

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 18th November 2013

Present: Councillor J Oakes (Chair)
Councillors Bleakley, Creaser, Hughes, Milling, Pilling, Procter

In Attendance: Emma Hussain, Principal Policy Officer
Janice Crawford, Finance Manager
Councillor Barnes, Leader, RBC
Councillor Neal
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

2 Members of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Keith Pilkington (Co-opted member).

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 23rd September be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow the members of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

A question was raised from a member of the public regarding the disposal of the Council's assets which the Leader of the Council agreed to reply to the member of the public after the meeting.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair informed Members that the Council had not used the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act during the last quarter.

7. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUARTER 1 (April to June 2013)

The Principal Policy Officer presented the Council's performance report for Quarter 2 (July to October 2013), which showed that the Council was working well towards delivering its Actions and Performance Indicators in its 2013-2014 Corporate Business Plan.

Following a strong performance in Quarter 1, the Council has continued to perform well in Quarter 2, with only 1 Action being red as a direct result of national changes. Overall 91.9% of Action finished Quarter 2 green, an increase of 2% on Quarter 1. The number of Actions that were Amber in status had reduced by 2% on Quarter 1 to only 7.1%.

The number of Performance Indicators that were green in status had risen by 6.9% to 79.3%. The number of amber Actions reduced from Quarter 1 by 13.7% to 6.9% in Quarter 2. However, the number of Performance Indicators that are red in status did increase by 6.9% on Quarter 1 to 13.8%, from 2 in Quarter 1 to 4 in Quarter 2.

Customers were waiting for less time in our One Stop Shop (OSS). Performance of customer waiting times both on the phone and in the One Stop Shop have both reported at quicker than the target, this was especially pleasing considering the changes to the welfare system which had seen higher enquiry rates.

Despite changes to the welfare system the accuracy rate for procession Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit claims was 2.4% above target reporting 95.4% accuracy rates for Quarter 2.

Planning applications determined on time continues to have another strong performance quarter, with all 3 application types above their target.

STAN continues to have a strong performance this quarter, with the number of people accessing STAN being almost double the target (targeted 120, actually seen 237). Rossendale represents 44.3% of the whole STAN footfall (the service is shared between 3 boroughs). Satisfaction rates with the service remain high with 100% satisfaction having been reported.

There were four performance indicators which were identified as underperforming in quarter 2, with each providing an explanation for their underperforming within the action plans.

LI82ai – Percentage of Household Waste Recycled - This Performance Indicator narrowly missed target in Quarter 2. However, the rate of reduction appears to be slowing and the Performance Indicator was expected to meet its annual target at the end of the year. The Council is working to getting this Performance Indicator back on target by ensuring that the bin policy was enforced and promotion recycling to all residents as far as reasonably possible.

LI12 – Number of Work Days Lost Due to Sickness - After being above target in Quarter 1, this Performance Indicator has reported slightly off for Quarter 2. This is largely due to small staff numbers and long term sickness; those employees were

being managed through the absence management procedure.. It is believed that with this management of sickness the Performance Indicator would be on track for its annual target.

PM3 – New Claims Decided Within 14 Days of Receipt of all the Information - This target was slightly down due to a focus on clearing Change in Circumstance Claims. The end of the quarter saw an improvement so it is expected that the next Quarter, and the annual target will be met.

LI64 – The Number of Private Sector Vacant Dwellings that are Returned Into Occupation or Demolished - After exceeding target in Quarter 1, performance in Quarter 2 has slowed, and is slightly below its quarterly target , however it was expected to surpass its year-end target. It was noted that the definition of this PI meaning the Council can only count a property towards the target once the final re-occupation lease was agreed, and this had slowed down in the summer months.

On an ongoing basis the Council considers the potential risks it is facing some within, and some outside of its direct control, and looks at what mitigating actions it can reasonably and practicably put in place to reduce these risks.

There has been no change in the status of the Council's Risks from Quarter 1 2013-14, 59.3% were low risk and 40.7% were of medium risk. There were no high risks in this quarter.

In relation to complaints, In Quarter 2 the Council received 22 complaints. 18 of these complaints were closed at the end of Quarter 2. This had reduced by 3 from Quarter 1 2013-14 and down 2 from Quarter 2 2012-13.

In Quarter 1 2013-14 the highest category of complaint was 'Bins/bin collection', which saw 4 complaints and Members were reminded that they agreed at the last meeting to monitor this area closely due to recent service reviews and current proposed changes to this service area. Complaints this quarter was 3.

