

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 July 2022

Present: Councillor S Feldman (Chair)
Councillor F Ezeifedi (Vice-Chair)
Councillors P Kloss, R Martins, T Osborn, K Rodrigues and J Stiff

Also present: Councillor Ian Stotesbury and Dan Thomason (Arriva)

Officers: Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy
Partnerships, Funding and Contract Manager
Business Intelligence Manager
Head of Leisure and Environmental Services
Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services
Associate Director of Environment
Senior Democratic Services Officer

9 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Ahmed and Turmaine.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

11 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2022 were submitted and signed.

12 **Other scrutiny meetings - minutes**

It was noted that Finance Scrutiny Committee had met on 27 June 2022.
Minutes of the meeting were available on the council's website.

13 **End of year 2021/22 Council Performance Report**

The scrutiny committee received the report of the Business Intelligence Manager setting out the council's End of Year 2021/22 key performance indicators (KPIs).

The Business Intelligence Manager introduced the report. She highlighted some key areas and provided responses to some of the questions that the committee had sent in advance. Further answers to queries would be circulated after the meeting.

Key highlights included:

- There had been good improvement in the Revenues and Benefits indicators following a challenging time for the service. The end to their additional responsibilities as part of the Covid response had provided more capacity.
- The percentage of calls answered by the Customer Service Centre (CSC) within timescales was just below target. When the service anticipated surges in demand staff were not able to take annual leave. Additional staffing pressures had also been experienced this year due to a resignation and sickness absence.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation remained steady. Details of how the target was determined would be circulated.
- It had been agreed to set the waste and recycling targets at more challenging levels. From Q1 22/23 the level of recycling would be set at 48% rising to 50% and 52% in 2023 and 2024 respectively. The targets for levels of residual waste would also be reduced to be more challenging.
- The IT helpdesk had seen a dramatic improvement with the Littlefish contract; the target for first time fix was 45% and the result was 96%; the service would be reviewing these figures.

Following the recent approval of the Council Plan, the process to review the KPIs and targets had begun as part of the council's service planning process. This would include looking at whether the right measures were included and how the data was presented. The committee was invited to send feedback on this.

Members felt that the format of the document was easy to follow and were pleased that performance was good overall. A number of the KPIs had had the same target levels for a number of years and a request was made that these be reviewed and brought back to the committee. Officers confirmed that the Q1 data would include the latest set of targets and where these were continually achieved they would look to increase them. A wider piece of work would be undertaken in relation to performance management including benchmarking with other, similar, councils.

Starting with KPI 7, long wait calls received, it was noted that calls to Revenues and Benefits were not included in the data. The committee asked why this was the case and how their inclusion would change the figures. Officers undertook to circulate that information. It was noted that a balance had to be struck with staffing levels to ensure resilience without the service being overstaffed. The move to online interactions meant that those who did call the CSC often needed

more support with complex queries. The committee further suggested that there should be targets for the percentage of queries that were dealt with online to help achieve the right staffing levels. A suggestion was also made to look at call-back technology which would avoid the need for people being on hold. Officers agreed to consider these suggestions as they reviewed the KPIs and the Customer Experience Strategy.

Discussing the number of green flags achieved, the committee commended the outstanding work and asked what the limitations were to increasing the number. It was explained that achieving the 17 green flags was a substantial annual task to prepare management plans and delivery of action plans. There were also resource implications to make the applications and to have the support from Veolia for the maintenance standards. While there was no further capacity to increase the number at present, the distribution across borough was good. There were other ongoing projects which had a positive impact on the green spaces including the River Colne programme.

In relation to the numbers of households in temporary accommodation, members suggested that it would be useful to have a measure of how long families with children were spending in such accommodation. This would be considered in the service planning process. The committee further noted that the housing service had very few targets; officers undertook to provide an explanation for this.

Following a request for an explanation of the process for reviewing KPIs, it was noted that the council plan for 2022-26 had recently been launched. In order to deliver the commitments, each service prepared a service plan to include Business As Usual (BAU) performance targets as well as the delivery of specific projects and how these would be measured. A process of peer challenge and check sessions would take place across services as part of this process, which would include the KPIs for each service. There was also more detailed work to develop a continuous improvement regime which sought to ensure that the monitoring of performance translated into improved performance.

RESOLVED –

1. that the key performance indicator results for 2021/22, appended at Appendix A to the report are noted.
2. that the committee notes that the KPIs will continue to be reviewed as part of the Business Intelligence Strategy, and that 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.
3. that the Customer Experience Strategy be added to the work programme to enable members to feed into that area.

4. that further information around how the housing KPIs, particularly for temporary accommodation, be provided.
5. that the revised KPIs come back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

14

Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) contract

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services setting out the background to the contract as well as data on usage and subsidies.

