

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 June 2021 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Colin Churchman (Vice-Chair), Abbie Akinbohun (substitute, arrived 7.05pm), Adam Carter, John Kent, Bukky Okunade and Graham Snell (substitute)
- Apologies:** Councillors Susan Little (Chair), and James Halden
- In attendance:** Councillor Shane Hebb, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance
Karen Wheeler, Director Strategy, Engagement and Growth
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, and live-streamed onto the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 March 2021 were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

4. End of Year (Month 12) Corporate Performance Report 2020/21

The Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth introduced the report and stated that it covered the Council's corporate performance from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. She stated that 63% of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had met target, which was 10% lower than in 2019/20 when 74% of KPIs had reached target. She highlighted that this was largely not due to service performance, but due to the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent restrictions. She explained that in Quarter 2 when COVID-19 restrictions had eased, 75% of KPIs had reached their targets, and she hoped to see this again in the figures for Quarter 1 of this municipal year. She described how each KPI that had not hit target had commentary and a 'route to green' attached, which explained the reason for the missed target and any action being taken to ensure it hit future targets. She summarised and highlighted point 3.4 of the report which outlined the KPIs that had achieved target.

The Vice-Chair questioned page 26 of the agenda and the KPI regarding the

occupancy percentage of council-owned business centres. He queried what marketing and incentives the Council were undertaking. The Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth replied that although the Council were not providing any direct incentives for council-owned business centres, but they were working hard to ensure the units were marketed and occupancy take up increased.

Councillor Akinbohun arrived 7.05pm.

Councillor Okunade questioned the KPI relating to the turnaround time of re-lets. She queried whether this KPI had been affected by the pandemic, and if the Council had a plan in place to ensure the time to re-let properties was reduced. The Director of Strategy, Growth and Engagement responded that the report highlighted the direction of travel for the KPI, and explained that in Quarter 1 the choice-based lettings programme had been suspended due to COVID-19, so the time to re-let had increased to sixty days. She explained that the re-let time had now decreased to thirty days, and was continuing to travel in the right direction, but had not hit the end of year target. She added that the team were seeing improvement in Quarter 1 this year, which would be shown to the Committee at the meeting in September.

Councillor Kent stated that this had been a tough year for the Council due to COVID-19, and felt that the KPIs reflected this. He thanked officers across the Council for their hard work throughout the pandemic, and felt that they had continued to deliver services during a difficult year. He highlighted page 21 of the agenda, and asked if the Committee could see the raw data for the KPI regarding the completion of treatment in the Young People's Drug and Alcohol service. He also questioned the KPI regarding the Council's support of cultural, social, and health and wellbeing events outlined on page 22, and asked if these had taken place virtually during the pandemic. He also asked if the Committee could see more detail on the type of events that took place, and what future events were planned. Councillor Kent then drew the Committee's attention to page 27 of the agenda and the KPI relating to payment of Fixed Penalty Notices. He felt that the repayment figure was still low, and asked what extra steps had been put in place to ensure this figure met target in the future. He then queried page 28 of the agenda, and asked if the figure of 195 homes permitted through the Planning Committee was correct. He also wished to see the percentage difference between sites suppressed due to the pandemic and site availability. Councillor Kent then moved on and highlighted the KPI on page 30 of the agenda relating to the number of houses at risk of homelessness. He stated that only 211 cases had been accepted, which was a rate of 11.5%, and questioned whether this was due to officers turning people away or ensuring they were not losing their homes. He added that it would also be useful to see a full report relating to the asset disposal strategy. The Director of Engagement, Strategy and Growth thanked Councillor Kent for his feedback, and stated that she would respond to his questions in writing after the meeting.

Councillor Snell agreed with Councillor Kent that lots of KPIs had missed their targets due to COVID-19 restrictions, but also agreed that parts of the report

needed more clarity, such as site availability of housing. He highlighted page 29 of the agenda, and the KPI relating to the number of initial health assessments for children completed, and felt that 57% completed within 28 days of a child becoming Looked After was low. He felt that this was a hidden impact of the pandemic, and although the team had done a good job in the circumstances, they would need to work hard to catch-up on those initial health assessments that had been missed. The Director of Engagement, Strategy and Growth replied that the team were currently finalising this year's KPIs, which would be brought before the Committee in September. She added that any feedback made by the Committee would be taken back to the team, and KPIs would continue to be monitored and reviewed.

The Vice-Chair summarised and stated that the Council would continue to work hard during these unusual times, and felt that KPIs would continue to improve now COVID restrictions were easing.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Noted and commented on the performance of the key corporate performance indicators, in particular those areas which are off target, and the impact of COVID-19.

2. Identified any areas which required additional consideration in 2021/22.

5. Work Programme

Councillor Hebb thanked the Committee for allowing him to attend the meeting, and stated that he was attending due to the scrutiny review, which had been developed by Councillor Gerrish as Chair during the previous municipal year, and had been a welcome piece of work. He explained that he had a suite of ideas to put to the Committee to build the Work Programme, which included:

1. The Fair Debt Summit – a piece of work on the impact of COVID-19 and residents who wanted to pay debts, but simply could not. This could include a deep-dive or a Task and Finish Group into the collections process, the new relationship between Thurrock's revenue department and the Citizens Advice Bureau, and the compassionate side of collections.

2. Education within the Fair Debt Summit – a piece of work on how to help young people anticipate the signs of household debt. He stated that before COVID-19 a small piece of work had been completed which looked at this issue, but had been stopped due to the pandemic. He hoped the Committee would look into how to rollout the education package to schools, sixth forms, and academy trusts. He felt that the generation who were being raised during COVID-19 would need additional help regarding this issue.

3. Wide-reaching consultation regarding the Local Council Tax Scheme to ensure it was fit for purpose, it met the borough's needs, and provided good value for money for the people that funded it.

4. Members oversight of investments, which had been suggested by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee last year. He stated that a Shadow Investment Board had been running since July 2020, but felt that the Committee should have a role in how the Board would be constituted and formed. He explained that although the Council were now no longer pursuing investments, Members still needed to ensure the strategy was fit for purpose, and transparent for residents to understand.

Councillor Okunade thanked Councillor Hebb for his proposals. She questioned the potential timeframes for completing this work. Councillor Hebb replied that the timescales could be determined by the Committee based on outstanding Work Programme commitments. Councillor Kent agreed with the proposals, but felt that the timescales would be quite tight due to the timings of future Committee meetings. He questioned if activities could take place in between formal Committee meetings. The Senior Democratic Services Officer replied that she would speak with senior officers, as well as the Chair and Vice-Chair, to formulate a draft Work Programme and timeline. Councillor Okunade highlighted that some work streams would need to be prioritised over others, due to potential time constraints.

The meeting finished at 7.28 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**