

Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel – 13 January 2022

Performance Focus – Communities

1. We welcomed Councillor Beverley Murray, Executive Member – Early Intervention and Jennifer Mullin, Director of Communities to present the report.
2. The directorate is underspending this quarter due to vacancies in several areas.
3. The leisure centre is performing well, visitor number is increasing. Like other areas of the Council, there are issues with recruitment.
4. The leisure centre, as a separate company has its own budget. It is expected that by the end of March 2022, without the addition or continuation of Covid-19 restrictions, opening times will be as they were before the pandemic.
5. The Council is not currently planning to sell the leisure centre, as facilities have been upgraded and modernised. Further information about the leisure centre and its operation will be at a Member Learning Session at the end of March 2022.
6. The completion of Disabled Facilities Grants is worse than the previous quarter, although delivery is under the baseline of 10 weeks at 6.8 weeks.
7. To decrease waiting times for occupational therapist assessments the council is considering recruiting its own. It is difficult to predict how long it will take to complete the outstanding 262 assessments due to the variety of potential needs, with substantial adjustments including building extensions and wet rooms will take significantly longer than installing handrails and stairlifts.
8. New and existing community groups continue to be supported. It is uncertain when activity will return to pre-pandemic levels. The number of residents that benefitted from opportunities created by the Communities Team is better than expected but below target.
9. There is a decline in the Housing Solutions' performance indicators. The new Housing Manager is currently reviewing the processes, procedure, and work delivered. Once completed, it is expected that there will be a change in what is monitored.
10. The Public Protection Team increased on the number of food establishments inspected, the current inspection programme is expected to be completed in March 2022.
11. All Corporate Projects are on track, there is a significant amount of work remaining to be completed by the end of March, including the homeless and rough sleeping plan.
12. A new Animal Welfare Officer is in post and is working closely with South Ribble's equivalent and is undertaking inspections of boarding and breeding centres.

13. Neighbourhood Area Meetings have resumed, with varying levels of success. An issue highlighted was the short amount of time to decide projects. The next round of meetings is in January 2022. We noted the report.

Any Urgent Business Previously Agreed with the Chair

14. We welcomed Adele Hayes, Service Lead – Planning to add additional context and clarity to the Planning process and how performance is recorded.
15. The Government set the target to determine planning applications which are either 8 or 13 weeks.
16. The Planning Department at Chorley Council has a culture of good performance. Communication is good with applicants and agents. The process of Planning and Development is predicated on the presumption of sustainable development and the starting point is to approve.
17. There are numerous reasons why extra time is needed for an application, but time extensions are never used to simply prolong the process. Reasons can include the application going to committee, awaiting technical responses, the application requires amendments, or the applicant wishes to make a change to the application.
18. The time limit for applications does not start until the application has been accepted. It is not uncommon for miscommunication to occur between agent and applicant. Inadequate applications that are not accepted could require significant amount of time to resubmit and the clock will not start until the application is accepted.
19. The customer of the Planning Department is the applicant, third parties, including residents are notified to make comments.
20. Response times can vary from external consultants. The volume of applications has increased significantly in the last 18 months. There is a vacancy in the department which has been difficult to fill due to competition from the private sector.
21. Applications that are non-determined are not counted in the figures of determined applications. Over the pandemic there were three appeals made against non-determination. Two were safeguarded sites with applicants not agreeing to a time extension. One was an appeal against a non-determination on a certificate of lawfulness.
22. There are two parallel systems providing figures, performance management and outside the scope.
23. Applications are categorised as minor or major, major applications are not always controversial, the erection of a garden shed is considered a major application.
24. There is no update to relating to the appeals from August, consideration is still underway, and a decision is not expected until the completion of the upcoming planning inquiry in February 2022. Adele is happy to meet with residents to discuss

any concerns held relating to applications, understanding that the process is long and anxiety inducing.

25. We noted the update and thanked Adele for attending the Committee.

Councillor John Walker
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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