

Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 30 November 2022

PRESENT:

Councillor Penberthy, in the Chair.

Councillor Finn, Vice Chair.

Councillors Churchill, Haydon, Hulme, Kelly, Lowry, Partridge, Stevens, Vincent and Wheeler.

Also in attendance: Councillor Shayer (Cabinet Member for Finance & Economy), Ross Jago (Head of Governance, Performance and Risk), Andrew Loton (Senior Performance Advisor), Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive), Alison Mills (Head of HR Consultancy), Kevin Treweeks (Unison Lead Representative), Sharon Battishill (Unite Lead Representative), Trish Small (GMB Lead Representative), Councillor Carlyle (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Children and Young People), David Northey (Interim Section 151 Officer), Jane Anstis (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Ruth Harrell (Director for Public Health) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 4.50 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

32. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members in accordance with the code of conduct.

33. **Minutes**

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meetings held on 5 September 2022, and 29 September 2022 as an accurate record.

34. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

35. **Policy Brief**

The Policy Brief was not introduced by an officer and instead moved straight to questions from Members.

In response to questions raised it was reported that -

- (a) it was anticipated that voter ID would be required for next year's elections however this would be clarified later in the agenda when the Elections Bill Implications item was to be discussed;
- (b) future policy brief reports would include any impacts or benefits to Plymouth as well as how the Council would take action to respond if required;
- (c) the Policy Brief referred to the call for evidence on the Home Office Afghan Resettlement Scheme – this was scheduled on the committee's work programme for 14 December 2022 meeting.

The Committee agreed:

- 1. that future policy brief reports would include any impacts or benefits to Plymouth as well as how the Council would take action to respond if required;
- 2. to note the Policy Brief.

Order of Business

The Chair agreed to change the order of business to facilitate good meeting management.

36. Corporate Plan Performance and Risk Report - To Follow

The Corporate Plan Performance and Risk Report was not introduced by a Cabinet Member and instead moved straight to questions by Members. Councillor Shayer (Cabinet Member for Finance & Economy), Ross Jago (Head of Governance, Performance and Risk) and Andrew Loton (Senior Performance Advisor) were in attendance.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- (a) risk 12 in the report regarding the Council not meeting its obligation to keep data secure by failing to adhere to data protection act regulations was an identified risk and not something that had happened; a description of the risk was contained within the report as well as the mitigation response and actions undertaken to ensure that to the Council's best ability it didn't happen; cyber security was also to be discussed at the panel's scrutiny meeting in February 2023;
- (b) risk 14 in the report regarding the Council not meeting its legal obligations regarding the health and safety of the workforce was an identified risk of the situation and the mitigation was included in the report; the Big Listen was to be discussed later in the meeting and this formed part of the mitigation of this risk;
- (c) the red risk in relation to staff sickness levels was acknowledged however measures were in place to address what had been identified as an issue

affecting the workforce; the Council had a well-developed policy for absence and sickness and it was highlighted that the welfare of staff was important;

- (d) a written response would be provided to Members upon the financial implications of the Council's decision to end the garden waste service early therefore affecting the overall recycling rate in quarter two due to a lower volume of composted waste than in previous years, specifically when it was considered that recycling was sold on for other use.

The Committee agreed:

1. that a written response would be provided to Members upon the financial implications of the Council's decision to end the garden waste service early therefore affecting the overall recycling rate in quarter two due to a lower volume of composted waste than in previous years, specifically when it was considered that recycling was sold on for other use;
2. to note the Corporate Plan Quarter Two Performance and Risk Update.

37. **Return to Work Safely - The Big Listen Update - To Follow**

Councillor Shayer (Cabinet Member for Finance & Economy), Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive) and Alison Mills (Head of HR Consultancy) presented the Return to Work Safely (The Big Listen Update) to Members. The three Union representatives, Kevin Treweeks (Unison Lead Representative), Sharon Battishill (Unite Lead Representative) and Trish Small (GMB Lead Representative) were also in attendance in order to provide a staff side perspective.

