

Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel

Monday, 17 September 2012

Present: Councillor Steve Holgate (Chair) and Julia Berry, Hasina Khan, Roy Lees and Kim Snape

Also in attendance: Councillors Dennis Edgerley (Executive Member (LDF and Planning)) and Paul Walmsley (Chair of Development Control Committee)

Officers in attendance: Jamie Carson (Director of People and Places), Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Partnerships and Planning), Rebecca Huddleston (Performance Improvement Manager) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

12.OSP.07 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Graham Dunn

12.OSP.08 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No declarations of any interest were received.

12.OSP.09 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That subject to the inclusion of the following paragraph under minute 12.OSP.05

Councillor Berry asked that there be more transparency in project reporting in the future to give Members greater confidence in project delivery

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting held on 23 July 2012 be held as a correct record for signing by the Chair.

12.OSP.10 BUSINESS PLAN MONITORING STATEMENT - PARTNERSHIPS, PLANNING AND POLICY

The Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy reported progress against the key actions and performance indicators for the Partnerships, Planning and Policy Directorate.

Of the 28 actions/projects contained within the directorates plan, only three were rated as amber and Members fully discussed the issues:

- The delivery of the second year of the Section 106 play and recreation fund had been delayed as there was currently insufficient funding to accommodate a reasonable number of bids. Funding would continue to be monitored and the process would be instigated when sufficient funds were available.
- Further work was required on an agreed service model of the introduction of supported accommodation for 16/17 year olds. It was important that the model met the Supporting People model regarding the number of hours/proposed contract and the intention was to strengthen the support to meet the needs of vulnerable 16/17 year olds, including a concierge service.

The Locality and Commissioning Body had both approved the principle of the service remodelling, however further work was needed to examine the structure and business model. Agreement would need to be secured from Chief Officers and Members regarding the impact on other Supporting People funded services in Chorley. It was highlighted that there were currently no elected Members represented on the Commissioning Body, as Lancashire County Council intended to reduce the funding from 2015 onwards and it would be this body that would ultimately decide on the outcome, the Leader would continue to lobby for the needs of Chorley.

Members requested more information on the supporting people projects in Chorley.

- The trial of the new car parking options would now be implemented from 1 October 2012. Revised pricing options had been proposed in line with feedback received from Town Team representatives and were part of the authority's new commitment to boost local economy and revitalise the town centre.

Of the 18 performance indicators that were reported, seven were below target and outside the 5% threshold at the time of the most recent reporting period as at 30 June 2012. An explanation and updated information was given against each one.

The indicators relating to the processing of planning applications were discussed further down the agenda.

Other queries related to:

- New businesses established
- The number of Homelessness Preventions and Reliefs
- Percentage planned departures at Cotswold

It was agreed that more needed to be done to encourage residents to seek housing and homelessness service advice prior to reaching housing crisis and the Council were currently exploring the introduction of a court desk service at Preston's Magistrate's Court.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the information within the report be noted.**
- 2. That further information be provided to the Panel on the supporting people projects in Chorley.**

12.OSP.11 PERFORMANCE FOCUS: PLANNING CONTEXT

The Panel received a report of the Chief Executive providing contextual information and some questions that would be asked of the relevant Executive Member in relation to planning performance.

Planning processing performance for minor and other applications had dropped in 2012/13 following excellent performance in 2011/12. Both indicators had been off target at the end of quarter one, with performance dropping again in July.

As the performance for 'minor' and 'other' applications was more than 5% off target, an action plan had been prepared to set out the issues and action that would be taken to improve performance.

The service had experienced a significant increase in the volume of minor applications in April and significant printing demands generating from safeguarded land applications. To compound the situation, there had been printing and indexing issues,

that had impacted the services ability to easily and effectively process the application that were received. As the timescales for these type of applications were relatively short (at 8 weeks), issues such as these, easily impacted on performance.

A number of measures had been put into place, including additional staffing, workflow modifications, management controls and temporary ICT fixes and it was expected that performance would improve for the next quarter. However although the measures had been implemented and customer satisfaction with the service remained high, achievement of the end of year target for Minor applications would not be achieved due to anticipated future volumes and the issues that can arise with this type of application.

Councillor Dennis Edgerley, Executive Member (LDF and Planning) and Councillor Paul Walsmsley, Chair of the Development Control Committee along with the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Performance attended the meeting to answer questions of the Panel and to provide further information as to why the improved performance of the service was being hindered.

The volume of applications still remains high, with around 70 applications being received on average each month. However, four of the last six months had seen applications receiving in excess of 80 and as high as 102 applications received. In addition the service deals with a large volume of pre application work to the region of 700 applications per year.

