

INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Christine Bateson (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Phil Haseler, Shamsul Shelim, Gurch Singh and Helen Taylor

Also in attendance: Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra, Councillor Gerry Clark and Councillor Samantha Rayner

Officers: Andrew Durrant, Nikki Craig, Vanessa Faulkner, Alysse Strachan, Shilpa Manek and Oran Norris-Browne

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor's Luxton and Davey with Councillor's Shelim and Taylor substituting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th June 2021 were approved.

This was proposed by Councillor Haseler and seconded by Councillor Singh

Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Andrew Durrant (Executive Director of Place Services) began by stating that in terms of the Q1 Performance Report, the council was currently working to an interim strategy, which was adopted on the 30th July 2020. The date and performance report provided progress updates against key priorities in the interim strategy and the remainder of the report sets out performance and related commentary for metrics in the current performance management framework that were relevant to the panel's remit.

Andrew Durrant continued by stating that the council was currently developing a new corporate plan to succeed the interim strategy, and it had been agreed that performance reporting against the interim strategy, continued through to such a time as when the corporate plan was adopted, and a new performance management framework was approved.

Andrew Durrant noted that a metric related to highways was previously reported under the heading commissioning or commissioning infrastructure and this was now listed under neighbourhood services after the organisational and structural change which was in effect from April. Alysse Stracham had now been appointed as Head of Neighbourhood Services.

Andrew Durrant referred to table 2, page 13, which gave an overview of performance metrics versus set targets.

At the close of quarter one of 2021/22:

- 6 out of 8 performance metrics were meeting or exceeding set targets.

- 1 was just short of target but still within the accepted tolerance threshold.
- The remaining metric, which was volume of homeless households and temporary accommodation continued to be untargeted as the effects of the pandemic could still be felt in many areas.

Reflections on Q1 included the recovery strategy in terms of the successful initiative rolled out in Windsor using technology for good through the engagement tool 'Hello Lamppost'. This innovative platform let people talk to street objects and share their thoughts on what they wanted to see in their towns and then these comments were considered as part of the local recovery plan as it moved forwards.

The 'don't let your guard down campaign' was noted as now being well established and that people had become used to that brand, out and about in towns and it was providing reassurance to visitors returning to the borough's town centres. Town centre footfall trends had also risen steadily with the easing of restrictions. Page 26 demonstrated a further increase of over a million visitors across Windsor and Maidenhead for the month of June.

Andrew Durrant identified that time had elapsed since then, when now reporting on Q1, but the positive trend had continued over the summer and the data continued all the way through.

Andrew Durrant then discussed the RBWM recovery strategy and stated that it would continue to promote the commercial centres of the borough as a safe place to visit and focus on retaining local spend. The number of households where prevention duty had successfully ended was above target and this was even with a previously increased target to 17 per quarter this year when compared to 15 per quarter last year.

Councillor Taylor asked if the effects of covid 19 had been considered on these figures when comparing the figures from 2019/20 and 2020/21?

Andrew Durrant replied by stating that the year-on-year figure was generally compared, however it did consider periods of time where the pandemic had an impact. In June last year, the combined footfall for town centres was 500,000, whereas 2 years ago it was 1.2 million and 3 years ago it was 1.6 million. June 2021 saw just over 1 million.

Councillor Taylor referred to page 29 of the report with discussion on footfall.

Councillor Taylor asked whether the borough was receiving a complete picture in terms of its footfall. This was with reference to Ascot especially as there was no mechanism present to track footfall there. During the redevelopments of Maidenhead town centre, this was where residents may visit. Andrew Durrant noted that tracking footfall here could potentially be done through CCTV provision. He would provide an answer offline.

Andrew Durrant said that the feedback for the proposed technology advancements had been well received. Discussions were ongoing as to whether this technology could be integrated into Maidenhead town centre. This would be done through potential QR codes on building site boards, which would allow for resident interaction.

Councillor Singh asked about homeless households in temporary housing. Andrew Durrant would provide a response to this question offline. Councillor Singh also asked for clarity on planning applications and definitions of what was minor or major.

