

Performance and Administration Cabinet Committee

Monday, 21 November 2022

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Narinderjit Singh Thandi (Chair)
Cllr Brian Francis (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Dakota Dibben
Sarah Gow
Gary Harding
Leslie Hills
Samir Jassal
Brian Sangha
Gurbax Singh

Sarah Parfitt Director (Corporate Services)
Pat Knight Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits)
James Larkin Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service
Carlie Simmonds Committee Services Manager (Minutes)

43. Apologies

An apology of absence was received from Cllr Elizabeth Mulheran and Cllr Brian Sangha attended as her substitute.

An apology of absence was received from Cllr Harold Craske.

44. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 21 September 2022 were signed by the Chair.

45. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interests were made.

46. Corporate Performance Update: Quarter Two 2022-23

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) and the Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service presented Members of the Performance and Administration Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Two 2022-23 (July to September 2022).

Any outturns where data had been unable to be reported will be presented within the next appropriate reporting cycle.

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) highlighted the following:-

PI 23, Average processing time taken for Housing Benefit claims (days)

The Committee was informed that this indicator was an improving trend. Q2 was 20.8 days which was an improvement on Q1 which was 22.4 days. September 2022 showed performance at 18.4 days with further improvement in October 2022 at 16.5 days. The latest available national data reported that the general trend over the past 18 months had been an upward one with nationally an average of 23 days and Kent districts averaging 22.0 days.

PI 24, Average processing time to assess changes of circumstances for housing benefit claims

Q2 was 11.5 days which was identical to Q1 performance. September 2022 showed performance at 6.7 days with further improvement in October 2022 at 5.1 days (the performance level had reverted to pre-covid). The latest available national data reported that the general trend over the past 18 months had been an upward one with nationally an average of 7 days and Kent districts averaging 7 days.

PI 26, Total number of reported corporate complaints

During Q2 there were 55 complaints compared to 46 received in Q1. Of those 55, 48 were recorded as Stage 1 complaints, of which 46 (95.8%) met the 10-day deadline to respond. There were 7 Stage 2 complaints, of which 5 (71.4%) met the 20-day deadline to respond and 1 had been extended for further investigation. During Q2 there were 99 compliments which was an improvement on Q1.

The Committee was informed that the Council handled all complaints as a constructive process and where areas, procedures etc. needed to be amended then the Council would make those changes. It was highlighted that a high majority of the complaints related to the direct/public facing services provided by the Council however, if those figures were compared with all of the services provided by the Council, then the percentage would be significantly low.

PI 50, Total number of people signed up to citizens' access

The total number of people signed up to citizens' access had increased by approximately 1k.

PI 49, % of posts involved in shared service arrangements

The Committee was informed that agenda item 6 (Annual Review of Information Governance Shared Service) related to a shared service arrangement.

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) also provided an update on the following:-

Council tax collection

The collection rate was currently 65.2% which was down by 0.3% compared to last year. This was mainly due to people applying to pay over 12 instalments instead of the standard 10 instalments.

Business rates collection

The collection rate was currently 69.2% which was up by 10.9%. There had been a change to retail discount relief reducing from 100% relief to 66% during 2021/22 so a significant balance was raised on those accounts affected.

Direct Debit Take Up

The direct debit take up for Council Tax was currently 69.3% and for business rates 38.7%.

Support Payments

In relation to energy payments, the Committee was informed that the Council had paid 34,948 eligible households in Council Tax bands A-D totalling approximately £5.2m. A discretionary scheme was made available to assist those, who were not entitled under the main scheme, but were in:-

- bands E to H and were in receipt of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme or in receipt of severe mental impairment exemption/disregard; or
- bands F-H and were in receipt of a disabled banding reduction.

Additionally, an additional top-up amount to the original £150 energy payment where:-

- in bands A-D and were in receipt of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme or in receipt of severe mental impairment exemption/disregard; or
- bands A-E and were in receipt of a disabled banding reduction.

6,153 eligible households were due to be paid via the discretionary scheme totalling approximately £248k.

In relation to the Household Support Fund, 749 eligible households had been paid totalling approximately £257k.

An additional £184k had been allocated to assist those households who had not received an energy support payment but were in receipt of Universal Credit. As the funding allocation had only just been received, the Council was yet to finalise the scheme.

The Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service highlighted the following:-

PI 55, % of internal audit recommendations implemented

The total number of recommendations due for implementation by the end of September 2022 was 35, 32 of which had been implemented, giving an outturn of 91.4%.

A brief update on the activity of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud as of 30 September 2022 had been included within the report.

As of 21 November 2022, plan delivery stood at 42% with a further 11% underway.

An apprentice had now started within Internal Audit, the apprentice will initially be working alongside other audit colleagues while the apprenticeship training commences.

In terms of counter fraud activity, cashable savings of approximately £105,257 in the form of additional Council Tax, plus a further £70,654 increase for future years, had been identified in the year to date. That was a total of £175,911 in comparison to the budgeted costs for GBC's share of the entire Internal Audit & Counter Fraud service which were approximately £214,000, the fraud resource being around £82,000 of that.

PI 56, % of information requests completed within statutory deadline

Performance in relation to FOI requests had increased to 97% of requests responded to within timescale in the last quarter and for the last seven weeks, monitoring received showed no requests outstanding after their due date.

The Committee congratulated officers on the indicators as they were performing well and thanked the Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) and his team for their hard work in processing the support payments.

The Committee noted the Corporate Performance Report: Quarter Two 2022-23.

47. Annual Review of Information Governance Shared Service

Members of the Performance & Administration Committee was presented with a copy of the annual review that had been conducted in respect of the Information Governance Shared Service with Medway Council.

The Director (Corporate Services) informed Members that, in the last nine months, the service had experienced significant staff turnover, with resignations at the Information Governance Manager, Senior Information Governance Officer and Information Governance Officer levels. The Information Governance Manager role was successfully recruited to and the new postholder, Preeti Lalli, assumed the role in September 2022. The Information Governance Manager will be undertaking a review of the Information Governance arrangements at each Council to determine targeted areas of activity as well as resourcing.

The Director (Corporate Services) advised that the intention will be for Preeti Lalli to attend a future meeting of the Performance & Administration Committee.

The Director (Corporate Services) drew Members' attention to appendix two of the report which provided an overview of the shared service arrangement together with an update against the recommendations identified in the previous year's review and the recommendations/service improvements for the coming year.

The Cabinet noted the information contained within the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 7.54 pm.