

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 February 2021

Present: Councillor M Parker (Chair)
Councillor J Dhindsa (Vice-Chair)
Councillors D Allen-Williamson, P Jeffree, R Martins,
B Mauthoor, G Saffery and M Turmaine

Also present: Councillor Tim Williams, Portfolio Holder

Officers: Executive Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Group Head of Transformation
Business Transformation Project Manager
Head of Programme Management Office

78 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Crout.

79 **Disclosure of interests (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

80 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2021 were agreed. It was noted that these would be signed once officers and members were able to return to the town hall.

81 **Focusing on delivery: Strategic Framework Quarterly Update**

The scrutiny committee received the report of the Executive Head of Strategy and Communications and Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office setting out progress on the council's strategic framework comprising the Council Plan 2020-24 and Delivery Plan 2020-22; the Organisational Development Strategy 2020-24 and Delivery Plan; and Covid-19 Road to Renewal Plan. Progress had last been scrutinised by members at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 November 2020.

The Executive Head of Strategy and Communications, Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office and Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development discussed the different strands of the framework and responded to members' questions. It was noted that there had been a substantial level of progress against all three plans in the last quarter, a considerable achievement by the council's staff who had been working remotely throughout the period.

During discussions the following points were raised and additional information sought:

- The decision around Croxley Park was showing positive benefits to the council. It was agreed to provide information on the percentage of leases agreed which had achieved the rental prices sought and how many had been below this level. Also, to confirm occupancy rates including whether any businesses in the park had ceased trading during the pandemic.
- Whilst the work relating to the recommendations of the Watford and Three Rivers Task Group – which dovetailed the Council and Delivery Plans – would be carried out by officers, progress would be monitored by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- It was important to scrutinise the success of the council's sustainable transport agenda, particularly the on-demand bus service Arriva Click which had been launched at the beginning of July 2020. Acknowledging that usage figures were not as strong as had been desired, Councillor Williams as the relevant Portfolio Holder agreed to provide figures alongside information about any subsidies paid to the operator.
- Measures to ensure a Covid-safe High Street as lockdown eased would be kept under review. It was important that people felt positive about coming into Watford and the use of Covid marshals had played a significant role in encouraging the observance of rules and behaviours. The council's environmental health officers had also been working closely with businesses to ensure compliance.
- Councillor Martins, the council's mental health champion, welcomed the council's focus on the mental health of its staff, including the recent "Time to Talk" initiative between colleagues. He encouraged the council to continue with this focus and to make open conversations between co-workers about mental health a central part of that agenda.
- Staff continued to work from home, except where access to the town hall was required for their roles. This mainly involved the print and post, and facilities management teams. Strict protocols were observed for those coming into the town hall to mitigate risks. It was suggested that consideration should be given to recognising the particular contribution of staff who had continued to work at the town hall during the pandemic.

- Local people aged 18+ would be sought for the council's apprenticeship scheme which was hoped to recruit six young people into the authority. Drawing on the council's strong links with West Herts College, it was expected that a review would be undertaken in April and, if possible to move forward, recruitment would take place in July with roles commencing in September 2021.
- The council undertook an annual community survey to get public feedback on its services. Due to the difficulties of Covid, this had not taken place in 2020 however a survey was planned in the late summer/early Autumn of 2021. In addition to the annual community survey, the council used other processes to collate feedback in order to tailor its services. These included customer compliments and complaints.
- The recovery from Covid would not take the form of a 'traditional' recovery and so the Road to Renewal plan would remain under review and would be adapted according to changing circumstances. Further reviews would be made as the town emerged from lockdown, including approaches to mental health.
- It was important that all businesses in the town were made aware of grants and practical advice available to them. The communications team had maintained a high profile public information campaign, but new means of contacting businesses were continually being sought. One option might be a direct mail approach once businesses had reopened.
- The BID monitored the number of businesses which had closed down, but this did not cover the whole town nor could it provide a complete picture of how many jobs had been lost. Other information available to the council included a performance indicator around the number of empty properties and data on the number of people receiving benefits. It was agreed to provide a comparison of the broader picture across Hertfordshire.
- Despite difficult trading conditions, Councillor Williams noted that new businesses were due to open on the High Street.
- It was confirmed that as of 21 February, 26,150 people had been vaccinated in Watford. This represented 27% of the local population as a whole or 36% of over 18s. The council was also taking steps to overcome vaccine hesitancy, including employing a new Health Inequalities Engagement Officer dedicated to providing Covid information and reassurance. It was noted that these activities picked up on the recommendations of the Responding to the impacts of Covid 19 on Watford's BAME communities and street name policy review task group

