

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 March 2022

Present: Councillor A Grimston (Chair)
Councillor J Dhindsa (Vice-Chair)
Councillors P Hannon, T Osborn (for minute numbers 81 to 88),
G Saffery, B Stanton and M Turmaine (for minute numbers 79 to
81 and 84)

Officers: Executive Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Executive Head of Human Resources
Group Head of Community and Environmental Services
Business Intelligence Manager
Community Safety Co-ordinator
Senior Democratic Services Officer (JK)

79 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Parker.

There was a change of membership for this committee; Councillor Clarke-Taylor replaced Councillor Feldman.

Councillors Dhindsa and Turmaine advised that they would need to leave the meeting early.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Dychton, also sent her apologies.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

81 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2022 were submitted and signed.

Strategic Framework Progress Update (Q2/Q3 2021/22)

The committee received a report of the Executive Head of Strategy and Communications and the Head of the Enterprise Programme Office.

The Executive Head of Strategy and Communications made a presentation to the scrutiny committee 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. The presentation was published on the agenda.

During the presentation, officers highlighted a number of key points:

- Key achievements including a further five green flags for the parks, the strong performance of the investment portfolio, revitalisation of the market, the Sustainable Transport Strategy, the adoption of the new Local Plan, engagement with businesses and the launch of a new heritage trail.
- Ongoing work included a customer experience strategy, the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, a conservation area management plan and a low carbon transport hub.
- Notable successes in the OD Strategy included Watford Health and You being shortlisted for award by the Royal Society for Public Health, mental health training rolled out to managers, development of agile charters, leadership development programmes, employment of kickstarters as well as appointment of Group Head Assistants.
- HR and OD work which was ongoing included the values and behaviours workshops, succession planning and organisational resilience, and a performance development module.

A number of key areas were also highlighted in the Road to Renewal update including the successful Audentior Awards, business growth grants, the continued use of the vaccination centre and the digitisation of the waste and recycling service.

During discussions the following points were raised:

- There had been an impact on the delivery on initial timescales in some areas due to Covid, but these were now being progressed at pace.
- The Group Head Assistants were undertaking additional responsibilities considered to be about one day per week. More delegation to their teams was encouraged and they received additional remuneration.

RESOLVED –

1. that the committee note the progress updates within the report relating to:
 - the Council Plan 2020-24 and Delivery Plan 2020 -22

- the Organisational Development Strategy 2020-24
- the Road to Renewal Plan

2. The impact of external factors on some of the areas of delivery. Where this is the case, the area have been reviewed to reflect the current environment during the last period. The focus on delivery within the life of the plans remains a corporate commitment.

83

Council Performance Report: Quarter 3 2021/22

The scrutiny committee received the report of the Business Intelligence Manager. The Business Intelligence Manager introduced the report to the committee highlighting key areas to note. These included:

- The average time to process housing benefit claims and the time to process change of circumstances, while just outside of target, had seen an improvement in Q3.
- The number of long wait calls to the CSC was down to 8% from 37%, this indicator was affected by communications from the council.
- While the numbers in temporary accommodation had dropped slightly, changes to benefits and the ending of furlough meant that increased demand was anticipated.
- Waste and recycling were well within target but the targets would be made more ambitious and would reduce again the following year.
- While staff sickness absence remained very low, it was rising. The return to work rates were also below target due to manager or employee leave.
- The leisure centres had seen their usage go down in Q3, this was a common trend in winter and also reflected concerns about the omicron variant.
- There was an error in the report; in paragraph 4.1 (2) relating to channel shift, 'Q2' was referred to instead of 'Q3'.

Following the presentation, the meeting discussed a number of additional issues:

- The committee congratulated the Benefits team for the improvements. Members questioned the delay in staff returning from track and trace; a response would be circulated to the committee.
- Some targets were within the council's gift to set, including waste and recycling. The Portfolio Holder had requested more challenging targets in this instance.
- Noting the difference between throughput at the two leisure centres, it was noted that the centres had a shared general manager but the offer and locations were different at the sites. There was a Strategic Partnership Board which considered how to maximise customer engagement. The officers would raise this disparity and report back to the committee.

- The committee were reminded that they could make suggestions about how performance should be measured and officers would ascertain if the suggested indicators were feasible.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Notes the key performance indicator results for Quarter 3 2021/22, appended at Appendix A.
2. Notes 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 – Group Head of Community and Environmental Services

84

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) - summary of 2021 and proposed CSP plan 2022

The scrutiny committee received a presentation of the Community Safety Manager. The presentation was attached to the agenda.

