



MINUTES

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16:30 to 18:45

6 September 2012

Present: Cllrs Stephenson (Chair), Bradford, Brimblecombe, Button, Galvin, Gee, Lubbock, Manning, Rogers, Sands (M), Stonard, Storie

Apologies: Cllrs Lay and Manning

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2012

2. TENANT SCRUTINY PANELS

Terry Adkins, Chair of the Norwich Tenants Citywide Board, and the head of housing gave a presentation to the committee on the new social housing regulation for tenant engagement and scrutiny. This was an opportunity for the scrutiny committee to gain an understanding of the proposals for revising the current Norwich city council tenant's involvement structure to ensure compliance to the regulation for tenant engagement and scrutiny.

The presentation outlined the new approach that was focussed on the tenants being more enabled to influence the service they received. There were changes to the Ombudsman service and the way in which tenants had a role in scrutinising the housing provider's performance. Now, the landlords were accountable to tenants and not a regulatory body.

Members were informed of the different ways in which tenants of Norwich city council housing already scrutinised the housing service through engagement. This was done by; focus groups, local events, patch panels, service area pit stops, tenant tick, the annual report to tenants, complaints and performance score cards.

An overview of the tenant involvement framework was provided and it was explained that there were three levels of tenant participation; strategic which involved members and the executive, citywide which involved tenant panels, and local which involved individuals and groups. Along with this there was also resident leaseholder involvement.

In response to member questions, the head of housing felt that the role for the council's scrutiny committee remained as being that of having oversight by the examining of performance monitoring reports and there was also the option of looking at the annual report to tenants. There may also be a future role in the occasional focus of the effectiveness of the tenant involvement process.

RESOLVED to recommend that the

- a) participation of tenants be welcomed
- b) council be encouraged to promote; common standards between housing associations and the council that promote best practice for involvement of and outcomes for tenants
- c) council continuously shares learning and comparison with other authorities
- d) while working as an independent entity, tenant scrutiny be made aware that they are able to contact and liaise with the council scrutiny committee if necessary
- e) scrutiny committee of the council carry out its role by;
 - 1. performance monitoring
 - 2. receiving the annual report and that this be presented by the tenant reps
 - 3. receiving the annual review

3. WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered a report from the head of city development services regarding a request for scrutiny committee to include on to its work programme an item that looked into the issue of street and gully cleaning on Gladstone Street.

The committee noted that as a result of the Pitt Review that came about following serious flooding elsewhere in the UK in 2007, coordination and planning should now improve. Out of the review, the county council was now designated as the lead local flood authority (LLFA). Part of the LLFA's role was to develop, maintain, apply and monitor a local flood risk management strategy. Now that the LLFA was in operation, all relevant agencies were able to work under one coordinated approach towards advising and looking to solving issues around the county and in Norwich.

The head of city development services explained that the gullies were now cleaned on a more regular basis on Gladstone Street, along with the adjacent streets. Earlier this summer there were some periods of intensive rainfall. Despite this, there had not been any reporting to officers of flooding.

In considering whether or not to place this item on to the committee's work programme, members took account of the roles and responsibilities of the council and partners such as the Environment Agency and Anglia Water.

It was felt that as a result of the discussion and report that was circulated to members the council should organise a meeting with concerned residents to go through the issues. Members were concerned that a matter such as this had become a matter for scrutiny consideration and that it was not adequately acted upon before-hand.

RESOLVED that :-

- a) the Head of citywide services involve and advise the relevant ward councillors in any process towards resolving the issues on Gladstone Street.
- b) the Head of citywide services set up a meeting with residents in the area to talk about the issue and to invite the county council and Anglia Water to attend along with officers of Norwich city council.
- c) the work programme be noted and that there be an extra meeting in December of the scrutiny committee to pre scrutinise the report on the draft proposals regarding a new council tax benefit scheme.
- d) the October 11 meeting of the scrutiny committee commence at 4:00 pm to accommodate an equalities training session for members on the rising of the meeting.

4. QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The policy and performance manager presented the report which covered the period April to June 2012. He outlined the key performance indicators and targets and answered members' questions. This was the first time that the quarterly performance data had been presented to the scrutiny committee alongside the budget monitoring information for the same period. The finance control manager went through the budget information with members.

In response to members' questions, with regards to housing benefit claims, the revenues & benefits manager explained that officers were committed to addressing the current backlog, which had been caused by officer absence and increased demand. Members raised concerns that the backlog had occurred even though risk assessments and contingency plans had been considered. The revenues & benefits manager stated that although there had been a rise in the time taken to deal with new claims, the team was still on target for reducing the time taken in processing benefit claims from the current level of 40.59 days to 21 days by January 2013. The reason for the rise in time taken was presently due to the effect of the time taken to deal with the backlog. With the reduction of the backlog, more resource would be available for dealing with current claims.

Prior to the meeting members had submitted questions to officers regarding the performance data. Those questions and the officer responses are attached to these minutes for information.

Discussion took place around the level of information provided by the report and the possibilities that may exist for the provision of historical context in future reports.

RESOLVED that

- a) the November meeting of the scrutiny committee receives a report from the revenues & benefits manager on the processes involved in dealing with benefits claims and the claims backlog.
- b) officers consider ways in which members can consider historical performance data that would be helpful in relevant in the monitoring of the current performance targets.

CHAIR

**Answers to questions submitted by Scrutiny committee members on the
quarter one performance report 2012/13**

- 1) Could a complete description of each of the indicators be made available (ideally online)?**

A description of the council's priorities, actions and measures is included within the corporate plan. A hyperlink to the corporate plan is included on the front page of the performance report, as requested by scrutiny committee. As explained in response to question 2 a document explaining how each of the performance measures is calculated has been circulated to scrutiny committee members as requested.

- 2) Following on from this, an explanation of how the indicators are measured, and the data sets and other information sources that are used to derive the measurements and performance against target?**

A document explaining this has been circulated to scrutiny committee members.

- 3) Could links to the information be sent as opposed to a paper copy/attachment?**

In future an email will be sent to scrutiny committee members with a link to the performance report on e-councillor rather than as an attachment.

- 4) The performance data are only meaningful in context, so could the data for the past two years (links to it) be provided where it exists?**

The new quarterly performance report template was discussed with scrutiny committee when it was in draft form and changes suggested and agreed. For each of the performance measures there is an arrow showing the performance trend from the previous quarter and this approach was welcomed by scrutiny committee. If scrutiny committee members would now like to see data for the previous two years this will require the performance report to be completely redesigned. There are also limits to how meaningful this will be, partly because many of the measures are new, but even where the measures are not new, due to the changing environment the council operates in (due to socio- economic changes affecting demand, policy and legislative changes, financial changes and changes in approach by other public sector organisations) comparing data from two years ago with current data may not provide a very accurate comparison. However, if scrutiny committee would like to see comparisons with historic data it would be suggested that with the fourth quarter's performance report each year an additional annex is provided showing annual performance against the previous two years (where this data exists).

- 5) SCC2: The target is listed as 50% in the corporate plan, but listed as 42% in the performance report. What is the reason for the decrease in the target, and how was this decided?**

The current performance is approx 40%. The target of 50% is for the end of the financial year. Therefore a target for each quarter has been set. The first quarter target was 42%, the second quarter 45% and the third quarter 47%. The target has not been decreased.

- 6) **SCC2: There has been considerable resource put into improving recycling rates, however the figure is slightly down compared to this quarter last year (39.9% compared to 39.51%). Has analysis been carried out to identify areas for improvement and measures most likely to increase the percentage recycled or composted?**

This is part of the work being carried out by the waste & recycling officers. As part of the door knocking and the recycling and waste survey, information is being gathered about why people do not take part in the recycling services offered. Once this is complete areas for improvement will be identified. This will be reported back to members through the Sustainable Development Panel.

