

CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 23 JUNE 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Targowski, Phil Haseler, Julian Sharpe, Simon Werner and Geoff Hill

Also in attendance: Councillors Gurpreet Bhangra, John Bowden, David Cannon and Gurch Singh

Officers: Mark Beeley, Shilpa Manek, Adele Taylor and Nikki Craig

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Councillor Sharpe nominated Councillor Targowski to be Chairman, which was seconded by Councillor Haseler.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Councillor Targowski was elected as Chairman of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2021/22 municipal year.

Councillor Sharpe nominated Councillor Haseler as Vice Chairman, which was seconded by Councillor Targowski.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Councillor Haseler was elected as Vice Chairman of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2021/22 municipal year.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L Jones, Councillor Hill was attending the meeting as substitute.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th April 2021 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Q4 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Adele Taylor, Executive Director of Resources, explained that the Q4 performance report was responding to the councils strategy and was effectively a progress update against the interim strategy. Of the nine targets in the report:

- Four were green – succeeding or achieved.
- Three were amber – near target.
- Two were red – needed improvement.

It had been a challenging year to meet the needs of residents during the global pandemic. Covid had a significant impact on the performance of the council, for example lockdown restrictions had affected the number of visits to libraries. Home based learning had been encouraged and there were increases in visits starting to be seen but these were at lower

volumes. The number of calls which had been received by RBWM had increased substantially in Q2 due to the waste problems, with the target of the percentage of calls answered within 60 seconds finishing amber. The revenues and benefits targets had exceeded the expected position, but the percentage of business rates collected had been impacted.

The Chairman commented on the targets for the percentage of calls answered and the number of digital forms received. He asked what metric was used by officers to show that residents queries were being dealt with and if residents were satisfied with the response that they received. The Chairman also asked if there was anything that was a concern to officers or if the general performance of RBWM was good.

Adele Taylor said that the website system was being worked on and improved. For the digital forms, it was something that officers wanted to improve, particularly to see if there were a number of repeat requests from residents. Responding to the question from the Chairman if there was anything to be concerned about, Adele Taylor said that there was a dip in performance in Q3 but this was to be expected. It had been a challenging year for the revenues and benefits team with some of the targets being particularly difficult to achieve.

The Chairman asked if RBWM had a good contact management system.

Adele Taylor said that there was a contact management system but work was ongoing to improve it.

Councillor Hill asked if performance reports in future would contain metrics against RBWMs net carbon pledge using the climate strategy and would it be aligned to the corporate plan. He also asked if Cabinet would be open to recommendations from the Panel on what metrics should be used to monitor performance going forwards.

Adele Taylor said that for the climate strategy, the metrics fell under a different Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The metrics would be on the new corporate plan and officers would be reviewing metrics to ensure that they reflected the performance and development of the corporate plan.

Councillor Hill asked if there was any further breakdown on digital forms and how often they were used by each department. The search bar on the website was not working as well as it should and was something that needed to be investigated. Councillor Hill commented that he felt the council was moving to 'digital by default' rather than 'digital by choice' and this was locking some residents out of services that the council provided. On voluntary turnover, Councillor Hill asked if this was known by department or area and if there were any red flags for voluntary turnover in any part of the council.

Adele Taylor said that a lot of work had been undertaken on the website, the search bar issue had been fixed recently and the function should now be performing better. It was a priority of RBWM to make systems quick, easy and effective to use and it was a continual improvement. Adele Taylor was unable to give a breakdown of the digital forms but all areas of the council were encouraged to use them. Adele Taylor said that she was happy to discuss with Councillor L Jones outside of the meeting.

Nikki Craig, Head of HR, Corporate Projects and IT, said that staff turnover could be broken down further but this would not necessarily highlight the problems that RBWM faced. The information was shared at directorate level and it was scrutinised with the councils HR business partner.

ACTION – Nikki Craig to send breakdown of staff turnover to the Panel.

Councillor Rayner, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Corporate & Resident Services, Culture & Heritage, and Windsor, confirmed that the search engine issue on the website had been resolved. A new user group had been set up to test the website and

this would include representatives from the Disability and Inclusion Forum and other groups that the council worked with. Regarding the discussion on staff turnover, it could often fluctuate. For example, students joining the council during the summer months on short term internships would affect the turnover figure.