There were 2 Ombudsman complaints in Quarter 2 that related to the Business Directorate. These 2 complaints were still open at the end of Quarter 2. One complaint was in relation to disabled grants and the other was in relation to planning permission.

The Council received 47 compliments in this quarter, 17 more than Quarter 1 2013-14. Most compliments were for a 'staff member or team', as was the case in Quarter 1.

A number of questions were raised which the Principal Policy Officer responded.

Members asked that congratulations be sent to all Officers within the Council for an very positive quarterly report.

Resolved:

1. That the Corporate Scrutiny Committee notes the level of performance and risks detailed in the report.

2. That the Corporate Scrutiny Committee continues to monitor performance of those actions and performance indicators that are underperforming targeted levels of performance and if required, would ask the relevant Head of Service and Portfolio Holder to attend a future meeting to provide information on how improvements would be made.

8. LOCAL LAND CHARGES DEBTS – PROGRESS REPORT

The Finance Manager provided the Committee with an update on the collection of works in default debts registered on the land charges register and the value of the current default works.

The report to Members in October 2011 included information about the overall amount of default work debts outstanding, which at that time amounted to £307k. It split those debts between those raised after April 2006 (£72.9k) which were on the Council's live debtors system, and older debts (£228.6k) which are only recorded on the local land charges register until the debts are cleared.

A further update was requested by the then Policy Scrutiny Committee in January 2012, which showed that the total value outstanding on the Council's debtors system had risen to £78.3k, with the issuing of over £23k of debts during the 2011/12 financial year.

The Finance Manager gave a detailed explanation of the following:

Pre April 2006 - Of the £228.6k of older debts logged only on the local land charges register, just over £0.7k of this has been received as a result of 2 land charge searches since October 2011. Members were reminded that these default works included one very large retaining wall project undertaken in 1997 at a cost of £64.8k which was spread over 6 properties.

April 2006 to March 2012 - To date, the value of debts outstanding, which were raised between April 2006 and March 2012 had dropped by almost £43k to £35.5k with instalment payments accounting for around £1k of the amounts collected.

The largest single debt outstanding was £17.2k pertaining to one domestic property in Stacksteads. Officers have been in contact with the property owner in recent weeks and payment had been received on 18th October 2013.

The remainder of the debt was made up of 66 separate items with an average of £322 and only 3 of these are over £1k.

April 2012 to March 2013 - During the financial year 2012/13 new works totalling £19.0k were recharged to 25 property owners, including one valued at £11.4k pertaining to a commercial site in central Rawtenstall. Officers were in the process of an enforced sale on this site and anticipate conclusion within the 2013/14 financial year. To date £2.7k of the 2012/13 debt has been collected, leaving £17.2k outstanding.

April 2013 to September 2013 - In the first six months of the current financial year, works totalling £8.7k have been raised to 23 property owners, of which £0.5k of this has already been collected.

Default work debts outstanding on the local land charges register were collected as and when pre-sale searches were undertaken by potential property buyers.

To date the enforced sale policy has been invoked only once and this is still in progress. Members commended the use of this policy and the work that continues to be undertaken in pursuing the Council's debts.

It was agreed that, as details of these debts are presented to Cabinet within the Financial Monitoring report, any concerns by Cabinet would be reported to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to enable them to request additional information from the Finance Department.

Resolved:

1. That the Corporate Scrutiny Committee notes the recovery progress of the Council's debts.
2. That Council Officers be congratulated on the work undertaken to recover the outstanding debts owed to the Council.

9. FORWARD PLAN

Members were informed that the following reports would be presented to the Committee in February 2014, but may to subject to change.

- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Self-Management of Free Lane Allotments
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Environmental Enforcement Policy
- Tree Policy
- Missed Bins Policy
- Mobile Phone Policy

Resolved:

That the information be noted.

10. UPDATE ON TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

The Scrutiny Officer provided Members with an update on the work of the Task and Finish Groups as follows.

Welfare Reforms - The next meeting will be on 2nd December and there would be one further meeting to finalise the report early in the New Year.

The Task and Finish Group would be receiving a short presentation on the remit of the Financial Inclusion Group, with a possible recommendation that they would be asked to continue to monitor the impact on the welfare reforms within Rossendale.

Public Rights of Way - The survey on the public rights of way closed on 18th October and 349 responses were received.

The Group would be discussing the survey and report at its next meeting on 9th December. This piece of work should be complete by the end of January.

Resolved:

That the information be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.15pm

Signed
(Chair)

Date