

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on **Thursday 17 December 2020 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor R Crute (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors A Batey (Vice-Chair), E Adam, R Bell, D Boyes, J Chaplow, M Clarke, A Hopgood, B Kellett, H Liddle, R Manchester, O Milburn, R Ormerod, C Potts, J Robinson, J Rowlandson, A Savory, A Shield, H Smith, J Turnbull, M Wilkes and A Willis

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Jopling, C Martin and F Tinsley.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor R Ormerod substituted for Councillor C Martin.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

The Head of Strategy referred to page 8, paragraph 6 of the minutes and confirmed that an e-mail response was provided to all members of the board on the frequency of staff appraisal and welfare checks and there was an opportunity for any follow up at agenda item 7.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 - Annual review of the Council's use of Powers 2019/2020

The Management Board considered the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed members about the use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 and the outcome of the operations. The Board were also provided with details of the updates to the Council's Corporate Guidance on RIPA as part of the annual review as well as details of the training that had been delivered (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

Councillor Wilkes was concerned at the number of licensed premises that had failed test purchases for the underage sales of alcohol and sought clarification if any premises licenses had been withdrawn. He was concerned that 70% of the licensed premises failed the test purchase then 50% failed the second test. He suggested that the powers were not strong enough and asked how many premises had had their alcohol licence revoked after repeated offences.

The Governance Solicitor responded that she would provide details of the outcome of the licence review hearings in future reports and was happy to share with members outside of the meeting details of variations to licencing conditions which had been agreed.

In response to a further question, the Governance Solicitor confirmed that they had withdrawn premises licences in the last two years.

The Chair confirmed that the outcomes of review hearings would be included in future reports.

Resolved: (i) That the annual report on the Council's use of powers under RIPA for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, be noted.

(ii) That the update of the RIPA Corporate Guidance to reflect any changes to current legislation and best practice be noted.

6 Integrated Customer Services Programme Update

The Management Board considered the report of the Corporate Director of Resources that presented an overview and update of the integrated customer services programme (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Head of Digital and Customer Services was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that provided an update on the improvements delivered by the Integrated Customer Service programme and

the future plans to enhance the contract offer and customer experience (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Councillor Boyes commented that the report contained some good news and the technology advances were long overdue. He added it was good that customers could contact the council using technology other than the telephone however, a lot of older residents still relied on the telephone. He asked if there was a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the time a call should be answered and if so, were we meeting this target. He referred to his own personal experience on a call to the council that gave the wrong estimate of time to wait and asked if the technology for call waiting was up to date.

The Head of Digital and Customer Services responded that they did have a corporate KPI for call answering times, the aim was to answer more than 80% of calls within three minutes and they were currently answering more than 98% of calls within three minutes, so they were exceeding the corporate KPI target. They regularly monitored this and reported back to the board as part of the Customer Feedback report. Some additional KPIs wrapped around this including the total percentage of calls that were answered and were available to view. Their aim was always to offer a channel of choice as they would always have residents who wanted to contact them in different ways. It was about meeting the needs of those people who did want to interact differently. The technology allowed them extra capacity so they could offer additional support to customers, in particular some elderly residents who were missing the face to face offer that had not been available recently. In terms of new technology, they were continually testing but there would always be a few glitches. They did carry out rigorous tests and reviewed feedback from customers on how they were finding information. The Head of Digital and Customer Services added she would take the particular point away in terms how often the system updated timings for the queuing system.

Councillor R Bell referred to the Customer Relations Management system (CRM) and the frustration in only receiving an acknowledgment with a CRM number when raising a case, then no update to say that the issue had been resolved. He regularly received requests from parish councils and residents asking on progress that members had to follow up and asked if there were any planned improvements to the CRM system.

The Chair indicated that when you get a response from the CRM system it only provided the CRM number and not the details of the case. It was a better system to what they had previously, but the system could be improved.

The Head of Digital and Customer Services responded that the report did not cover the CRM system, but she was aware from feedback from members about some of the challenges they had been facing. Following an earlier

review of the CRM, a number of improvements had been made to the system. Some of those improvements were due to move forward but had been delayed as a result of additional development work, new web forms and additional web content that had to be produced in response to COVID-19. Work had not stopped, and they had continued to work on improvements and were planning to update the Board on what had delivered, what work was outstanding and any future changes. A lot of development work had been carried out around workflow particularly on communications and messaging. Extra commentary would be included in the next Customer Feedback Report to reflect some of the comments and the additional work that had taken place.

