

Minutes of **Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel**

Meeting date **Thursday, 24 June 2021**

Members present: Councillor John Walker (Chair), Councillor Roy Lees (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Sarah Ainsworth, Julia Berry, James Nevett and Aidy Riggott

Officers: Asim Khan - Director (Customer and Digital) Shared Services, Howard Anthony – Performance and Partnerships Team Leader, Michael Johnson – Policy Officer (Engagement), Matthew Pawlyszyn – Democratic and member Services Officer, Nina Neisser – Democratic and member Services Officer.

Other Members: Councillor Adrian Lowe – Executive Member (Customer and Streetscene Services)

21.OSP.5 Minutes of meeting Thursday, 4 March 2021 of Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

21.OSP.6 Declarations of Any Interests

No interests were declared.

21.OSP.7 Performance Focus – Customer and Digital

The Committee welcomed Asim Khan Director (Customer and Digital) Shared Services and Councillor Adrian Lowe, Executive Member (Customer and Streetscene Services).

It was highlighted that since the last Customer and Digital Performance Panel, operational challenges occurred because of the ongoing global pandemic, but services have adapted.

The process of Shared Services changed the landscape of the directorate and Directors were now responsible across both Chorley and South Ribble. The Customer and Digital Directorate included

- Customer Services
- Neighborhoods
- Street Scene
- ICT

The budget for the Directorate was £6,051,880 with a variance of 4.7% equaling £285,703. The biggest attribute to this was the vacant posts.

Paragraph 13 highlighted the three colour rating system, a green star indicated 'Performance is better than target', a blue circle is 'Worse than target by within threshold (5%)' and red triangle is 'Worse than target, outside threshold (5%)'

The number of online requests that were received had increased significantly compared to the previous 12 months, with fewer dissatisfied users compared to Q4 2019/20.

It was noted that during the last twelve months, the Council suspended recovery action for Council Tax, instead opting to send reminder notices. Collection of Council Tax was down 0.9% (£639,000). This figure was worse than Q4 2019/20 but was within threshold. Recovery of non-payment was due to recommence at the start of July.

There had been a reduction in the time taken to process housing benefit and change of circumstance.

There had been a significant increase in missed residential waste and recycling collection, as the council recorded 43 missed collections per 100,000.

Members understood that due to lockdown, the amount of cardboard waste was higher and questioned if an increase in collections was likely. Members were advised that the Council were always open to feedback from residents. Despite monthly collections, the size of the receptacle had been increased to 240L, and that residents could request an additional bin or leave cardboard next to the bin if required.

The Council outperformed targets for collection of public litter bins, high street cleaning routes completed, and ground maintenance service requests completed on time. Ad hoc service requests failed to outperform the previous year but the figure was greatly above the target of 80%.

All of the projects part of the ICT strategy were green.

In relation to the 2020/21 corporate projects, the website was delivered but development and rollout was affected by Covid-19. The programme to deliver a cleaner and more attractive borough was linked into the streetscene targets.

Members questioned whether the primary contact point to the council would be online after the pandemic and if there was an expected target for face to face interaction in the next 12 months.

Asim Khan believed that demand for online services will continue to grow due to the convenience provided, enabled by significant investment in the ICT infrastructure. The Council understood the demand for face to face interaction and will continue to support the opportunity where possible. The target for 2020/21 for online service requests was 35% but the actual result was 52.74%.

Members questioned if the 80% targets set for Streetscene was too low and suggested 90%. The suggestion was acknowledged, and consideration would be

given to raising the targets, but Members were made aware that the weather had the potential to significantly affect the work of Streetscene.

In response to Members seeking clarification about a data breach, Asim Khan explained the process in which customers received information from the Council, and that the Council were notified that the system could be manipulated to access other requests. The Council acted quickly and appropriately to resolve the issue. The Council reported itself to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for investigation and it was ruled that there was no breach as there was no access to sensitive information through the manipulation.

The Chair raised that the five Chorley Parks with Green Flag status was positive, but remarked they have had that status since 2010, and questioned if the Council had plans or consideration to increase the number.

Cllr Lowe was open to potential suggestions for consideration.

The Chair sought clarity about the policy of mini meadows and wildlife. Councillor Lowe agreed that the policy was contentious with some residents. The project had successfully delivered a variance in bloom and contributed positively to the Council's wider green agenda.

Both Councillor Lowe and Asim Khan agreed to provide members a list of officers and their roles to enable greater communication, especially for new Members, but the first point of call was the contact centre. Chris Walmsley should be informed of any unreasonable delays, who would then provide an explanation. Members were also able to approach Asim directly if required.

Decision: The report was noted.