Councillor Sharpe asked if officers had done any analysis comparing RBWM with other local authorities. He asked what the metric was that was used to measure visits to libraries and whether this was physically based or included digital visits too.

Adele Taylor said that benchmarking against other local authorities depended on if they used similar metrics. Other comparisons were more difficult as information was collected in a different way. Officers had largely been concentrating on the councils own performance. Library visits included both physical and digital visits across the whole year.

Councillor Sharpe expressed concern for a completely digital library experience and feared that some residents could be left behind.

Adele Taylor said that libraries formed a key part of the transformation strategy, where there was a piece specifically looking at digital exclusion. The council was looking to support and help people using digital devices if they needed it.

Councillor Bowden joined the meeting.

Councillor Werner asked which targets had not been hit for non-Covid reasons. He commented on the climate change strategy of the council, which discussed working with key stakeholders, but they did not feel like they were part of the process. Councillor Werner expressed concern about the digital divide and said it worried him when organisations said that they would help to bridge the gap, explaining that he had seen a negative experience occur with a customer in his local bank branch.

Adele Taylor said that she did not think there were any targets that had not been achieved for non-Covid reasons. Sustainability was not in the remit of the Panel and so could not comment on but this could be fed back to officers. The council were committed to helping residents access online services as some would need extra support. The internet could open up a new world for some residents and it was important to concentrate resources on allowing residents to access the internet.

Councillor Haseler said that he used digital forms to report issues with things like waste. He had noted that the council set a target for the number of forms received, but surely this meant that a number of things were going wrong or that there were a number of issues. He said that less forms being received could actually be a positive thing.

Adele Taylor said that there was a blend of different forms which had different functions. Some covered issues, like Councillor Hasler had suggested, but there were also forms covering things like requests for information or access to services. It was the level of customer interaction which the council were interested in monitoring, with digital forms a key way to measure this.

Councillor Haseler said it would be useful to see a breakdown of the forms received for issues so that officers could see if the forms were more positive or negative in nature.

Councillor Werner said that some residents had complained to him that the 'report it' tool was hard to use and they had abandoned the process part way through. He asked if there was a measure for how many forms were abandoned before they had been submitted.

Adele Taylor said that the transformation project team had been looking extensively at the website and digital forms. She would ask the relevant officers regarding the questions on digital forms and report back to the Panel after the meeting.

ACTION – Adele Taylor to ask about the digital form enquires from Councillor Hasler and Councillor Werner and report back to the Panel.

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

- i) Noted the 2020/21 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel End of Year Data & Performance Report in Appendix A.**
- ii) Requested relevant Cabinet Members, Directors and Heads of Service to maintain focus on improving performance.**

WORKFORCE PROFILE REPORT

Nikki Craig explained that the workforce profile was an annual survey of the make up of the council. The first section of the report included things like a head count and pay grades, while it also made comparisons to the previous year so that trends and patterns could be identified. There had been a reduction of 55 employees over the last year, mainly due to a transfer of staff to Achieving for Children. A full time monitoring officer had also been appointed. The second section of the report considered the protected characteristics. One positive was the comparison between starters and leavers profile in ethnicity and disability, which showed a larger percentage of starters than leavers. At a senior management level, no employees were from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background. The final section of the report highlighted the councils commitment to improvement and also employee initiatives like the diversity, equality and inclusion network. The network had recently surveyed staff on their diversity related experiences. The report had been compared with the Census 2011 results, next year the report would be produced using the new Census 2021 data.

The Chairman noted that there were no employees from a Black, Asian or Ethnic Minority background in senior management at RBWM and asked what was being done about it. Protected characteristics were part of the report but there was nothing on the socio-economic background of employees, which would be good to know.

Nikki Craig said that RBWM was keen to nurture talent from within and it was important that senior management identified who was keen to progress and develop. The diversity, equality and inclusion network survey had recently been completed and it would be interesting to see those results which would reveal how staff felt.

Vanessa Faulkner, Service Lead – HR People Services, said that the diversity, equality and inclusion network had recently completed the survey. Once the results had been collated, the network could then move forward and see what they wanted to do.

Nikki Craig suggested it would be possible to look at socio-economic information of staff and said that she would discuss this idea with her team. However, this would depend on staff being comfortable to share this with the council.

