

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 3 April 2023

Present: Councillors Gerry Clark (Chairman), John Bowden, Simon Bond, Karen Davies, Greg Jones, Lynne Jones, Helen Taylor, Julian Sharpe, Shamsul Shelim and Leo Walters

Officers: Mark Beeley, Andrew Durrant, Kevin McDaniel and Andrew Vallance

Officers in attendance virtually: Rachel Kinniburgh, Nikki Craig and Louise Freeth

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Price, Councillor Story and Councillor Werner. Councillor Taylor and Councillor Bowden were attending the meeting as substitutes.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Bond declared a personal interest, in the first main agenda item the RBWM 'solar together' scheme was mentioned. He had recently taken advantage of the scheme and installed solar panels on the roof of his home.

Minutes

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 30th January 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Corporate Plan 2021-2026 Performance Report

Rachel Kinniburgh, Service Lead – Strategic Policy Performance and Insights, explained that the report reflected performance against the corporate plan and considered the progress made up to the end of 2022. The format of the report had been adjusted in line with feedback from Panel Members at the previous meeting.

Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place Services, highlighted that several areas of the corporate plan were showing as completed or were exceeding targets set. On sport and leisure, there was a target to encourage more residents to engage in physical activity. This target was being achieved and attendance had been above target at leisure centres, at 1.6 million compared to 1.5 million. Disabled participation had been below target, officers were working closely with leisure operators as there had been a difference for a while despite some events being organised. Benchmarking seemed to be an issue and would need to be reviewed. 4G coverage was increasing at a good rate and was around 7% above target, with coverage across the borough being 99.74%. Following consultation, the South West Maidenhead Supplementary Planning Document had been adopted by Cabinet in December and this would help to coordinate new infrastructure being installed in this area of Maidenhead. On planning applications, the target was in agreed tolerance and had been affected by staffing levels and delays in specialist advice. However, the up to date performance had improved significantly over the first few months of 2023.

Andrew Durrant considered walking and cycling, these figures were still below the pre-pandemic baseline which was why they had been highlighted as amber in the report. These targets had been reviewed and officers did not feel that the data created a reliable measure of progress on growing walking and cycling. The walking target had been altered, with the metric considering all walking journeys in the borough rather than just those in the town centres of

Maidenhead and Windsor. The project to make improvements to the A308 was out for consultation and officers were waiting for feedback, it was anticipated that this project would start over the summer. Andrew Durrant concluded by saying that some of the place making milestones did need some further work. The Ascot Supplementary Planning Document had been prepared and engagement would follow with key stakeholders while in Maidenhead applications had been opened for the new Maidenhead Town Team.

Councillor Walters commented that there was opposition to the proposals to reduce the A308 speed limit from 40mph to 30mph. He asked where the funding for the scheme would come from.

Andrew Durrant explained that there was approved funding for the project in the capital scheme, this was part of Local Enterprise Partnership funding. The consultation would encompass different views, feedback would be considered before works commenced.

Kevin McDaniel, Executive Director of People Services, said that there were a number of goals on the citizens portal which were progressing well. Over 90% of referrals to the early help service had been closed with a positive outcome and there were a large number of schools which were being judged well according to the Ofsted framework. There was still not a national dataset for education results by sub-group and this was anticipated this year. Kevin McDaniel said that obesity amongst young people in the borough was a concern, the proportion was lower compared to other authorities but the number had been increasing which was a concern for the public health team. The team had considered what were the healthy behaviours which the council could encourage to make a difference. Quality indicators on early years provision was considered an area of focus, there had been a high turnover of childminders along with a couple of organisations which could not make ends meet. There had also been declining satisfaction in adult social care which had been caused by difficulties in retaining staff. To counter this, the hourly rate of pay had been increased for the lowest paid particularly with the current cost of living crisis. Kevin McDaniel concluded by commenting on the goal of reducing the number of people living in temporary accommodation. The cost of rented accommodation in the borough was expensive, with a number of people needing to be housed outside of the borough in a timely manner as a result.

Councillor Sharpe asked that if all of the targets were being achieved or exceeding expectations, how would this affect the lives of residents in a positive way.

Kevin McDaniel suggested that the amount of correspondence that Councillors would have with residents on issues would decrease, as would the number of complaints made to the council. He also hoped that more people would be interested in helping in the community as a result.

Councillor Sharpe asked if the measures which were used in the report to monitor performance were correct and if they were the same measures which other authorities used.

Kevin McDaniel said that there were a number of benchmarks which compared with other authorities.

Rachel Kinniburgh added that the measures which had been selected were tied to goals in the corporate plan, these goals emerged from an evidence base to see where the key challenges in the borough were. There were a number of indicators where benchmarking could be done and the borough could be compared to other local authorities.

Andrew Durrant said that there was a target for fewer than 60 missed waste collections per 100,000. As of December, the number was 18 per 100,000 and this target could be revised. The performance report provided a good overall picture of how the council was performing but there were areas to consider.