Councillor Adam indicated that a tremendous amount of work had been done within a short period of time that had enhanced the customers experience of contacting the council. He asked if there was real customer involvement in testing the system. He added that some of the language used in the text and links were not understood by members of the public and wondered how much testing had been done and if direct feedback had been received from a wide range of customers.

The Head of Digital and Customer Services agreed they were valid points and indicated they had a programme of work which would enhance customer experience and satisfaction in the new year. They did capture significant customer satisfaction data that primarily came from individuals who engaged through the CRM system. This could cause challenges as it was often emotive subjects that people gave feedback for and not the everyday experience or where they had been happy with the service delivered. They did have a customer focus group for CRM and had used feedback to develop some of the new technologies in particular voice recognition. She also confirmed they did wider stake holder meetings with disability groups. She would ensure that any of the language used on the system was easy to understand and would look at the demographic of that group and see if they could involve anyone else as they moved forward with the wider customer engagement and insight programme.

Councillor Wilkes referred to the CRM system and that he had previously raised some issues which still had not been resolved and was not convinced another year's time would see all these issues ironed out. One particular issue was that the online portal was slow and for many residents in the county who didn't have great reception on their phones whilst they are out and about it was difficult to log in. He added if you send an e-mail instead with a photo of the problem, unless you copied in the relevant officer it never gets to them and is not dealt with. He stated he first raised this issue eight years ago. He indicated that it must be simple when someone sends in a photo to add it onto the system so those on the front line could see the issue

instead of going backwards and forwards or it dropped off the system completely.

The Head of Digital and Customer Services responded that she would take back Councillor Wilkes feedback. They had worked with Councillor Wilkes separately on some issues, some of which had been resolved but some required improvement. It was important that they build in this feedback to see how they could resolve some of these issues especially as more people wanting to contact the council digitally and they needed to ensure the platform meets their needs. They were also working around connectivity and understanding where some of the issues sit in terms of mobile connectivity and broadband connectivity so that they could ensure they had the right levels of connectivity. She then referred to the mapping system and if that was the best solution if other systems could support more ease of access.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager advised Members that Councillor Milburn at the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee had asked the Council to look at the 'what3words' app to pinpoint the location of fly tipping incidents. The Neighbourhood and Protection Manager who was in attendance had agreed to look at the app as a further development to the system.

The Chair indicated that it was difficult to pinpoint the location of incidents on the system and the 'what3words' app appeared to be a good solution.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Quarter 2, 2020/21 Performance Management Report

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

The Head of Strategy explained that the report was structured around the three externally focused results-based ambitions of the County Durham Vision 2035, More and Better Jobs, Long and Independent Lives, Connected Communities and a fourth 'Excellent Council' theme. The report further detailed the impact of COVID-19 on council services, staff and residents.

The Chair commented that there was some excellent work going on at the moment against the backdrop of the pandemic and ongoing austerity that was testament to the hard work of officers at the council, members and other workers across the public and private sectors in the county. However, we were all still living with the pandemic and the uncertainty and this was a particular problem facing the authority and communities. He advised

Members that the data sets would be reported back to each of the thematic committees.

The Head of People and Talent Management was in attendance to respond to Members questions on the 'Excellent Council' theme and commented that the workforce had been phenomenal during the ongoing pandemic and they had not seen a peak in absence among staff with COVID related absences being small for the size of the authority. They still had a higher number of long-term absence but around 95% of those absences were individuals who returned to work within six months or leave the authority. The number of employees with no absence was 63% overall.

Members were advised that they had managed to redeploy over 500 staff voluntarily into areas of high priority. Managers had also been positive in terms of support to staff throughout this period with the huge number of staff working from home who had never worked in that environment before which had worked incredibly well.

She then referred to the apprenticeship programme. The authority had been awarded a place in the government's top 100 employers for apprenticeships. The authority had an 80% retention rate of apprentices continuing with posts within the authority and in the last couple of weeks an apprentice who had only been with the authority for ten weeks, had secured a permanent post within the authority.

Councillor R Bell welcomed the large number of staff recording no sickness and asked if this was due to people working from home. He also asked if staff who had not taken any time off sick were recognised by the authority.

