

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL

MEETING DATE Thursday, 25 September 2014

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor John Walker (Chair), Councillor June Molyneaux (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Julia Berry, Mark Jarnell, Greg Morgan and Alistair Morwood

OFFICERS: Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Customer and Advice Services), Chris Sinnott (Head of Policy and Communications), Asim Khan (Head of Customer, ICT and Transactional Services), Natalie Taylor-Proctor (Policy and Partnerships Officer) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Graham Dunn (Executive Member for Customer and Advice Services)

14.OSP.58 Minutes

RESOLVED – That subject to the inclusion of Councillor Mike Handley being present at the meeting the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting held on 10 July 2014 be confirmed as a correct record for signing by the Chair.

14.OSP.59 Declarations of Any Interests

There were no declarations of any interests.

14.OSP.60 Scrutiny Focus - Customer Dissatisfaction

The Panel received a report of the Chief Executive that provide contextual information and proposed initial questions to initiate discussions regarding current levels of customer dissatisfaction with Council services.

The Head of Customer and ICT Services, Asim Khan and Head of Policy and Communications, Chris Sinnott along with Policy and Partnership Officer, Natalie Taylor Proctor attended the meeting to answer questions of the Panel about the information contained with the report.

Ensuring that customers are satisfied with the services they receive from the Council is a high priority for the authority. The council measures satisfaction in a number of ways including a comprehensive resident's survey every few years that captures residents' views on levels of satisfaction of the quality of life in their local area and of

the Council and its services, together with a monthly survey which seeks feedback from customers on specific services they have requested from the Council.

The 2013 resident's satisfaction survey showed that 73% of people were satisfied with the way in which the council runs things, a significant improvement on the 50% satisfaction recorded in 2008. A target of less than 20% had been set to measure customer levels of dissatisfaction with the services that they receive from the Council. This target reflected the council's ambitious approach in continually improving its services and levels of customer satisfaction. The latest figures taken at the end of August reported current performance levels at 22.6% which indicated that the figures continued to fall and officers were confident that their target could be achieved.

The main reason for customer dis-satisfaction was staff not getting back to customers in a timely manner and many steps had been taken throughout the Council to address this. My Account had been launched to enable customers to track the progress of their requests 24/7 via the website and contractors such as Veolia had been issued with mobile devices to enable them to provide up to date progress on customer requests.

The results of the satisfaction survey, including customer reasons and comments, continued to be reported to Strategy Group on a monthly basis and Information Exchange to enable Heads of Service to address any service related issues.

By developing My Account, the information that officers input can update customers with the status of their request and it is only closed when actually complete, rather than when it is expected to be finished.

There had been an internal communications drive for all staff to get back to the customer within two working days. Customer dis-satisfaction levels are available via the Loop and articles appear on a regular basis reminding all staff of the importance of customer call backs. And everyone within the authority can use the My Tasks system to assess the current status of any request. Work is progressing to ensure that the same standards are implemented across all services, whether by email, phone or face to face.

Some issues however are more complicated to resolve as they can involve several partners and can sometime considerably longer than two days to reach a conclusion. In these instances, additional training has taken place with officers to ensure that they take the necessary steps to keep the customer adequately informed as the issue is progressed.

The sample survey is now sent via the Attain system which enables the Council to maximise the number of respondents. The survey has been optimised to ensure that respondents are able to give their views quickly and easily. The Council has now built up quite a comprehensive data base of emails that can be used in this way.

They are also used to better inform people of what actions have been taken to resolve their issues or what services the Council can provide. This method of communication is now used as a way of conveying key messages to the residents of Chorley. This data base will continue to grow especially with the increased use of residents registering to use the My Account application on the Council's website. Around 1000 email addresses are now being captured on a monthly basis as opposed to around 200 previously.

However, the Council are aware that there are some people that do not have an email address and a piece of work is currently being undertaken to establish the different pathways that people access Council services. This will allow the authority to find alternative ways of gaining feedback from all strands of the community across the borough.

Members asked how the My Account service had been marketed as there didn't seem to have been an official launch. It was explained that the application had been brought in quietly in order to test the system so that it could be improved and developed accordingly. Once the team are happy with everything it will be fully marketed. There are plans to widen its scope to give residents the option to pay their Council Tax or other bills, but this is dependent on improved security measures being put into place.

