

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 January 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Colin Churchman, Mike Fletcher (substitute), Garry Hague, and Elizabeth Rigby (substitute) (*arrived 19.15*)

Apologies: Councillors Gerard Rice and Andrew Jefferies

In attendance: Les Billingham, Assistant Director of Adult Social Care
Sean Clark, Director of Finance, Governance and Property
Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service
Sarah Welton, Strategy Manager
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

14. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 September 2019 were approved as a correct record.

15. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

16. Declaration of Interests

There were no items of urgent business.

17. Mid-Year Corporate Performance Report 2019/20

The Chair stated that the agenda would be amended, and this item would be heard first. The Director Strategy, Communications and Customer Services introduced the report and stated that this was the Quarter 2 performance report, which was being heard at this time due to the cancellation of meetings because of purdah. She felt that this was a positive report as 74% of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had achieved their target, and overall there had been a positive direction of travel. She summarised and added that in line with a suggestion made earlier in the year by the Committee, any indicators that had missed their target included a 'route to green', which outlined steps being taken to ensure the KPI met its target in the future.

The Chair opened the debate and highlighted page 25 of the agenda and the

improvement in the KPI relating to tenant satisfaction. He felt that this was a positive KPI as it had exceeded its target and hoped this was partly down to focus placed on the KPI by the Committee. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services stated that feedback from tenants had been about the lack of communication between the Council and tenants, rather than specific repair complaints. She highlighted that because of the feedback the Council had started a resident's newsletter and developed upon engagement with the Tenants Excellence Panel, which kept residents up to date with any necessary information. She felt this was having a direct impact on the KPI, and had therefore increased tenant's satisfaction.

The Chair then highlighted page 26 of the agenda and the KPI relating to the percentage of bins collected on the correct day and felt it was good to see this KPI had also met its target, and added it was good to see a monthly breakdown. He then commented on page 31 of the agenda, and the percentage of waste recycled, as he felt it was disappointing to see this KPI had missed its target, and had shown a negative direction of travel in the monthly breakdown. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services responded that a Cross-Party Waste Management Working Group had been set-up in relation to recycling and waste management, which was currently consulting to get residents feedback on recycling. She added that pilot schemes had been tested for particular areas of difficulty, such as recycling in flats, to find options that could work across the borough. She also commented that Thurrock were running a social media campaign and regular press releases, which were tied into national media campaigns to increase plastic recycling. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services summarised and mentioned that officers were also going back into schools and visiting assemblies, so that 4000 children would receive additional education regarding recycling.

Councillor Fletcher stated that he was pleased to see that 'routes to green' had been added to the report, as he felt it showed a clear statement of how improvement would be achieved. He also asked how the information was collected regarding the percentage of tenant satisfaction KPI, and queried whether all tenants were surveyed or simply those that had complaints. The Strategy Manager replied that it was a random spread of tenants taken by an independent survey company, but would clarify the details with the relevant officers and reply via email. Councillor Fletcher then discussed the KPI regarding the number of library sign-ups and asked if there was a long-term library strategy in place, as many young people no longer used them. He also asked a question regarding the relevance of the KPI relating to the number of permanent admissions of older people to residential care homes. The Assistant Director Adult Social Care replied that although libraries had seen a large uptake of users, it had also seen large numbers of people become inactive, so the KPI had not been met. He added that a libraries strategy had been developed which would improve the libraries offer and improve IT facilities available, as well as making them more commercially viable and financially self-sufficient. He felt that as libraries became more linked with community hubs, the uptake of library memberships would increase. The Assistant Director Adult Social Care then answered Councillor Fletcher's

second question relating to older people in care homes, and stated that in recent years the perception of residential care homes and their need in the community had changed. He felt that in previous years the Council had wanted to reduce the number of people in residential care, as the theory was to keep people in their homes for as long as possible, but recently this idea had become untenable. He quoted a study which had been undertaken and had compared the type of residents in care homes in 2010 and now, which had found that people in care homes were now older (often having their first admittance over the age of 85) and had more complex care needs. He stated that for those people, residential care was appropriate, and so the needs profile of people had changed. He commented that Thurrock's first desire was still to keep people in their homes for as long as possible, but felt that it was sometimes necessary for people to be in residential care. He felt that although the KPI had not met its target, this was not related to poor performance, but simply a reality of life that some people needed residential care. He added that the KPI also included self-funders, compared to other Councils who did not include these people in their figures.

