

CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 4 APRIL 2022

PRESENT: Councillors Gerry Clark (Chairman), Sayonara Luxton, Julian Sharpe, Lynne Jones and Simon Werner

Also in attendance: Councillor John Bowden, Councillor Mandy Brar, Councillor Phil Haseler, Councillor Gurch Singh, Councillor David Hilton and Councillor Samantha Rayner

Officers: Mark Beeley, Adele Taylor, Andrew Vallance, Rebecca Hatch, Rachel Kinniburgh and Nikki Craig

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Mark Beeley, Democratic Services Officer, opened the meeting and explained that there had been a change to the Panel Membership. Councillor Haseler was now a Member of Cabinet and therefore could not sit on the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel, he had been replaced by Councillor Clark. As Councillor Haseler was Chairman of the Panel, a new Chairman needed to be elected for the remainder of the municipal year.

Councillor Werner proposed that Councillor L Jones was Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Councillor L Jones.

Councillor Sharpe proposed that Councillor Clark was Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Councillor Luxton.

As two nominations had been received, a named vote was taken on each nomination.

Election of Councillor L Jones as Chairman of the Panel (Motion)	
Councillor Gerry Clark	Against
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	Against
Councillor Julian Sharpe	Against
Councillor Lynne Jones	For
Councillor Simon Werner	For
Rejected	

The nomination fell.

Election of Councillor Clark as Chairman of the Panel (Motion)	
Councillor Gerry Clark	For
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	For
Councillor Julian Sharpe	For
Councillor Lynne Jones	Against
Councillor Simon Werner	Against
Carried	

RESOLVED: That Councillor Clark was elected as Chairman of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the remainder of the municipal year.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Muir, Councillor Luxton was attending the meeting as a substitute.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes from the meetings held on 20th December 2021 and 26th January 2022 were approved as true and accurate records.

Mark Beeley, Democratic Services Officer, explained that as had been agreed at the last meeting, an actions table would be produced which listed all of the actions and then the outcomes from those actions. This had been circulated to the Panel at the end of last week and covered actions from the November 2021, December 2021 and January 2022 meetings.

Councillor L Jones commented on the minutes from the December 2021 meeting, in the section regarding longer term view of financial estimates. She had asked at the meeting for an explanation of the affect the budget had on reserves and how the reserves would be strengthened, this had not been covered in the personal report. Councillor L Jones asked if she could have an explanation on this from officers.

The Chairman suggested that a written answer could be provided to Councillor L Jones after the meeting.

ACTION – Finance team to provide response to Councillor L Jones query on the effect of the budget on reserves.

CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND Q3 2021-22 PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

Rebecca Hatch, Head of Strategy, said the report would be split into three elements. An update would be provided on the new performance monitoring arrangements following the adoption of the new Corporate Plan, there would be a brief overview of Q3 performance and finally an introduction to the new Citizens Portal. The new Corporate Plan set out three overarching objectives along with 50 specific goals which RBWM would look to achieve over the next five years. Officers had been working hard to achieve the goals set out in the plan and had been considering relevant milestones and metrics with which to show progress against the goals. This information had been brought together to create the performance monitoring Citizens Portal. The goals were primarily focused on outcomes, with a small number of goals focused inwards which considered the council as an organisation and how it was viewed by residents. As had been discussed at the January 2022 meeting, the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel would have a key responsibility in the oversight of the process. The Panel would receive quarterly performance reports, with reporting by exception so that there was focus on areas where there had been challenges. The first report would be brought forward at the July 2022 meeting. Officers would be encouraging Members to review the data on the Citizens Portal so that progress could be viewed independently. The role of the Panel would be to review the performance against the plan, the Panel could make recommendations to other Panels if required for further scrutiny and consideration. Further data and support would be provided by officers for any review and the Panel could look to make recommendations on how performance could be improved.

Councillor Sharpe commented on the proposal for reporting to be by exception, so that issues would be flagged up by officers where they arose. He asked if a goal was amber for a long time, would this be flagged up to the Panel.

Rebecca Hatch said that Members would be able to review the performance of all of the goals from the Corporate Plan on the Citizens Portal, officers would choose a selection of goals which they felt should be highlighted to the Panel. This would include, for example, goals which were felt could turn amber.

Councillor Werner asked if things could be flagged up by Members and brought to the meeting, he asked if there was assurance that relevant officers would attend Panel meetings to answer any questions from the Panel.

The Chairman commented that timing was important, questions from the Panel could be asked of officers but Members needed to allow officers time to give factual information. If questions came at the meeting, it could lead to more questions needing to be answered offline after the meeting.

Councillor Werner said the issue was timing, Members only received the agenda a week before the meeting.

