

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 7 July 2022 at 1.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor C Martin (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors E Adam, A Batey, J Charlton, J Cosslett, B Coult, O Gunn, P Heaviside, C Hood, L Hovvels, J Howey, A Jackson, P Jopling, C Lines (Vice-Chair), R Manchester, K Shaw, M Stead and M Wilson

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Charlton-Lainé, I Cochrane, R Crute, J Elmer, L Maddison, C Marshall, B Moist and A Surtees

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Report on the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 - Quarter 4 - 2021/2022

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided an update on the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ('RIPA') during the quarter 4 to ensure that it is being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remained fit for purpose (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

- (i) that the quarterly update for the period covering quarter 4 2021/22 be noted
- (ii) That the powers are being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose.

5 Quarter Four, 2021/22 - Performance Management Report

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director Resources (Interim) which presented an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework and highlighted key messages to inform strategic priorities and work programmes for Quarter 4, January to March 2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head Transformation, Planning and Performance advised that performance had already been reported via the thematic committees however the report provided details of performance relating to:

- More and Better Jobs
- Long and Independent Lives
- Connected Communities
- An Excellent Council and;
- The impact of COVID-19

The report further provided details of the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter one performance and the actions being taken in service areas to address areas of underperformance including the significant economic and well-being changes because of the pandemic.

Councillor Batey referred to paragraph 11 of the report and with the high demand for business premises she had concerns about the high occupancy rates and the impact that would have on future sites. The Head of Transformation, Planning and Performance was aware that there was a pipeline of projects and how this would be followed through to meet the future demand for sites but would follow this up with the service.

With reference to paragraph 14 about the City of Culture Bid, Councillor Batey asked for some clarity around the 'runner up' funding of £125,000 as she had been informed that it was up to the partnership to administer the grant. She was advised that this would be clarified with the service.

Councillor Hovvels made a number of comments and asked if there were reasons for the increase of the use of libraries during the pandemic, what support was given to faith groups who were proactive in taking over buildings and delivering projects within the community. She also asked how the Ukrainian families could be supported in the local community such as helping with access to computers and transport.

In response the Head of Transformation, Planning and Performance advised that the Ukrainian refugee work was being led by officers who had dealt with the Syrian Refugee Programme and he confirmed that they would be looking at how to provide that broader support. With regards to libraries he advised

the demand had begun to normalise following the pandemic. Referring to the change of use of buildings he would pass those comments onto the service.

Councillor Gunn referred to paragraph 26 of the report regarding anti-social behaviour (ASB) which was a cross-cutting issue and asked how this was being dealt with. She did have concerns that we had enough staff in the ASB team dealing with some very complex issues. She also asked that with home schooling, safeguarding should be mentioned in the report, as making sure the child was secure, safe and healthy was just as important as the educational side. Referring to paragraph 28 of the report on the shared prosperity fund and DurhamWorks, she asked about the timescale for funding and how it was being used to ensure value. Finally she referred to paragraph 41 of the report about the new civic headquarters and asked about the timescale for development, in particular the construction and the habitation of staff.

In response the Head of Head Transformation, Planning and Performance reported that the ASB team were aware of the current issues on the ground and they worked very closely with the Police and local co-ordinators. This would be followed up at the relevant OSC committee. He agreed that home education was about the quality of care being provided and would pass those comments on to the service. He added that the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services was aware of the numbers and was drilling down into this information. With regards to the shared prosperity fund he reported that it was a three year funding programme with less money than what was received through EU funding. However, he added that there was no requirement for match funding. Moving on to the HQ question he informed the Board that plans were being reviewed to determine where staff would relocate, with the possibility of some staff working from home on a permanent basis. Numbers were being looked at together with the future requirements of the estate. He advised that the plan was to demolish County Hall and develop on that land as soon as possible. It was envisaged to complete this review work by the end of the year.

Councillor Adam referred to Councillor's Batey's earlier point about the grant for the City of Culture and that it was also included in the Partnership report later in the agenda. He asked for some clarity around that. He went on to ask about how many families had moved here and were being supported from the Ukraine and if this could be provided in a future report. He also asked for a further report on the shared prosperity fund in terms of the impact this had had on the Council and if it had related in performance reduction. Finally he had expected to see some comments within the performance report about the impact of Brexit for the Council.

In response the Head of Transformation, Planning and Performance advised that the quarter four report would include more detail about the Ukrainian

refugee numbers. He advised that the Economy and Enterprise OSC would pick up detail on the shared prosperity fund in future reports, looking at funding streams and match funding opportunities. With regards to Brexit he said that this was a huge piece of long term work which was broader than the performance report.

Coming back to the point about Ukrainian refugees Councillor Howey asked who was looking after our residents who were acting as host families and helping them to access support. She was advised that this work was following the same principles already in place with the Syrian refugee programme. He would report back to the tam about concerns raised around the host families finding themselves out of pocket to ensure they could access the help and support required.

Councillor Jopling enquired as to the money allocated from the shared prosperity funding compared to the EU funding and was advised that over seven years EU funding had been £150 million. The shared prosperity fund had received approximately half of that for the first three years.

