

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 June 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Jack Duffin (Vice-Chair), Colin Churchman, Mike Fletcher, Andrew Jefferies and Elizabeth Rigby

Apologies: Councillors Garry Hague and Gerard Rice

In attendance: Daren Spring, Assistant Director – Street Scene & Leisure
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.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 March 2019 were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

The Chair raised one item of urgent business regarding the proposed expansion of the Civic Offices. He recollected that a report on the Civic Offices expansion had come before the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny in November 2018, and that at this meeting the committee had requested to see a full business case, but this had still not been provided. He felt that this project was now moving quickly, and wanted the committee to be able to see the business case for the project before it was agreed by Cabinet. He stated, that with Members agreement, he would write to the Leader and the Chief Executive to ask for this to be presented to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The membership agreed to this proposal.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

4. End of Year Corporate Performance Report 2018/19

The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service introduced the report and stated that this set out the progress of key performance indicators (KPIs) for 2018/19, and that in total 68% of KPIs had achieved their target; and added that 50% of KPIs had improved on their score from

2017/18. She commented that this report also set out the proposed KPIs for 2019/20 and new suggested targets so the Committee could comment, before it went to Cabinet for approval in July.

The Chair opened the debate and highlighted the KPI on page 21 of the agenda regarding the percentage of primary schools judged 'good' or better. He asked why this was a missed target and the reasons for the negative direction of travel over the year. The Strategy Manager confirmed that a decision nationally to change the calculation explained the sudden change during the year. She stated that whilst most KPIs the council monitors worked to a financial year, schools data normally worked to an academic year which started and finished in September. She elaborated that historically, if a school had become an academy, they were not considered in the KPI until an OFSTED inspection had taken place; but now they were included in the calculation and this took into account the predecessor school's rating. The Chair replied that the committee should be careful in interpreting the direction of travel, due to the statistical nature of the KPI, but felt that having 1/10 schools in the borough not achieving a 'good' or better rating was poor. He asked what actions were being taken by the Council to support schools, and if the service were considering any additional action. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services replied that the education team met regularly with schools on an individual, as well as a group basis with headteachers. She added that the team also ran broader programmes such as forums for head teachers to allow discussions.

The Chair then drew the Committee's attention to page 21 of the agenda and the KPI relating to street cleanliness and litter, as this had been doing well, but was now falling back. He asked what factors were influencing the decline in street cleanliness. The Assistant Director Street Scene and Leisure replied that although the KPI had not been met, they were better than the national benchmark. He then described how in tranche 3 the performance was below target, even though tranche 1 and 2 had been better, and this seemed to be becoming a trend from previous years. He explained that tranche 3 occurred in late winter, which presented additional problems for the team, for example gritter teams often worked late nights during tranche 3 and therefore could not work the next day so staff numbers were lower. He stated that a new action plan was being put in place to combat this issue, and the team were looking at re-zoning sweeping areas and purchasing new smaller mechanical sweepers, as the larger mechanical sweepers could not go out during tranche 3 due to the grit. The Chair stated that street cleanliness was a problem in his ward, and residents wanted continued cleanliness throughout the year. He asked if the KPI would improve during 2019/20. The Assistant Director Street Scene and Leisure responded that remedial work was already being undertaken to solve the issues, and the teams were focussing on areas where street cleanliness was a particular issue, such as major routes and industrial areas.

The Chair then moved on to discussing the KPI regarding the percentage of refuse bins emptied on the correct day, and stated that although the previous few quarters had improved, the KPI had still failed to meet its target. He asked what further action was being undertaken to improve the KPI. The Assistant

Director Street Scene and Leisure replied that March had been an anomaly due to the unusual weather and very dry spell, as the team ran a reduced service for green waste bins in the winter, but the nice weather had meant more people cutting grass and using the green bin, and the teams had to adjust to this. He added that from April 2019 until June 2019 the KPI had reached 99.3% and showed a continuing improving trend. The Chair asked if the bin collection day affected the KPI, as those streets that had their bins collected later in the week often reported bins missed. The Assistant Director Street Scene and Leisure confirmed this was sometimes the case, as if teams fell behind early on in the week it became harder to catch up as the week progressed. The Chair asked if this KPI could be highlighted to the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee so they can monitor in more detail and suggest operational decisions.

