

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,
on Thursday, 18th July, 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Sarah Madigan in the Chair;
Councillors Ciaran Brown, Melanie Darrington,
Andrew Harding, Andy Meakin and Dave Shaw.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Phil Rostance and Caroline Wilkinson.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Joanne Froggatt, Mike Joy, Nicky Moss
and Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Councillor Jason Zadrozny.

OS.5 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

OS.6 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6th June, 2019, be received and approved as a correct record.

OS.7 Corporate Scorecard Performance - Year End Out-Turn 2018/19

The Assistant Director for Corporate Resources and Transformation undertook a presentation to the Panel in relation to the year-end outturn for the Council's Corporate Scorecard.

Various methods were utilised to assess how well the Council was performing including delivery of the Corporate Plan, outcomes from the service review programme, feedback from the LGA Peer Challenge, the Place/Star Surveys and performance scorecards.

The Council's Corporate Plan was currently being reviewed and updated and Committee were advised as to its main purpose and its influence on the Council's allocation and prioritisation of resources. Members acknowledged the three different performance scorecards (Place, Corporate and Service) and their roles in providing key organisational and operational performance data to management as part of the Council's Performance Framework.

Over the period of the current Corporate Plan (2016 – 2019) over 83% of corporate scorecard measures have indicated an improved position since 2015/16. The outturn for April 2018 to March 2019 revealed that 88% of measures were achieving or had exceeded their target or were within a 10% variance of the target. 71% of measures had also indicated an improved position compared to the same period in the previous year or were within 5% of previous years' performance levels.

To illustrate some areas of performance (via performance indicators) that were failing to meet their targets, Members considered five performance indicators as follows:-

- percentage of household waste recycled and composted;
- number of resident generated service requests received for fly tipping;
- number of user attendances at ADC leisure facilities;
- number of long term empty homes and derelict properties being brought back into use;
- percentage of rent collected from total rent due.

Committee Members discussed the performance indicators and some of the mitigating factors as to why the areas were failing to achieve their performance targets as set:

Percentage of household waste recycled and composted

The reintroduction of garden waste charges in 2018 and a sustained period of dry weather and slow growing grass had initially impacted on performance. However, subscribers were now increasing year by year and glass recycling rates had also increased.

Number of resident generated service requests received for fly tipping and litter

The number of service requests to tackle fly tipping and litter had increased but this was showing as both a national and local trend. Hotspot areas were being targeted along with the use of overt surveillance cameras as required and it was acknowledged that residents were now much more inclined to report an issue once spotted. It was suggested that the performance indicator for this service might need to be updated to enable officers to reflect a more accurate picture.

Number of user attendances at ADC leisure facilities

User attendance numbers had fallen following the transfer of Selston Leisure Centre to the local High School, the unavoidable closure of the Lammas ice rink for maintenance works and the perceived uncertainties surrounding the longevity of the Festival Hall.

Number of long term empty homes and derelict properties being brought back into use

The number of long term empty and derelict private sector homes brought back into use had reduced by 16% but the performance had still significantly exceeded the target for the year. The lower outturn figure reflected the work undertaken by the Private Sector Enforcement Team over the previous 5 years to reduce the overall number.

Percentage of rent collected from total rent due

Current rent arrears were £20,000 higher than at week 52 from the previous year, with performance affected by the wider roll out of Universal Credit. However, the Council was still performing in the upper quartile when compared nationally.

RESOLVED that

- a) the 2018/19 year-end outturn for the Corporate Performance Scorecard, as presented to Committee, be received and noted;
- b) the Assistant Director for Corporate Resources and Transformation be requested to review the current performance indicator (PI) for measuring incidences of fly-tipping to ensure that the target reflects more accurately the national trend thus enabling the capture and analysis of more appropriate data over the longer term.

(During consideration of this item, Councillors Andy Meakin and Sarah Madigan entered the meeting at 7.17pm).

OS.8 Scrutiny Review: Impact of Universal Credit

The Service Manager for Housing Management and Tenancy Services took the opportunity to speak to Committee Members about the impact of Universal Credit on the Council.

Preparations had been underway since 2012 and the service first went live on 22nd June, 2015 for all new claimants and single households in all areas apart from Hucknall. A full service was then introduced incrementally by area from June 2018 to November 2018.

The Council currently had 627 Universal Credit cases and of these, 383 cases were already in arrears (61%). This equated to £161,985.36 with an average of £422.94 per case. The Committee acknowledged that current rent arrears (not Universal Credit) were continuing to improve but the Universal Credit arrears were continuing to increase. Extrapolation of figures associated with this trend could see an estimated debt of £11m should the arrears increase at the same pace for the remainder of the year.

The introduction of Universal Credit has had a profound impact on residents with many having to cope with the change from fortnightly to monthly payments through a fully digital online claim portal. Many residents had no real experience in budgeting their money and were already dealing with further hardships from the switch including universal credit deductions, payday debts, foodbanks and fuel poverty. The payments to cover housing costs were therefore being spent on other things.