21.OSP.8 Quarter Four Performance Report 2020/21

The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel welcomed Howard Anthony (Performance & Partnerships Team Leader). The Quarter Four report covered January to March 2021.

Considering the challenging circumstances, performance was said to be very good. 84% of projects were on target and rated green. 8% were not started, and 8% were amber. 50% of the indicators were on track or above target and 50% of the corporate strategy measures were on target.

The Communities team worked to provide support to residents and local businesses during the pandemic. The renovations of Astley Hall were currently amber due to issues found during renovations, but when resolved will be back on track. It was hoped that the work will be completed before the G7 speakers arrive.

Members questioned if the Astley Hall refurbishment was at risk of requiring further funds from Council. There was no indication that the project was at risk of going over-budget and that the amber rating was due to a delay.

The percent of the population with an NVQ level 3 or higher exceeded the target.

Play spaces progressed well with Westway Sports Campus's installation of grass and artificial pitches. Work on King George V's Playing Field commenced with improvements including a changing facility, kiosk space and a foyer.

Other projects included the extra care scheme and community facilities at Tatton Gardens. The project was progressing well and will provide high quality, affordable and suitable housing, a GP surgery, a pharmacy, a café and community centre. Work is ahead of schedule.

The number of empty properties increased during the quarter. The number of affordable homes in the region underperformed.

Members raised that only 47 affordable homes were delivered, which was below the target. Tatton Gardens would not make up the number and asked what was being done to increase the number of affordable homes. Howard explained that due to the market, house building had slowed, there were supply constraints. The Local Plan was being developed, highlighting land supply, and exploring the longer-term strategic position of how sites could be brought forward. The Members were reassured that the Council remained focused on delivering affordable homes.

In response to Members enquiring about the average length of time properties remained empty, Howard Anthony did not have a figure on hand, but noted that there were particular reoccurring empty properties that required further examination and when completed, the information will be returned to Members.

Good progress had been made with Alker Lane. Improvements have been made to the town centre with the upgrade of the market. The site at Bengal Street progressed well. All three projects reported green.

The Chair asked if the action taken to use letting agents to solve the town centre vacancy rates was the best way forward. Howard Anthony explained that the Council used the most efficient means of getting the vacant lots on the market, and it was hoped that once pandemic restrictions lift, town centres started to recover, but it was not an issue unique to Chorley.

Members asked if Alker Lane and other business locations were at risk with the changing patterns of work and if the Council had considered the short- and long-term impact on businesses and Council owned premises. Howard felt that it was too early to fully understand the future of working dynamics and is happy to approach the Business Team to provide evidence when understanding was greater.

The pandemic caused significant impact to overall employment rate, and there had been an increase in 16 – 17-year-old NEETs (not in full time education, employment, or training). Further monitoring to continue to assess if it was a short-term issue that would self-correct or if action was needed. The employment rate was below the target and decreasing in line with the average. There was work underway with the Quick Start scheme and the Business Engagement Team worked throughout Covid-19 assisting with government grants. The figures were not unique to Chorley and were common across Lancashire.

In relation to filling the skill gaps in the region, education establishments have been working with the Local Enterprise Partnership to proactively work across Chorley and South Ribble to provide future employees the skills to fill these gaps.

Median workplace earnings were below the average for the region. Efforts to improve growth in the local economy include Alker Lane and Strawberry Fields. Members felt that Chorley did not have the structural and deprivation of other areas in Lancashire and felt that the area should not be on the wrong side of the average rate, and that if there was not a turnaround, it could be an aspect Scrutiny could pick up and address with partners.

Howard added that areas that consistently performed below targets were explored, action plans created and monitored. He also noted that the statistics came externally from Nomis and the figures were not broken down into various demographics but will approach the Department of Work and Pensions for further details.

Phase two of shared services progressed well, the Council implemented shared Chief Executive and Directors. Progress made for ICT and other departments to include Streetscene. New technology improved services for residents.

The Council progressed with its green agenda with the appointment of a Climate Change Co-Ordinator with capacity to deliver and enact the programme. The Clean Air Consultation was underway.

For the Performance of Key Service Delivery Measures, two were worse than targeted, one was worse but within threshold and five performed better than targeted. The number of businesses closed due to the pandemic increased the Town Centre vacancy rate. As covered by Asim Khan, the Council failed to meet its target of missed collections per 100,000 of household waste.

Members discussed the format of the Performance Panel and questioned if other Directors and Cabinet Members should attend to answer questions relating to the quarter's performance. The Chair disagreed and felt that the system in place of each Directorate and Cabinet Member attending one Performance Panel per year to answer questions made, and any further requests can be made at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Decision: The report was noted.

Chair

Date