

**MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL**

**MEETING DATE** Thursday, 24 September 2015

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor John Walker (Chair), Councillor Hasina Khan (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Paul Clark, June Molyneaux and Alistair Morwood

**OFFICERS:** Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Customer and Advice Services), Paul Whittingham (Development Control Manager), Victoria Willett (Performance and Partnerships Manager), Jason Mills (Policy and Communications) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Debra Platt

**OTHER MEMBERS:** Councillor Paul Walmsley (Executive Member (Public Protection))

**15.OSP.5 Declarations of Any Interests**

There were no declarations of any interests.

**15.OSP.6 Minutes**

**RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting held on 24 April 2015 be confirmed as a correct record for signing by the Chair.**

**15.OSP.7 Performance Focus - Planning Context**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Paul Walmsley, Executive Member for Public Protection and Paul Whittingham, Development Control Team Leader the meeting who were attending to answer questions on the scrutiny performance focus topic that had been identified for further discussion by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee received a report on planning performance and an overview of the different types of planning applications that the Council processed.

‘major’ planning applications are developments of over 10 units or floor space of over 1,000 square metres, ‘minor’ applications are categorised as developments of 10 units or less and which have a maximum combined gross floor space of no more than 1,000 square metres and ‘other’ applications cover, householder developments, change of use and certificates of lawfulness. It was also brought to member’s attention that the

majority of the Development Control Teams workload is made up from the latter two categories and that the timescales for their completion are more stringent than for those of the major applications.

It was also highlighted that the Council's Constitution was a major factor in the amount of applications that had to be determined at the Development Control Committee with members having to determine all applications for housing developments of three houses or above instead of under delegated powers in line with other authorities. This was something that had been constitutionally changed a few years ago, in response to a large number of applications being submitted for smaller housing developments on garden land across the borough.

There was however a view by officers which was supported by the Panel and the Executive Member that the scheme of delegation was an area that could be reviewed and possibly tweaked to help ease the large volume of applications needing to be considered at Development Control Committee. Any reduction in the amount of applications to be determined by Committee would also help to save the Council money and increase efficiencies.

Planning performance at the end of 2014/15 was above target for 'major' applications and off track but within threshold for 'minor' and 'other'. At the end of quarter one, 2015/16, performance for 'major' applications remained excellent, however 'minor' applications are now off track and 'other' applications significantly off track.

Comparative statistical information was also provided of the authority's performance in relation to its nearest neighbours group, based on performance in the first quarter, although with not having information on the number of applications these authorities were processing, it was accepted that this information was difficult to quantify.

As the performance for 'minor' and 'other' applications was more than 5% off target at the end of the first quarter, an action plan had been prepared setting out all the issues and action to be taken to improve performance.

It was explained that recent new advice issued by the Government within the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) on Section 106 had meant that the delegation of officers to determine applications of one or two dwellings had been removed and had to be referred to Committee before the Section 106 process could be started. Although, this had since changed, it had had a massive impact on the length of time taken to process these types of applications.

There had also been performance issues with regard to the external supplier of the householder planning application service which had been intended to relieve the pressure due to a vacancy within the planning team. This has since been resolved by a change of personnel and the team are starting to see improvements in performance targets.

Whilst the Executive acknowledged the reduction in the performance statistics, they were more concerned about quality rather than quantity and had set the team a mandate that was more around the resident's experience of the service and that despite performance being off track, customer satisfaction with the planning service remains high.

The report also gave an overview of the difficulties the planning team were experiencing in producing accurate performance data for the service. Monthly data had not been input on to the council's performance management system since April 2015 due to capacity issues, making it difficult for the policy team to effectively monitor and identify service delivery issues early. However the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter figures had been produced and submitted to Government as required.

