

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 5 March 2018

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Evans (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, G Berry, J Clarke, M Cornelious, I Hayat, J Richards and J Watkins

In Attendance: Councillors: R Truman (Cabinet Member for Licensing and Regulation), R Jeavons (Cabinet Member for Streetscene) D Mayer (Cabinet Member for Communities and Resources) and J Mudd (Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing).

Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance), Rhys Cornwall (Head of People & Business Change), Gareth Price (Head of Law & Regulation), Keir Duffin (Head of Regeneration Investment & Housing), Paul Jones (Head of Streetscene and City Services) and Daniel Cooke (Overview and Scrutiny Officer).

Apologies: Councillors K Critchley

1 **Declarations of Interest**

None.

2 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2018**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2018 were **approved** as an accurate record.

3 **Performance Update - Quarter 3**

Finance (Corporate)

Invitees:

- Meirion Rushworth – Head of Finance

The Head of Finance explained to the Committee that 4 of the 5 local performance indicators were green and one was amber and the position remained the same as at the end of Quarter 2.

The performance indicator FIN/L/014, was on schedule and was £1 million ahead of target. The performance indicator CFH/006 was a 0.70% away from being green.

The Committee asked the following:

- CFH/006:
 - Members queried who were the outstanding invoices owed to, and if there are any legal timescales imposed against local authorities to settle invoices. Members were advised that the invoices were for all Council suppliers schools. There were

no legal timescales however the public sector standard is for 90% of invoices to be paid within 30 days. The Payment Team conduct 2 BACS payment runs a week and endeavour to release payments as fast as possible.

- There were instances where there were delays in processing invoices due to companies not providing order numbers which was out of the control of the team.
- It was confirmed that the legal timescales in England were the same as Wales.
- What improvements were being made to processes? The department was continuing to run morning and afternoon sessions regularly for budget managers to help with the payment process. Work was also being done with suppliers to ensure that purchase order numbers were being included as a matter of course, which would speed up processing. Courses were also being run for employees on payment processing.
- The Direction of Travel for performance measure CFH/006 changed from Red to Green, but the actual figure had remained at 89.30% from Quarter 2. Members were advised that it maybe because it is a slight improvement, but the Officer confirmed that this would be clarified and reported back to the Committee.
- Were any Departments not using the order authorisation (PO) system, and what percentage of those invoiced paid over a month would not have an order number. Estimated 12-13%, but the Officer agreed to confirm the exact figure and report back to the Committee.
- Highlighted the importance of a system being in place to make sure everything has been paid and delivered. Members were advised that receiving the goods was one of two of the actioning points for invoices to be paid. Once the order number had been received and the goods received, the budget manager would then confirm for the invoice to be paid. The customer would be chased up for further details if one of the two actioning points had not been met.

People and Business Change (Corporate)

Invitees:

- Rhys Cornwall – Head of People and Business Change
- Cllr David Mayer – Cabinet Member for Communities and Resources

The Head of People and Business Change presented an overview of the performance measures to the Committee, which included 9 Green, 2 Ambers and 1 Red.

With regard to Red Measure: PBC/062, concern was expressed at the current percentage of ICT Helpdesk calls resolved at first point of contact. Although the figures were lower than the target, assurances were given that they had improved through the year.

With regard to Amber measure: HRP/049, it was clarified that a number of employees have taken up Welsh Awareness Training and that the target should be achieved by the end of the year to comply with responsibilities of the Welsh Language Act. Courses had taken place in January and February, with more being planned although there was currently a small uptake.

The Employee sickness measure was currently green, which was the 8th lowest rate across Wales, but with the Winter virus the statistics could decline as the year goes on.

Members then asked the following:

- PBC/062%:
 - Clarification on ICT Helpdesk calls where the number of calls had increased however report is showing off target. The direction of travel had improved but was still operating below target, and was unlikely to be on target by the end of the year. The Department was still working through transitions 9 months in, and lots of work is needed to be done with self-help. This was being aided by Digital Champions in each service so that fewer calls needed to be made to the SRS helpdesk. It was also noted that SRS was relatively low costing compared to other IT support for other public services.
 - Members were advised that the Cabinet report and related appendices from March 2016 for the move to SRS, would be sent out to them for context and background. The Cabinet Members advised that there were concerns in some areas which were being addressed and it was considered the most cost effective and efficient option for the provision of IT services for the Council.
 - When queried about the logistics of SRS, the Committee were advised that the service was being delivered within the constraints of the funding available and that collaboration work can sometimes be challenging when joining established partnership arrangements as Newport City Council has done in joining the SRS.
 - Members asked if the department has had discussions with other Local Authorities. Discussions had taken place with other authorities, including Caerphilly that was not part of the SRS consortium.
- The (M) in employee sickness indicator referred to median, which was the average number of sickness days per member of staff. The Officer explained that it was done this way to establish how the LA compared to other LA's across Wales. The target is currently set below the Wales average.

