

Minutes of **Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel**

Meeting date **Thursday, 13 January 2022**

Members present: Councillor John Walker (Chair), Councillor Roy Lees (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Sarah Ainsworth, Julia Berry, James Nevett and Aidy Riggott

Officers: Jennifer Mullin (Director of Communities), Victoria Willett (Service Lead - Transformation and Partnerships) Jon-James Martin (Performance and Transformation Officer) Adele Hayes (Service Lead – Planning) and Matthew Pawlyszyn (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

21.OSP.17 Minutes of Meeting Thursday, 16 December 2021 of Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

21.OSP.18 Declarations of Any Interests

No declarations were made.

21.OSP.19 Performance Focus - Communities

Councillor Beverley Murray, Executive Member - Early Intervention, and Jennifer Mullin, Director of Communities attended virtually to present the report.

There was an underspend for the quarter, primarily due to the vacancies within the Directorate which included; Housing Solutions Team, Communities Service, and Environmental Health.

The leisure centre performed well, with an increased visitor number from the last quarter. As with other areas within the Council, there had been issues with recruitment. Focus had been placed on providing good customer service and it was believed that there was a positive atmosphere and culture for both employees and customers.

The leisure centre had its own budget as it was a separate company. Matters that related to finance had improved, but Covid-19 had an impact. It was expected that by the end of March 2022, without any additional or continuation of restrictions, opening times would be as they were before the Covid-19 pandemic.

There was no inclination to sell the leisure centre, but the option would not be ruled out. Investment had been made to upgrade and modernise facilities. It was

recommended that a Member Learning Session was held for Members towards the end of March 2022.

It was confirmed following a question from Members that the leisure centre still allowed staff to use time credits in exchange for gym and swim sessions.

Disabled Facilities Grants completion was worse than the previous quarter. At present, delivery was under the base line of 10 weeks at 6.8 weeks.

In reference to the 262 people waiting for an assessment by the Occupational Therapist, the Council considered employing its own to decrease waiting times. The timeframe required to complete the 262 Assessments was uncertain due to the variety of potential needs. Those that required minor adjustments such as handrails, or stairlifts took less time than substantial requirements such as building extensions, wet rooms, or door adjustments.

New and existing community groups continued to be supported. There was uncertainty as to when community support activity would return to pre pandemic levels, it was noted that the number of residents that benefitted from opportunities created by the Communities Team was better than expected, but was far below target.

There had been a decline in the performance indicators for Housing Solutions. The new Housing Manager was currently reviewing processes and procedures, work that had been delivered and what was in progress. It was expected that following the review, there would be a change in what was monitored.

Performance Indicators from the Public Protections Team showed that the number of food establishments inspected had increased from the previous quarter, although due to Covid-19, staff had been involved in other work. The current inspection programme was expected to finish in March 2022 and was currently on target.

Performance Indicators for Corporate Projects were all green and on track, but a significant amount of work was to be completed by the end of March. This included the homeless and rough sleeping plan.

Neighbourhood Area Meetings resumed, with varied levels of success. Some believed that there had been too little time to fully consider potential projects. The next round of meetings to start in January 2022.

The new Animal Welfare Officer was in post and worked closely with South Ribble's equivalent to learn the role and undertake inspections of boarding and breeding centres.

There was a current vacancy in the Environmental Health Team, and following work related to Covid-19, a return to normality was underway with ongoing inspections of food, housing, and health and safety.

Jennifer Mullin highlighted that during her first year in the role across Shared Services, she had identified and utilised expertise at both authorities to the benefit of both Chorley and South Ribble.

21.OSP.20 Business Plans

The item was withdrawn from the agenda.

21.OSP.21 Any urgent business previously agreed with the Chair

Members were provided information requested at previous Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panels. Outstanding requests included ICT data and tree planting by ward.

Adele Hayes, Service Lead – Planning, attended the Performance Panel to provide clarity to the planning system and how performance was recorded.

She highlighted that the Government set the target to determine planning applications which were either 8 weeks or 13 weeks.

Within the Planning Department at Chorley Council, a culture of good performance had been cultivated. There was good communication with applicants and agents. The process of Planning and Development was predicated on the presumption of sustainable development and the starting point was approval. Frequently extra time was needed to secure added value, this could include alterations to the designs or waiting for the response of technical consultants.

Reasons varied as to why some applications took longer, time extensions allowed positive and proactive decisions to take place. Time extensions were never used to prolong the process.

Response times from external consultants varied, there was a good working relationship with the County Council. The Council had seen the volume of applications increase substantially over the previous 18 months.

Non-determined items were not counted in the figures of determined applications. Over the 18 months of the pandemic, three appeals were made against non-determination. Two of which were in safeguarded sites with applicants not agreeing to an extension of time. The third appeal was against non-determination of a certificate of lawfulness.

There were two parallel systems that provided figures, Performance Management and Outside the Scope.

Applications were categorised as either minor or major. Major applications were not always controversial, the erection of a garden shed would be considered a major application.

Extensions were provided for a variety of reasons included, but not limited to the application going to Committee, the application awaited technical responses, the application required amendments, or if the applicant wished to change part of the application.

The time limit does not start until the application had been submitted and accepted. It was not uncommon for miscommunication between agent and applicant to occur regarding the time the application was submitted. Inadequate or poor applications

would need to be resubmitted, this could take a significant amount of time, the clock would not start until the application was accepted.

If there were any concerns about the impact of any application, progress of application, or other queries about an application, it was recommended that the Case Officer be contacted. Any delay in communication between Councillors and Planning Staff should be highlighted to Adele.

Members raised questions about the progress and outcome to the sites in Coppull, Adele stated that she was happy to meet with residents and talk about any sites that they held concerns with. It was understood that the process was long, stressful and anxiety inducing but due process was required, but there was no update to provide. The proposals were part of the five-year housing supply that needed to be resolved, if no decisions were made, there were risks of appeals against non-determination.

The Planning department had no significant issues with sickness over the previous 18 months, but there was a high caseload compared to other authorities. There was a vacancy in the department, and there had been difficulties with recruitment due to competition from the private sector.

Members noted the update and thanked Adele for attending.

Chair

Date