

Extract from the minutes of the Scrutiny Panel meeting of 11 December 2018

195. Half Year 2018-2019 Performance Report including progress on the 2018-2019 Strategic Plan Action Plan

Councillor King, Portfolio Holder for Resources, and Dan Gascoyne, Assistant Director Policy and Corporate, introduced the report setting out the performance for the 2018-10 half year, and an update on the Strategic Plan Action Plan.

Councillor King explained that the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had been reviewed in view of the Panel's previous comments that some were insufficiently rigorous. The targets in respect of the time taken to process housing benefit claims and changes, and the time taken for local council tax support assessments had been made more challenging. He thanked the Panel for their comments which had proved beneficial. The presentation of the information about the KPIs had also been changed. It was now presented in graph form showing year to date performance and the previous year's performance and target. It also retained the narrative used in previous reports. This would make it easier for the Panel to identify and review trends in performance.

Dan Gascoyne highlighted the Key Performance Indicators where the performance was amber:-

- Processing of major planning applications: There were a comparatively small number of 'major' planning applications, so a small amount missing their target had a disproportionate impact. It was anticipated that performance against the target would improve and it was noted that performance in respect of processing of 'minor' and 'other' applications, which involved a far greater number of applications, was meeting its target.
- Residual waste per household: Notwithstanding that the performance was amber, performance against the target had improved dramatically. It was felt that the target may need to be amended slightly, but he was satisfied that performance was good and at a consistent level.
- Number of missed collections: Performance against this target was improving and it was anticipated that by year end it would be on track.

The only KPI where performance was red was in respect of sickness rates. Whilst rates of short term sickness were reducing, long term sickness was increasing. This

was a matter of concern which was being taken very seriously within the Council. Each case was being looked at and case conferences being held to ensure that the necessary support was in place to facilitate a return to work, and where a return to work was unlikely addressing whether there were better options for the individual and the Council. The trends were not consistent across all the Council service groups and the organisation was looking at those areas where the issues were the most pronounced.

Councillor King stressed the seriousness with which this issue was taken. He was satisfied that the right approach was being taken. It would be difficult to bring the numbers down quickly or easily, in part because the figures were calculated on 12 month rolling period so it takes time for improved performance to be reflected in the figures. The level of change within the organisation and the consequent pressures being put upon staff were likely to be contributing factors. It was important that managers showed empathy and compassion and maintained relationships with those staff who were away from the office because of long term sickness issues and a briefing was being held for managers to reinforce these messages.

The Panel also expressed concern about presenteeism, particularly by those suffering with with mental health, and sought clarification about what training was available to managers to help identify and deal with this. Dan Gascoyne explained that whilst the Council was aware of presenteeism as a potential issue, he did not think it was a major problem partly as a consequence of the Council's flexible working practices. However, the Council was very much aware of the issue of mental health. The Staff Survey was currently being conducted which would provide helpful information about the views and morale of staff.

In discussion on the Strategic Plan Action Plan the Panel raised the following issues:-

- How the information in the report was assessed, amalgamated and reviewed and whether the structure of the report, in concentrating on particular actions, led to an incomplete picture being presented in respect of some issues.
- The timescale for the Economic Strategy Strategic Plan Action Plan report. It was also suggested that that this would be a useful item for pre-scrutiny. Councillor King undertook to provide further information to the Panel about the timescales.
- In respect of theme O5, whether the Council had the ambition to convert all Council vehicles to electric only by a set date, and to make them available to staff via a car share system. It was explained that the conversion of the fleet was being looked at, although it might be more difficult to convert waste collection vehicles.
- In respect of theme W5, why did the Diabetes Support Programme events at Leisure World have a low attendance and whether the Council was pushing

health organisations to address diabetes. Pam Donnelly, Strategic Director for Customers and Partnerships, suggested that there may be some benefit in inviting the North Essex Health and Wellbeing Alliance to present their work to the Panel in the next municipal year.

- In theme R4, clarification was needed about the legal powers referred to and how these related to the legislation specified in the commentary.
- In theme G4, it was suggested the wording of this needed to include a caveat reflecting recent developments in respect of the Local Plan.
- In respect of theme O2, whether the charging points in Priory Street were being pursued given that it was understood that Priory Street would not continue as a car park. There should be a planning policy requiring the installation of charging policies as part of new developments. Councillor King indicated that he would look into these issues.
- In terms of the trial closure of the High Street mentioned at theme O3, the hours of closure were being looked at? Councillor King indicated that he would investigate and respond.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The performance set out in the Strategic Plan Action Plan Half Year report April – September 2018, the KPI Half Year report covering April – September 2018 and the Awards and other Performance News be noted.
- (ii) The Reporting Timetable covering 2018-19, specifically the dates for setting KPI targets for 2019-20, be noted.