Law and Regulation (Place)

Invitees:

- Gareth Price – Head of Law and Regulation
- Cllr Ray Truman – Cabinet Member for Licensing and Regulation

The Head of Law and Regulations presented an overview to the Committee advising out of 8 performance indicators 6 were Green and 2 were Amber. As a new performance indicator which measured the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued, the previous target was estimated and had been amended to reflect actual performance and is now Green.

Performance measure PAM/023 - Food establishments broadly compliant with food hygiene standards' had remained at a consistent level of just above 94%, which was above the All-Wales average. Extra funding had been secured from the Food Agency to carry out more inspections and it had been agreed that the money would be used to carry out inspections on Category D – low risk buildings up to the end of March.

It was explained that the performance measure for Legal Searches in 5 days had dipped due to the IT system being down, so the team had completed the searches internally in the 5 day target but could not distribute the searches electronically.

The Committee asked the following:

- PAM/023 - Clarification of what Category D buildings were. These were the very low risk establishments, such as garages that sell food. When asked if the funding would cover all low risk properties it was advised that it would cover around 50 premises.
- HRP/041 - Members requested a breakdown of the number of Council's social media followers. The officer agreed to provide a breakdown of how many people were using the Council website and followers on Facebook and Twitter, however it was explained that the heavy snow in the previous week had resulted in a large increase.
- LR/L/002 - Members requested a breakdown of the number of fines issued for littering, dog fouling and smoking offences. The Officer agreed to provide this to the Committee.

Streetscene and City Services (Place)

Invitees:

- Paul Jones – Head of Streetscene and City Services
- Cllr Roger Jeavons – Cabinet Member for Streetscene
- Cllr David Mayer – Cabinet Member for Communities and Resources

The Head of Streetscene and City Services presented an overview of the current performance of the service area to the Committee. He advised that there was little change from Quarter 2 to Quarter 3, with 6 out of the 9 performance indicators Green and 3 Amber.

PAM/017 - The target for Visits to Sport and Leisure Centres per 1000 population had been adjusted since Quarter 2, as it was felt the figures would confidently be met. The number of people using the swimming pools and gym had gone down, which could be because of competition with other gyms, but is thought by the end of the year the performance figure should be Amber or Green.

STR/L/018 - The percentage of waste recycled at the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) had improved slightly and it was hopeful this would improve next year.

PAM/031 - The percentage of waste sent to landfill was slightly above the national target. The entrance to the tip has been reversed on the weekends to create less congestion of traffic and for staff to engage with the public to improve recycling rates. The Cabinet Member advised that this measure should be permanently in place in May.

Members asked the following:

- STR/L/018 - How were residents being encouraged to use the civic amenity site for refuse and recycling. Members were advised that a pilot scheme to ease congestion around the HWRC entrance for cars entering the tip site had been taking place on the weekend which also allowed member of staff more time to greet people and direct them to the correct refuse and recycling points. It was also advised that there are 5 members of staff on site usually, who would ask people if they require help, which was especially helpful for disabled users.
- PAM/017:
 - Members queried whether the decrease in the number of people using the swimming pool included children's swimming lessons. It was clarified that this measure relates to people using the leisure centre pools, not swimming lessons. The reason for the decrease could be that people were using private health club pools, but the swimming lesson figures were steady.
 - What was the explanation for this measure going from green and above target at Quarter 2, to Amber and below target at Quarter 3 and why was the direction of

travel indicator still showing as green. The direction of travel was an automatic calculation via the performance system and the officer undertook to provide an explanation of this to the Committee.

- Members requested that comment be made to Newport Live to congratulate them on the Everybody Campaign.
 - Members requested a breakdown of Exercise Referrals could be given, the Officer agreed to provide these figures to the Committee.
- PAM/031 - Percentage of Municipal Wastes sent to landfill. Why has the target changed from 10.00% since it was reported at Quarter 2 to 7.00% at Quarter 3. The targets had been tightened after being reviewed as it was felt the new target would be comfortable to achieve.

Regeneration, Housing & Investment (Place)

Invitees:

- Keir Duffin – Head of Regeneration, Housing & Investment
- Cllr Jane Mudd – Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing

The Head of Regeneration, Housing and Investment presented an overview of performance to the Committee, which included 13 Green, 3 Amber and 1 Red performance measures, 10 of which had improved since the last Quarter. He advised that the Amber measure, NEET01, was around 0.50 below the 875 target with the direction of travel being upward it was expected that this measure would become Green for the next quarter, as analysis showed the number of young people registering for courses usually increased after the Christmas period.

The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that performance measure PAM/013 was a new version of an old measure required to report nationally. There were a number of loans and grants available to support empty houses coming back into use, however the uptake for this was relatively low, and there were limited resources to promote within the Local Authority. At a strategic level, the Council was considering supporting partners to increase the numbers of homes brought back into use. It was also being examined how owners could be contacted to bring their homes back into use. This measure would continue to be monitored, however at the current level of resource available internally to support this measure, it was anticipated that progress would be slow.

