

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 18 March 2019 at 9.30 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor R Crute in the Chair

Members of the Committee

Councillors A Patterson (Vice-Chairman), E Adam, A Batey, R Bell, J Chaplow, P Jopling, H Liddle, L Maddison, C Martin, C Potts, L Pounder, J Robinson, J Rowlandson, A Shield, F Tinsley, J Turnbull, M Wilkes and A Willis

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Boyes, M Clarke, K Hawley, J Makepeace, O Milburn, M Simmons and H Smith

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitutes.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

The Head of Strategy referred to paragraph 1, page 7 of the minutes and the request by Councillor Bell for a copy of the response to the Fair Funding Review to be circulated. She confirmed that this had now been circulated to all Members of the Board.

In relation to paragraph 3 of the same minute, the Head of Strategy further noted that in relation to a query raised by Councillor Shield regarding notification of highway maintenance works, she advised that all Members were provided with details of proposed maintenance works at the beginning of the financial year and then on a quarterly basis.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Update on the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Plan 8

The Board considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which provided an update on the progress made at the end of December 2018 on the delivery of the 2018/19 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP8) (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Wilkes commented that he welcomed the work of council departments in achieving savings targets however he would be interested to learn where there were gaps identified in savings targets and asked that this information be provided. He further referred to proposals he made at the previous meeting regarding Empty Homes and whether any action had been taken on this by Councillor Napier. Councillor Crute suggested that this would need to be raised with the Deputy Leader outside of this meeting.

Councillor Batey asked whether a break down could be provided on the female to male staff ratio. It was agreed that this could be provided to members following the meeting.

Resolved

That the content of the report and progress made in delivering MTFP8 be noted.

6 Quarter 3, 2018/19 Customer Feedback Report

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which presented the Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions report for quarter three, 2018/19 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Customer Relations Team Manager provided an overview of customer feedback with comparable data for the same period last year. Further information was reported with regard to customer developments, suggestions, compliments and customer satisfaction.

The report went on to detail information regarding customer complaints and those statutory complaints received regarding Children and Young People's and Adults and Health Service groupings.

Details were then provided in relation to complaints which had been escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman, noting that 3 of the 28 complaints considered had been upheld.

Councillor Maddison asked whether information was available on the number of complaints that were not dealt with year on year. The Customer Relations Team Manager advised that complaints were only included in the report once they were concluded.

Councillor Jopling asked whether further information could be provided regarding the proposed voice recognition system for the council's customer services telephone system. The Customer Relations Team Manager advised that the council were exploring new solutions to assist with the accurate routing of calls and provided automated ways for the customer to receive information where there was avoidable contact. This facility was also part of offering the customer a wider choice whilst balancing an increased demand. She further noted that the voice recognition trial would be commencing imminently, and this would be used with low complexity high demand matters. The introduction of the new telephony technology would enable an increase of capacity in other areas.

Councillor Adam in referring to paragraphs 42 and 46 of the report and the number of corporate complaints upheld in relation to bin collections, asked what analysis was undertaken on these types of complaints. The Customer Relations Team Manager noted that a peak in the number of complaints had been expected this period as a result of a change in the way this data was recorded. She noted that work was being done with bin crews to continuously improve service delivery.

Councillor Patterson in referring to paragraph 40 of the report and Adult and Health Services asked whether further information could be provided on how many complaints relate to third party care providers and what control the council had on the quality of outside providers. It was noted that this would be a matter for the Health or Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Customer Relations Team Manager agreed to report back on the numbers of complaints involving third party providers.

Moving on to discuss Ombudsman complaints, Councillor Tinsley asked how the council's performance compared to similar organisations. The Customer Relations Team Manager responded that the figures were low and this was mainly due to a very robust complaints system. It was agreed that comparative data could be brought to future meetings to track performance year on year.

Referring back to the topic of voice recognition, Councillor Bell suggested that when the options are set, that the most common complaints are placed higher up the list as this tended to be the reason that people would call rather than to make a compliment.

Resolved

That the content of the report be noted.

7 Quarter Three 2018/19 Performance Management Report

The Board considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which presented progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Strategy proceeded to report upon the key performance messages for the quarter by priority theme.

Councillor Robinson asked that congratulations be passed to those staff involved with the recent Book Festival and its success. Furthermore, he noted a new recycling facility was to open in Seaham and suggested that the Environment Committee arrange to view the facility in due course. With regard to suicide rates across the county he acknowledged the importance of this topic being closely monitored by Overview and Scrutiny.

Councillor Maddison raised a point regarding crime levels and changes to reporting of anti-social behaviour.

Returning to the issue of suicide, Councillor Shield noted the importance of determining contributing factors and how this could be linked to the suicide prevention action plan. He added that the council did have a responsibility to help identify these causes and noted that focus should be placed upon hotspot areas and the impact of austerity and welfare rights on individuals.