Andrew Durrant said that if there were 10 or more dwellings, then this is categorised as major. Planning applications were only just in the amber zone, and this has been partly due to an increased amount of staff vacancies placing extra strain upon the team.

Councillor Singh expressed his concern due to this being a positive section of the council and asked if Andrew Durrant had figures on this. Andrew Durrant would reply to this offline.

Councillor Singh expressed his concern with the agenda items and the level of scrutiny that was attached to them. Shilpa Manek (supporting clerk) stated that there was a new process in place where before items were brought to the agenda, members had to approach lead officers directly. The Chairman agreed with this stance.

The Chairman asked Andrew Durrant how many shops had closed in Windsor town centre. Andrew Durrant said that some smaller businesses had opened, which residents had enjoyed. He said that he would reply offline with some clarity around specific numbers.

Councillor Singh asked about the cost of car parking and resident discounts. He asked if there was any data showing what impact the loss of the advantage card parking discount has had on footfall in the borough. Andrew Durrant said that this was possible, however footfall was increasing and footfall now was now 500,000, split between Windsor and Maidenhead, whereas 3 years ago this was 537,000. Discussions were ongoing on how to best attract residents to the town centres, including through parking charges. Councillor Singh welcomed this.

Councillor Taylor asked if there were any statistics on empty units and businesses leaving and businesses entering in their place. Councillor Taylor asked if there were any trends here. Andrew Durrant replied by saying he would answer this offline.

Councillor Shelim asked about a specific issue behind the Guild Hall in Windsor. Andrew Durrant said he would investigate and reply to this offline.

Councillor Singh asked about town centre regenerations and if there were any plans in place to temporarily house retailers, whilst work was underway. Andrew Durrant replied by stating that these conversations would be underway with the developers and the borough. Greenspaces, box parks and temporary units were all under consideration.

ACTIONS:

Andrew Durrant to update the panel on:

- **How footfall would be calculated for places such as Ascot and are there any statistics for this**
- **Statistics on empty retail units and if there were any trends between businesses leaving and coming in?**
- **Statistical data for how many shops have closed in Windsor town centre**
- **Exact numerical figures for planning applications, opposed to a %**
- **An issue behind the Guild Hall in Windsor town centre, regarding a seating area**

- **A breakdown of the Numbers of households in temporary accommodation, including types of accommodation and whether in or out of Borough**
- **What the plan is to reduce the numbers quarter by quarter, how is this going to happen?**
- **The number of households on the housing list and further information about this**
- **A breakdown of cost of temporary housing and associated charges at present which should include taxis and transportation.**

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the report and:

- i) **Noted the 2021/22 Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Panel Q1 Data & Performance Report in Appendix A.**
- ii) **Requested relevant Cabinet Members, Directors and Heads of Service to maintain focus on improving performance.**

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS REPORT 2020/21

The Chairman invited Nikki Craig (Head of HR, Corporate Projects and IT) to begin discussing the report. A local authority had a statutory obligation to report on complaints relating to its adults and children services, but not those relating to other corporate services. However, the RBWM's annual report covered all compliments and complaints in terms of the complaints process.

Corporate complaints had a 2-stage process.

- A review of the complaint would be undertaken and would ideally be responded to in 10 days or ask for an extension could be asked for, if required
- Stage 2 gave a time frame of 20 days, where a director for that service would carry out a review of the stage 1 complaint

There were opportunities there to raise this further with local government and social care ombudsman.

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In 2020/21 there were:

- 2,268 contacts made to the compliments and complaints team.
- 415 were progressed and dealt with as formal complaints.
- Just over 350 of these complaints related to services, which were not adults or children.
- There were 766 compliments made to the team, compared to 355 the previous year.
- There were 15 compliments for housing, 14 for planning and 8 for highways.

The Chairman reiterated the focus being only on Highways, Planning, Housing and Transport in this report.

Councillor Taylor asked Nikki Craig, what was officially classed as a complaint.

