Size Briefing”

Andrew Stokes

Executive Director (Transformation) & Chief Finance Officer



Corporate Select Committee

- Council's Decision Making Process
- Role of Select Committees
- Role of Corporate Select Committee
- Developing a Work Programme
- Role of Officers



Council

Sets the budget and policy framework

Executive
Decision
Making

Committees

Overview &
Scrutiny

The Executive
& Individual
Executive
Decisions

Select
Committees

Dev. Control
Licensing
Standards
Audit and Reg

Scrutiny



High Peak Borough Council
working for our community

Forward Plan

- Key Decisions due to be made by the Executive in the next three month period & updated monthly.
- “Key Decision” criteria:
 - Changes or additions to the budget and policy framework
 - A report likely to result in expenditure or savings which are significant having regard to the Council's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates.
 - Decision which affects communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards



Overview & Scrutiny

- Local Government Act 2000
- Overview & Scrutiny (Select) Committees:
 - Help shape Council policy
 - Hold the Executive to account
 - Consider matters affecting the Council's area or its inhabitants
 - Scrutinise services provided by our partners, such as Fire & Rescue Service and Police - invited to give evidence at Committee
- Select Committees do not have decision-making role



Corporate Select Committee

- The main overview & scrutiny (select) committee
- Remit includes:
 - Corporate plan
 - Budget
 - Council tax collection
 - Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
 - Local welfare benefits
 - Performance
 - Procurement
 - Staffing
 - Asset management
- Key areas of challenge: financial planning; performance management



Work Programme

- Select Committee work programme to be further developed
- Regular reports, e.g. medium term financial plan, financial & performance monitoring
- Focus on corporate priorities
- Link to Forward Plan of Decisions
- Develop further following priority setting day:
 - **16th July 1.00pm at Pavilion Gardens**



Task and Finish Groups

- Facility to establish “task and finish” groups
- Appointed to investigate, research and advise on a specific issue
- Report back to Committee with recommendations
- Constitution allows for maximum of two (per Committee) in any year and no more than one at a time



Role of Officers

- Executive Director allocated to each Select Committee – close working with Chairman & Vice-Chairman, agenda planning etc.
- Officers from service areas help provide research and information for topics on agendas
- Democratic Services team support each Committee



Questions



Questioning Styles

There is no one 'right way' to go about questioning. A mixed approach should be adopted incorporating a variety of questioning techniques. How witnesses are approached will depend on the nature of the topic and the kind of person being questioned.

Open questions – Open questions allow the witness open up and to share all the information they have. Encouraging the witness to elaborate early on will allow them to speak and will calm their nerves. This will help them to relax, and can be helpful in ensuring the witness will answer further questions in a more helpful manner.

Closed questions – Where a simple yes or no answer will suffice it is advisable to stick to closed questions (such as when checking a fact). Closed questions are harder to avoid and easier to challenge.

Useful phrases Did you ...? Have you told.....? 'What I think I'm hearing is... is that right?'

Reflecting Questions – These are used to clarify something which has been said, and/or to get the respondent to speak about a subject in more depth.

Useful phrases 'You said that...'' You sound as if ...' I get the feeling that'

Extending Questions – Extending questions invite the respondent to offer more information, and to elaborate on what they have already said.

Useful phrases 'How else could...?' 'Could you tell me more about..?'

Comparative Questions – These can be used when the scrutineer wants to compare situations (for example on a before and after basis)

Useful phrases 'What has it been like since...?' 'What difference has ...?'

Hypothetical Questions – The use of hypothetical frameworks allows the witness to answer a question from a safer theoretical position and may encourage them to explore issues more in-depth.

Rephrasing or paraphrasing – Another technique that can be used to clarify something that has been said by the witness, it may also encourage the witness to elaborate on their previous answer and provide more detail.

Useful phrases Are you saying that...?' 'Let me see if I understand the problem completely...'

Linking Questions – Linking questions rely on active listening on the part of the scrutineer (see below). By linking previous responses offered by the witness to other issues the scrutineer is able to demonstrate that he has valued the witness's input. This technique may then encourage the witness to offer further explanation.

Useful phrases-You mentioned earlier that...how would you....?

Questions to avoid:

- 'Double blind' questions such as "Have you stopped massaging the figures?"
- Biased questions with an inbuilt bias towards a particular perspective. A respondent then either has to accept the bias or challenge it and this could lead to an adversarial exchange.
- Leading questions that unfairly lead a respondent to a particular answer. Questions asking "What/When/How/Where" are not usually leading.
- Questions which might produce 'yes' or 'no' answers (unless you are seeking a definitive answer).
- Tag questions (i.e.) that end with 'wasn't it/won't they/isn't it'. With these you could be making an assertion in order to gain agreement or compliance
- Avoid making statements that might vaguely have a question at the end. Short and precise questions are much better.
- Avoid making assumptions in your questioning.

Finance Key Questions

- How will the budget reflect investments that are aimed at achieving longer-term savings – ‘invest to save’?
- What consideration has been given to maximising income (e.g. income from sales, fees and charges etc.)?
- What is the anticipated impact of efficiency targets on the budget and how is the council planning ahead to deal with the cumulative effects of efficiency targets?
- What is the anticipated impact of budget pressures on:
 - services
 - performance
 - clients/service users
 - partnerships and joint working
 - staffing levels
- What choices and options did you have when setting your budget targets?
- How were decisions arrived at in order to decide between options?
- How do your budget targets contribute to the achievement of corporate priorities?
- Is this external funding time-limited – if yes, have we got an exit strategy?
- Are we making full use of prudential borrowing and trading and charging powers?
- How can our income be increased in a sustainable way?
- How much of our budget is fixed – what do we have discretion over?
- Can you clarify how setting the budget is linked to medium term financial planning?
- How do we use the medium term financial strategy to decide on resource allocation to corporate and service priorities?
- Are the level of reserves appropriate and what is the logic behind that level?
- How reliable are these forecasts?
- What assumptions are these based on?
- What factors could have an adverse impact on these assumptions?

- What the reasons are for underspend?
- Why is a service overspending but not delivering on key indicators – is it due to high demand and or unforeseen costs?
- What actions are being taken to remedy the position and how robust are they?
- Are there emerging trends that we need to be concerned about?
- What can we learn from other authorities?

Performance Key Questions

Why is performance at the current level?

- Are we meeting our target?
- Why has the variance occurred?

What difference does it make?

- What are the implications of not meeting this target?
- Do resource levels need to be looked at?
- What impact will this have on service users, local people and partner agencies?
- How will this affect our corporate priorities?
- Have repeat complaint issues been addressed and lessons learned?
- Is there an impact on equalities, sustainability or efficiency?

How can we make sure that things get better?

- What performance is predicted for the next period?
- How can performance be improved (are additional resources or training required)?
- When will performance be back on track?
- Could other people be brought in to assist (internally or externally)?

What about missing data/the reliability of data submitted?

- What are the reasons for non-submission?
- What action is being taken to ensure that data is provided going forward?
- How has the data been collected and how reliable is this?

What do we do next?

- What decisions need to be taken?
- What are the risks involved?
- What can we learn from this for the future?

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