- 7) **SCC3: Recycling and waste web survey – was any advice taken (e.g. from WRAP) in the survey design? Will there be surveys also carried out face to face e.g. by the doorknocking teams? How will the results be collated and disseminated? How are the web survey results going to be used? Will other data be gathered and used to improve participation and diversion rates (and used to take decisions on how to allocate resources)?**

The survey was developed with the waste and recycling officers and the communications team. It is a series of 8 questions designed to highlight the major barriers to recycling. As part of their work information is gathered by the door knockers as to why people do not recycle. The results will be collated and disseminated through reports to the Sustainable Development Panel. The reports will identify where improvements can be made both in terms of service delivery and where there are opportunities to extend the service. This forms part of an overall work plan as reported to Cabinet in October 2011.

- 8) **SCC6: Fatalities and serious injuries – roads: Can reasons for the decrease be identified and applied to bring about further improvements? What progress has been made or plans in place to introduce 20mph zones in residential areas? Given that this statistic relates to ‘random, rare events’, it would be useful to see it set in context of overall road safety and efforts to improve safety and access for all road users (such as bicyclists)?**

The indicator covers a rolling twelve month period and for each quarter it is for the previous twelve months. The council has worked together with the county council for many years to identify accident cluster sites and introduce engineering improvements to reduce the number and severity of casualties in the city. Alongside road safety education and enforcement, this has seen the number of people killed and seriously injured on the city's roads fall from 120 p.a. in 1994 to 44 in the 12 months to July 2012. The figure for Q1 is 38, but the latest figures are within the tolerances that we would expect; the trend continues to be downward.

There has also been a downward trend in the number of slight casualties as well (which together with killed and seriously injured casualties make the total number of casualties). In 1994 there were 527 slight casualties p.a. whereas this had reduced to 348 in the 12 months to July 2012.

In the past considerable progress has been made through low cost engineering measures to improve road safety. Whilst it is still feasible to bring forward such schemes, with much lower accident rates the low cost route is increasingly difficult.

For this reason schemes tend to be more expensive and may be introduced to resolve a number of issues. The most recent such scheme was the St Augustine's gyratory which addressed the significant accident problem at the Aylsham Road / St Augustine's / Magpie Road junction, as well as air quality issues and regeneration needs.

At present there is a particular focus on road safety education, especially the most vulnerable groups: young drivers aged 17 to 24, those over 75s and powered two wheeler riders.

The vast majority of casualties including killed and seriously injured casualties occur on the main road network (A, B & C roads) and therefore the effect of introducing 20 mph speed limits in residential areas on casualty rates will be limited (although there are other reasons why a 20mph speed limit would be of value to a local community including to help encourage walking and cycling and improve 'liveability'). Officers continue to look at ways of funding the implementation of 20 mph speed limits, but with an estimated cost of around several hundred thousand pounds no budget has yet been identified. There had been a hope that changes in legislation would reduce the cost of installing the speed limits, although a recent consultation undertaken by the Department for Transport (DfT) did not offer any indication of this. The Department's consultation closes at the beginning of October and officers will bring a report on the way forward to Members of Norwich Highways Agency Committee once the DfT's position is clear

- 9) **PRC7: The fact that the yearly target of 50 has already been exceeded perhaps suggests that the target may have been set too low. How was the target set initially (e.g.as a result of benchmarking)? Will the target be revised (upward) for this year?**

The nature of this work means that performance will naturally fluctuate during the year as different programmes are undertaken to encourage households to take advantage of the measures and grants available to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. We have been very successful at this work during the first quarter of 2012/13. However, the government funding streams that have supported this work are being replaced by the green deal and it is not yet clear how attractive this will be to households in the future. Nevertheless, we plan to review this target at the end of the year with the potential to recommend to council as part of them agreeing the policy framework (corporate plan) for 2013/14 an increase in this target for next year.