Councillor Walters was alarmed that the A308 scheme would be going ahead as he was aware of opposition to the plans. He asked that if there was an overwhelming negative response to the consultation, would the scheme still go ahead.

Andrew Durrant confirmed that the findings from the consultation would be reviewed this week before the project would be moved forward. If the scheme was to progress as planned, it would start over the summer.

On the number of young people that were obese, Councillor Walters felt that encouraging residents to eat healthy was common sense for those involved.

Kevin McDaniel said that there was not one single thing that could be done by the council, the best way was to nudge different groups of people to encourage healthy behaviours. Circumstances varied with each family and therefore there was not a single approach that would be effective in every case.

The Chairman said that the metric allowed officers to compare the borough with other areas and see if there was a need for action.

Councillor Davies noticed that staffing was a key issue in the report, particularly in planning, along with revenues and benefits. She asked if there were common factors across service areas in retaining and recruiting staff.

Andrew Durrant explained that he met with other Berkshire Place directors regularly and they all had similar experiences of staffing issues in the same areas. Planners were in high demand along with issues like pay and conditions. A lot of statutory positions had seen people retire and the council had not seen the next generation with similar skillsets enter the job pool.

Kevin McDaniel added that there had been a number of examples where people had been part of the teacher training programme but had then moved to another area after a couple of years, due to the borough being an expensive place to live.

Louise Freeth, Head of Revenues, Benefits, Libraries and Residents Services, said that the revenues and benefits team had been at the forefront of the government's response to the pandemic. This had put pressure on staff in these positions, nationally there was a shortage of experienced revenues and benefits staff. Customer contact staff also delivered a huge amount during the pandemic, there had been peaks in the abuse of staff when there had been changes in the waste schedule. At one point, there had been six vacancies in a team of 20, which also helped to explain the dip in performance. These vacancies had now been filled and the team was almost back to its full capacity.

Nikki Craig, Head of HR, Corporate Projects and IT, added things like working flexibly needed to be considered. Across the country, there were more vacancies than there were people looking for jobs, this meant that the council needed to find its unique selling point to sell these positions in a competitive market.

Councillor L Jones commented on some of the datasets which were used in the monitoring that were out of date, with a number of sets from 2020 and 2021. When she clicked forward on the report, the data did not make sense. On the number of residents satisfied, the goal was for September 2022 and there was no goal looking forward. Councillor L Jones continued by highlighting some datasets where the latest data was December 2022, she suggested that later data could have been included. She commented on the number of children referred to family hubs along with the number of interventions, there had been a huge increase in demand. Councillor L Jones was concerned by this increase, particularly as the budget for this area needed to be adequately resourced.

Rachel Kinniburgh explained that a number of metrics were compared against national datasets so that benchmarking could be done but this meant that the data could be out of

date. The pandemic had disrupted data collection in some areas which was why there were some gaps. There was a cut off point to allow for the preparation of performance reports which was why the latest data had not been used. The metrics on the portal did follow different patterns, with some being monthly, some quarterly and some annually. Data for March was expected to be updated on the portal over the next couple of weeks.

Louise Freeth said that there was a time lag between information reaching the performance team and the Panel being able to consider the report. On customer calls, the council was on target for calls answered in two minutes, for calls abandoned after five seconds the council was slightly outside the target. Louise Freeth was also able to share figures on council tax, following the end of the financial year the previous week. For council tax, RBWM was 0.5% above target on collection which equated to an additional £4 million from the previous year. Business rates were slightly down at 0.3% off target. However, on cash collected from business rates, the team were £14 million up on the previous financial year. Benefit claims was shown as worsening in the report but had now improved, there had been a significant increase in claims in December which had been an impact on performance.

Kevin McDaniel commented on the increased level of demand seen on the early help hub, additional resource had been added to the team to deal with the demand.

Councillor L Jones said that she understood that there were different frequencies for reporting, but she did not feel that a dataset from over three years ago was useful in monitoring performance. On calls abandoned after five seconds, the data for this metric was shown up until January but Councillor L Jones felt that data for February could be included in the report too.

The Chairman suggested that the Panel could look to seek assurance that officers were using the latest datasets where possible for all goals.

Councillor G Jones questioned whether some datasets were useful at all as they had been gathered during the pandemic. He noted that the number of solar panels installed was part of the report, he asked if there was any data collection on the number of properties which were insulated. Councillor G Jones further asked of the residents who had signed up to the 'solar together' scheme, how many solar panels had been installed.

Andrew Durrant said that he was happy to explore this with the team and report back on both questions after the meeting.

ACTION – Andrew Durrant to provide a written response to the Panel on both questions after the meeting.

Councillor Walters asked how many planning officers there were in the planning team.

Andrew Durrant did not have the exact number to hand, there had been movement and consultancy planners were also used when required.

ACTION – Andrew Durrant to confirm the number of staff in the planning team.