With reference to paragraph 60 of the report regarding rough sleepers Councillor Jopling was concerned that a low number of people were being found and assisted. She was advised that the figures were received from the Housing Solutions Team and could be picked up by the relevant committee to look at the detail around this. It was recognised that this was a complex area whereby some people did want to accept any help.

Councillor Hovvels commented that it was important to capture information for further reports on the host family support for refugee families.

On answering a question from Councillor Gunn the Head of Transformation, Planning and Performance advised that the Poverty Action Plan would be reported through this Board including detail around the financial support available.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

6 Customer Feedback Report, Year End update, 2021/22

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director Resources which provide an overview of information collected from the council's customers to describe their experiences of using our services over the last 12 months, to the period ending 31 March 2022, compared to the same period in the previous year (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Strategic Manager (Customer Relations) reported feedback on the following areas:-

- an overview of contact through our Customer Services team,
- a summary of customer satisfaction outcomes through completed surveys and compliments received,
- a selection of customer suggestions and their outcomes,
- an overview of comments relating to our policies, procedures, and decision-making,
- our performance in dealing with complaints (both statutory and non-statutory corporate complaints), and
- recent developments that enhance the customer experience.

Referring to the number of complaints being made about communication, Councillor Howey asked why this area was not showing any signs of improvement, as the same information was reported time and time again. The Strategic Manager said that this was a challenging area due to the Energy Rebate scheme which was continuing to cause increased levels of contact.

Councillor Jackson commented about the new CRM system integration and that the majority of complaints were about people not receiving the response they wanted or an appropriate response. He asked if there was a way to have a system in place to ensure officers did reply. The Strategic Manager reported that with a new CRM in place could offer opportunity to have more information in place but she agreed that it did come with challenges due to the number of systems in use.

Councillor Batey expressed her concern that nothing seemed to change with a high proportion of complaints being upheld. She added that a lot of people could not get through by telephone or were kept on hold for a long time. With the rise in the cost of living this was worrying as could put people off telephoning in. The Strategic Manager advised that individual services would look at the levels and reasons of complaint. She acknowledged that it had been difficult for people to get through during the pandemic as work was done to set up telephony teams at home but it was hoped to see improvements and change with this issue across most services.

Councillor Gunn left the meeting at 2.45 pm

Referring to the surveys, Councillor Jopling was concerned that the Area Action Partnership (AAP) results were low. She felt that residents still did not know about AAPs. She had found the levels of return overall low and asked that a better way of engaging with the public be looked into. The Strategic Manager agreed that a system that was more engaging would be looked into.

Councillor Stead referred to paragraph 28 of the report regarding the number of telephone contacts made of 1.4 million and was concerned as to the affect of those high levels on staff. He expressed concern at the CRM system and asked when the deadline for the new system was. The Strategic Manager confirmed that the figure was correct and that it was for contacts made to all services. She could not provide any further information regarding the deadline.

Councillor Batey commented that the new CRM system was ready to roll out pre-covid but as roles had changed and further improvements had been identified to the system this had caused some delays. She was aware that it was still being trialled. She suggested that a call back option/ voicemail would help alleviate any pressures on members of the public having to keep trying to get through or being on hold, especially with the rise in costs.

Councillor Jackson said that a fit for purpose system was required for the organisation and a simple message to people saying 'we have received your call, here is your case number and someone will get back to you' would be an improvement.

Further to a question from the Chair it was confirmed that this was on the work programme for this Board, and he suggested that to tighten up the timeline was added.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

Councillor M Wilson left the meeting at 3.00 pm

7 County Durham Partnership Update

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change that provide an update on issues being addressed by the County Durham Partnership (CDP). The report also includes updates on other key initiatives being carried out in partnership across the county (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Partnerships Team Manager went on to provide a detailed presentation, which highlighted that whilst the scale of the coronavirus pandemic was still impacting services across County Durham, partnership work continued and had done so throughout the pandemic. It furthermore highlighted it importance in supporting the voluntary and community sector with work helping to prevent widening of health and wellbeing inequalities and improving outcomes for local people in line with the County Durham Vision.

Councillor M Stead left the meeting at 3.10 pm

Referring to paragraphs 20-23 of the report, Councillor Batey asked what the £125,000 would be used for, who was on the board and who would administer that funding, as there was no clarity around it. She was concerned that communities throughout County Durham should receive an equal share. The Partnerships Team Leader advised that the lead was the Culture Durham Partnership and that scrutiny involvement would align with the Economy and Enterprise thematic committee. Councillor Batey asked who sat on the board and asked for clarity and how reports were referenced in future. In response she was advised that this area of work was led by Visit County Durham and she would report back to the Councillor with further information.

Councillor K Shaw left the meeting at 3.12 pm

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

8 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/22

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources that presented the Overview and Scrutiny Annual report 2021/22 for comment and approval prior to submission to the County Council meeting in September 2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Interim Democratic Services Manager provided information on activity by both COSMB and the five thematic Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programmes, which included in-depth and light touch reviews, monitoring of performance management and budgetary reporting. The report reflected the work undertaken by all overview and scrutiny committee members throughout 2021/22 and included detail on the statutory scrutiny roles with health and crime and disorder. Reference was made to the Ecological Emergency Response Plan being merged with the Climate Emergency Response Plan. This was following the recommendation by Environment and Sustainable Communities OSC to declare an ecological emergency.

Resolved:

That the report be noted