

Performance and Administration Cabinet Committee

Monday, 20 November 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Narinderjit Singh Thandi (Chair)
Cllr Gavin Larkins (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Rajinder Atwal
David Beattie
Leslie Hills
Jo Hart
Jordan Meade
Christina Rolles
Benjamin Sizer

Note: Councillor Lauren Sullivan was also in attendance.

Sarah Parfitt	Director (Corporate Services)
Pat Knight	Head of Revenues & Benefits
Ben Turner	Strategic Policy Manager
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager (Minutes)

8. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Dakota Dibben and Councillor Jordan Meade attended as his substitute.

9. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 20 September 2023 were signed by the Chair.

10. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

11. Demonstration of Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

The Committee received a presentation, including a demonstration, of the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT).

The Committee was informed that the LIFT project was implemented in February 2021 in partnership with Policy in Practice. LIFT was a platform which amalgamated benefit claimant datasets and yielded powerful insights by identifying individual Gravesham households that were impacted by policy changes now and in the future.

The project proactively supported the Council in achieving the following objectives:-

1. To gain a better understanding of the low-income cohort in the Borough - *Targeting support and advice to those who were the most financially vulnerable in the Borough, ensuring they had access to all the support available to them.*
2. Fewer people in financial crisis in the Borough - *Introducing a package of housing measures and creative interventions that provided support to the households identified as most vulnerable.*
3. Improve council tax recovery - *Recognising households affected by the poverty gap and ensuring all families were adequately supported however significantly they were struggling.*

The Council had used the information to identify the most vulnerable families and proactively targeted financial support to them. Since February 2021, the Council had provided the following support:-

- campaigns to increase Pension Credit take-up using LIFT which had resulted in over £330,000 per annum being allocated. Economic benefits of the campaigns were projected to be over £2.2m to Gravesham residents;
- by 31 March 2024, £624,000 of the Household Support Fund would have been proactively allocated using LIFT poverty triggers;
- £130,000 of the Council Tax Financial Support Fund had been allocated to those who were vulnerable and identified as 'can't pay';
- £248,743 of the discretionary energy scheme payments had been proactively allocated to 6,152 households;
- changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme;
- Council Tax in-year collection had improved year on year; 2020/21 was 94.5%, 2021/22 was 95.5% and 2022/23 was 96.1%; and
- aided reduction in Gravesham households in relative poverty from 3,214 (2,844 children) to 2,446 (2,263 children).

The Head of Revenues & Benefits advised that the project had been recognised nationally and the work undertaken mentioned in the House of Lords.

The presentation/demonstration provided Members with an overview of the support given to date, future plans and also gave specific insights at ward level.

The Committee was also provided with the performance statistics in relation to the Revenues and Benefits Service which was an improving trend.

The Committee thanked the Head of Revenues & Benefits for an informative presentation/demonstration and commended the excellent work being undertaken to help the most vulnerable households in the Borough which had resulted in the project being recognised nationally. It was felt that there should be a separate briefing session arranged for all Members in order for Members to receive a presentation/demonstration of LIFT.

Members stated that where households were being recognised as vulnerable and may be entitled to additional support, it was important for the Council to be mindful that not all households were computer literate/able to access information online therefore

supports/assistance should be provided to those households . The Head of Revenues & Benefits advised that the service was mindful of this and would support and/or signpost those who may need assistance with accessing and/or completing forms etc.

Members also requested that all departments be made aware of the LIFT project and the powerful insights it can offer.

It was acknowledged that households would be considered as below the poverty line if their income was below 60% of the median household income and asked whether savings/assets were taken into consideration. The Head of Revenues & Benefits advised that it was based on income only.

The Committee noted the information provided as part of the presentation/demonstration.

12. Corporate Performance Management Framework: 2023-27

The Committee was informed that the Corporate Plan presented the Council's ambition for the Borough over a four-year cycle and was adopted by Full Council in October 2023. Alongside a suite of corporate objectives and associated policy commitments, the Corporate Plan set the tone and guiding principles from which all Council activity would be based over the 2023-27 administrative period.

To evaluate if the Council was effectively achieving against its stated objectives and delivering consistently high-quality services for local residents, the plan established a commitment to sound performance management arrangements, to be delivered by a formal corporate Performance Management Framework (PMF).

Operationally, the purpose of a corporate PMF will be to establish how we use information, data, and business intelligence to make informed decisions and drive continuous service improvement. In our efforts to deliver best value services that provide for the right community impact, the framework ensured a consistent and robust approach to performance management at all levels throughout the organisation.

At its core, the PMF formally presented:

- Responsibility: *the roles and activities involved in the effective management of performance in the Council.*
- Monitoring: *a formal performance reporting regime that incorporated all tiers and content of corporate performance data.*
- Indicators: *as the upper tier of performance material, a suite of corporate performance indicators and how they were directly assigned to specific policy commitments established through the adopted Corporate Plan, alongside details of the responsible Cabinet portfolio holder.*
- Quality: *governance controls providing assurance that reported performance content was consistent, timely, valid, and accurate, enabling the Council to make informed evidence based policy decisions.*

Practically, for Members, the PMF will form the basis of corporate performance reporting during the 2023-27 administrative period. As determined by the Leader of the Executive, this will primarily be delivered through a commitment to a quarterly performance reporting process to Cabinet and portfolio-based Cabinet Committees.

The Strategic Policy Manager advised that the Performance and Administration Cabinet Portfolio had responsibility for the effective governance of the Council's performance management arrangements. The Committee was presented with the draft PMF and was advised that, pending any final comments received from the Committee, it was recommended that the PMF be approved by the Cabinet Member for Performance and Administration in order for the framework to be formally implemented. Adoption will enable formal performance reporting against the new Corporate Plan to commence for the Q3 2023-24 reporting period, scheduled for early 2024.

The Committee considered the draft PMF for the 2023-27 administrative period and commended the framework. The Committee was supportive of it being ratified by the Cabinet Member for Performance and Administration.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.26 pm.