Adele Taylor, Executive Director of Resources, said that the Citizens Portal would allow Members to review trends over previous months, which would allow questions to be asked in good time.

Councillor L Jones suggested that it would be useful to have presentations offline before the meeting. This would then allow Members to be more informed when attending the meeting, this would add value to the Panel. On metrics, Councillor L Jones said that the Panel had not had any input into what metrics would be used. She said that the Panel should have been consulted on the metrics and milestones to be used before the portal went live.

Councillor Sharpe asked if the portal would only consider data moving forward, or if it would also include previous data when it went live.

Rebecca Hatch said that historic data would be included, where it existed. Some metrics were new and therefore current data did not exist, while others would need to establish a baseline. On the question asked by Councillor L Jones, Rebecca Hatch responded by saying that metrics had been decided by officers for practical reasons, the portal would soon be live and there would be a Member briefing next week which would also consist of a question and answer session. The portal was the start of the process, more information would be added to the portal over time.

The Chairman said that the portal would be a useful tool for Members, he agreed that it was a process that would be developed over time.

Councillor L Jones said it was a shame that the Panel did not have knowledge of the metrics before the portal went live, she felt that the Panel should have been involved earlier in the process.

Adele Taylor said that this was a new way of working and the practicalities needed to be considered. It was a big leap forward but officers should be able to see what was working and change anything that was not. Ideally, the system would have been tested in advance but this was not possible. This was not the end of the conversation, the Panel would be able to guide officers.

Councillor Rayner, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Business, Corporate and Resident Services, Culture and Heritage, and Windsor, said that the Corporate

Plan was a huge piece of work. The portal was the start of the process and she was pleased to see it going live shortly.

Councillor Werner raised a point of order, he did not feel that the Cabinet Member was answering any questions or giving additional information which would help aide the Panel. He did not feel the contribution was appropriate.

The Chairman understood the point made by Councillor Werner but noted that the Cabinet Member was speaking in relation to the point raised on the criteria for how metrics had been selected.

Councillor Hilton, Cabinet Member for Asset Management and Commercialisation, Finance, and Ascot, said that the portal could be accessed by any resident in the borough. This was a good way of publicly opening up data and improving transparency.

Councillor Werner raised a further point of order, he did not feel that the contribution from the Cabinet Member was appropriate.

The Chairman said that he welcomed clarity and explanation from Cabinet Members, he was trying to allow everyone watching the meeting the opportunity to understand what was being proposed.

Councillor L Jones reiterated her point that the presentation could have been delivered in advance of the meeting, the point of the meeting was to allow Panel Members to ask questions.

The Chairman said that he had taken these comments on board, the work being delivered was about to go live.

Councillor Werner said that he welcomed the approach of the new Chairman. He felt that the previous Chairman of the Panel had blocked discussion on certain topics. Councillor Werner commented on the financial detail and the value for money, he asked when savings from this would be delivered.

Councillor Luxton did not feel that the comments from Councillor Werner on the previous Chairman of the Panel were fair or appropriate.

The Chairman said that all Chairman worked hard to try and balance all interests, he said that he would do his best to be as fair and balanced as possible.

Adele Taylor, responding to the question from Councillor Werner, said that she would pick the point up as part of the Finance Update agenda item. Value for money was one of the measures which could be tracked on the portal.

Adele Taylor moved on to outline the Q3 performance report. All targets were green other than two, one was amber and one was red. Council tax collection was amber and was slightly behind target, while business rate collection was behind target due to the various government schemes which had been introduced over the course of the pandemic. Despite this, RBWM had kept its target on business rate collection the same which was why it seemed like it was off target.

Councillor L Jones commented on the percentage voluntary turnover, she believed that the aim was to be below target.

Nikki Craig, Head of HR, Corporate Projects and IT, responded by explaining that it was still within tolerance and the target was low.

Councillor L Jones said it was around 2% higher than the target, therefore this should be considered as amber.

Nikki Craig added that considering the trajectory across the whole year the target would be green. She added that she was happy to confirm this after the meeting with Councillor L Jones.

ACTION – Nikki Craig to confirm if the percentage of voluntary turnover would be on target according to the trajectory.

Adele Taylor added that it was a cumulative figure, officers expected it to be within the target by the end of the year.

Nikki Craig said that the data was usually presented in a graph which was clear to see the trajectory.

Councillor L Jones said it would be helpful to see the graph, especially where the figure was cumulative.

Councillor Sharpe asked if anything was a concern for officers in the Q3 performance report.

Adele Taylor replied by saying the targets that were off were due to Covid, everything else was green. It had been a pressured year for the council and it had performed well in the circumstances.

The Chairman said that he understood the distortion that government grants had on the business rate collection target. He suggested, where possible, it would be useful for the Panel to have some clarity on this going forward.

