

Minutes

Performance Management Scrutiny Committee 23rd March 2022



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J Coleridge	No	S Rehman	Yes
G Courtauld	Yes	B Rose	Yes
Mrs C Dervish	Apologies	P Schwier (Vice-Chairman)	Yes
T Everard	Yes	N Unsworth	Apologies
M Radley (Chairman)	Yes		

32 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

33 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd February 2022 were approved as a correct record.

34 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

35 **SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22**

INFORMATION: Members gave consideration to a report on the performance of the Council as at the end of the second quarter (1st July 2021 to 30th September 2021). Mrs Tracey Headford, Business Solutions Manager, was invited to present the report.

Members were informed that the second quarter performance report was the last to be reported against the projects and performance indicators within the Annual Plan for 2020/2021. As at the end of September, a total of 27 projects had been completed with 24 projects on track and progressing well. Two projects had an amber status; these were in relation to construction delays which had pushed back the project end dates.

In respect of performance indicators, seven of these had either met or exceeded target and six had missed their target. Two performance indicators had missed target by less than 5% and four had missed their target by more than 5%. It was added that any projects that had not been completed by the end of September 2021 would either be carried over for delivery through the next plan 'Bouncing Back Together,' or they would continue to be delivered through usual business and activity.

Some of the Council's key achievements during the second quarter were noted and these included: a third of 99 affordable homes were delivered during the second quarter, which brought the total to 190; redevelopment of the entrance to Witham Town Park was completed; the respective Climate Change and Cycling Strategies were unanimously agreed by Full Council; the new community tree and bulb planting scheme was commenced; adoption of the Coggeshall Neighbourhood Plan, which brought the total number of such plans for the District to five; completion of the main infrastructure for Horizon 120, which provided two access roads to the site; the return of the street markets to Braintree Town Centre, and; the District's leisure centres increased their capacity in line with phased re-opening to encourage local participation in sport and leisure activities.

In respect of complaints, 185 complaints had been received which represented an increase when compared with those received in the first quarter. The majority of the complaints received were in respect of the Council's Operations Service and missed bin collections.

On the subject of the Council's financial performance, the net budget position forecast for the year was a positive variance of £383,000. The estimated impact of the pandemic in 2021/22 was £915,000, which was expected to be offset by funding from the Government. The forecast position regarding the base budget was a positive variance of £383,000. After taking into account other planned movements in balances, the projected change in General Fund unallocated balances was a reduction of £253,000. A total of £15.525million was spent on capital projects during the first half year which was mainly incurred on: the Horizon 120 business park infrastructure; the new Horizon 120 Enterprise Centre; I-Construct; the Manor Street regeneration scheme; town centre improvements and the Halstead Leisure Centre artificial grass pitch.

The Chairman thanked Tracey and invited Members to ask their questions in relation to the report. During the questions, a number of Members commended the work of officers, contractors and Members alike who were involved with delivering the projects and in ensuring the financial outturn of the Council; both the projects and the Council's finances were in a largely positive position in spite of the challenges that had arisen from the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Further to the questions raised, the following actions were agreed:-

- In response to a question raised by Councillor Rehman about the financial impacts of the two projects which currently had an amber status, Members were advised that the delays were not caused by the construction companies. A written response would be provided to Members.

DECISION: The report informed the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee of the performance of the Council following its presentation and noting at Cabinet on the 29th November 2021.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Council provides a report to demonstrate the performance of Braintree District Council (the Council) at the end of the second quarter (July 2021 to September 2021). The performance report was presented to Cabinet on the 29th November 2021.

INFORMATION: Members gave consideration to a report on the performance of the Council as at the end of the second quarter (1st October 2021 to 30th December 2021). Mrs Tracey Headford, Business Solutions Manager, was invited to present the report.

Members were advised that this was the first report which reported against the new 'Bouncing Back Together' document and reflected the progress of the actions required to assist the District with its recovery and growth over the next few years. As at the end of December, two projects had been completed with 51 projects on track and progressing well. Ten projects had an amber status, which was due primarily to either supply chain issues that had impacted on some of the larger projects and subsequently pushed back the completion dates, or resource issues and prioritisation of workloads.

On the subject of performance indicators, eight had either met or exceeded their targets, and five had missed their target. Three performance indicators had missed their target by less than 5%, and two had missed their target by more than 5%.

A number of the Council's key achievements within the quarter were then highlighted, which included: a high street improvement scheme was launched in December 2021 to improve the look and feel of shopfronts; successful delivery of the Braintree Christmas Lights Switch On; launch of the Council's Climate Change Strategy; a total of 18,700 native trees and 73,000 bulbs were planted across the District; work with Community 360 to provide activities and nutritious meals to more than 440 children during the winter school holidays; opening of I-Construct; the delivery of two additional Business Adaptation Grants in time for Christmas, and; the delivery of a further 111 affordable homes, which brought the total for the year to 301.

In respect of staffing, it was highlighted that although sickness levels had increased, these were still low with over 60% of staff having had no sickness throughout the year. In terms of complaints, only 91 had been received in the third quarter.

On the subject of the Council's financial position for the third quarter, the net budget position forecast for the year was a positive variance of £699,000 after taking into account the projected impact of Covid and variations of the base budget. The estimated budget impact of the pandemic in 2021/22 was £868,000; this was expected to be offset by Government funding. It was noted that the proposals for the 2022/23 budget included £367,000 of savings which had been reflected in the projected outturn as they were considered to be ongoing. After taking into account other planned movements in balances, the projected change in General Fund balances was an increase of £191,000. In terms of expenditure, £21.8million was on capital projects up until the end of December, with spending mainly incurred on: Horizon 120 business park infrastructure; the new Horizon 120 Enterprise; I-Construct; Manor Street regeneration scheme; town centre improvements and the Halstead Leisure Centre artificial grass pitch.