Nikki Craig responded by stating that of the 2,268 contacts, some were simply called service requests, such as a resident's bin not being emptied. This would then be filtered through the appropriate channel leaving the figure of 415 formal complaints.

Councillor Taylor expressed her acknowledgment of the increase seen in compliments and asked if the impact of the pandemic had impacted this? If it had, could this be adopted for the future, to continue this increase in compliments.

Nikki Craig said that the pandemic had changed how some things have operated, such as increasing communication electronically with residents.

Councillor Taylor also asked how long the local government and social care ombudsman (LGSCO) paused their service during the lockdown?

Nikki Craig said it was back up before the 2nd lockdown and that the LGSCO had taken the decision to pause their investigation of complaints during the first lockdown so that local authorities could concentrate their efforts on covid response and resident safety being prioritised.

Councillor Haseler put on record his acknowledgement of the increase in compliments. He asked if the panel could see numbers of individual cases of service requests such as the number of missed bins or hedgerows? This would give the panel an indication as to what issues specifically were impacting residents.

Nikki Craig agreed she would ask the team responsible for the Report IT function and if possible, provide a response offline.

Councillor Singh asked if there was a breakdown in the report as to how residents went about registering a complaint.

Nikki Craig said this was not present in the report, however the website was the most used function to log a complaint. Occasionally there were emails, or less frequently phone calls or letters. Nikki Craig agreed to see if the specific detail was held so that it could be shared offline.

Councillor Singh welcomed this and expressed his concern for his ward and the digital exclusion that could be present, restricting his resident's ability to register a complaint.

Nikki Craig replied by saying that upon phoning the council, a member of the customer services team would be able to assist the resident by completing the online form for them and refer a member of the appropriate team to them a time that was convenient for them.

Councillor Singh asked if there were figures for how often this happened. Nikki Craig agreed to ask the service if it was possible to provide this information offline.

Councillor Shelim referred to page 40 of the report and asked for clarity on table 3.

Nikki Craig provided this clarity by explaining each value within the table mentioned.

Councillor Taylor asked if the function could exist for residents to use the library staff to log a complaint, in reference to Councillor Singh's discussion of the digital exclusion some faced. Nikki Craig said that she would confirm this offline but was confident that the library staff would support this.

ACTIONS:

Nikki Craig to update panel on:

- **Statistics for Report IT requests if available.**
- **Statistical breakdown of what forms of communication are used to register complaints if logged by the service.**
- **How many complaints came directly from the customer service team, through referrals if held by the service.**
- **Would the library staff assist residents with submitting a complaint?**

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the report and:

- i) That the report was published on the Council’s website.**
- ii) That the annual report continued to be produced and presented at Overview and Scrutiny panels**

WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Taylor asked the Chairman if she was able to read out a statement to do with the work programme from Councillor Davey who was unable to attend. At the Chairman’s discretion, this was allowed. Councillor Taylor began to read the statement on Councillor Davey’s behalf, but was stopped by the Chairman. The Chairman asked what the main points of the statement were, in relation to the work programme specifically and added that if Councillor Davey wished to make suggestions then he would have to approach the clerks or the panel at the next meeting.

The supporting clerk then confirmed that the Head of Governance had given permission for the statement to be read, all be it at the Chairman’s discretion. The supporting clerk suggested that there should be a discussion offline, where the work programme could be updated to address out of date items. The supporting clerk also made it clear to panel members that the way going forward was now changing to a new system. Panel members would approach lead officers regarding an issue, to allow for more scrutiny to take place at future panels.

The Chairman stated her support for this way forward. Councillor Singh stressed his frustration at this process and labelled it an attempt for some panel members to have behind-closed-doors discussions. The supporting clerk attempted to explain further and reassure panel members that this way forward was a work in progress and was currently being trialled in separate panels. Councillor Singh said that he had a suggestion for the work programme regarding Tivoli. The supporting clerk advised that this was part of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel and therefore was not appropriate to be discussed.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 8.25 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....