Councillor Fletcher added that for the failed KPIs, the commentary focussed too much on explaining why they had failed, but did not show clearly the 'route to green'. He felt that each failed KPI should be explained in more detail, and measures being taken to mitigate its failure should be listed. The Vice-Chair commented that it was good to see the KPI regarding apprenticeships was meeting its target, and asked if the KPI could be developed to show how many full-time jobs came from those apprenticeships. He also highlighted the KPI regarding response times to media and press enquiries, as it equated to roughly one press enquiry every day, but responses were still not being sent out within 24 hours. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied to Councillor Fletcher and stated that this was something that had been identified and she was currently working with the Portfolio Holder and the Leader to better articulate a 'route to green' and increase the level of detail included in the report. She then replied to Councillor Duffin in relation to apprenticeships and commented that it would be dependent on the records each service keeps as to whether the KPI can be updated, but she would look into this. She added that replying to media responses could be challenging as queries could be inter-departmental or involve Members. She stated that the communications team tried to answer queries within the 24 hour time limit, and 85% were answered within 48 hours.

Councillor Jefferies added that it was good to see the KPI regarding the percentage of potholes repaired was on target, and agreed that the number of apprenticeships was also good news. He asked whether the sixteen new apprenticeships were all school leavers, or if a percentage were people who had already been working for the Council. The Strategy Manager confirmed that half of the apprenticeships in the KPI were from Council workers who wished to upskill. She stated that apprenticeships were no longer just for school leavers, and were available for all ages, including existing staff, who wished to upskill, gain formal qualifications and continue their professional development. Councillor Jefferies asked if the KPI could be separated into apprenticeships for school leavers, and apprenticeships for those who wanted formal qualifications. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service suggested that as another Apprentice Recruitment Day was being held in July an item on the results from this day, and apprenticeships in general, could be brought back to the Committee at a later date which would

give Members greater understanding.

Councillor Jefferies then drew the Committee's attention to the KPI involving street cleanliness and litter and asked what was being done to upkeep cemeteries and war memorials following the celebration of 100 years since WW1 in 2018. He also asked why the threat of strike action had affected the KPI regarding percentage of refuse bin collected on time. The Assistant Director Street Scene and Leisure replied that war memorials had all been fixed and cleaned up last year for the celebrations, and were now included as part of planned regular maintenance schedules that occurred. He stated that grass cutting occurred on those memorials with grass, and those with hard surfaces were treated with weed killer once every three months. He added that winter maintenance included the upkeep of shrubs and bushes. The Assistant Director Street Scene and Leisure also replied that the threat of strike action had affected the ability to collect bins on time due to reduced flexibility during this period.

The Chair highlighted page 20 of the agenda and the KPI involving the percentage of waste recycled, and asked if this performance had been brought down by the brown bin score. The Assistant Director Street Scene and Leisure replied that this was a continuing issue across locally and across the country and the KPI was a challenging target. He stated that the team were currently looking into setting up a cross-party working group to study recycling rates and a new Recycling Education Officer was now employed by the Council to focus on this issue. The Chair elaborated and stated that residents in flats were particularly finding it difficult to recycle as the facilities were not sufficient and waste could easily get contaminated. The Assistant Director Street Scene and Leisure agreed that recycling was more difficult, particularly around waste becoming contaminated, in flats. He stated that the Recycling Education Officer was focussing on flats to ensure every resident knows what can be recycled, and which bin waste goes in. He added that the team were also considering mesh-fronted bins so residents could physically see which waste belonged in which bins. Councillor Churchman added that in some houses which had been converted into flats, there was only one recycling bin, even though there were now up to 4 separate residences in the house.

