

Minutes

Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

6th October 2021



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J Coleridge	Yes	S Rehman	Apologies
G Courtauld	Yes	B Rose	Yes
Mrs C Dervish	Yes	P Schwier (Vice-Chairman)	Yes
T Everard	Yes	N Unsworth	Apologies
M Radley (Chairman)	Yes		

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

INFORMATION: There was one interest declared:-

Councillor T Everard declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest as the Council's representative for Friends of Bocking Windmill.

14 MINUTES

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee held on 14th July 2021 were approved as a correct record.

15 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

16 FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22

INFORMATION: Consideration was given to the First Quarter Performance Report for 2021/22. Tracey Headford, Business Solutions Manager, was invited to present the report. Members were advised that as the Council was beginning to emerge from lockdown during the First Quarter, a number of projects that had previously been delayed had been reviewed and were now on track. Furthermore, the existing Annual Plan had been extended until September 2021, which provided many projects with the time required to focus on achieving their targets.

As at the end of June 2021, 13 projects had been completed with 39 projects on track and progressing well. Some of the key achievements from the projects were highlighted, including; completed improvement works to play areas in the District; the completion of the artificial football pitch at Halstead Leisure Centre, which had since been named the 'Calum Leys Memorial Pitch' in tribute to the previous Head of Ramsey Academy; the appointment of a mental health navigator, and the prevention of 64 cases of

homelessness by the Housing Team. It was reported that one project had an amber status and that this was in respect of the I-Construct Innovation in Construction Hub at the Braintree Enterprise Centre; the project had experienced delays in the First Quarter due to one of the sub-contractors becoming insolvent, which subsequently pushed the completion date of the site back to September. It was added that in more recent weeks, issues had arisen around the availability of materials and as such, the September target date for completion of the project was to be amended.

In respect of performance indicators, it was reported that six performance indicators had met or exceeded target, whilst seven had missed their target. Two performance indicators had missed their target by less than 5% and five had missed their target by more than 5%. The areas of underperformance were in relation to the kilograms of waste collected; the collection rate for Council Tax; recycling rates; average waiting time for disabled facility grants; average call answering time in the Customer Service Centre; the percentage of invoices paid within 30 days and the collection rate for Business rates.

Members were also made aware that, as of October 2021, the performance target in respect of the call answer times had been amended to 30 seconds, which would be in line with the emerging Annual Plan.

On the subject of staffing and health and safety, it was reported that sickness levels remained low and that there had also been a reduction in the number of accidents and incidents that had occurred in the workplace.

In respect of the outturn financial position for the for the First Quarter, Members were informed that taking into account the projected impact of Covid and variation to the base budget, the net budget position forecast for the year was a positive variance of £252,000. The estimated budget impact of the pandemic in 2021/22 was £1.213m, although this was expected to be partially offset by funding received from the Government, leaving a net projected variance due to Covid of £278,000. The forecast position regarding the base budget was a positive variance of £530,000. After taking into account other planned movements in balances, the projected change in General Fund unallocated balances was a reduction of £384,000. Expenditure of £5.53m on capital projects during the quarter, with spending mainly incurred on: Horizon 120 business park infrastructure, now completed; the new Horizon 120 Enterprise Centre; I-Construct; Manor Street regeneration scheme and the Halstead Leisure Centre artificial grass pitch.

Further to the report, Members asked a series of questions in relation to the information provided. Where a verbal response could not be given at the meeting, the following written replies were agreed:-

- Tracey Headford agreed to provide a written response to Councillor Schwier's question in regard to any cost implications associated with the delayed opening date of the I-Construct Innovation in Construction Hub, and any impact on business relationships as a result.
- The Chairman questioned whether the Council's budgetary allocation of £1 million towards Covid support would still be required. Tracey Headford would provide a written response.
- The Chairman also requested an update as to the status of Halstead and Witham Town Centre Regeneration Projects. It was explained that further information on

the two projects would be included as part of the Annual Plan, with a written response to be provided beforehand.

- The Chairman queried the number of complaints received in respect of the Operations Team. Although it was acknowledged that many of the complaints received were in regard to waste, Tracey Headford agreed to speak with Mr Paul Partridge, Head of Operations, to find out what targets had been set to help reduce the number of complaints received.
- In response to a query raised by Councillor Rose as to whether residents were advised on the correct etiquette for disposing of heavier waste materials, Tracey Headford agreed to feed this back to the Operations Team.
- Councillor Coleridge asked whether any practical assistance could be provided by the Council to help support the NHS project to improve health facilities across the District, including in Witham. Tracey Headford agreed to speak to Lee Crabb, Head of Environment, and report back to Members on this.
- Further to a query raised by Councillor Everard, Tracey Headford agreed to report back to Members on how the Council communicated with primary care networks, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following the end of questions, the Chairman expressed his thanks to Tracey for the responses provided to Members.

