

Performance and Administration Cabinet Committee

Thursday, 23 March 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Narinderjit Singh-Thandi (Chair)

Councillors: Dakota Dibben
John Caller
Sarah Gow
Gary Harding
Leslie Hills
Emma Morley
Brian Sangha

Sarah Parfitt Director (Corporate Services)
Pat Knight Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits)
Preeti Lalli Information Governance Manager
Chloe Taylor Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

48. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mulheran, Cllr Francis and Cllr Singh. Cllr Caller, Cllr Sangha and Cllr Morley acted as their respective substitutes.

49. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 21 November 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

50. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

51. Draft Data Protection Policy

The Chair welcomed the Information Governance Manager to the Committee.

Members were presented with a report that detailed the updated Data Protection Policy, which enabled the committee to review and comment on the Policy prior to it being ratified by the Cabinet Member for Performance and Administration. The Information Governance Manager outlined the key points from the report and explained that:

- The Data Protection Policy was adopted by the Council in 2018 and required a review every 3 years.
- A few changes had been made to the Policy to keep it in line with current legislation, provide an accessibility format and to adhere to Gravesham Borough Council's (GBC) requirements.

- A Busy Reader's Summary had been introduced which allowed easier and quicker understanding of the main elements within the Policy.
- Additional footnotes had been removed to make it more relevant to GBC framework.
- The Policy will be reviewed again in January 2025 and then annually.

The Information Governance Manager and the Director (Corporate Services) fielded questions from Members and informed them of the following:

- The Policy was an overview of how Gravesham Borough Council handles data. In relation to external data sharing, there would be agreements in place for each data sharing arrangement and those agreements will determine how that data was shared.
- The Information Governance Manager agreed to welcome a suggestion to make it clear that the default position of the Council was that we wouldn't disclose any information unless necessary, with this being incorporated into the policy before sign-off by the Portfolio Holder.
- Following a question on Subject Access Requests, the Information Governance Manager advised that there were requests submitted on a regular basis to disclose information held on individuals or to remove or amend data held. There was a significant amount of work related to this.

In response to a question on data sharing in shared service arrangements, the Director (Corporate Services) advised that the data processing arrangements would depend on the structure of the arrangement and the operational systems and platforms used.

The committee noted the report.

52. Corporate Performance Update: Quarter Three 2022-23

The Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits) and the Information Governance Manager presented the committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Three 2022- 23 (October to December 2022). The committee were taken page by page and the following was explained:

PI23 – The performance indicator for the average processing time taken for Housing Benefit claims (days) had levelled out and was back on course to be within the target of 20 days, and remained at 20.6 days in February 2023. The national average is 21 days, with the average across Kent districts averaging at 23 days.

PI24 – This performance indicator had improved to 9.1 days. Whilst this was still high, there had been further reduction to 7.5 days (year to date) by February 2023 and for those claims assessed in the month of February 2023 the average was 3.1 days. Additional work within the service had caused an impact, such as:

- More claims were moving over to Universal Credit, causing GBC to be left with a smaller number of cases, but those tended to be more complex.
- Undertaking of work on behalf of central government that was not directly related to Revenue and Benefits, such as the distribution of energy payments.

Using the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT), GBC were able to identify households with vulnerable needs and allocate over £430,000 in funds. GBC had been recognised as a

finalist in the IRRV Performance Awards for our work with the LIFT project, and being shortlisted was a tremendous achievement.

Two new schemes had been launched regarding energy bill support for those who did not receive the initial funding, with a sum of £400 credit, and a further scheme for those on alternative fuel, with a sum of £200 credit.

The collection of Council Tax was 94.4%, a 1% increase from the previous quarter, with the collection of business rates at 97.85%, both indicating that performance was strong.

PI23 – The number of reported corporate complaints in comparison to the previous quarter had reduced. Only one of those complaints had reached stage 2, indicating that complaints were well resolved. In addition, Q3 also saw 107 service complaints received from customers, compared to 99 in Q2.

PI50 – This indicator was currently sat at 15,700 to date and continued to increase.

PI49 – This was an annual indicator, with the narrative outlining the work being conducted by the Assistant Director (Corporate Services) and the Corporate Improvement Team.

PI55 – James Larkin had passed on his apologies and gave the Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits) a statement to read to the committee updating them on this performance indicator. Out of 51 recommendations provided by external auditors, 46 had been implemented.

PI56 – Progress in responding to information request had significantly increased, with 99.5% of requests responded to within the 20-working day deadline, and this had been consistently maintained throughout Q4 so far.

The Information Governance Manager, Service Manager (Revenues and Benefits) and the Director (Corporate Services) fielded questions from Members and explained the following:

- New Burden funding had been received from the Government due to the responsibility of energy payment distribution. LIFT has helped the team to be proactive and over time, they had found efficiencies to improve the processes. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had commented on the positive performance in terms of benefits processing.
- In response to a question around capacity, the Director (Corporate Services) shared her view that the team had gone above and beyond in their efforts to administer payments and grants to individuals and businesses during the pandemic. Other departments within the Council had also chipped in such as Customer Services and Finance proving the effort had been spread across the organisation.
- Regarding Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, the Information Governance Manager clarified that these cannot be refused without a justified exemption in place, such as the request being for commercially sensitive information. It was noted that information on this could be included in the Annual Information Governance Report.
- There had been no concerns regarding the quality of FOI responses across the Council.
- Regarding PI49, the seven corporate risks had been discussed in depth at Cabinet, Council and other Committees. In relation to the Corporate Improvement Team, the team were following a similar process that was followed in 2016, looking at the services and seeing where either expenditure could be reduced, income generated,

or efficiencies delivered. They were on their 3rd and 4th review and will produce a series of recommendations which will be presented to Cabinet after the election for consideration. The decision of the Members will establish what recommendations were taken forward and how the target budget reduction will be reached. Management Team were committed to doing this exercise and delivering the right outcomes.

- In relation to PI26, the example was given of the issuing of bills and council tax recovery contributing to the fluctuation of complaints in each quarter.

The Committee thanked the team for their hard work.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.17pm