All other performance measures were green. The Cabinet Member also advised the Committee that the performance measure RIH/L/043 was being monitored closely, as there was a statutory duty to provide advice to anyone who approached the Council with housing issues. Other external factors that could affect the measures were beyond the local authority such as Universal Credit, however the Council would endeavour to help and support people.

Members asked the following:

- PAM/019
 - What was being done about the percentage of planning appeals being dismissed. The Members were advised there is a program of training in place for Planning Committee members, and both the Planning Chair and Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Investment monitor performance and appeals regularly. Information upon appeals dismissed and upheld is reported back to the Planning Committee on a monthly basis. It was assured that the best training and support was provided.
 - Why the target in performance measure PAM/019 changed from 75% at Quarter 2, to 50% at Quarter 3, changing the performance from Red to Green. The Members were advised that the department reviewed and considered the targets

and were now clear about the perimeters of what can be achieved, which was similar to an earlier performance measure from Streetscene and City Services.

- PAM/014 - What was the Council doing to improve shortage of houses for people, as there were a lot of empty properties around the city that could be brought back into use. The Enforcement Team could enforce people to bring properties back to standard however it was a lengthy process. An issue that all local authorities had was identifying ownership of the properties, especially empty properties. Interventions that may help to increase the turnaround time would go out to consultation when finalised.
- RIH/L/043 - Did the figure shown in this performance measure include housing waiting list figures as this was not detailed in the Head of Service comments. The Cabinet Member advised that the figures were only for the number of people who had approached the Council for housing advice and assistance, not the waiting list. There were currently 7830 live applications on the housing register and the turnover of housing stock for letting was slowing down.
- PAM/012 - Members welcomed the 57% actual for this performance measure and asked how the performance improved. More money had been invested in homelessness prevention and a provision had been made in the budget. The prevention work to help people remain in their homes was commended, as the sooner an officer is made aware of the challenges a resident is facing, the sooner help and advice can be provided.
- In response to queries about the provision of housing advice at the information station, the Cabinet Member advised the Committee that there were shared concerns with the pressures of the housing market but assured that the Council works closely with Housing Association partners with the Common Housing Register which was a Council managed system; Home Options Newport, upon which residents could bid for houses from 8 different Housing Associations. Policies were reviewed regularly and the Council was also exploring with Welsh Government new funding streams to help people get home ownership.
- The Committee commended the projects and events taking place in the Pill area for young people and supporting business. With 16 houses in the area that had previously been out of use now in use, was there provision to extend this to the remaining houses in the area. The Council had access to over a million pounds of mixed loan and funding support to bring empty homes back into use, however it was difficult to make people access the funding to do so. The Officers engaged and worked with affected residents, however it was a slow process.
- Concern with the large number of people on the housing waiting list and with the demand on the increase advised that bringing properties back into use for people who need them is important. More resources available to the Local Authority could see more properties in place. The Council had made challenging choices in investment and had chosen to invest the work around homelessness prevention, which would help people to remain in their own homes. The limited resources available had been acknowledged and that this has been targeted as an area to improve.
- How effective were compulsory purchase orders on bringing homes back into use. The Cabinet Member advised opinion could not be able to be given yet, but Officers were currently looking at a range of evidence based strategic options and would look at results before going out for consultation.

- Clarification was sought upon the £5.5 million being invested in social housing. The Committee were advised that this was a local authority grant allocation from Welsh Government, and the grant goes into the development of new properties.
- Members queried the comment in performance indicator PAM/013 which stated “*This target has been challenging for a number of years. Currently the strategic housing team are looking at a number of ways to improve this measure.*” What was being explored to improve performance relating to this measure, as the measure remained Red at Quarter 3. Members were advised that the department were currently looking at different plans before going to consultation so details were not available for the Committee at this time. Members requested the information be circulated to the Committee once available.

The Chair and Committee thanked the Officers and Cabinet Members for attending.

Conclusion

Comments to the Cabinet

The Committee noted the progress being made towards the performance indicators for the Services areas, and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.

The Committee wished to highlight to the Cabinet the issues achieving the PAM/013 – % of empty private properties brought back into use. The Committee acknowledged the challenges facing the Council in this area and the work being done by the officers to try and address the issue. The performance had remained the same since the previous quarter despite the efforts of the officers to improve performance. The Committee **recommends** that the Cabinet Member considers this issue and explore how the challenges and barriers to progress can be overcome.

Actions to the Committee

In addition to the actions agreed with the officers during the meeting, the Committee requested the following be provided:

People and Business Change –

Comparable information on how SRS was performing within the other Local Authorities within the consortium.

Regeneration, Investment and Housing –

PAM/014 – the figures of how many properties were currently empty, broken down into Wards.

4 Forward Work Programme Update

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented the report to the Members and outlined the purpose of the report seeking the Committee’s approval for items on its work programme for the next two meetings.

For the meeting on 4 June, it was advised that the Scrutiny Officer would present a draft work programme for the Committee’s consideration.

Actions:

The Committee **approved** the work programme for the next two meetings on 9 April and 4 June 2018.

The meeting concluded at 18:15.