The Council had been endeavouring to mitigate against the impacts of Universal Credit and assist residents with the following:-

- Welfare Reform Board/Partnership working
- roadshows/presentation to tenants
- digital zones with officer support
- Universal Credit information points
- tenant surveys and profiling
- officer support and guidance
- a shift of officer resources to prevention work with additional staff rather than enforcement work
- consistently reviewing the way the support team works.

The service had recently also employed a Welfare Reform Apprentice as an additional fixed term resource to assist tenants with the transfer over to Universal Credit.

The Committee, having considered the impact of Universal Credit on the Council thus far, acknowledged the good work and support the Housing and Revenues/Benefits Teams had shown to Ashfield tenants to enable them to transfer across to the new regime with minimum stress. The work was continuing to offer support and guidance as needed.

The Service Manager for Scrutiny and Democratic Services drew Members' attention to the proposed terms of reference for the review as outlined on page 49 of the report.

Being conscious of time constraints, the Committee were asked to consider meeting as an informal group to enable the review to progress in a timely manner and ensure that any investigative research was completed in time for the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting scheduled for 5th September, 2019.

It was suggested that some insight into the experience of an Ashfield Universal Credit claimant might be beneficial to the review and to extend an invite to a willing participant to participate in an informal group meeting.

The Service Manager for Housing Management and Tenancy Services advised that some of the problems being experienced with the introduction of Universal Credit had been from the service being provided to residents by the Department of Work and Pension (DWP). Their Universal Credit Call Centre was not locally based and many of the staff were being perceived as ill-equipped to assist residents with their ongoing enquiries.

The Scrutiny Research and Support Officer advised the Committee that he was intending to invite a DWP representative to attend the first informal group meeting to obtain their perspective as to the impact Universal Credit was having on their work requirements and the residents of Ashfield.

Committee Members concluded by discussing the best focus for the review and to align the terms of reference accordingly.

RESOLVED that

- a) the report, as presented, be received and noted;
- b) the terms of reference for the review 'Impact of Universal Credit' be approved with the addition of some focus being directed towards how the Council and its partners are working together to assist claimants in achieving a smooth, successful transition over to the Universal Credit scheme and maintaining their finances responsibly thereafter;
- c) the Scrutiny Research and Support Officer be requested to facilitate Members meeting as an informal group during August 2019 to enable the review to progress in a timely manner and ensure any investigative research is completed in time for the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting scheduled for 5th September, 2019.

(During consideration of this item, Councillor Melanie Darrington left the room at 7.45pm and returned to the meeting at 7.47pm. Councillor Dave Shaw also left the room at 8.28pm).

OS.9 Scrutiny Workplan 2019/2020

The Scrutiny Research and Support Officer presented an update in relation to the work of the Committee and Panels as follows:-

Scrutiny Panel A

The Panel had commenced the 'Community Engagement' review and had held the first meeting on 4th July, 2019. Informal working groups had been arranged during August 2019 to progress the work accordingly.

Scrutiny Panel B

The Panel had commenced the 'War Memorials' review and had held the first meeting on 27th June, 2019. Four interim recommendations had been presented to Cabinet on the 15th July, 2019 to endeavour to secure funding to ensure the four priority war memorials, as identified, were professionally cleaned and restored in readiness for remembrance events in November 2019. The review was ongoing and an informal working group would be meeting during August 2019 to progress the work accordingly.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee had just commenced the 'Impact of Universal Credit' review and were meeting as an informal group during August 2019 to progress the review.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services then requested Members to consider the following scrutiny review suggestions for inclusion on the Workplan:-

Food Poverty

(as suggested by a member of the public)

To consider the alarming increase in the use of foodbanks with many food packages being obtained by struggling parents specifically for children;

Town Centre Regeneration

(as suggested by a member of the public)

To consider the continued regeneration of the Council's town centres including the market facilities currently being provided.

Digital and Service Transformation Programme

(previously suggested by a Member)

To consider the Council's Digital and Service Transformation Programme which is endeavouring to provide a blueprint on how digital technology can improve the way the Council will work with and support local residents, partners and businesses within Ashfield in the future.

Community Protection Officer Service

(suggested by a Member at the meeting)

To consider the work and remit of the Council's Community Protection Officer Service and how it assists Nottinghamshire Police in undertaking their duties to reduce anti-social behaviour within the District.

RESOLVED that

- a) the update in relation to the work of the Scrutiny Panels and Committee, be received and noted;
- b) the following items be included on the Scrutiny Workplan for 2019/20:-
 - Town Centre Regeneration
 - Community Protection Officer Service;
- c) the review of 'Food Poverty' be amalgamated with the ongoing 'Impact of Universal Credit' review which commenced in July 2019;
- d) the review of the 'Digital and Service Transformation Programme' be declined and not included on the Scrutiny Workplan for 2019/20.

(During consideration of this item, Councillor Dave Shaw returned to the meeting at 8.32pm).

The meeting closed at 8.43 pm

Chairman.