The Head of People and Talent Management responded commenting that the number of staff working from home had impacted on sickness levels. The authority had a flexible approach and supported staff if they felt well enough to continue to work. In terms of recognition for those staff with no sickness absence the position that trade unions had taken was that sometimes staff had no choice but to be off. There were also issues around disability and for those reasons the authority had taken the stance not to recognise full attendance, however they did encourage managers to have complimentary discussions with individuals.

Councillor Wilkes referred to paragraph 83 of the Performance Management report in relation to care homes and at page 10 of the agenda, reference to COVID related issues in care homes. At the time there were 60 deaths per 1000 people in care homes and the current rate was showing as 90 deaths and that did not include 42 people who had passed away in hospital but had gone there from a care home so they were at a point where potentially one in ten of people living in care homes in County Durham died of COVID. He

stated these figures were based on the number of beds in the county not the occupancy, so the actual rate was potentially even higher. The issue was raised at full Council yesterday, but we are still seeing people dying in our care homes. He felt that this was something that needed looking at in detail to see what was going on.

The Chair responded that full Council discussed the issue yesterday and he advised Councillor Wilkes that his comments would be noted.

Councillor Boyes indicated that 39% of violence against persons had been linked to domestic violence as well as a 26.7% increase in alcohol related incidents in the same period last year. These were issues that the council needed to worry about as they were going to have a generation of people growing up thinking that violence was normal which was generally men hitting women and children having to witness this. At his local primary school, the headteacher was looking for signs of children coming to school with bruises, this issue was beyond Management Board. He also wanted to focus on a 93% increase in environmental anti-social behaviour compared to the same period last year. A lot of this would come within the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee but also came under Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He then referred to Neighbourhood Wardens and he appreciated the safety of staff was paramount but queried whether they were not going out to deal with members of the public for the fear of catching COVID or if this was council policy, but the council still needed to deal with members of the public.

The Chair asked Councillor Boyes if he was happy to raise these issues through Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which Councillor Boyes agreed to and would report back to Management Board.

Councillor Hopgood referred to safety and school crossing patrols and that residents had raised issues with speeding around schools and that there had been some near misses with crossing patrols. She commented that neighbourhood wardens had cameras and asked if this was something that could be extended to crossing patrols. She asked the Chair of Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee if this was something his scrutiny committee could look at.

Councillor Boyes responded that this was something his committee could look at, they already had a packed programme leading up to the elections, but this was something they could explore.

Councillor Hopgood then referred to apprenticeships and asked how many apprentices stayed with the Council at the end of their apprenticeship. She referred to the practice of some companies using apprentices then laying

them off. She hoped the council trained apprentices for the future workforce. She also referred to carbon neutral and planning and referred to paragraph 25 of the report and that the first building the council had approved planning permission for at Aykley Heads does not meet the councils own carbon standards. To make sure we were carbon neutral by 2050 the council needed to lead by example. She also expressed concern about data relating to empty retail units and a further approval of out of town shopping within walking distance of the Arnison Centre. She asked that the strategy be reviewed.

The Chair responded that scrutiny had looked at issues around the retail offer of the county in the past. The issue was beyond the remit of scrutiny and was a planning process, but this could maybe be picked up in Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of People and Talent Management responded that the council had approximately 85% retention rate for apprenticeships. Those apprentices who don't remain with the council either leave because they had secured employment elsewhere or chosen to take a different career route. During the course of the year they worked on a quarterly basis with managers to anticipate when an apprenticeship may end so they did a lot of work in advance to make sure that they give the apprentice the best opportunity of being able to secure a job within the council. They saw a lot of individuals move on before they had completed their apprenticeship. She would ensure that these figures would be included in the next report to the board.

Councillor Hopgood indicated that this was brilliant news that the council should be proud of and was a good news story.

Councillor Turnbull asked officers if Members could be informed when members of staff had left the authority due to ill health or had passed away.

The Head of People and Talent Management responded that she would investigate this and it maybe more appropriate where officers were dealing with members on a regular basis and would come back with a response.