Councillor Bond said that the council was not always in control of what it was trying to measure, for example satisfaction with the bus service depended on both the resource of service routes and also whether buses actually turned up on time. It was disappointing to see that cycling usage was low compared to walking. On temporary accommodation, it was worth considering that for some families with school aged children, it was better to be housed outside of the borough in some cases than in the south of the borough, depending on public transport links. Councillor Bond commented on the disabled use of leisure centres, he was surprised that this was unable to be accurately reported as he thought that those that were disabled were able to take advantage of discounted entry which should be fairly straightforward to record and monitor.

Andrew Durrant said that monitoring disabled participation was complicated because some people accessed services but did not report themselves as having a disability. There was a difference between the previous benchmarking figure and what was being reported now, the overall usage of leisure centres had increased therefore it would be assumed that the disabled usage would also increase. The team were looking into it to see if reporting on this metric could be improved.

Councillor Bond felt that there was a cohort of disabled people that had previously used the leisure facilities but the impact of lockdown meant that they had stopped this habit and had not returned to leisure centres following the pandemic. This was similar to bus usage, there was lower usage of disabled and older person's bus passes.

The Chairman said that it was important that if residents were no longer using facilities and transport which they used to do, that the council needed to ensure that it encouraged them to resume these activities.

Kevin McDaniel said that for families in temporary accommodation, the council looked to place them in the best place possible. The number of families housed outside the borough showed the lack of available accommodation which was available.

Councillor L Jones questioned how much the council could influence the number of positive Ofsted ratings. There had been a news story recently around the pressures of Ofsted inspections and it was important that all aspects of a young person's development were considered. She suggested that having a target on Ofsted inspections could bring more pressure on teachers.

Kevin McDaniel explained that following the sad story of the suicide of the head teacher at a school in Reading, the school improvement team had spoken to all headteachers of good and outstanding schools and reassured them that the council wanted a school which was great for pupils and great for staff. The 'one word badge' was not the only thing that mattered, things like school readiness for early years children was more important.

Councillor Shelim felt that improving exercise and healthy eating meant that more residents should be encouraged to engage with sporting events and activities, particularly younger cohorts. He also asked if the council had a long term strategy on temporary accommodation, to ensure that residents were not constantly moved out of the borough.

Kevin McDaniel said that the council was not equipped to be the solution for every group and activity. However, the council could use links in the local community to encourage residents and organise events. School took part in events like the daily mile which was beneficial to young people. The council had an important role to play in encouraging the community to get involved in the events on offer.

Andrew Durrant said that a sport and leisure health development officer had been employed to increase physical activity while working with community groups. This was designed to encourage people to be active wherever they were. The council was at a very early stage of a piece of work which was designed to provide affordable housing to allow people to take advantage of opportunities unique to the borough, this could help to deal with the issue of families being relocated outside of the borough.

Councillor Walters asked what happened if a resident requiring housing in the borough but there was none available at the time.

Kevin McDaniel said that there was short term accommodation available at John West House for those who were homeless. Otherwise, properties were rented by the day as required.

Councillor L Jones requested from officers that datasets were reviewed to ensure the latest data was provided, that there was a current goal for each targeted area and a review of the detail displayed for the number on each target. Councillor L Jones also highlighted her comment on Ofsted inspections and this being a target which performance was compared.

ACTION – Officers to consider the comments made by Councillor L Jones.

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

- i) **Agreed any areas of performance the Panel considered appropriate to refer for further, more detailed consideration.**

Annual Scrutiny Report - Drafting Ideas

Mark Beeley, Principal Democratic Services Officer – Overview and Scrutiny, explained that each year a report was produced which would go to Full Council and highlighted the work of scrutiny over the past municipal year. The Panel were asked if there were any comments or areas they would like to see included in the annual report.

The Chairman highlighted to members of the public watching the meeting that a list of items which the Panel had considered was included as part of the report. Panel Members could send ideas through to be included in the report.

Councillor L Jones suggested that scrutiny panels were usually used in policy development, when she considered best practise. She felt that the Panel had not been used for any policy development over the past municipal year, this was something to be considered for the future.

The Chairman suggested that the Panel would welcome early oversight of proposals from Cabinet.

Councillor Bowden asked for clarification on the suggestion that the annual report would be interlinked.

Mark Beeley said that there would one report with sections covering the Corporate, Place and People Overview and Scrutiny Panels. In previous years, there had been a separate report for each Panel.

Councillor Bowden noted the call in on Cedar Tree House, he asked if the property was still on the market or if it had now been sold.

Kevin McDaniel said that the action on this property had been to dispose of the asset for the highest possible value. He did not believe it had been disposed of yet, but he would confirm this after the meeting.

ACTION – Kevin McDaniel to confirm the current situation with Cedar Tree House.

Work Programme

The Panel noted the work programme.

The Chairman thanked all Panel Members and officers for their contributions over the past municipal year, as this was the last Panel meeting before the election in May.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 8.35 pm

Chair.....

Date.....