

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Tuesday 5 September 2023

Present: Councillors Mark Wilson (Chair), Jack Douglas, Alison Carpenter, Maureen Hunt, Helen Price, Julian Sharpe and Julian Tisi

Present virtually: Councillor Chris Moriarty

Also in attendance virtually: Councillor Genevieve Gosling

Officers: Mark Beeley, Mikey Lloyd and Nikki Craig

Election of Chair for the meeting

The Chair and Vice Chair had submitted their apologies for not being able to attend the meeting. The Panel therefore needed to elect a Chair for the meeting.

Councillor Douglas proposed that Councillor Wilson was Chair for the meeting. This was seconded by Councillor J Tisi.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That Councillor Wilson was elected as Chair for the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Howard, Councillor Buckley and Councillor Moriarty.

Councillor Douglas was attending as a substitute for Councillor Howard and Councillor Carpenter was attending as a substitute for Councillor Buckley.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

Minutes

Councillor Price requested that the word 'voluntary' was added to the following line to clarify that she was referring to voluntary organisations.

"Councillor Price said that the organisations needed to be considered as they were having their own cost of living issues, for example a rise in utility bills."

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That this amendment was made to the minutes and that the minutes of the meeting held on 5th June 2023 were a true and accurate record.

Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2022/23

Nikki Craig, Assistant Director of HR, Corporate Projects and IT, said that all local authorities had a statutory obligation to publish data related to complaints on adult and children's services. RBWM chose to also publish complaints relating to corporate services. The report contained information on complaints and compliments received across the 2022/23 municipal year. The key points of the report were:

- There had been a decrease in the number of contacts, a total of 1,408.
- Of these contacts, 269 were progressed as complaints. 168 of these were for service areas not covered by adult or children's services.
- 27% complaints were upheld.
- 23% were partially upheld.
- 40% were not upheld.
- The number of complaints for each listed reason was included in the report.
- The number of complaints responded to within timescales was not met in 51% of cases.
- 293 compliments had been received.
- Lessons had been learned and narrative on this was part of the report.
- Detail related to adult and children's services would be considered by the People Overview and Scrutiny Panel in October.

Councillor Price noted that the most common reason for complaints was on waste and recycling, this was a service area which affected all residents on a weekly basis. There had recently been a change to the contract of waste collection teams as they were now required to work a number of bank holidays across the year. Councillor Price wondered if this had an impact on morale and the quality of the service. She also felt that the council had promised a certain level of delivery for residents and therefore if this expectation was not met, it would lead to complaints. Councillor Price had tried to discuss resident issues with officers but she did sometimes not receive a reply, often the only solution was to advise the resident to submit a formal complaint.

Nikki Craig said that the employees on waste collection were not employed by RBWM, she was able to ask the Assistant Director of Neighbourhood Services for further details. It would be difficult for the council to judge whether the requirement to work on bank holidays had impacted on the quality of the service delivered. There were handheld devices used in trucks which could be used to record bins which had not been left out and to take pictures if necessary. The council not delivering what had been promised was a reason why residents could make a complaint, any patterns would be investigated by the relevant officer. There had been a reduction in complaints each year but officers wanted to ensure that any dissatisfaction from residents was addressed appropriately.

ACTION – Nikki Craig to ask for further details on the contract change for staff employed by contractors on the waste contract.

Councillor Hunt said that if she had any cases in her ward of bins being missed, she could contact the Waste Strategy Manager and they were always resolved promptly. Councillor Hunt felt that the contract was well managed by the council.

Councillor Douglas asked if the data from customer satisfaction surveys matched up with the complaints and compliments data.

Nikki Craig explained that the survey had been led by the Assistant Director of Strategy. The data from the survey was triangulated with a number of datasets but it was not in synch with the complaints and compliments report so there might not be a correlation. An external

organisation contacted residents on a random basis, which was broadly linked to the Corporate Plan.

Councillor J Tisi commented that there had been a lower number of complaints received, but the number responded to within timescales had gone down slightly. He queried whether there could be an issue there which needed to be explored.

Nikki Craig said that the lessons learned section of the report was honest about areas of improvement. Two of the areas considered the challenge of resources. The live data would be monitored on a regular basis by the Executive Leadership Team.

Councillor J Tisi noted that 'freeman of the land' was part of the complaints on council tax, he asked if these were individuals that refused to pay council tax as they did not believe it applied to them.

Nikki Craig confirmed that she believed this was correct.

