

Council

6 December 2022

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (INTERNAL)

Report of the Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Internal)

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To present to Members:

- A summary of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 24 November 2022.
- Details of any Task Group Meetings held since the last Council Meeting.
- A summary from the Performance Monitoring Briefings.

2.0 Scrutiny Meeting held on 24 November

2.1 Tenants' Panel Update

It was a pleasure to once again welcome members of the Council's Tenants' Panel to the meeting. They provided us with an update of their recent work.

They have been working with both Selby and Harrogate's Tenants' Panels on producing a Tenants Participation Strategy for North Yorkshire Council and have found it very interesting to find out what involvement and work other Panel's undertake.

The latest round of estate walkabouts have taken place with members of the Tenants' Panel involved.

2.2 Performance Monitoring Briefings – Quarter 2 2022/23

I presented a summary of the Performance Monitoring Briefings – Quarter 2 2022/23 as set out below at paragraph 4.

Concerns were raised about the impact of the current high levels of inflation in several areas. Particularly in relation to the Discretionary Housing Payment funds and the homelessness prevention figures. With the Committee asking how the figures compare to last year and if demographic information is available for those who have made approaches.

2.3 Task Group Update and Work Programme

We agreed to include the request from Corporate Board to undertake a joint review with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (External) into the operation and management of the Richmondshire Leisure Trust.

3.0 Task Group Meetings/Review Work

3.1 There have been no task group meetings held since the last meeting of Council.

4.0 Performance Briefings

4.1 In late October, early November 2022 the Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring Briefings were held. Along with the Vice-Chairman, I attended the Resources and Strategy & Regulatory briefings. The key performance issues reported at Quarter 2 are detailed below.

Resources

- Housing Benefit claims' processing is showing 17.05 days for Q2. The average processing time for new claims is 18.17 days for the whole of 2021/22. This increased time taken is due to the increasing complexity of assessments on new claims. For changes in circumstances, performance is similar at 2.81 days compared to the 2.30 days for 2021/22. The national average for processing of claims is 23 days for new claims and 10 days for change of circumstances for 2021/22.
- Council tax collection rates at 59.96% are lower than for Q2 of 2021/22 (60.46%). Business rates collection is slightly under target at 64.23% (58.63% in Q2 2021/22).
- The level of Discretionary Housing Payments for Q2 of 2022/23 was £95,943, compared to a reduced cap of £113,863. This performance is slightly under target for 2022/23.
- Positive transition from 'face to face' contact to electronic continues with over 1.3m electronic accesses compared to 1.2m in 2021/22. There has been a slight increase in the number of face-to-face visits, but a similar number of phone calls.
- Corporate sickness levels for the second quarter of 2022/23 year are above target (4.59 per FTE compared to a target of 2.75 per FTE for the year to date). This is slightly worse performance than in 2021/22 (3.30 days per FTE).
- There was one Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) complaints during Q2 of 2022/23, and one was partially upheld. There were two for the second quarter of 2021/22 (none upheld).

The key points raised at the Resources briefings were:

1. The overall financial position was noted, and the impact of the net outflow of staff that is required to be covered by agency staff.
2. The latest position on the discretionary energy scheme was noted and this was now available to apply for.
3. It was noted that the Discretionary Housing Payment funds were almost spent and concern was raised about those suffering hardship over the forthcoming months.
4. Queries were raised in relation to budget setting and council tax equalisation for the new council and also the inflationary increases need to keep up with pay and inflation increases.

Strategy & Regulatory

- The annual canvass is now at the reminder stage and of the 8,332 responses received by 31 August, 7,674 used one of the automated services to return their form with only 332 postal returns. 316 responses were recorded by other means including telephone, e-mail and data matching.
- Environmental Health response to routine requests for service (within 5 days) was at 92% against a target of 90%. There were 368 requests received in Q2.
- Homelessness Preventions. There have been 112 approaches to the Housing Options Team during Q2. This compares to 94 in Q1 of 2022/23.
- Development Management – less than 33% of planning appeals allowed – This quarter there was one appeal decision. A further appeal was lost.
- Development Management – Between 40% - 50% of searches completed within 7 working days – This quarter there were 158 standard searches with an average return time of 9 and 10 days and 87% of all searches were completed within 7 days.

The key points raised at the Strategy & Regulatory briefing were:

1. Members noted that the Court had granted leave to consider the Statutory Review of the Inspectors Appeal decision in respect of the proposed development at Ashes Farm. A consent order is being negotiated with the Secretary of State and the second defendants and we will update Members with further information once we have an agreed position.
2. Members noted the Homelessness data relating to the reasons for approach and asked to be kept informed as to whether other authorities were experiencing a similar increase in presentations due to family breakdown and domestic violence.
3. Members noted the ongoing discussions that were taking place with Rolls Royce regarding their shortlisting of Scotch Corner as a potential site for their Heave Vessel manufacturing plant and that we would await further information regarding the process once they had spoken to all of the shortlisted areas.
4. Members discussed the decision to hold progress on the Local Plan Review following legal advice connected with LGR but that work would continue in respect of key development areas such as Catterick Garrison. Members asked for reassurance that housing applications could continue to be managed through the maintenance of a five-year land supply and the continued use of the Richmondshire Core Strategy.

2.2 Whilst I was unable to attend the Operations Quarter 2 briefing, the Vice-Chairman attended, and the key performance issues reported are detailed below.

Operations

- Council rent arrears – a target of £160,000 by 31 March 2023 has been set. Arrears at the end of quarter 2 for 2022/23 totalled £211,622 showing an increase on the end of the previous quarter (£196,714 Q1). Pursuing serious cases through the judicial system continues to hinder performance and the national cost of living increases are clearly beginning to impact locally.
- Car Park income – Income up to the end of Quarter 2 totalled £276,189 (compared with £296,565 during the same period in 2021/22).

- Re-letting empty Council properties – performance for Quarter 2 is summarised below with performance for the previous quarter provided for comparison. Overall targets are still challenging and performance continues to be affected by building material supply chain issues. An increasing number of property refusals are adding to overall relet periods and some asbestos checks/removals have caused delays in some properties.

Category	Target – number of days to relet	Q2 2022/23	Q1 2022/23
		Actual	Actual
		General Needs and Sheltered Housing	General Needs and Sheltered Housing
Category 1	15	12	26
Category 2	20	27	25
Category 3	30	41	33
Category 4	40	49	47

- Recycling rates – there is a time lag between quarter ends and when dry recycling rates are known which means best estimates are used at the end of each quarter. The estimated Quarter 2 outturn is 42% compared to an overall target of 40%.
- Green waste subscription service – an income target of £286,000 has been set for the full year with income totalling £280,293 at the end of Quarter 2 (compared to £283,418 for the same period last year).
- Street lighting repairs – During Q2 there were 20 standard faults completed, taking an average of 9 days to complete against a target time of 5 days. There were 3 Non-Standard jobs completed taking an average of 15 day against a target time of 20 days.
- Pest control income at the end of Q2 is £77,587 (compared to £89,130 at the same point last year) with a full year target of £125,000.

The key points raised at the Operations briefing were:

1. Confirmation of the pay settlement was sought (Response: £1,925 per member of staff)
2. Comparable (pre covid) figures were requested for car park income (Response: £281,709 at the end of quarter 2 during (2018/19)
3. Further information was sought on arrears figures for other stock retaining Landlords – to be provided as part of quarter 3 update.

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