Councillor Werner commented that Covid needed to be considered, it had been difficult for the council to operate in its usual way. He wanted to see ambition and said that stretch targets could be needed, it was easy to achieve a low target so the council should look to see if it could stretch itself as a result. It would be useful to see previous years performance so that the data could be compared. On calls answered after a certain period of time, Councillor Werner had noted that this target was now within two minutes which was easier to achieve compared to the old target.

Adele Taylor said that the right metric needed to be set, it did not matter how fast a call was answered, the quality of the call was the most important thing to consider. The target had been discussed and RBWM needed to be realistic about its priorities and how well resourced it was.

Rachel Kinniburgh, Service Lead – Strategic Policy, Performance and Insights, gave a demonstration of the Citizens Portal to the Panel. She said that the portal would be accessible on a separate webpage which would be linked through from the RBWM main website.

Councillor L Jones asked how many items were on each page of the portal.

Rebecca Hatch said that the 50 goals had been split between the three overarching objectives. She added that the template could be better but it was easy to use.

Rachel Kinniburgh added that it was a standard template from the supplier and a lot of the ambition for the portal was not currently possible. Officers had held positive discussions with the supplier about how to improve the portal in the future.

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

- i) Noted the new performance management arrangements and the progress made since publication of the Corporate Plan; and considered the future role of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny in monitoring performance.**
- ii) Provided feedback on the new public-facing dashboard, 'the Citizen's Portal'.**
- iii) Noted the Q3 Performance Summary (October-December 2021).**

FINANCE UPDATE

Andrew Vallance, Head of Finance, said that the report had been to Cabinet last week. It covered month 10, which was January 2022, and showed an underspend of £239,000 which was an increase of £138,000 from the month 8 report. The main changes had been the increase in wedding income, reduction in the estimate of library staff used and finance staff interims. There had been a recovery of parking income of £250,000 but across the year this figure was still way down due to the pandemic. The contingency sum in the budget of nearly £2 million was now not required, this had been put into the reserves.

Councillor L Jones said that there was a shortfall on the savings tracker of £2.29 million forecast across the year. The report stated that this should be mitigated within the service, she asked what the likelihood was of this happening and the saving being mitigated, where the funds were coming from within those services and if it would affect anything that the council did.

Adele Taylor said that she was confident that a number of the amber savings would move to green. Improvements needed to be made on the savings tracker, where there were alternatives these should be shown and a more sophisticated format of showing this could be needed. Alternatives should not affect the quality or level of services, the total number of savings outlined would be delivered.

Councillor L Jones commented on property and the Covid pressure on the budget of £1.2 million that was not needed, what would happen to this. On vacancy savings, was this because the council could not recruit and whether services were resourced effectively. Councillor L Jones continued on adult social care, the council had received £1.3 million more income than budgeted but despite this the area was £769,000 overspent and she would like to understand why this had happened. Councillor L Jones concluded by asking about the COMF (Contain Outbreak Management Fund) grant which was £4.5 million, less spend, which took it down to £4 million, she suggested taking this point offline as she wanted to know what this had been spent on.

In response, Adele Taylor explained that on property, this had been picked up and reported throughout the year. During Covid, some of that funding had been rolled forward that was not needed to help close the gap on some of the one-off Covid costs. This had already been included in the budget for the next financial year. On vacancy savings, there had been a number of new posts created, some of which had been vacant for a period of time. Vacancy savings were not something that was aimed for. Considering social care income, there was more income but there was also increased service costs. There would always be pressures on adult social care and the service was good at making savings from transformation. A demographic reserve was set aside of £750,000 for demographic pressures in next years budget. On hospital discharges, there had been an estimate in the budget in 21/22. Officers worked closely with CCG on hospital discharge funding and the council worked in close partnership with health colleagues. Adele Taylor concluded her response by commenting on COMF funding, there was a specific, set criteria which laid out what this funding could be used for. There would still be some responsibilities and costs for RBWM around Covid, it was heavily audited.

The Chairman noted on the savings tracker, the red numbers were fairly small. On amber, there were a number of delayed deliverables which was understandable when the narrative was read. He asked if either the Executive Director of Resources, the Head of Finance or the relevant Cabinet Member would be able to comment on the budget virements.

Andrew Vallance said that the first item was the replacement of the Idox system which was used by the Planning team. This would be funded from capital which did not need to be spent in various other capital pots, either £225,000 from the neighbourhood plans, Joint Minerals and Waste and the IT strategy. The IT strategy was the HR system but this would be in for the following financial year. The replacement of school boilers with gas would be done using government grants.