During his presentation, the Community Safety Manager highlighted the following areas to members:

- The impact of the pandemic had meant a downturn in antisocial behaviour (ASB) and crime, which had not been true in all council areas. The town centre was the driver for crime and closures of premises meant that ASB was down 30% and crime was down 26%.
- The rationale for the strategic priorities chosen:
 - Serious youth crime, although incidents were rare they had a high impact.
 - Meet any community tensions, some challenges had been encountered with at the introduction of Covid restrictions but this profile soon faded.
 - Promoting the Echo system, to understand the community's feelings around the safety of their area.
 - Reassure and inform, to ensure the public are aware of community safety work.

- Emerging priority areas were also kept under review including theft of Beryl Bikes, misuse of e-scooters, drug dealing, issues with the rough sleeper cohort and maintaining focus on violent crime as the economy reopened.
- Crime profiles changed due to the Covid restrictions so theft from shops decreased but thefts from vehicles increased and there was a fall in burglaries.
- Domestic abuse was always an area to monitor. There were more intergenerational issues and between siblings. The anticipated increase due to damaged relationships was not seen.
- There had been ten incidences of community triggers, where an investigation was made into issues which have had more than three complaints in six months to consider how the partnership responded. Councillors were encouraged to make use of this where appropriate.
- Emerging risks included the focus on violence against women and girls and the associated feelings of threat. Safe zones had been established in venues. No evidence of issues with spiking of drinks were found locally.
- ASB was up 2% but was still 28% lower than 2019 and crime overall remained 16% down on 2019. There had been a huge drop since 2012.
- The partnership remained very strong with a range of partners taking active roles. The chair of the Community Protection Group was held by Watford Community Housing who were actively handling complaints from tenants and operating a prevention first model.
- The Strategic Assessment had demonstrated that there was no profile for high crime types in Watford and a few for medium-level crimes. With the town centre closed Watford fell from being the top crime profile in the county to the fourth. It was anticipated that there would be a natural increase in figures to 2019 levels.
- The 2022 plan had not yet been confirmed but a number of existing priorities would remain including serious youth violence, violence against women and girls due to the perception of threat, thefts from vehicles remained important as did the priority to reassure and inform. The focus would be adapted should there be a serious incident or a spate of similar crimes.

Following the presentation, the meeting discussed a number of additional issues:

- Reassure and inform days would be led by councillors and could include environmental health and the fire service.
- Significant work had been undertaken to ensure that the Police and Crime Commissioner's precept reflected the levels of demand for policing in Watford. It was important that resourcing matched the crime profile and this had been agreed. It was not yet clear what this would mean in real terms.
- There was likely to be some police officers who were new to Watford and there was an opportunity to equip them with local knowledge. It was suggested that some virtual meetings could be set up to orientate them and to work with the new chief inspector to reinvigorate a forum.

- Crime levels should be benchmarked against 2019 and this had been written into the preface of the CSP plan. A rise in crime compared to 2020/21 was inevitable and the messaging needed to reflect this. This was particularly the case for theft from shops and sexual assault with the reopening of the economy. The crime rate had been rising by about 2% per month which would see a return to 2019 levels by Christmas.
- Data from the Echo system was broken down by ward and the top three priorities identified for each one.
- The CSP's data did not include information from the British Transport Police about incidents in the area.
- The CCTV in the borough was currently under review, if a request for CCTV was matched by a crime profile the need could be evaluated. A mobile CCTV pilot was also beginning and could be useful for ASB issues.
- For areas experiencing lower levels of nuisance, such as parking, this would be highlighted in the Echo data and addressed. Resources were limited at times, however.
- Police numbers appeared to be steady since 2019, despite some absences for national events.
- There had been concerns about the removal of dedicated ASB officers at WCH but the gap had been met and partnership working remained strong.
- The Reassure and Inform priority aimed to re-establish the importance of reporting incidents.
- Members requested more explanations of acronyms, graphs and comparisons with other local areas for future community safety items.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the update on the summary of 2021 and the proposed plan for 2022.

85 **Other scrutiny meetings - minutes**

It was noted that Finance Scrutiny Committee had met on 7 March. Minutes of the meeting were available on the council's website.

86 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

The scrutiny committee was invited to review the current Executive Decision Progress Report for 2021-22 and consider whether any further information was required.

RESOLVED –

that the 2021/22 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

87 Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee

The council's representative on the Health Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Grimston, advised that she had been unable to attend the recent meeting. She would be attending a forthcoming briefing on Covid.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

88 Work Programme

Members were invited to suggest any items for review during the 2022/23 municipal year.

RESOLVED –

that the committee send any suggestions to the Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.05 pm
and finished at 8.45 pm