Councillor Rigby arrived 19.15

Councillor Hague echoed the Chair's comments that the direction of travel for the majority of KPIs was good. He questioned the figures around the recycling KPI as he felt these had not made any progress, and asked if the way of measuring the KPI had changed. The Strategy Manager replied that the measurements had remained the same, but the KPI was dependent on numerous factors some of which could not be controlled; one example being the weather, for example, a wet month would see reduced garden waste. Other factors included recycling in flats and contamination of bins. She added that low recycling rates was not just a problem for Thurrock as different boroughs and councils had different recycling policies dependent on which recycling centre they used, which could be confusing.

The Chair asked what level of recycling data the council had across the borough, and the Strategy Manager replied that the data could be broken down by round, and by day, and this helped pinpoint hotspots around the borough. She stated that these figures were provided to the Waste Management Working Group for their oversight. Councillor Fletcher added that he was the Chair of the Waste Management Working Group and had seen data relating to why people did not recycle, and their problems regarding recycling policies, which he felt would be good for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to see. He added that a successful pilot had been run to tackle recycling in flats, which had seen positive results. Councillor Rigby added that at the previous Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a detailed report on recycling had been presented, and felt it would be useful for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to see the minutes of this meeting. Councillor Churchman added that education regarding recycling was important, particularly around contamination and types of plastic that could be recycled.

The Chair then highlighted page 29 of the agenda and the KPI relating to the

number of places accessed by two year olds for early years education, and asked what the policy was on expanding placements at settings. The Assistant Director Adult Social Care replied that he would consult with officers and would answer via email. He mentioned that the performance of this KPI was dependent on the season, as over summer there was lots of movement of children, which settled down in September when children took up their places. He stated that the Quarter 3 figures showed that 80% of places had been accessed by two year olds, which showed improvement and met the KPI target.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. The Committee noted and commented upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators, in particular those areas which are off target.**
- 2. The Committee identified any areas which required additional consideration.**

18. Local Council Tax Scheme

The Director of Finance, Governance and Property introduced the report and stated that this was an annual report that had to be agreed by Council, even though the scheme had seen no changes. He stated that Thurrock followed the national approach that mirrored benefit regulations, but as central government had slowed the work on Universal Credit, changes could not be made until 2020/21. He added that a more detailed report would be brought before the Committee once regulations had been agreed, which would hopefully be early in the next municipal year and would go to public consultation.

The Chair asked what the proposed review would look like, and what the outcomes of the review would be. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that the report would include any changes to housing benefit regulations, and the report would be brought before Committee to discuss those changes and options. He added that the review would then be signed-off by Cabinet, with consultation being based around comments from both scrutiny and the Executive.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. The Committee noted the analysis of the current scheme.**
- 2. The Committee considered the recommendation that no changes are made to the current scheme for 2020/21.**
- 3. The Committee agreed to undertake a full review of the scheme within 2020/21 once the government had confirmed further detail on the future of universal credit.**

19. Briefing on Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local Authorities

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and stated that it summarised the recently published Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny, and discussed how it related to Thurrock. She commented that as it was statutory guidance, local authorities must have regard for it, which is why it was being brought before the Committee. She stated that any comments relating to the guidance could also be included in the ongoing scrutiny review if Members wished.

The Chair felt this was a good report, and felt that the relationship between the Executive and scrutiny would be improved by the introduction of an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol, which would ensure scrutiny could make an impact, work was collaborative, and scrutiny could be a part of the decision-making process. The Chair added that co-opting technical experts onto scrutiny committee's was also an idea that should be considered as they could provide additional input into the scrutiny process. The Chair summarised and stated that Members could email Democratic Services once they had digested the report and if they had any comments for the ongoing scrutiny review.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. The Committee noted the updated MHCLG Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local Authorities, published in May 2019.**
- 2. The Committee commented on any aspects of the guidance they would like addressed in the ongoing review of the overview and scrutiny function.**

20. Work Programme

The Chair stated that the Communications Strategy was being moved to the first meeting of the municipal year, to allow an LGA Peer Review to take place in February/March that would include residents, Members and local newspaper editors.

The meeting finished at 7.45 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**