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes:

1. The progress updates within this report relating to:
 - the Council Plan 2020-24 and Delivery Plan 2020 -22 (Appendix A);
 - the Organisational Development Strategy 2020-24 (Appendix B); and
 - the Road to Renewal Plan (Appendix C).
2. The significant corporate effort over the last three months that has resulted in a substantial level of progress made against all three plans.
3. The impact of external factors on some of the areas of delivery. Where this is the case, the areas have been reviewed to reflect the current environment during Quarter 3. The focus on delivery within the life of the plans remains a corporate commitment.
4. The Road to Renewal plan will adapt to best serve residents and businesses as the Covid-19 incident continues and develops. A review and refresh of the existing plan will be undertaken over the next quarter to ensure that it is responding to the impact of the pandemic and the arising needs of residents and businesses.

Action: Executive Head of Strategy and Communications and Executive Head of HR & Organisational Development

82

End of Quarter 3 - 2020/21 Key Performance Indicator Report

The scrutiny committee received the report of the Business Intelligence Manager setting out the council's key performance indicators (KPIs) for the end of quarter 3 2020/21.

The Business Intelligence Manager introduced the report explaining the continued impact of Covid 19 on the council's KPIs which made comparisons with 2019/20 data more difficult. She further highlighted:

- Eight rough sleepers had been recorded at the annual count on 21 November 2020 (compared to 19 in the previous year). This number had reduced to four by the end of December 2020.
- Households in temporary accommodation had continued to fall – to 80 against a target of 100.
- Planning indicators were all above target.
- Customer services continued to show a channel shift from phone and face to face contact to digital services with 76% of "Report It" forms and 83% of green waste sign ups completed on-line by customers.

- The first separate food waste collection data showed positive results against recycling and food waste tonnages compared to 2019/20. There had also been a reduction in residual waste collections.
- HR's focus had been on supporting the health and wellbeing of staff during the pandemic. A report on measures had been considered by Cabinet on 8 February 2021.
- The ICT service desk contract performance was below target. It was hoped that the introduction of a new portal would improve performance.
- Council tax and NNDR collection rates were both down – many domestic accounts had delayed payments or spread instalments. Businesses had received additional relief and many businesses had re-profiled payments.

During discussions, members requested additional information on the following:

- Indicator 1: action being taken to improve the average time to process housing benefits claims.
- Indicator 10: context and understanding around the statutory homeless figures and the government's "everyone in" campaign during the pandemic. Specifically whether anyone accepted as being homeless under the statutory definition had not been housed.
- Indicators 23 and 25: more detailed understanding of the levels of detritus and flying posting recorded and the actions being taken to improve cleanliness.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes:

1. The key performance indicator results for Quarter 3 2020/21.
2. That the KPIs will continue to be reviewed as part of the Business Intelligence Strategy, and Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be kept up to date with any changes to the KPIs, or the process for collecting, analysing or presenting KPI data.

Action: Business Intelligence Manager

83

Executive Decision Progress Report

The scrutiny committee was invited to review the current Executive Decision Progress Report for 2020-21 and consider whether any further information was required.

RESOLVED –

that the current 2020/21 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

84 Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee

As the council's appointed representative to the County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee, the Chair gave a brief update on the committee's recent activities. She noted that the next formal meeting would take place on 16 March.

The Chair expressed frustration at the lack of progress on the recommendations from Watford Borough Council's Health Services for the Deaf scrutiny task group. She had spoken with the Mayor who had agreed to contact Councillor Quilty directly. In addition, it was proposed that the recommendation that West Herts Hospitals Trust should add 'welcome' in a written representation of BSL to the signage outside the main entrance to Watford General Hospital should be taken up directly with the hospital.

Action: Senior Democratic Services Officer

85 Work Programme

The scrutiny committee received the 2020/21 work programme. It was noted that earlier in the meeting members had suggested a review of the green waste collection service should be added to the forward programme.

RESOLVED –

that the 2020/21 work programme be noted and the suggested items be added to the forward programme.

86 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 18 March. This would be the last meeting of the committee in the current meeting cycle.

Chair

The meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 8.50 pm