The Chairman thanked Tracey for the information provided and invited Members to ask their questions in relation to the report. The following actions were subsequently agreed:-

- Further to a question raised by Councillor Everard which pertained to organisations involved with arranging activities for children during school holidays, Members were advised that the majority of these were coordinated by Community 360. It was agreed

that further details as to the organisations involved with activities for children would be provided to Members.

- Tracey Headford agreed to provide Councillor Courtauld with the details of which Officers were responsible for monitoring trees planted across the District throughout the year.
- Further to a request from the Chairman, it was agreed that the targets set against each project listed within the performance report would be included in future reports.

DECISION: The report informed the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee of the performance of the Council following its presentation and noting at Cabinet on the 14th March 2022.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Council provides a report to demonstrate the performance of Braintree District Council (the Council) at the end of the third quarter (October 2021 to December 2021). The performance report was presented to Cabinet on the 14th March 2022.

37 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO COMMERCIALISATION – DRAFT SCRUTINY REPORT**

INFORMATION: Members gave consideration to the draft report for the Scrutiny Review into Commercialisation. The report was introduced by the Chairman.

Over the course of the Scrutiny Review, the Committee had determined that there was a sound and positive approach towards commercialisation by the Council which provided a solid base to further develop and grow commercialisation in the future. The Chairman made particular mention of the Council's Investment and Development Programme (IDP), which represented a structured, focused approach and sought to involve everyone in driving forward improvements. On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman also wished to extend his grateful thanks to Mr James Sinclair, the Council's Commercialisation Manager and Lead Officer for the Scrutiny Review, for his support throughout the evidence gathering process.

The report included seven individual recommendations to Cabinet which were read out by the Chairman. Members were invited to raise any comments or suggestions they had for amendments as the Chairman moved through the report.

Recommendation 1

"The Committee recognises the essential nature of the role of Commercialisation Manager within the organisation in driving forward future efficiency savings and increased income generation. It is therefore recommended that the Council continues with its appointment of a permanent full-time post of Commercialisation Manager."

Members were reminded that the purpose of the recommendation was to underline the importance of the role of the Commercialisation Manager in driving forward a more commercial approach within the Council. The recommendation also highlighted the need for the role to be a full-time, permanent post going forward filled by an individual with the necessary knowledge, experience and skillset in order to achieve the most effective results for the organisation.

Recommendation 2

“Further opportunities are explored for collaborative working with other Local Authorities in order to build upon the success of the Shared Payroll Services initiative.”

Members were in agreement with the recommendation as written.

Recommendation 3

“The costs and income across all traded services at the Council are examined in order to improve the net financial benefit to the organisation, especially where profit levels are low, and reviewed on a regular basis going forward to ensure that performance is at an acceptable level.”

Members were advised of a typographical error within the text of the recommendation whereby the last few words had been omitted by mistake. The Governance Officer agreed to rectify this error within the report.

A number of Members requested that the wording within the recommendation be strengthened in order to emphasise the need for the Council to maintain traded services which continued to deliver acceptable benefits for the organisation in terms of their commercial income, rather than retaining services which no longer added value. The Governance Officer agreed to amend the wording within the recommendation slightly to reflect these comments.

Recommendation 4

“Further opportunities are explored to build upon the higher performance of Traded Services areas and to add any new services that deliver similar benefits.”

Members felt that it was important to convey an appropriate message within the recommendation around ensuring that services continued to add value to the organisation. It was therefore suggested that the wording within the recommendation be amended to *“Further opportunities are explored that can be demonstrated as delivering higher levels of performance in Traded Services areas and to add any new services that deliver similar benefits.”* The Governance Officer agreed to make the amendment.

Recommendation 5

“Council endorses the excellent approach taken by the Council with the Investment and Development Programme (the Programme) and makes this a permanent management process going forward in order to ensure there is future value for money and optimisation of financial and service performance.”

Members were in agreement with the recommendation as written.

Recommendation 6

“As part a more strategic approach, the Council should consider exploring any opportunities for more radical approaches to commercialisation, such as partnerships and/or setting up commercial operation.”

It was suggested by a Member that the word “radical (approaches)” be replaced with “innovative,” which the Committee was in agreement with.

Members also requested that the word “amplify (its own activities)” included within the accompanying text within the recommendation be replaced with the word “enhance.”

Recommendation 7

“The Committee receives an annual update on the progress of the Investment and Development Programme (the Programme) to allow it to scrutinise the performance of the organisation in this area. It would be of benefit to receive the update line with the Council’s budget setting process (i.e. September).”

Members were in agreement with the recommendation as written.

DECISION: The Performance Management Scrutiny Committee:

1. Reviewed the draft report and finalised the content and draft recommendations to ensure that they were in keeping with the Terms of Reference of the Scrutiny Review and the evidence gathered.
2. Authorised the Chairman to finalise the draft report, prior to its submission to Cabinet and Full Council, and gave authority to Governance Officers to make any necessary administrative changes to the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: To finalise the draft report for the Scrutiny Review into ‘Commercialisation at Braintree District Council’ prior to its submission to Cabinet and Full Council.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.32pm.

Councillor M Radley
(Chairman)