The Chair also highlighted the KPI regarding the percentage of older people in their homes on page 20, and asked how much influence the Council had over this. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied that the Council could impact upon this KPI. She added that the Council's re-ablement team had needed to provide 'other' care that the current market could not provide. She stated that the re-ablement team were currently reviewing contracts with providers to decrease risk and improve the KPI. She also added that the figures in the KPI related to a relatively small cohort so small changes had a big impact on percentages, and due to the way the indicator had to be calculated in line with national guidelines, some aspects of the KPI could not be controlled, for example the number of elderly people that unfortunately passed away.

The Chair moved on to discussing the KPI on page 22 regarding the percentage of satisfied tenants as he felt this was a missed KPI every quarter. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service responded that this service had seen improvement in the second half of the year and had met its target in April. She elaborated that this KPI revolved around resident engagement with tenants, and the increased communication was having an impact. She stated that the service had introduced a new newsletter for tenants, and that tenants could now become more involved in the procurement process and how the service was delivered. She stated that the team was continuing to review and a detailed report regarding this KPI was being examined at the next Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, due to the comments at previous Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair then drew the Committee's attention to Appendix 1 and the draft KPIs for 2019/20. He asked why the total gross external income KPI had only been increased by 3% for the new municipal year, and asked if a more ambitious target could be put in place. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied that this target had been put in place before the final outturn report had been written, and was based on factors such as fees and charges. She stated she would provide this feedback to Cabinet. The Chair asked if the KPI could focus on commercial interests as well as fees and charges. The Chair also asked why the target for the KPI regarding total number of employee jobs in Thurrock was not more ambitious, as the target had not been increased, and asked if the Council could directly influence this KPI. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied that she would clarify the figure, but that it was not directly reflective of the Council's performance. Councillor Rigby questioned how KPIs were set, and what they were benchmarked against. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied that historically KPIs were benchmarked nationally, but this had changed so some reflected statutory duties whereas others were benchmarked against statistical neighbours.

The Chair then summarised discussions and stated that the Committee felt concerned over the performance of some KPIs, some of which did not have a 'route to green'. He added that the relevant overview and scrutiny committees would be made aware of this, so they could look at the KPIs on a more detailed and operational level.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. The Committee noted and commented upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators for 2018/19**
- 2. The Committee noted and commented on the indicators and targets for 2019/20 and identified any areas which required additional consideration in the next monitoring cycle.**
- 3. The Committee recommended that future Corporate Performance Reports which were presented at Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee focussed on routes to achievement or failed KPIs, and the**

expected date of that achievement.

4. The Committee recommended that letters were written to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the missed KPI regarding percentage of schools rated 'good' or better; to the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the missed KPI regarding the percentage of bins collected on the correct day; and to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the missed KPI regarding percentage of tenants satisfaction. This is to ensure that the relevant overview and scrutiny committee can undertake more detailed monitoring and further work if required.

5. The Committee called for greater ambition in the targets for the draft KPIs for 2019/20, in particular the KPIs regarding gross external income and total number of employee jobs in Thurrock.

5. Work Programme

The Chair called for the following items to be added to the Work Programme:

1. An update on the Communications Strategy, with an invite to go out to selected editors of local media outlets.
2. A Commercialisation Strategy Update, to understand in greater detail how the Council found commercial finance and how this was benchmarked and processed.
3. A report on community forums and engagement, with Chairs of local community forums invited.
4. A report on external partnership relations, such as the Local Enterprise Partnership, and where they're working well and improvements to be made.
5. A report regarding apprenticeships.
6. Asset Strategy Update.
7. Council Tax Scheme to be moved forward from January so the Committee can look ways to keep council tax frozen before the budget reports.
8. An update on the Overview and Scrutiny project.

The Chair asked if the Work Programme could be populated accordingly and distributed to Members.

The meeting finished at 8.00 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**