

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Virtual Meeting held on Thursday, 16th July, 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Andrew Harding in the Chair;

Councillors Jim Blagden, Dale Grounds,
Phil Rostance, David Walters, Lee Waters and
Caroline Wilkinson.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Joanne Froggatt, Vicky Green,
Mike Joy and Shane Wright.

OS.1 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

OS.2 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 February 2020,
be received and approved as a correct record.

OS.3 Corporate Scorecard Year End Position

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 Corporate Plan has been updated for the period 2019-2023 with the
Council's Corporate Priorities being reviewed and developed by
Cabinet last year and more recently, paying particular consideration to the
impact of the pandemic and the Council's intended recovery activity.

Committee were advised that the Corporate Plan sat above a wider strategic
context which included the Corporate Project Management Framework,
Corporate Performance Indicators and a range of strategic documents relating
to the organisation and its services. 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.

Notwithstanding the impacts of the pandemic, the Corporate Scorecard position for April 2019 to March 2020 indicated that 74% of measures had been achieved or exceeded their target or were within 10% variance of target. Also, 64% of measures had indicated an improved position compared to the same period in the previous year, or were within 5% of their previous year's performance levels.

Members were presented with the Corporate Plan's key successes delivered over the full range of the services during 2019/20, which included:

- non-decent housing stock remaining under target;
- consistent support for tenants remaining in their tenancy for 6 months or more following completion of their support package;
- planning applications processed well above standard targets;
- 20,800 subscribers to the garden waste service; 1,300 more than the previous year with an increase in garden waste tonnage collected;
- average call waiting time decreased over the year;
- online payments showing a significant increase compared to the previous year;
- reduction in staff sickness absence out-turn compared to the previous year.

Members also considered a couple of identified areas for improvement in relation to rent collection and rent arrears, which had been severely affected by the full rollout of Universal Credit during November 2019. Coupled with a delay in payments made to claimants by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the financial uncertainty brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak, this had resulted in a substantial decrease in funds to the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Committee took the opportunity to discuss the rent collection and rent arrears issues and considered amongst other things:

- acknowledgement that the increase in rent arrears due to Universal Credit had been expected and in mitigation, the additional support being provided by the Council to alleviate some of the anxieties being experienced by claimants during this period;
- the exceptional work ethic of staff who had continued to support claimants and deliver services during the COVID-19 outbreak including the recruitment of additional staff to meet the growing demand;
- the demand for social housing, the Council's response to bringing any non-decent homes into use and the operational arrangements for delivering the Council's planned maintenance programme for housing stock;

- the increase in people and families presenting as homeless which had been exacerbated further due to the recent pandemic and the need to bring vulnerable people off the streets and into a safer environment;
- the possible reasons for the significant reduction in rent collection showing during January of each year.

To conclude, the Scrutiny Research Officer took the opportunity to remind Members that the Committee had considered Universal Credit as a topic in the previous year and had made some valuable recommendations to Cabinet that had been approved in February 2020. It was hoped that the recommendations would complement and enhance the wide range of services already being provided by the Council to support claimants and manage the difficulties associated with facilitation of the Universal Credit regime.

Members acknowledged that previous practice had seen the Committee invite Cabinet Portfolio Holders (on a rolling programme) to attend meetings and give updates and felt this would be a good time to reintroduce the arrangement to enable Overview and Scrutiny Members to receive feedback and progress reports in relation to their recommendations as submitted.

RESOLVED that

- a) the 2019/20 year-end outturn for the Corporate Performance Scorecard, as presented to Committee, be received and noted;
- b) the Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services be requested to reintroduce the programme for inviting Portfolio Holders to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings and offer updates/feedback in relation to their Portfolios.

OS.4 LGA Peer Challenge 2020

The Assistant Director for Corporate Services and Transformation presented the report and reminded the Committee that in April 2020, the Council had endorsed the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge that had been undertaken by the Local Government Association in January 2020. The Peer Review was requested by the Council on a three-yearly basis.

The review was designed to support the Council and was part of a sector led improvement programme. There was an expectation from the LGA and Government that the findings would be used to support improvements and Cabinet had subsequently sanctioned all actions arising from the LGA report. Five themes were worked upon and the Peer Challenge Team were on site for three days whilst speaking to around one hundred people over a period of three hundred hours collectively.

