Performance Exceptions Report - Quarter 4 2021-2022

Audit & Scrutiny Committee - 5 July 2022

Report of: Chief Finance Officer (Section 151)

Purpose: For information

Publication status: Open

Wards affected: All

Executive summary:

This is an exception report about the Council's four policy committees' performance and risk management. The aim is to support the Audit & Scrutiny Committee to monitor the Council's performance and delivery of services.

Due to the timings for the submission of committee reports, written updates on the actions, the different policy committees are taking with respect to their exception performance and risk, may not be available. The relevant committee meeting reports and minutes can be viewed online. Verbal updates will be provided at the respective committee by officers, wherever possible.

This report supports the Council's priority of: Building a better Council

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Recommendation to Committee:

To review and note the policy committees' performance and risk exceptions for Quarter 4 2021-2022.

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Reason for recommendation:

To help the committee monitor performance and risk at the Council.

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Introduction and background

1. The committee's terms of reference include reviewing and scrutinising "the decisions and performance of the Council. In addition, section xiii of the terms state that the Committee will "Monitor the Council's performance against targets which seek to ensure the provision of cost effective, quality services to the community (as part of the Council's own performance management regime)".

2. The committee receives a performance and risk exception report for each policy committee: Community Services, Planning Policy, Housing and Strategy and Resources.

3. Due to the committee dates and associated report timelines, it is not possible to include each policy committees' responses to the off-target performance indicators and 'red' rated risks. Please review the reports listed in 4 below and officers will provide verbal updates on the outcome of the preceding policy committees wherever possible.

Policy committees' performance and risk reports

4. The most recent performance and risk reports for the policy committees can be found in the relevant committee meeting agenda, under performance report:

   - [Community Services](#)
   - [Planning Policy](#)
   - [Housing](#)
   - [Strategy and Resources](#)

Performance headlines

5. The following performance headlines have been included on the basis a target has not been met for at least two quarters.

6. Up-to-date written commentaries on the policy committees' responses to these headlines are not always available, due to the timing of this report's publication. Verbal updates will be provided during the committee wherever possible.

Community Services

7. Percentage of roads, footpaths & public open spaces which meet the environmental cleanliness standard. This was off target by 3% in quarter 3 at 92% and 7% in quarter 4 at 88%. The target is 95%. The street cleaning team has found it difficult to meet the daily schedules due to vacancies and annual leave.

Planning Policy

8. Trend data for planning is not currently available, as data gathering and reporting systems are being reviewed as part of the Council's improvement project.

9. The Local Plan is currently undergoing examination and progress is dependent on the requirements of the planning inspector. This makes it difficult to develop meaningful KPIs.

Housing

10. Average time taken to re-let local authority housing. This is off target by 1.3 days in quarter 3 and 6.8 days in quarter 4. The target is 25 days. Performance has been affected by a number of properties that are difficult to let in the current climate, as well as the increased void time caused by Covid-19 compliant practices.

11. Average time taken to re-let local authority sheltered housing. This is off target by 37.9 days in quarter 3 at 85.5 days and 38.2 days in quarter 4 at 68.2 days. The target is 30 days. The figure has been inflated by three properties which were vacant for much of 2020/2021. Demand for older persons and particularly sheltered housing decreased before the vaccination programme. As a result, the length of time taken to let these properties has increased. This is in line with effects seen by other local authorities.

12. People in Urgent Need (Bands A & B) on the Housing Register – off target by 133 people in quarter 3 at 408 people and 139 people in quarter 4 at 414 people. The target is 275 people. This figure has remains high due to high demand and a limited supply of affordable housing. The Housing Team continues to work with colleagues in strategy and development to ensure a continued supply of affordable housing is provided throughout the district, as well as pursuing other initiatives, including the Tenants' Incentive Scheme, Assisted Purchase Scheme and relocation strategies within our own housing stock.

Strategy and Resources

13. Days taken to process housing benefit/council tax change event. This is off target by 39 days in quarter 3 and by 9 days in quarter 4. The target is 12 days. This is largely due to the installation of the new council tax and business rates system, which led to a backlog of work. Work is continuing to clear the backlog and further reduce assessment times.

14. Staff Sickness (long & short term). This is off by 2.61 in quarter 3 at 9.71 days and 3.41 in quarter 4 at 10.51 days. The target is 7.1 days. Long term absences connected with Covid accounted for 12% of all absences in 2021/2022, which have increased the overall absence figures. Almost 12% of overall cases are linked to debility/fatigue, some of which are linked to Long Covid symptoms. 27.3% of all absences are attributed to stress, depression and anxiety. Musculoskeletal absences account for approximately 22% of all absences

15. Staff turnover is off target by 0.3% in quarter 3 at 15.3% and 0.9% in quarter 4 at 15.9%. The target is 15%. Reasons given for leaving included new opportunity, personal reasons, work/life balance. Staff are facing challenging times and uncertainty over the future of their job, which means it is likely this trend will continue.

