

**Minutes of** **Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel**

**Meeting date** **Thursday, 9 March 2023**

**Committee Members present:** Councillor John Walker (Chair), Councillor Roy Lees (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Sarah Ainsworth, Michelle Le Marinel, Arjun Singh and Kim Snape

**Officers:** Adele Hayes (Head of Planning and Enforcement), Zoe Whiteside (Head of Spatial Planning), Howard Anthony (Interim Head of Policy and Performance), Sophie Tsang (Transformation Graduate), and Matthew Pawlyszyn (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

**Apologies:** Councillors Alistair Bradley and Adrian Lowe

A video recording of the public session of this meeting is available to view on [YouTube here](#)

**19 Minutes of meeting Thursday, 12 January 2023 of Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel**

**Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting Thursday, 12 January 2023 of Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel be approved as a correct record.**

**20 Declarations of Any Interests**

**21 Performance Focus: Planning and Development**

Executive Member for Planning and Development Councillor Alistair Morwood presented the report.

The directorate was noted to be unusual due to covering three Executive Portfolios.

Financially, there was an overspend of £37,346 due to the increase cost of professional fees, statutory notices, legal fees and rise in staffing. The legal fees required to defend planning decisions at appeal was £147,000.

There was a reduction of income from the building control plan fees and inspection fees and due to the suspension of the pre-application advice service the budgeted £17,000 was not received. The service was suspended due to the pandemic, in its place, improvements were made to the planning portal and supplementary guidance. It was noted that for developments that did not require planning permission, it was advised that a certificate of lawful development was obtained.

Staffing remained a challenge within the council, with failed recruitment attempts and the use of agency staff. All duties were carried out at maximum capacity, but the expense was greater. The issue with staffing was recognised by central government and a consultation was open exploring resilience within local authorities. It was commended that the private sector was able to offer larger compensation packages, and efforts to train from within were likely to result in the departure for the private sector. It was noted that there were no current plans to recruit and install a Director of Planning and Development.

The performance indicators from within the report were highlighted and discussed.

In relation to the local plan and developments within the borough, it was understood that the council were below its indicators, for a large development, the average build rate was 30 – 50 units a year, although figures varied. By the end of a local plan fewer allocated housing sites remained, and those allocated may yet to be developed. The Panel heard that the council was currently under the process of negotiating with a developer to purchase a number of affordable houses in its role as a registered provider.

The consultation for the new Local Plan ended 24 February 2023, 1200 online responses and 270 written responses were received. Over 500 people attended sessions across the borough, and external partners, including the School Planning Team and Highways have provided feedback which resulted in additional work required.

It was clarified that there were between 1000 and 1200 planning applications made a year, the majority of decisions were made by delegated decision. Most appeals were dismissed, however those that went to appeal were statistical outliers. The Panel were informed that the Planning Directorate, like many public bodies had a resource and capacity issue, which resulted in the time to consider appeals to be substantial.

Of the three projects in the directorate, 'to work with partners and residents to improve local play and community facilities across the borough', and 'lead activity to address climate change including tree planting' were on track. The project 'to deliver affordable housing within the borough' was slightly off track.

The project for the 2023/24 municipal year are to 'deliver the local plan', 'to deliver natural green initiatives', and to 'develop the use of green energy in the borough'.

The project to 'deliver affordable housing remained a corporate project, however it would be placed under the director of Change and Delivery

## **22 Business Plans Update 2022-23**

Howard Anthony, Interim Head of Policy and Performance presented the report.

The business plans were set by the services within the council, some were small and simple, others were large and complex, but it was the responsibility of the service to deliver the project and provide an update on their progress throughout the year.

The 2022-23 cycle of projects were ending, there was an average of 5 projects per service, but overall, performance was positive. 73% of projects were green or

completed. And it was expected that most, if not all would be completed by the end of Quarter 4.

Achievements noted included the successful launch of the People Strategy and the new Customer Access Charter was approved by Executive Cabinet in January 2023.

Two projects were red and considered off track, these were the 'flood defense work to Earlsway, Euxton and 'evaluate a rent management system for housing stock'.

The flood defense work was unable to progress due to a combination of land ownership issues and the high costs to complete the work.

The delay to the rent management system was due to capacity and staffing.

34 projects were rated amber and considered slightly off track. The reasons varied, but a common theme was capacity and resources.

13 projects were currently on hold and not being progressed, the primary reason again was capacity and resources. There were examples of project managers departing the council and newly placed officers developing their workload and reviewing projects.

It was clarified upon questions that the projects that were delayed within public protection had no impact on the statutory duties delivered. It was confirmed that the animal welfare activities licensing was in relation to licensable activities such as breeding and selling animals, although the full parameters of this would be confirmed to members.

Information and questions that would be followed up and reported back included:

- Brincall Swimming Baths
- Cowling Farm
- CCTV infrastructure, its operation, and proposed relocation to Strawberry Meadows
- Proposed District Council Health Scrutiny
- Progress of ICT rollout, and the status of the ICT Disaster Recovery Plan.
- The draft Environmental Crime Enforcement Policy

It was clarified that the on-hold projects 'health and safety: HSE priority project – safe use of inflatable amusement devices' and 'food safety: delivery of food hygiene and allergen awareness training to targeted groups' were awareness campaigns as opposed to policies. It was understood that it was good practice to highlight issues and proactively work to prevent accidents.

**Resolved: That the report be noted.**

Chair

Date