DECISION: That Members of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee were informed of the performance of the Council following the report's presentation and noting at Cabinet on the 6th September 2021.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Council provides a report to demonstrate the performance of Braintree District Council (the Council) at the end of the first quarter (April 2021 to June 2021). The performance report was presented to Cabinet on the 6th September 2021.

17 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO COMMERCIALISATION – THIRD EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION**

INFORMATION: The Chairman invited James Sinclair, Commercial Manager, to present his power point presentation to Members. The presentation provided the Committee with an update on the Council's Traded Services.

The full presentation slides and Members' discussion may be viewed on the Council's YouTube channel via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pwcht4aEoxA>

The main points from the presentation were as follows:-

- Members were reminded that the Commercial Team at Braintree District Council supported a variety of projects and contracts across the organisation, such as the Council's Investment and Development Programme, which included the £1.6 million Challenge to fill the budget gap.

- Traded Service Focus: Local Authority Accounting caused some difficulty in identifying net income positions given the crossover of staff and equipment to deliver Council and 'paid-for' services.
- The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic had been felt across a number of traded services over 2020/21; for example, the Enterprise Centre in Braintree would continue to be closed until 2021/22 due to construction works (the slides included a comparison table to show the cost impacts across key traded services between 2020/21 and 2021/22).
- Engagement - £1.6 million challenge: a successful manager's conference was held on 21st July 2021, during which a multitude of ideas were shared as to how the £1.6 million challenge could be addressed and further income generated. These ideas were then filtered down and their individual merit discussed. Similarly, Managers were also recreating 'idea incubator' sessions with members of staff as part of their team meetings. The first introductory level 'Commercial Insights' workshop had also taken place on 25th August 2021.
- New team structure: it was reported that commercial projects were being undertaken by staff across the organisation, with training offered in order to embed successful cultural change. The Commercial Manager would now manage the programme with a shared role between Braintree District Council and Essex County Council for a trial period. The new structure included shared procurement management and consideration of opportunities through economies of scale between the two Authorities.

Members were invited to ask their questions throughout the presentation. In response to the questions asked, the following information was provided:-

- "Trade waste" related to waste that was collected by the Council from businesses across the District. Where there was a need, the Council also collected trade waste from more rural areas of the District. Trade waste was collected separately. Detailed information around the mixing of waste, and what types of waste was sent to landfill or for recycling would need to be provided by the Operations Team.
- In regard to reprographics and the graphic design and printing functions, a large proportion of the costs associated with these related to staff assigned to the traded element of the service who also provided a service to the Council as well. An exact breakdown of the costs was not currently available. It was acknowledged that the list of traded service costs provided within the presentation slides were a minimum indication only of the expenditure across different traded activities at the Council; this was due to a number of additional 'shared' costs attached to some services, such as reprographics.
- The net expenditure figure in regard to the Pest Control service had not emerged as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was explained that a number of functions like that of Pest Control provided services to more vulnerable residents at lower rates. It was stressed that the Council was working to increase the income for Pest Control in order to offset the net losses; for example, through greater advertising and increased business following the successful bid with the "Eastlight framework" for Pest Control services.
- The Chairman believed that it would be useful for the Council to examine Pest

Control, Trade Waste and Horticultural Services in greater depth, as these services generated relatively low income streams when compared with other traded services. Other services, such as Reprographics, generated higher levels of commercial income which could perhaps be expanded upon if new growth opportunities were identified.

- With regard to meeting the £1.6 million budget challenge, one such idea was to examine what action other Local Authorities had taken in order to generate additional income and draw inspiration from this. It was explained that many services within the Council, such as Operations, maintained their own networks for connecting with external organisations which allowed them to share and compare commercial initiatives. Furthermore, there was the 'Essex Commercial Network,' which showcased commercial ideas from across different Districts and Boroughs within Essex, and the "cross-Council" revenue generation group, which formed part of a nationwide initiative.

Further to the presentation, the Chairman reminded the Committee the session marked the third evidence gathering session on the topic of 'Commercialisation,' and that a previous session had included a presentation from the Cabinet and Officers in regard to plans and initiatives to meet the £1.6 million budgetary challenge.

The Chairman expressed his grateful thanks to James Sinclair who, as Lead Officer for the Scrutiny Review, had committed much of his time and resources towards supporting the Committee's evidence gathering. As Members had not identified any further lines of enquiry that they wished to explore, the Chairman proposed that the Review be drawn to a close and that he intended to work with the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, along with Governance Officers, in order to prepare the draft report. If Members had any particular recommendations for inclusion within the report, it was requested that these be sent to the Governance and Members Team for consideration. Once completed, the draft report would be circulated to all Committee Members for their comments.

When giving consideration to any potential recommendations for inclusion within the final report, Members were reminded to consider the Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Review. Should Members wish to explore any other lines of enquiry around the topic of commercialisation, this was possible, but the opportunity for this was limited due to the need for the report to be finalised and approved within the current Civic Year.

18 **DECISION PLANNER**

DECISION: The Decision Planner for the period 1st October 2021 to 31st December 2021 was noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.15pm.

Councillor M Radley
(Chairman)