

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 March 2023

Present: Councillor S Feldman (Chair)
Councillor F Ezeifedi (Vice-Chair)
Councillors S Ahmed, P Jeffree, P Kloss, R Martins, T Osborn,
K Rodrigues and M Turmaine

Also present: Councillor Mark Watkin (Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Director of Performance
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Business Intelligence Manager

81 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

There was one change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Jeffree replaced Councillor Stiff.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

83 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2023 were submitted and signed.

84 **Other scrutiny meetings - minutes**

Finance Scrutiny Committee had met on 8 March, the Chair, Councillor Turmaine provided an update to the committee. He reported that the committee had reviewed the final period of the year and the headlines were in line with what had been reported at Council. There had been some use of reserves for the revenue account and the capital accounts continued to be monitored.

Focusing on Delivery: Performance and Progress Report

The scrutiny committee received a report of the of the Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Service, EPMO Coordinator, Executive Head of Human Resources and Business Intelligence Manager.

The Director of Performance made a presentation to the committee providing key updates on the Council Plan, Delivery Plan and Organisational Development Strategy.

Members discussed the following areas, with actions recorded as requested:

- The council was disappointed not to have been successful in its bid to the Levelling Up Fund. It had been a lengthy and demanding piece of work and the process had been disappointing for Watford, and many other councils. The feedback from government on Watford's submission had been very positive and there was a possibility of bidding in a third round; the council was waiting for guidance on government.
- Certain services areas in local government faced recruitment difficulties, including planning and environmental health, but Watford remained in a strong position in terms of vacancies without significant gaps. Watford was an attractive place to work and there was an approach to grow talent internally, which was reflected in the forthcoming People Strategy.
- Working with foodbanks on the cost of living crisis had highlighted that donations were down. They were entrepreneurial organisations who worked with businesses (such as supermarkets) to pick up and use unwanted food and goods. Some had paid staff to help as well as volunteers but many were finding volunteers was becoming challenging. Foodbanks were being funded through the Watford allocation of Household Support Fund from central government and this was becoming increasingly important to their budgets.
- There was not yet a communications plan aligned to the Customer Experience Strategy to enable residents to have appropriate expectations. Officers agreed to provide an update.

The Business Intelligence Manager presented the Q3 performance indicators and details of the KPI review to the committee, identifying highlights and key areas of focus.

Members discussed the following areas, with actions recorded as requested:

- The parking service was not concerned about the decrease in the number of penalty charge notices as it was within the normal range and was

affected by a variety of factors. Officers agreed to confirm whether there had been any changes in staffing levels.

- The number of outstanding invoices over 12 months had been outside the target due to three members of staff being on sickness absence. The staff members had returned and the backlog had been addressed so that the level of outstanding invoices had reduced to 8.25%, which was within target.
- The write-off of outstanding invoices was a strict process requiring sign off from the S151 officer.
- The percentage of staff who had undertaken their performance development review had been reviewed and was now 75.9%. This excluded staff who were not eligible for PDRs due to being temporary staff or on maternity leave.
- While the percentage of return-to-work interviews that had been completed remained below target, a change was being introduced to increase visibility of this indicator and it was hoped this would improve the figures.
- The percentage of freedom of information requests answered within targets had reached 99%. The service had been working hard to follow these up and access to the system had been extended to more users. The lessons learnt would be applied to other areas.
- It remained to be seen if the dip in leisure centre usage was linked to the cost of living crisis; there was a seasonal element with a decrease seen in Q3. Further data from Q4 and Q1 would provide a fuller picture. Any support provided would depend on the contract and the council remained committed to the leisure centres. There were no concerns at this stage.
- The climbing wall at the leisure centre had not been operational for a number of years, the reasons for it not working were not clear.
- The reduction in the amount recycled amounted to a 3% drop. It was normal to see fluctuations in this indicator. There would be a waste compositional analysis at the end of March which would provide insight into the changes and inform the strategy going forward.
- The service to deliver the food waste recycling to flats was due to start in autumn 2023; it was complicated to implement and a working group had been established. Officers undertook to check whether this work had been included in the 23/24 budget.
- The approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion was being refreshed. Approximately 50% of staff had provided equalities data and more self-reporting was encouraged. This was an issue across many organisations but work was underway to address this. Concerns raised included about how the data would be used. There was a need to show positive impacts on employees.

- The KPI review was in progress to ensure that the indicators were right and were presented well.
- The Portfolio Holder reported that with the public KPIs it was a question of reporting against the corporate strategy and the management KPIs determined whether the organisation was working effectively.
- There would be indicators for the housing service; potentially with some new ones and others becoming internal KPIs, these would remain under close review. The impact of the cost of living crisis would be reflected in the Q4 data in terms of numbers in temporary accommodation.
- The government was bringing in the Office for Local Government as a 'watchdog' for council performance. The impact on how performance was monitored was not yet clear.
- The timeline in the slides represented the end of the process and a significant amount of engagement with Portfolio Holders and services had already taken place and remained ongoing.
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have a briefing on the new KPIs later in March. The intention was to begin monitoring from 1 April to enable a full year's monitoring to take place.
- The collection rates for council tax was a cumulative indicator with the target of 97% by year end and profiled month by month.
- One aim of the refreshed approach would be to connect directly into back-office systems to enable more frequent data refresh.
- The committee noted that the KPI reporting process meant that there was often a delay before they saw the data.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes:

1. The progress updates within the report relating to:
 - the Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022 -24 (Appendix A)
 - the Organisational Development Strategy 2020-24 (Appendix B)
 - the key performance indicator results for Quarter 3 of 2022/23 (Appendix C)
2. That the key performance indicators and measures will continue to be reviewed as part of the council-wide service planning process and the ongoing work on the Business Intelligence Strategy, and that these will be discussed with Overview and Scrutiny members at a briefing on 28 March 2023.

86 **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.

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

Councillor Osborn provided an update on the latest meeting of the Health Scrutiny Committee. There had been two substantial items:

- A positive update on maternity services at Lister hospital following an inadequate grading from the CQC grade.
- A less encouraging update on A&E performance; while some statistics were improving there was a limited basis for comparison outside the local area.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

88 **Work Programme**

The committee reviewed the latest version of the work programme. The committee were asked to contact officers with any suggestions for the new municipal year.

RESOLVED –

that the work programme be noted.

The Chair expressed his thanks to the committee for their work this year.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.05 pm
and finished at 8.20 pm