The transition of the Local Plan and production of a new site allocations DPD had also generating a significant number of safeguarded applications for large sites. Re-consultations outside the control of the Council for the revision of plans to overcome objections is currently circa 170 per annum which extends the application beyond the 8/13 week deadline. The volume of neighbour notifications and responders remains extremely high which can impacts on performance, particularly when IT and printing systems are down. In addition the volume of appeals work remains high which requires the preparation and attendance at appeals and the Council's performance in this regard is high at circa 72% and above the industry average at 65%.

The percentage of decisions delegated is way under the industry target that is considered to impact on planning performance with regards to processing times. There had in fact only been four months since April 2010 when just over the 93% target had been achieved. Members attention was particularly drawn to this fact as the more applications which are delegated or deferred for site visits at Committee will impact on achieving processing times.

The service is continuing to monitor and closely manage performance to determination and following issues in January and February there had been an increase in the number determined per month despite the planning appeal work, on going ICT resilience issues, increase in volumes and handling complex safeguarded sites. The average number of applications determined per annum is in the low 80's and for the period April to August 2012 the average had been 108 per month.

Therefore, cases on hand were reducing but still high and it was demonstrated that it would be highly unlikely that the processing of 'minor' applications would get back on target for the remainder of the year.

The Council had engaged the services of Urban Vision to help keep the 'other' applications on track and other improvements implemented included:

- Workflow review and re-design
- Introduction of traffic light system for the processing stages
- Introduction of red box systems to fast track processing tasks
- Regular (twice weekly) case management discussions to meet targets.

The authority could take a tougher line on applications where amendments were required, although this would come with a risk, particularly in light of the recent planning announcements and reputational impact.

Additional corrective action included:

- New IT software to enable more efficient and intense level of case supervision.
- Improved resilience of IT systems and implement a final long term printing solution.
- Continued use of Urban Vision for some householder applications to free up Local Planning Authority planners to focus mainly on major and minors.
- Consider re-visiting the delegation position.

RESOLVED – That the information received be noted.

12.OSP.12 PEOPLE AND PLACES DIRECTORATE - BUSINESS PLAN MONITORING

The Director of People and Places reported progress against the key actions and performance indicators for the People and Places Directorate.

Only three key actions had been rated as amber, with an explanation about the issue and the action being taken to address them:

The improvements to the promotion of Pest Control Service had been delayed due to other priorities and had been rescheduled to begin in September 2012 in line with the Councils new website page.

The Neighbourhood Review would now take account of other initiatives which would impact on the design of a neighbourhood working model.

The Common Bank – Big Wood Reservoir was dependent on Section 106 funding payments from developers and was linked to the Gillibrand Estate adoption.

Only two performance indicators had not been on target and action had subsequently been taken to get these back on track:

- Percentage of streets meeting graffiti standards
- Number of proactive dog patrols

The Chair, Councillor Holgate commented that the Civic Pride Campaign had been in danger of duplicating many aspects of the Neighbourhood Review and that it was important that all the interested parties worked together to ensure that this did not happen and that the reviews original remit be extended to include community development work.

RESOLVED – That the information in the report be noted.

12.OSP.13 TRANSFORMATION DIRECTORATE - BUSINESS PLAN MONITORING

The Panel received a report of the Chief Executive presenting the directorates business improvement plan for 2012/13. The Performance Improvement Manager reported progress against the key actions and performance indicators for the directorate.

The report contained those key actions that were rated amber and gave an explanation about the issue and the action being taken to address them, these included:

- Implementation of changes to the management accountancy function
- Compete Bank tender
- Implementation of Virtual Post Room
- Complete review of Information Management
- Develop and deliver a new Intranet

Some of the key actions related to IT difficulties and delays and the ICT Plan that had been reported at the last meeting continued to be regularly updated in line with the progress being made against each task and Members requested if they could have access to the updated ICT programme.

Members asked whether the resources and capacity of the ICT service was thought to be adequate. The service had recognised that there had been an issue in skilling up staff and this was now being addressed.

The report also included a full list of the directorates performance indicators, with only five being reported as being below target and outside the 5% threshold. An explanation of the reasons and action being taken to address the issues were given for each of the following:

- percentage of customers satisfied with the way they were treated by the Council
- percentage of benefits correspondence dealt with in 7 working days
- percentage of draft minutes circulated within 7 days
- percentage turnout for local elections.
- percentage of employees who consider themselves to have a disability

Although the percentage of customers satisfied with the way they were treated by the Council was considerably down, the customer satisfaction indicator had been changed in recent months to one that was more realistic and could identify and address specific issues.

Members were interested to know the full details of the customer satisfaction results and it was agreed that a report currently being drawn up for all the Heads of Service would be made available to the Panel for further scrutiny.

RESOLVED –

- 1. That the information in the report be noted.**
- 2. The results of the customer satisfaction survey be circulated to the Panel.**
- 3. That the updated ICT plan be brought back to a future meeting of the Panel.**

Chair