It was explained that the authority's current IDOX reporting system that was used by many services across the Council was no longer fit for purpose for readily calculating planning performance due to a recent change in legislation by central government on what should be taken into account of when calculating performance. Negotiations were currently underway to upgrade the system and it was hoped that this would be rectified by the beginning of April 2016, if not sooner. In the meantime, the Development Control Team Leader was spending 2 days each quarter manually inputting the figures and was confident that the data now being produce was accurate. Confirmation was also given that the Director was seeking to address the capacity issues to ensure performance could be calculated and entered into the performance management system on a monthly basis.

The Chair thanked Councillor Paul Walmsley, Executive Member (Public Protection) and Paul Whittingham for attending the meeting.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the report be noted.**
- 2. That the Executive Member (Public Protection) agreed to a review of the current delegated powers arrangements with a view to reducing the amount of applications to be determined by the Development Control Committee.**

Councillor Hasina Khan (Vice Chair) left the meeting.

#### **15.OSP.8 Monitoring of the Organisational Plan 2015/16**

The Committee received a report of the Chief Executive that reported progress on the delivery of the Organisational Plan 2015/16 and the performance of corporate and local indicators.

The Plan contained all priority improvement activity being undertaken by the organisation in 2015/16 and included information on:

- corporate strategy projects
- business improvement projects
- budget growth items
- neighbourhood priority projects

Overall progress was good with 86.5% of the Council's corporate priority projects set out in the Corporate Strategy rated green or complete and with 72.2% of the 72 indicators measured achieving or exceeding their target, with a further 11.1% performing within the 5% threshold.

All projects are recorded in the MyProjects system along with detailed milestones and tasks so that progress can be monitored and managed throughout the year.

Only four projects were rated Amber and an explanation as to why along with the action being taken to address any issues was provided.

Progress of the neighbourhood priorities is monitored regularly and reported at the neighbourhood are meetings, 50% of the projects were rated green with a further 20.8% having already been completed. Some projects, 16.6% not yet started were due to seasonal delivery targets.

The Panel asked a number of questions in relation to the following:

**Chorley Flower Show:**

Assurances were given the show had been delivered within budget. However, this year had mainly been around establishing the show as a main contender in its field and feedback received to date was extremely positive that this would be achieved. In deed preliminary talks had already taken place and a date identified for next year.

**Destination Play Area, Astley Park:**

It was reported that use of the facility remained high and that antisocial behaviour incidents had reduced considerably. A recent resident satisfaction survey had shown that satisfaction with the borough's play and open spaces had increased dramatically.

**Extra Care Scheme, Fleet Street Project:**

The Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Advice Services had recently met with Lancashire County Council to discuss the Council's business case and justification for asking the County Council to contribute £1,85m to the project and were given reassurance that this was being looked at. A HCA bid of £2,868,750 to contribute to the capital costs of the construction of the scheme has been submitted. The Council has received feedback informally from the HCA that the proposal was the best schemes in the North West and had been referred to the evaluation Panel in London. An announcement on whether the Council's bid as been successful or not is expected sometime in October. Once the funding is secured, the development will need to go before Council for approval to progress and subsequently the scheme proposals to be approved Planning Committee.

**School Place Projections:**

Initial meetings have been held with LCC education to enable an understanding of the processes used by the County Council. Where CIL contributions have been obtained in some areas, part of the funds available is to increase school capacity and to facilitate this, the Council needs to understand the county's school expansion plans.

**Bengal Street Depot Site:**

As the decision to lease part of the site out to Recycling Lives was not now taking place, the Chair asked about the possibility of the whole of the site being used as car parking as part of the proposals for the extension of the Market Walk shopping development.

**Friday Street Health Centre:**

Financing of the development is extremely complex but all partners are still very committed to the project. By keeping the project on the Council's corporate plan it ensures that the delivery of the centre is kept high up on everyone's agenda.

**Sickness absence:**

Although this performance indicator was performing off target, it was noted that the target value was extremely low at an average of 2 days per employee FTE lost through sickness absence. It was explained that good performance was always challenged and attempts made to drive it down further. The target also showed that the wide range of health initiatives that the Council invested in was working in retaining such high standards.

**RESOLVED – That the report be noted.**

Chair

Date

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