The following key points were highlighted to Members:

- (a) the report shared the main findings of the Big Listen staff survey and the information provided was taken across all council employees; there was currently no benchmarking data undertaken by other councils to measure the information however it presented a clean cut representation of a post covid council;
- (b) the Council conducted the Big Listen survey in June/ July 2022 and the report shared the headline findings and provided information as to how the Council would respond to the findings from the survey;
- (c) the survey linked to the Council's People Strategy and had a 71% engagement level, two thirds of staff were proud to work for the Council, seven in ten people considered the Council was a good employer, the largest improvement was made in the satisfaction levels to staff working environment, 87% of staff were aware of their responsibilities and duties, 65% responded that they got development or training needed to do their job safely and 82% of staff felt that they were treated fairly, respectfully and without discrimination;
- (d) the report also highlighted how change was managed across the Council,

career progression within the Council and the confidence in how the survey results would be responded to; plans were detailed in the covering report on focus groups being arranged to take forward actions.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (e) it was difficult to encourage staff to speak and engage with surveys however those that did were thanked; it was highlighted that the response rate of 51% was a top quartile rate and was considered very high as the average rate was 25%;
- (f) in terms of the 51% response rate, Sharon Battishill (Unite Lead Representative) considered that front line workers were not heard and generally did not participate in surveys as they did not work on computers so didn't receive an electronic version of the survey however also didn't receive paper copies; they also had to complete surveys in their own personal time other than during working hours. There was a high density of front line workers in Street Scene and Waste with reading and writing therefore the feedback would be low from those areas;
- (g) in terms of the 51% response rate Kevin Treweeks (Unison Lead Representative) advised that he considered some people may not have participated because they believe that if they didn't have anything nice to say they shouldn't say anything at all;
- (h) an external company was used to conduct the survey in order to ensure anonymity if people considered they could be identified by their responses; a dual approach was taken with online availability and staff were proactive with paper copies for frontline staff. Colleagues went out to specifically try and increase rates in front line areas;
- (i) the engagement rate of 71% was made up of the answers to a specific suite of questions around the extent to which people felt engaged with the Council; the figure was made up of the answers to specific questions that were answered. The exact questions that were considered for the engagement index score would be provided to Members;
- (j) figures for comparison between the results of the 2022 staff survey and the 2018 staff survey would be provided, specifically for the following survey questions:
 - Working in my job make me want to do my best (this was 14 points down from 2018 figures)
 - I would like to be working for the Council in 12 months' time (this was 14 points down from 2018 figures)
 - The Council is a good employer (this was 21 points down from 2018 figures)

It was highlighted that Members should be mindful when comparing the 2018

staff survey and the 2022 Big Listen staff survey as the pandemic hadn't happened in 2018 and attitudes to work and life had changed significantly over that period;

- (k) 51% of staff participated in the survey, meaning that 49% of the workforce didn't take part in the staff survey;
- (l) the design of the survey as well as formatting of questions was discussed with trade union representatives. It was considered by trade union representatives that the use of an external agency was a good idea as no complaints had been received this year with regards to staff being easily identifiable from their responses;
- (m) it was considered by Unite Lead Representative that it would be preferable to send front line staff the survey in the post with a return envelope;
- (n) the Cabinet Member agreed with a concern raised in terms of the percentages of staff that felt they were victims of bullying or harassment and the potential impact that might have upon sickness levels and the confidence in staff being comfortable in completing the survey due to a fear of being identified or experiencing repercussions, especially if they had to undertake the survey in a physical format; this would be taken on board;
- (o) the next steps for the survey was to release results to departments for greater discussion and analysis in focus groups;
- (p) front line workers were given paper copies and representatives from Human Resources and Organisational Development went to particular work locations to support those employees that required help filling out the survey if required – this also helped responses to be anonymous as it was separate from support provided by managers;
- (q) Staffroom was the name of the Council's virtual staffroom – managers were responsible for cascading down information and key messages from staffroom to council employees that didn't have access to staffroom. Television screens were also in different locations across council sites for staff to be advised of key messages;
- (r) in terms of having trust that the survey results would impact positive change, Sharon Battishill (Unite Lead Representative) considered that she had trust in senior managers however wasn't confident that key messages would reach front line workers;
- (s) in terms of having trust that the survey results would impact positive change, Kevin Treweeks (Unison Lead Representative) confirmed that there was a lot of cynicism from staff and the idea of engaging with focus groups on difficult issues like communication could be useful however from past experience with staff surveys, the changes that had been made were the changes that those in charge wanted to make anyway other than what the workforce wanted to be made;