16. Percentage of calls answered by Customer Services within 60 seconds – off target by 19% in quarter 3 at 61% and 25% in quarter 4 at 55%. The target is 80%. The volume of calls has been impacted by annual billing, leaseholder management expense letters and enquiries about support for Ukraine refugees. The length of calls increased due to the complex nature of the calls. The number of repeat callers increased with residents calling about planning applications. The planning service is reviewing its processes.

17. Number of overdue complaints, off target by 11 complaints in quarter 3 and 13 complaints in quarter 4. The target is 1 overdue complaint. Some complaints require wider investigation and cover more than one team or department. This can mean finalising a response sometimes takes longer than the set deadlines. If the relevant staff are away or on leave, providing a response within the timelines can also be difficult. Holding responses are sent to customers to let them know when they can expect a response

18. Number of overdue Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs) – off target by 16 FOIs in quarter 3 and 10 in quarter 4. The target is 4 overdue FOIs. Some FOIs are very complex and require a lot of information to be gathered to provide a response. This can also include documents which need to be redacted. This can also take a lot of time. Some FOI responses require input and information from more than one team and it can take time to finalise a response. Holding responses to customers to let them know when they can expect a response

Risk headlines

19. The following risk headlines have been included on the basis that a risk has remained red on the corporate or committee risk registers for at least two quarters.

20. If a risk arises as part of an audit report, but is not featured in this report, it will be due to the lead time between the audit report being published and the next internal risk register review, and/or the risk not being red for two consecutive quarters on the relevant committee register.

Corporate Risk Register

21. There are four red risks on the Corporate Risk Register. The risks listed below also appear on the risk register for each service, but are only listed once in this report.

- Local Plan is found unsound by the Inspector.

- Lack of capacity in planning department negatively impacts performance and delivery of service, such as determining applications in statutory timeframes and managing complaints and FOIs.

- Lack of resources constrains the Council's "business as usual" capacity.

- Resources unavailable to progress the climate change action plan in set timescales.

Community Services Risk Register

22. No applicable risks.

Planning Policy Risk Register

23. Lack of five-year housing land supply, including gypsy and traveller land. There are a number of planning policies and plans which mitigate this risk.

24. Failure to determine a planning application within the statutory period and significant increase in number of complaints and FOIs related to planning. The planning department has more capacity and is more resilient than it was six months ago, which is reducing the risk of determining applications in the statutory timescales, as well as the complaints and FOIs.

Housing Risk Register

25. Overspend on housing repairs. The current software used for repairs and budget monitoring needs to be updated to ensure the systems are aligned and the correct budget spend is recorded. Officers are reviewing potential solutions.

Strategy and Resources Risk Register

26. Inability to maintain high standards of delivery for statutory services. Despite the pandemic and other operational challenges, services have been maintained, although standards in some areas may have reduced.

Review of performance indicators and risks

27. A review of all performance indicators and risks is planned to ensure they reflect and capture what really should be measured and monitored. This will be done in consultation with committee chairs. It is hoped a new approach will be in place by the next committee.

Debt update

28. At Strategy & Resources Committee on 1 February, a new *Payments from Customers and Debt Management Policy* was approved. At that meeting, discussion took place on the need for staffing resource to address the issues previously identified. Since that point, the Council has appointed a dedicated Exchequer Manager to take forward the improvement plan for Exchequer and develop a self-financed business case for resolving outstanding debt.

29. Work continues to develop, review and improve debt recovery routines. Improved monitoring and reporting practices are being implemented, along with performance indicators which will be reported quarterly.

30. The performance indicators will monitor ongoing business as usual performance, along with progress of reducing aged outstanding debts. The Council's bad debt provision is closely monitored to ensure adequate provision is made for debts which are unlikely to be recovered.

31. To progress with the recovery of aged debts and continue to implement improvement activity a report Debt Management Review was part of the agenda for [Strategy and Resources Committee on 30 June](#) to seek temporary resource to improve the position. This report includes a comprehensive update on outstanding debt.

Key implications

Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The risks identified in the corporate risk registers reported to individual policy committees and their mitigating actions may lead to additional resources and cost implications for the Council if they materialise

Once identified, the financial impact of any additional cost pressures to reduce risk and / or improve performance will be shown in the monthly budget monitoring reports. Budget monitoring reports will also identify and quantify where possible financial risks to delivering the budget, along with mitigating actions. Ensuring the Council has adequate reserves and contingencies to respond to these risks is a key element of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Comments of the Head of Legal Services

A performance exception report is presented to the committee on a quarterly basis as part of the Council's current performance management framework. By working with officers from different service areas in the production of this report the Council embeds accountability for performance within the senior management structure. This allows for a flow of detailed information to and from the Council's leadership.

There is no statutory duty to report regularly to councillors on the Council's performance, but as a best value authority under the Local Government Act 1999, the Council has a statutory duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Regular reporting of performance can assist the Council to demonstrate best value. Analysis is also needed to understand the trend, the history and probable future direction of performance of the Council.

Equality

This report contains no proposals that would disadvantage any particular minority groups.

Climate change

This report contains no proposals that would impact on the Council's commitment to climate change.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None

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