Councillor Werner said that adults, health and housing would mostly come from transformation savings, with a savings forecast of 45%. He raised concerns about setting savings targets against the transformation programme before the transformation had taken place. Councillor Werner asked if any of the new savings that had been found would be transferrable into next years budget and would they be used again to sure up the transformation budget. He asked if the transformation programme should be monitored closely by the Panel over the next year. Councillor Werner commented on the savings tracker, he felt that the adult social care spend was certain to not make the target of the full year forecast yet the target was highlighted as green, Councillor Werner felt that it should be red.

Adele Taylor clarified that this was an error, it should not say 0%. Officers would look at the format of the savings tracker. Any alternatives found would be a consideration for next years budget, any savings had already been included. In a different format, this would be clearer for the Panel to see.

Councillor L Jones asked if the number of older people with learning disabilities had started to stabilise, she asked if the trend had continued to stabilise or if it had gone up further. Councillor L Jones noted some comments in the report on fly tipping, where there was increased pressure in this area. She thought that the waste contract should be lowering that cost to the council and wanted to know if there had been any successful prosecutions as a result of fly tipping. Councillor L Jones continued by discussing car parking, the council was 28% down against the budget, she asked if RBWM would hit the budget which had been forecast. Councillor L Jones asked what the 'first three months of the year' was referring to. On virements, there was £65,000 there for neighbourhood plans but there were still neighbourhood plans going through. She asked why money had been taken out of this area.

Adele Taylor said that she believed the figure on older people with learning disabilities was stabilised but she would confirm this after the meeting. Fly tipping was also something that would need to be taken away from the meeting and a response would be provided after the meeting. On car parking, it would be hitting the forecast outturn. Adele Taylor said that there was a sales, fees and charges scheme, the council was able to claim for the first three months which was why it had been mentioned in the report. All virements went through the Capital Review Board, they checked what was required along with what was left in the budget and this had been approved by the Board.

ACTION – Adele Taylor to provide responses on the questions asked around older people with learning disabilities and any successful prosecutions from fly tipping.

The Chairman said that the relevant Cabinet Member and the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel were currently investigating the waste contract and this was the best place for that contract to be scrutinised and probed.

Councillor L Jones said that her question was based around finance in relation to the contract.

Councillor Werner mentioned the low borrowing rate, he asked if the council would be sticking with short-term borrowing and what the plan was. The other factor was inflation, with some

contracts the council had a duty to cover inflation. Councillor Werner asked what assurances officers could give him that showed that inflation and interest rate rises were being taken seriously.

Adele Taylor said that borrowing rates were closely monitored by officers. It was a balancing act, it was important to not borrow too early as this could cost more to the council. The council worked closely with financial advisors Arlingclose who were experts in the field. All contracts had inflation included which was standard practise and this had been factored into the budget.

Councillor Werner asked if officers were confident that inflation could be coped with. He asked what officers were most concerned about in terms of risk.

Adele Taylor said there could be risks which was why reserves were set aside, this was based on inflation at the time. The Section 25 report highlighted the areas of risk, however the Ukraine situation was not included as this had not taken place at the time of the report.

Councillor Hilton referred to Councillor L Jones question on the stability of the number of older people, there was a table included in the report which covered the period between April and December.

Councillor Werner requested that the Panel would look at the detail of the transformation programme over the coming year.

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT

Mark Beeley explained that the annual scrutiny report had been circulated amongst Panel Members and a draft had been produced, which was attached to the agenda. If Panel Members had any comments or amendments to the report they could either be discussed in this agenda item or discussed offline after the meeting.

Councillor L Jones commented that the majority of topics considered by the Panel were brought by officers. The Panel needed to carefully consider what it wanted to do, she felt the Panel should be more proactive.

The Chairman said it was important to consider items which were of value and could be scrutinised. Questions could be asked and answered by relevant officers.

Councillor Sharpe said the Panel had been through a process over the year, a lot of topics had been scrutinised.

WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor L Jones said that the item on the RBWM Property Company Governance Action Plan Update was coming to the Panel at the end of the process, the item had gone to Cabinet without the Panel being involved beforehand. Items were often added to the Cabinet forward plan late and this was a process that could be reviewed, she felt it was out of step with scrutiny.

The Chairman said he would look at this issue, items needed to be added to the forward plan in a timely manner.

Adele Taylor said that the action plan update on the Property Company would be considered by the Panel at the next meeting. Officers were trying to clarify the shareholder responsibilities and how scrutiny would fit into the process.

The Chairman said it was linking in with the Cabinet forward plan and things should be added as early as possible.

Councillor Werner suggested that transformation should be something that the Panel considered across the year.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Members had no further comments on the Financial Update, therefore there was no need for the meeting to move into Part II.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 8.50 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....