Councillor Crute also noted the importance of this issue and the work completed to date by the Adults Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Wilkes commented that although he was sympathetic to these issues he did feel that the Management Board were not able to focus on performance against the Altogether Better Council priority in enough depth, as the Board was currently receiving performance information which was already being considered by other scrutiny committees. He went on to refer to sickness absence and asked that the Board reconsider and review the recommendations of the working group as performance had not improved over a period of three years.

Councillor Crute welcomed to the meeting the Head of People and Talent Management who provided detail on sickness absence figures noting that some improvements were being seen. She noted that there were variations in the way in which authorities calculated sickness absence and commented

that the council were reviewing their data. She went on to add that sickness absence remained a priority for CMT and there was a lot of good work happening to promote health and wellbeing through the occupational health service.

Councillor Wilkes in response commented that although the data suggested that the majority of absences were not work related, 58% of absence was related to musculoskeletal or mental health and this in part must be down to work.

Councillor Crute asked what comparators the council was using. The Head of People and Talent Management advised that it was known that authorities without Direct Services had much lower sickness absence figures, however comparing data in this regard was challenging.

Further to Councillor Wilkes suggestion to review the report of the former Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Attendance Management, Councillor Crute agreed that a follow up report to a future committee could be carried out.

Councillor Adam referred to Altogether Greener and the target for reducing carbon emissions. The Head of Strategy commented that further detail would be added to the report to be submitted to the Environment and Sustainable Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Further discussion ensued regarding attendance management and Councillor Tinsley in referring to a meeting of the Board held last year at Crook noted that it was reported at this time that the sector average for days lost to sickness was 6.4 per FTE, he therefore supported a benchmarking exercise with other local authorities and other public sector employers to also include age profiling.

Councillor Wilkes commented that he had on many occasions suggested that the council employ the services of an outside company to manage sickness absence, however this had always been dismissed. He asked whether this again could be reviewed. The Head of People and Talent Management advised that the council had in fact engaged with a company to discuss options in this regard however further discussions and CMT consideration was required in relation to how this would link with occupational health before any further options could be considered.

Further discussion took place regarding long term absence due to terminal illness and it was noted that in line with the 'Dying to Work Charter' these people were removed from sickness absence recording and offered additional employment protection.

Moving on to discuss performance in relation to suicide rates, Councillor Liddle asked whether she could have sight of the Suicide Prevention Plan. She noted that she had worked with families in her division who had been unable to detect warning signs in their loved ones and therefore queried how the council and other partner organisations felt that they could.

Councillor Martin in welcoming the new appraisal system, asked for some clarification on why data on past appraisals had been deleted from the report. The Head of Strategy advised that this had mainly been due to a change to the new system. She agreed that this information could be reinstated for future reporting purposes.

Resolved

That the Board considers the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter three performance, and the actions being taken to address areas of underperformance.

8 Quarter 3 December 2018: Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2018/19

The Board considered two reports, the first of the Corporate Director of Resources and the second of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships, which both provided details of the forecast outturn budget position for the above service groupings highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget based on the position to the end of December 2018 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved

That the content of the report be noted.

9 Refresh of the Work Programme 2019/20 for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

The Board considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which provided the opportunity to review and refresh the work programme for 2019/20 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Crute noted that the Board would have a strong focus on the Transformation Programme however noted that the report would be further considered at the meeting in June where agreement on the work programme would be made.

Councillor Martin asked whether the Board would be considering the government's review of scrutiny guidance. The Head of Strategy advised that the guidance was still awaited, however when it was received it would be

circulated to the corporate overview and scrutiny members for consideration as to how this would be taken forward.

Resolved

That the content of the report be noted and that a further report to agree the COSMB work programme for 2019/20 would be submitted to the June 2019 meeting.

10 Update in relation to Petitions

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided for information the quarterly update in relation to the current situation regarding various petitions received by the Authority (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Senior Committee Services Officer advised that since the last update four e-petitions had been submitted, two of which were rejected. One contained personal and sensitive information and the other did not have the required number of signatures. Two e-petitions had been hosted on the website relating to the County Durham Plan and final numbers had been passed to the appropriate service to consider as part of the consultation process.

In addition, two new paper petitions have been submitted, one of which had now closed.

Resolved

That the content of the report be noted.

11 Notice of Key Decisions

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided for information the list of key decisions that was scheduled to be considered by the Executive.

The Senior Committee Services Officer informed the Board that the following were new to the plan:

- Proposal to change the age range of Cotsford Junior School from 7-11 to 4-11 from 1 September 2019 and to close Cotsford Infant School as a registered school on 31 August 2019
- County Durham Carbon Reduction Delivery Plan
- County Durham Plan
- New Industrial Development

Resolved

That the content of the report be noted.

12 Information Update from the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The Board considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which presented for information overview and scrutiny activity from 13 February 2019 to March 2019 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved

That the content of the report be noted.