- (t) in terms of having trust that the survey results would impact positive change, Trish Small (GMB Lead Representative) had trust that there was an intent for the council to make changes however it was questioned how much could be realistically achieved with budget restraints, especially when staff were overworked;
- (u) line managers were responsible for ensuring that the needs of their staff members were listened to and addressed;
- (v) the Return to Work report was submitted to scrutiny previously and it was mentioned by the presenting officer that this survey had been undertaken; scrutiny was therefore in receipt of very early information which had not yet been cascaded through directorates or working groups for further development;
- (w) when the Plymouth Book came into force the Council removed payments for staff for professional registrations; this was not supported by trade union representatives as the registrations were required as part of the job.

Trade Union Leads offered their perspectives upon the results of the Big Listen survey as follows:

Kevin Treweeks (Unison Lead Representative):

- (x) it was important for the Council to recognise that there was a lot of negativity in the workforce – satisfaction levels were down across a lot of metrics in comparison to previous surveys and staff didn't seem to think there was a particular vision or leadership in the council. There was diminishing faith in line managers, a lack of faith in the future and a view that training opportunities were limited.
- (y) some staff were ambivalent about if they still work for the council in 12 months' time, there was a 13% turnover of staff and an expectation that change was coming and it would be negative. Staff were feeling that they had little control and were constantly managing change; it was considered that a lot of departments within the Council restructured on a bi-annual basis leading to issues with how to function with other teams;
- (z) concerns of isolation were specifically directed towards front line staff that worked in the call centre, who generally worked from home and were dealing with members of the public on an increasing basis that were dissatisfied leaving staff with no one else to talk to once the call had ended;
- (aa) it was recognised that work appeared to be grinding people down, there was insufficient staff numbers, stress was apparent and long term stress needed to be focused upon;
- (bb) there was dissatisfaction with the pay and reward and it was considered staff were 20-25% worse off in spending power terms than 10 years ago. Pay was managed nationally however the council's local terms and conditions were

used as a way of saving money however it was considered to be a false economy as the council was losing staff to neighbouring local authorities;

- (cc) environmental impacts only looked at travel however hybrid working was here to stay but the survey indicated that more people expected to return to their workplaces more often than they had been previously – we needed to consider that came in to work in green ways;
- (dd) registration fees for social workers was no longer paid for by the Council;
- (ee) Union leaders didn't score well around communications and would like to get messages out using the council's platforms.

Trish Small (GMB Lead Representative):

- (ff) there was a high demand on staff and this was driving people to be ill with work related stress; it was considered that if staff wellbeing was prioritised this would mean that less people would feel burnt out and the impact on sickness levels and cost would be lessened. To recruit to new members of staff and to retrain costed money;

The Committee agreed:

1. that the exact questions from the Big Listen survey that were considered for the engagement index score would be provided to Members;
2. figures for comparison between the results of the 2022 staff survey and the 2018 staff survey would be provided for the following survey questions:
 - Working in my job make me want to do my best (this was 14 points down from 2018 figures)
 - I would like to be working for the Council in 12 months' time (this was 14 points down from 2018 figures)
 - The Council is a good employer (this was 21 points down from 2018 figures)
3. to recommend that prior to the next staff survey, additional thought was given to how those without computer access were given support to be able to complete the survey (to feel confident in doing so), that all staff should be allowed the opportunity to complete the survey within working hours, and that the process was agreed with the trade union representatives in advance to enable them to support the delivery of the survey;
4. that staff registrations was to be added to the work programme (where council officers were required to have registrations to undertake their role), with the aim to understand costs, what registrations were required and for whom, and to understand the impact upon the Council – Trade Union representatives to be included in the discussion at scrutiny;

5. that the action plans for the following areas would be added to the work programme (and for trade union representatives to be included as part of the discussion):
 - Staff wellbeing;
 - Communications – how cascading to all staff happened;
 - How we can support being a green council (transport plans/ climate emergency element of the action plan and impact on workforce);
 - Senior Leadership – seek action plan to improve those areas
6. that the Chair sends out a communication to staff thanking them for their input in the Big Listen staff survey.