Councillor Price pointed out that compliments should also be considered. The revenues, benefits, library and resident services team had received a significant number of compliments and Councillor Price asked if this good practise would be passed on to other service areas.

Nikki Craig explained that service areas often asked for feedback from residents and this was shared amongst service areas. She could discuss with the Assistant Director of Revenues, Benefits, Library and Residents Services to explore where best practise could be shared with peer groups from across the council.

ACTION – Nikki Craig to explore with Assistant Director of Revenues, Benefits, Library and Residents Services, where best practise could be shared in relation to the number of compliments the team received.

Councillor Price suggested that the timescales could be reviewed if 10 working days was unrealistic. It was important that the council provided residents with realistic expectations.

Nikki Craig confirmed that this had recently been reviewed. For children's services, the response was still required to be within 10 working days. For corporate complaints, this had been raised to a response being given within 20 working days. A further 10 day extension could be agreed with the complainant if the nature of the complaint was complex and required more time to be properly dealt with.

Councillor Moriarty said that many residents could have a frustration with a particular council service but did not deem it significant enough to be progressed as a formal complaint. Residents could use the report it tool instead, Councillor Moriarty asked if there was a link between the number of report it requests each service area received and the number of complaints.

Nikki Craig said that of 1,408 contacts, only 269 were progressed as complaints which meant that the rest were followed through as service requests. The report it page itself had a number of options to make officers aware of certain things, there was no system in place to triangulate this data but with the procurement process currently underway for a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, it was hoped this could be addressed in the future.

Councillor Sharpe said that he often heard from residents who had reported something but no action had been taken. However, there had been more compliments than complaints so the council were doing things well overall. Setting expectations at the right level would help to reduce the number of complaints.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the report and agreed:

- i) **That the report was published on the council's website.**
- ii) **That the annual report continued to be produced and presented at future Overview and Scrutiny Panels.**

Work Programme

Councillor Wilson requested a word change to his suggested topic, to consider whether the resourcing of staff across the council was appropriate.

Mark Beeley, Principal Democratic Services Officer – Overview and Scrutiny, said that performance reports would be considered in a different format to previous years. Performance would go to Cabinet for review and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny would be provided with an opportunity to focus on areas of concern at meetings. Plans on the draft budget would also be finalised and added into the work programme once confirmed.

Councillor Hunt asked what the proposed item on the RBWM Property Company was.

Mark Beeley was unable to confirm the details until Councillor Howard had sent through an initial scope.

Councillor J Tisi mentioned that Birmingham City Council had recently been issued a S114 notice, which effectively declared the council bankrupt. Given the financial situation at RBWM, he suggested that a finance update or budget monitoring report should be considered by the Panel.

Mark Beeley said that Corporate had previously considered budget monitoring reports, he would explore this with the Deputy Director of Finance.

ACTION – Mark Beeley to speak to the Deputy Director of Finance to bring a report on the financial position at RBWM to the Panel.

Councillor Price was concerned that items the Panel had previously scrutinised and should be considered on a yearly basis had not been coming through. She said that the Panel needed to ensure that items were brought forward and that there was tight grip on the work programme.

ACTION – Mark Beeley to work with officers to ensure that statutory items were brought forward and once confirmed this would be shared with the Panel.

Councillor Wilson felt that it would be useful to have a list of items which the Panel reviewed each year.

Mark Beeley said work was being done to update the Overview and Scrutiny webpages, a list could be added to the website. The work programme would also be updated so that the Panel were aware of what the Panel would be looking at.

ACTION – Mark Beeley to circulate link to the website once ready and the updated work programme.

Councillor Hunt asked if RBWM was in any danger of having a similar problem to what had occurred at Birmingham City Council, which had served a S114 notice due to equal pay claims.

Nikki Craig said that no organisation was safe from equal pay claims but felt that considering the job evaluation, grading system and the way recruitment was done she did not believe that RBWM had the same issue and nothing had been raised with her.

Councillor Sharpe said that there were routine reports which were missing, this should be added to the work programme to ensure the Panel was able to carry out its work effectively.

Councillor J Tisi asked about timescales involved in preparing the agenda.

Mark Beeley said that ideally officers should have 4 weeks' notice to be able to prepare items and write reports. The agenda for November should be confirmed by early October to ensure that there was adequate time.

The meeting, which began at 7.10 pm, finished at 8.10 pm

Chair.....

Date.....