Councillor Robinson indicated that he fully agreed with Councillor Hopgood and referred to the Combined Fire Authority who had just won the national Employer of the Year award for apprenticeships. He then thanked officers for the work they were doing but he had great concerns regarding the impacts of the matters referred to in paragraphs 12, 15 and 17 of the report around 16 to 24-year olds who were the future of County Durham. There was a 62% increase of young people claiming universal credit and 6% of children not claiming free school meals. One in four children in the county were in poverty and 4,000 people were not applying for free school meals that would suggest that some of this was due to pride. He then referred to the mental health of

young people and concerns about the future of our young people post COVID.

The Head of People and Talent Management indicated that the authority had signed up to the government's future job initiative that included the kickstart scheme and had been able to identify 91 job placements for young individuals on universal credit between the ages of 16 and 24 and had submitted their proposal to government for funding and were awaiting the outcome.

Councillor Shield echoed the sentiments of Councillor Boyes and he had had several incidents where the neighbourhood wardens had refused to attend incidents of anti-social behaviour. He then referred to the report in relation to suicide rates within County Durham. He was concerned as the closure of Derwentside Mind had recently been announced. The suicide rates were between 2017 and 2019 and these figures would likely increase with mental health issues due to social isolation since the pandemic. He would like to see a formal strategy to address this in the North West Durham and Consett areas where it had previously been acknowledged that these areas were hot spots. He asked officers to acknowledge the concerns and how they intended to address this.

The Chair indicated that he had raised a valid point, and this had been raised at the Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Strategy highlighted the information on suicide surveillance and response at paragraphs 71 to 73 in the detailed report and that she appreciated the concerns in the current climate. At this stage the analysis from the public health intelligence team who monitored suicide for the county was that suicide rates had not escalated overall in the pandemic to date, although close monitoring was ongoing. The Chair indicated that they would keep an eye on this as there had been concerns over the time lag of data.

Councillor Adam referred to the neighbourhood wardens and advised members that the neighbourhood wardens were on lockdown and working from home for a period of time and had been advised if they were going to make contact with any residents only to do this if safe to do so and had to make that judgement as individuals. He then referred to the carbon neutral strategy and that the council also had the carbon management plan and the climate emergency response plan that was due to go to the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 19 March 2021, so Councillor Hopgood's question could be explored in more detail.

Councillor H Smith referred to the mental health of young people and the increase in child poverty which were two of the huge issues that the Children

and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been looking at. At the last meeting almost, the entire agenda was about these two issues. An active child poverty working group is looking at alleviating some of these problems.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.

8 Quarter 2 Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2020/21

The Management Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided details of the forecast revenue and capital outturn budget position for the Resources service grouping, highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget based on the position to the end of September 2020 (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

Councillor Hopgood referred to the significant differences in the figures either under or overachieved and asked if there was anything that they needed to be aware of that was not COVID related.

The Officer responded that they did meet regularly to review budgets with managers, and they were looked at in their entirety. If there was an underspend in an area, then managers would be allowed to overspend in other areas as this would be offset by the underspend. He was not aware of anything significant over and above COVID related expenditure.

Councillor Hopgood referred to the increase in expenditure for revenue and benefits that you would not expect this year and expected this to be down.

The Officer responded that payroll had been successful this year in securing some funding through Service Level Agreements that they generated.

Resolved: That the forecast of outturn position be noted.

9 Notice of Key Decisions

The Management Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided a list of key decisions that were scheduled to be considered by the Executive (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

The Head of Strategy was in attendance to present the report and advised Members that the MTFP (11) Financial Settlement that was on the schedule to be considered at Cabinet on the 13 January 2021 had now dropped off due to the lateness of the settlement figure from government.

Councillor Adam referred to the County Durham Plan: Minerals Waste Development Plan indicating Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee involvement and asked if this should also go to Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

The Head of Strategy responded that this was linked to Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee as they had done the overall scrutiny work on the County Durham Plan but suggested that members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be invited to join that discussion.

Councillor R Bell referred to the provisional financial settlement and asked what date the MTFP would be considered by scrutiny.

The Head of Strategy confirmed that the MTFP would now be considered at the February meeting of scrutiny.

Councillor Hopgood referred to items disappearing from the schedule that didn't come back, in particular the consultation on leisure services which was no longer shown. She indicated this still should be shown on the schedule so that members knew what was on the work programme as they cannot ask questions on something if they were not aware of it. The schedule gave the impression that some areas had no major projects which she did not think was the case.

The Head of Strategy confirmed that the report was the statutory publication of the notice of key decisions. She would take Councillor Hopgood's comments back in relation to leisure services.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.