The Peer Challenge team, within its Executive Summary, had concluded that:

- The Council was a council where the politicians provide strong community engagement, are involved, passionate and resident-focused;

- Councillors are particularly active in seeking residents' views and wants and use them to identify priorities for action;
- The Council is successful in using resident views in influencing service delivery;
- The Council has clear ambitions and it is clear which Directors and Departments are responsible for delivering them;
- The Council has a clear aspiration to take a One Council approach;
- The Council has adopted values and associated behaviours through a participative approach which are displayed across the organisation;
- Staff are very positive about working for the Council and are committed to delivering the best for the Council's residents and customers. They are also enthusiastic about using their untapped potential for the good of the Council and its residents.

Following receipt of the report, a detailed Action Plan had been developed based on the recommendations and five themes, with progress being monitored through Pentana, the Council's performance management solution. Members discussed some of the key recommendations as outlined in the report and considered how best they could be kept updated as to their progress, or otherwise.

RESOLVED that

- a) the development and monitoring of the Action Plan in relation to the implementation of key recommendations following the LGA Peer Challenge review, as presented, be received and noted;
- b) based on each of the five themes contained within the Action Plan, the Service Manager; Scrutiny and Democratic Services be requested to invite the most appropriate Portfolio Holder to future meetings of the Committee, to give updates in relation to progress against the key recommendations as required.

OS.5 Scrutiny Workplan Refresh 2020/2021

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services presented the report and outlined the main requirements of the Council's Scrutiny Workplan.

Under normal circumstances, the Scrutiny Workplan once finalised and approved by the Committee, would outline the Council's yearly rolling work programme of in-depth reviews and standing items considered by Panels A and B and the Committee respectively.

However, due to various disruptions to the Council's scrutiny work over the previous municipal year and the COVID-19 outbreak, four topics from the 2019/2020 Workplan needed to be carried over to the 2020/2021 Workplan, namely:

Bus Provision in Ashfield
Community Protection Service
Climate Emergency
Service Personnel.

Therefore, Members were asked to approve no more than two new additional topics for the 2020/21 Workplan (to add to the 4 ongoing topics) to avoid any unnecessary backlog, and to additionally compile and approve a 'reserve list' of topics for commencement as and when space became available later on in the municipal year.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre for Public Scrutiny had recently released a series of online guides designed to support councils with governance and scrutiny during the outbreak and throughout the aftermath. The guides were intended to support councillors and officers on managing some of the challenges associated with the COVID-19 crisis.

Guide No 2 covered the key arguments in favour of continued, robust member-led scrutiny during the COVID-19 crisis and set out an approach to enable Councils to provide scrutiny in a format that would fit within the constrained resources that councils would have at their disposal.

Following receipt of the guidance, the Council felt it would be prudent to establish a time-limited COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet made a recommendation to Council, to that effect, at its meeting on 30 June 2020.

The Panel was made up of 7 Members who were appointed in accordance with the requirements of political balance. It was agreed that the Panel would review the Council's response to the pandemic and take an active role in respect of the Council's recovery plans.

Members took time to consider new topics for the 2020/21 Workplan and made suggestions for the following:-

1. Accessibility, equipment and support for disabled children on the Council's play parks;
2. Performance of the Council's Commercial Investment Portfolio and its ongoing management during the COVID-19 outbreak and onwards;
3. The recent fall in recycling collection figures and methods for improving collection rates and providing education and support for residents;
4. How to improve the Council's digital resource provision;
5. The increase of loneliness and isolation within resident's homes;
6. 5G technology advances and current issues;
7. The increase in reports of children suffering from mental health difficulties;

8. To review the Council's provision of electrical charging points and support for green transportation.

RESOLVED that

a) the following items be included on the Scrutiny Workplan for 2020/21:-

- accessibility, equipment and support for disabled children on the Council's play parks;
- the recent fall in recycling collection figures and methods for improving collection rates and providing education and support for residents;

b) the following items be included on the Scrutiny Workplan reserve list for 2020/21:-

- performance of the Council's Commercial Investment Portfolio and its ongoing management during the COVID-19 outbreak and onwards (to be undertaken as part of the Committee's annual budget review process);
- how to improve the Council's digital resource provision (to provide a watching brief as a Member/Officer Working Group already established to deliver this project).

The meeting closed at 8.21 pm

Chairman.