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services introduced the report which provided an overview of the DRT with details of bus stops, the number of buses in service, ridership and subsidies to date. The council met the team from the provider, Arriva, monthly to understand and monitor performance. The service had been due to start in April 2020 but was delayed to July 2020 due to the onset of the pandemic which had had a significant impact on ridership.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Transport, Councillor Ian Stotesbury, added that the DRT was a reflection of the council's commitment to modal shift and active travel schemes in particular. While the service had been impacted by Covid, numbers were picking up. There was a focus on marketing particularly in the B2B (business to business) sphere. Surveys had shown that a lot of car journeys in Watford were short distances and this service was part of the solution to reduce car use.

The committee discussed how concessionary travel operated on the DRT. Blue badge holders and concessionary bus users could travel for free between 10am and 3pm and this was a key demographic. A call centre was in operation which received bookings by telephone for those without smart phone access. Members noted that the telephone number for this service was not publicised and considered it should be made widely available.

Turning to accessibility, the Portfolio Holder underlined that this was a real goal of the service. Officers confirmed that the app did not capture demographic information but there was some data on use by disabled customers who needed assistance.

The committee considered the usage of the service which in April 2022 had been approximately 10% of what was projected. The committee asked for the numbers of unique riders to be circulated. Officers advised that the pricing levels were reviewed annually. An efficiency notice had been issued in November 2021 with associated actions. Arriva had been asked to bring back revised numbers and there was an increased marketing budget to support this. While there had

been an improvement since the notice being issued, the Portfolio Holder advised that if the numbers of users still did not improve, the future of the service could be in doubt.

Following questions around the marketing of the service, it was confirmed that Arriva had responsibility for this. The Mayor, Portfolio Holder and officers offered local knowledge and assisted with making connections. The Portfolio Holder said he would welcome suggestions to marketing materials. Once people used the service they were enthusiastic about it and ambassadors for the service had a role to play. The marketing needed to be multifaceted focused at different groups and a video of users was already in production.

Dan Thomason advised that he visited Watford often and the relationship with the council was critical. It was confirmed that the decals on the buses were those agreed with the Council on commencement of the contract; officers noted that the council would need to fund any changes but an update could be considered. The rolling blinds on the buses also offered a marketing opportunity. Officers further noted the suggestion of focusing resources near the railway stations when there were issues with the rail services. The committee agreed that a workshop with members would be a helpful way to take the discussion forward, particularly around marketing including videos.

There was a focus on marketing the service to businesses and groups in the town. Businesses were asking for more information and additional virtual stops were being added. The stop at ASOS had seen a big increase in passenger numbers. The team would be making a presentation to new students at West Herts College as well as offering them two weeks' free travel. Officers held fortnightly marketing meetings with Arriva and there was a forward plan which linked to Big Events and in publications. Members further suggested that if the service could be integrated into the Google maps journey planner that would benefit numbers. Targeted advertising on Google could also be considered.

Dan Thomason noted that the shift to higher levels of home working had impacted the service. This also made it harder to make projections on user levels going forward. One constraint was that as a borough council, the service was limited to Watford, however conversations about DRTs were ongoing with Hertfordshire County Council. Committee members mentioned community groups, including the Blind Centre, who they felt would benefit from the service. Suggestions of community groups to contact were invited. It was further noted that W3RT promoted the service to community groups.

Comparing with the other DRT services run by Arriva, it was noted that the service in Liverpool was a local authority contract that replaced a standard bus service and had proved very successful as it was fully concessionary and located

in an area with a significant elderly population. The service in Ebbsfleet was also launched in lockdown and had succeeded, mainly due to the lack of bus services in the area. In Leicester it was a housing contract, this contract would not be renewed due to the impact of Covid and the recruitment challenges in the Midlands across the transport sectors. Lessons from this had been learnt for Watford, including altering driver pay and hours.

RESOLVED –

1. that a workshop be arranged to discuss the marketing of the service.
2. that the telephone number of the service be publicised more widely.
3. that an update on the service be brought back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee with renewed targets and outcomes of the efficiency notice.

15 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

The scrutiny committee was invited to review the current Executive Decision Progress Report for 2022/23 and consider whether any further information was required.

RESOLVED –

that the current 2022/23 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

16 **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee**

The Chair, as the council's appointed representative on Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee, advised that the Vice Chair had attended the last meeting in his place.

She reported that there had been agenda items on Long Covid, access to primary care and on Health Watch. Key recommendations in improving the access to primary care were around telephoning and greater use of community pharmacies for minor ailments. Regarding Health Watch, there was a need to diversify the voices that reported. There would also be a forthcoming item to look at the experiences of ethnic minorities in maternity care.

17 **Work Programme**

The committee reviewed the latest version of the work programme, noting that since the publication of the agenda an item around ICT had been added to the November meeting.

It was noted that there would be a small working group to look at the Report-it function; it was agreed that the outcome of this group would be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

18 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would be 21 September 2022.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 8.50 pm