Councillor Werner asked what resources were being used by the council to help those with a disability. He noted that the figures in the report did not include companies owned by RBWM, for example RBWM Property Company Ltd, and asked why they were not included. Councillor Werner asked if RBWM was interested in the diversity of the various contractors which the council worked with.

Nikki Craig said that the provision of equipment in relation to disabilities would always be provided to any employee who required it to undertake their role. RBWM Property Company Ltd and external contractors were separate entities to RBWM and therefore officers did not see any of the data, as they were not RBWM employees.

Councillor Werner asked how the process could be changed, it was important that external companies were following RBWM standards when it came to equalities.

Nikki Craig said that during the procurement process, there were questions asked about adhering to the Equalities Act. She said that she would need to ask an officer from procurement for confirmation of what procedures they undertook. Officers could ask for general employee data but there was no obligation for external organisations to share this with the council.

Councillor Werner suggested that this was something that could be added to the procurement process.

ACTION – Nikki Craig to ask procurement team for confirmation of the process used to ensure that contractors abide by similar equalities values as RBWM.

Councillor Hill said that voluntary turnover was shown as 10.55% but this did not match with the head count figure for March 2020. He asked what figure it represented.

Nikki Craig explained that turnover was calculated by the leavers figure being divided by the starters and average head count across the year.

Councillor Sharpe commented that everything looked good in the report and asked if this was a correct statement to make.

Nikki Craig said that things did look good on the whole but some areas could be improved, for example the lack of ethnic diversity at management level. It would be interesting to compare the report next year when the latest census data would be available.

Adele Taylor said that things like the survey from the diversity, equality and inclusion network would help officers to understand how staff felt to work at RBWM. There were opportunities for the council to improve.

The Chairman asked if the Panel would get to see the results from the survey that had been undertaken by the network.

Nikki Craig explained that the network was employee led and the results of the survey would be referenced in future reports which would be brought to the Panel. She said that she would be happy to ask the network to see if they would be happy to share the results with Members.

ACTION – Nikki Craig to ask the diversity, equality and inclusion network if survey results can be shared with the Panel.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny noted the report and:

- i) Received future reports which would take into account the Census 2021 detail when published.**

WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman said that he had asked Panel Members at the last meeting to send him suggestions for items to include on the work programme, but he had not received any. He asked if residents would be able to submit suggestions for topics to be scrutinised.

Mark Beeley, Democratic Services Officer, confirmed that residents were able to submit topic suggestions on the website. Messages would go out on social media to advertise this and any items that were received would be added to the work programme. Mark Beeley said that a

suggestion had been received a few months ago on an RBWM App and a report was currently being drafted. Once this was ready, it would be brought to the Panel for consideration.

The Chairman asked if this could be added into the 'items suggested but not yet programmed' section of the work programme.

Councillor Werner suggested having a finance update come to the Panel for the meeting in October 2021. He suggested having an item on procurement and whether it was possible to add in equalities as a requirement for any contract which RBWM entered in to.

The Chairman suggested to wait until Nikki Craig had asked the question and reported back to the Panel on the discussion that had taken place around equalities in the previous agenda item. The Panel could then determine whether it needed to be added to the work programme.

Adele Taylor confirmed that the Panel would be seeing the finance updates and they would be added to the work programme.

Councillor Hill suggested performance monitoring against the corporate plan and the customer journey. Councillor Hill said that RBWM was carrying a lot of debt and suggested a task and finish group on how the council would clear the debts, also looking at developer contributions from development sites. He asked what changes needed to be made to scrutiny to make it more effective, Cabinet needed to welcome challenge from scrutiny.

The Chairman said that the suggestion on the scrutiny process was a statement rather than a suggestion to be added to the work programme.

Councillor Hill explained that scrutiny should make written statements and suggestions to Cabinet which should be answered in public forums.

Adele Taylor said that developer contributions were picked up as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and so was not sure of how a specific task and finish group on the topic would work. Adele Taylor suggested that the topic could fall under the remit of the Audit and Governance Committee, she would be happy to discuss the potential scope with Councillor L Jones.

Councillor Sharpe said that he believed the equalities issues discussed were already part of the procurement process but thought it would be best to wait and see what Nikki Craig came back with before deciding to add it as an item on the work programme.

The Chairman suggested that the clerk could take the suggestions away and work with the Panel and officers after the meeting to see where suggestions could be added to the work programme.

The meeting, which began at 6.15 pm, finished at 7.50 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....