38. **Finance and Capital Monitoring Report - Month 6 (to include a focus on the Children's budget)**

Councillor Carlyle (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Children and Young People), David Northey (Interim Section 151 Officer) and Jane Anstis (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) were in attendance at the meeting – it was highlighted that the information had been published alongside the agenda therefore the item moved straight to questions.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (a) in the Finance and Capital Monitoring Report month 6, it set out the gross budget, the forecast and the net variance for month 6 to the end of the year which was £2.217m; the slide in the pack detailed what the pressures in month 6 were, the areas of concern and the drivers including SEND, transport, placements. There were already plans in place for mitigation, therefore it was now to consider how those plans were progressing;
- (b) the sum of £500k identified in the report as ‘partner income’ was put down as a mitigation and conversations had started with partners. Officers were talking to the ICB regarding their overall agreement with the Council and had discussed that rather than the current process which included a child hitting a trigger point and the ICB agreeing to support a specific percentage of the cost, it was hoped that changes were made to the overall agreement in that an average was taken over a set period of time and the sum of money provided to the Council allowing officers to work within a set budget target and agreed envelope of funding. Officers had written to the ICB and they had released £829k;
- (c) negotiations with the ICB had started and help was welcomed from any forum in order to expedite conversations and change the way in the process was currently working;
- (d) the Council had 12 social workers due to start in February 2023 – it was considered that agency cost and bespoke placements made up a significant amount of the cost in the department and caused the most budgetary pressures. The introduction of the 12 social workers would encourage a greater saving;

- (e) the numbers for looked after children were starting to fall overall – there had been a recent slight increase however the numbers were starting to decrease. Bespoke placements had also started to reduce and were currently at one down from three. These placements held the greatest costs for the Council;
- (f) the SEND budget was set at £3.1m with a deficit of £0.284; it was considered that the pressure on this part of the budget was due to short breaks. It was highlighted that the Council aimed to continue to offer these services and wanted to prioritise looked after children;
- (g) the number of children with SEND had not increased; Councillor Carlyle had been provided with updated figures and agreed to provide a written response to Members outlining the updated information on the figures and budget;
- (h) the Council had recently created a new interim post to specifically focus upon: the cohort of young people that were in unregulated bespoke care arrangements, the high complexity children in care in residential settings, and to manage the children in avoidable care admission numbers in the older age group;
- (i) the Cabinet Member apologised that her announcement of the creation of the 12 new social workers was not included in the paperwork provided to Members and it was highlighted that this might be because it wasn't due to take place until February 2023. Under this item the Interim Section 151 Officer confirmed that work was being done on next years' budget and invest to save initiatives to drive out savings;
- (j) bespoke arrangements were care arrangements and were emergency, interim and unplanned where children and young people should be in registered settings but largely through a combination of their exceptional complexity and high needs and the availability and high demand in the system, were brought into the care of the Council; they were high cost as special care was needed to have a high level of support. They may need several staff to mitigate the risk for caring of these children outside of a residential setting;
- (k) the Council had started putting in place plans to stop using bespoke arrangements and also worked to make the foster carers allowance and package more attractive in order to realise savings; it was considered that an additional 30 foster carers would have huge benefits and should be achievable in the future;
- (l) the housing crisis was affecting care leavers and the supported living placements; a meeting had recently taken place with the Cabinet Member and some children and young people to talk about their concerns. An approach was to be made to the Planning Committee by the Cabinet Member to establish if when people apply for planning permission there was something that could be done for care leavers;

- (m) part of the mitigation around supported living placements was to work with officers in housing to work towards solutions; housing pressures were a strong driver in increases in supported living. Conversations were ongoing and this was an issue that required support and input from several sections of the Council;
- (n) the number of young people in care that had been housed through independent housing in the past two months was not known but would be provided to Members;
- (o) officers agreed to submit a mitigations sheet (working document) to all future scrutiny meetings detailing an update on children's services and progress made on the budget and pressures;
- (p) home to school transport was a budgetary issue; money had been saved in this area as a result of a review on children that required transport however because of extra fuel costs, the cost of living crisis and the need for additional taxi drivers, this was still an area of concern.