Members commented that they were very impressed with the My Account application and the work that was being done in the One Stop to encourage people to use the system. The Group were satisfied with the work that was being undertaken to bring customer dis-satisfaction levels down and it was generally accepted that some people will not be satisfied, no matter what the Council do.

Some people are not satisfied if they have not received the answers that they were looking for; this is particularly evident when dealing with planning applications or housing allocations. It was also felt that resident's expectations were higher for the Council/ public sector than they were for private companies such as mobile phone and electrical companies.

The Chair thanked the officers for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the note be reported.

14.OSP.61 Monitoring of the Organisational Improvement Plan 2014/15

The Chief Executive submitted a report giving progress made to date on the delivery of the Organisational Improvement Plan, including the delivery of key projects and the performance of key indicators.

Good progress was being made with 83.6% of projects rated green or complete. One projected was rated amber and one, rated red. 13.11% of projects had not yet been started, with work scheduled to start over the next few months.

A breakdown of the projects by Corporate Priority was included within the report, there one project, development of the Buttermere Community Centre that was rated red and one project, provision of Off Street Parking in Croston, that had been rated amber. An explanation as to why was given as follows:

Work on the new Buttermere Community Centre was yet to start due to a delay in the tender process by the developer. Work had been due to start at the beginning of September however the company had gone into liquidation so the developer was now looking to reappoint with a view to begin work early December 2014.

A number of sites had now been identified and presented to Western Parishes as potential options for Off Street Parking in Croston. Feedback on the proposals was still outstanding and the parishes had been chased a number of times for their feedback.

Although delivery of the organisational plan is only just underway with some projects not yet scheduled to start there had already been a number of notable achievements that were listed within the report.

However there was a number of key performance indicators that were off track and Members were informed of the reasons as to why they were below target that included:

% of domestic violence detections

Domestic Violence detections was a measure that had been set by the police and adopted by the Council. The original target was set as a stretch target and due to changes in legislation, the work that was undertaken to encourage people to report, interventions and alternative disposals, including mediation to reduce the number reaching 'detection' stage, the police argued that this would change. This was echoed to the Panel by Detective Inspector Geoff Hurst at a previous meeting in March 2014. The Council's Corporate Strategy is due to be refreshed in November and it was agreed that the authority needed to identify a new way of capturing the relevant statistics in order to target specific areas more effectively.

It was also reported that the current funding arrangements for the IDVA service were due to come to an end, as funding from Lancashire County Council would cease shortly. The Community Safety Partnership would be holding its Annual Conference in October and it was hoped that both issues could be addressed at this forum.

Number of long term empty properties in the borough

Although slightly off target, the number of long term properties in the borough had continued to reduce. Current performance was 208 empty properties, against a target of 195, however the total had stood at 214 at the end of the 2013/14 financial year. It was however noted that performance can be affected by fluctuations on the housing market and delays in probate cases. The Council had appointed a temporary empty homes officer to address this issue and would be targeting some of those homes that had been empty for a considerable length of time.

Average time taken to process new claims and change events for Housing and Council Tax Benefits

The performance of this indicator was consistent with that of previous years for quarter one, current performance was 12.09 days against a target of 10%, comparative against 11.99%, at the same time in 2013, as this is the busiest period for the customer services team after the year end. High work volumes have increased processing times for new claims and change events. In addition, the recent single front office training programme was having an effect on performance and would continue to do so over the coming months.

New customers requiring housing advice (monthly not year to date)

Current performance was 117 against a target of 57 and was reflective of the increased demand in the service. Housing Advice is provided by the Housing Option Service, with their role being to prevent families from becoming homeless. This is achieved by creating awareness with customers and partners to encourage households to seek advice at the earliest opportunity, and it is this proactive approach that can result in an increase in demand.

In response to this and following the changes in Welfare Reform, the team has increased its pro-active work and has introduced early-warning protocols with landlords to support tenants who fall into arrears.

Number of older people (65+) visiting Council's leisure centres

Although currently performing at 6801 against a target of 7571, the overall number of visits to the leisure centre continued to increase. This was a difficult target to improve upon as there are a number of voluntary groups established with Chorley that offer a wide range of different activities such as health walks, exercise classes or social activities that older people can diversify into.

Members were informed that all the Council's services are expected to complete a service level risk register which formed part of the Council's risk management framework and was an important assurance procedure. They were also provided with an update on the work that had been undertaken on the Integrated Impact Assessment to ensure that the Council fulfils its commitment to equal opportunities.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

Chair

Date