The Committee agreed:

1. to provide Members with a written response outlining the updated information on the figures and budget associated with children and young people with SEND;
2. to provide Members with a written response on the number of young people in care that had been housed through independent housing in the past two months;
3. that a mitigations sheet (working document) would be provided to all future Performance, Finance and Customer Focus scrutiny meetings detailing an update on children's services and progress made on the budget and pressures;
4. to refer the following items to the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel for further scrutiny: mitigation and weaknesses surrounding partner income (£500k identified), action plan to reduce agency spend, housing pressures and what being done to ensure housing is provided, bespoke arrangements, home to school transport and the action plan for the red rag performance rating associated with children with multiple child protection plans;
5. recommend that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People actively intervenes in the conversations with partners around the processes in place for partner income, in a timely manner, to ensure a good outcome is achieved for the Council and children and young people affected;
6. to note the Finance and Capital Monitoring Report – Month 6 and childrens budget update.

39. **Elections Bill Implications**

The Chair advised Members that the Government had confirmed that the Elections Act was to be introduced in time for the May 2023 elections; the Head of Electoral Services would be present at the 14 December 2022 Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in order to provide an update. It was acknowledged that the elections team would be busy planning and working to elections deadlines however it was considered that the Elections Act update could not feasibly be moved to the panel's next scheduled meeting in February as it would be too late to scrutinise this issue prior to the May 2023 elections.

A request was made for the link to the statutory instruments to be provided to Members.

40. **Bereavement Services Update - To Follow**

The Chair introduced the Bereavement Services Update item and advised that a brief paper had been provided. It was highlighted that this item had been initially scheduled as a standing item on the panel's agendas due to concerns with the new provision, however the executive board had since been set up and the report detailed that things were running to time. It was proposed that the Bereavement Services Update was no longer a standing item on the scrutiny agenda and that instead an update would be provided in six months' time with a detailed report upon the transition to opening and the future of the Western Mill and Efford sites.

In response to a question raised it was reported by the Chair that the panel had scrutinised costs, timings, the contract, the accountability of Cabinet Members, the cross party approach, and were therefore satisfied that the crematorium project was no longer escalating – this was further satisfied by the contact for the project having been finalised.

The Committee agreed that the Bereavement Services Update would no longer be a standing item on the panel's work programme, and that a detailed report would be provided to scrutiny in six months' time upon the transition to opening and the future of the Western Mill and Efford sites.

41. **Leisure Services Update - To Follow**

This item was not discussed in part I.

42. **Work Programme**

The Chair introduced the work programme item and highlighted the following:

- that the digital transformation and inclusion item should be included with the Customer Services Strategy update;

- that the recommendations from the Armed Forces Covenant would be presented to a future scrutiny panel for sign off;
- that Equality and Diversity would be scheduled for the February meeting and would focus upon hate crime;
- the aim was to efficiently timetable remaining items on the work programme where possible in order to prevent too many items being scheduled for the new municipal year.

43. **Tracking Decisions**

The Chair highlighted to Members that all recommendations and actions from previous meetings (except for one) had now been provided and greyed out as complete on the document. The Democratic Advisor was thanked for her work in sourcing and communicating responses to Members.

Under this item the amount and frequency of 'to follow' papers was raised by Members as well as the challenges experienced in accessing the information, especially when reports were restricted.

The committee agreed that the Chair would write to the Chief Executive expressing the concerns of the Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Panel regarding the amount and frequency of 'to follow' papers.

44. **Exempt Business**

Agreed that under Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

45. **Bereavement Services Update - To Follow**

The Bereavement Services Update was not discussed by Members.

46. **Leisure Services Update - To Follow**

The Leisure Services Update was discussed by Members.