- 10) **PRC6: Does the performance plan include a risk assessment and mitigation strategy? Bearing in mind knock on effects from delays (including impact on other indicators such as avoidable contact) will target be revised downward from 21 days? The average number of days to process has been increasing on the whole since 2010/11.**

The average number of days to assess a new claim has been steadily increasing since 2011. The national average has also increased from 23 to 24 days between 2010 and 2011. The target of 21 days was set in April 2012 and the expectation is that once the backlog is cleared this is an achievable target. The current backlog

of outstanding work is monitored closely. Risks and mitigations are routinely discussed at the weekly Norwich Revenues and Benefits Improvement Board.

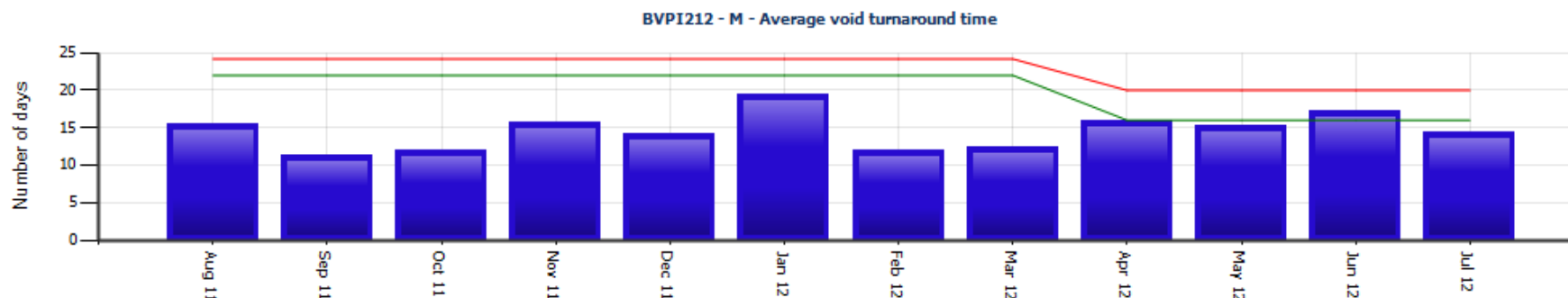
11) DHA1: The average time to re-let is increasing over time, have reasons for this been identified and are there plans to proactively address this?

The performance report records performance for the first quarter at 16.8 days which is just above target. Taking a slightly longer term view the Council have relet 443 voids since April and the average voids relet is 15 days for August and 16 days year to date. The target is 16 days. This year we have seen our voids performance under 16 days, with only one month over at 17 days.

This exceptional performance is a significant improvement from previous years when we were averaging 30 plus days and is top quartile performance. The voids are expertly managed from termination of tenancy through to reletting by a dedicated team who work pro-actively with the out going tenants, the contractors, home options and the in coming tenants to ensure a quick turnaround, at minimum cost and we have a 90% satisfaction rate from tenants.

Our outstanding achievement has also been noticed nationally. We have the most improved performance of retained stock on average relet times and we have been invited to share our success with peers at the Housemark stock retain performance improvement club in September.

We expect variations to our voids targets as we include all day to day voids and often harder to let sheltered voids in our figures and the age of our stock does mean some properties need extensive works. However, the voids team carry out pre-inspections and work closely with the contactors and we continue to successfully minimise the turn around times. As always we monitor outcomes and look to improve our performance by reviewing trends



12) VMS2: Resident satisfaction: What steps are being taken to address what are the factors influencing this?

As explained in the report, a number of factors have affected the score including the backlog in processing housing and council tax benefits, changes to contracts (e.g. repairs and maintenance) and customer expectations being very high. There is a range of work being progressed to address this such as the benefits improvement plan.

We believe the drop in performance around satisfaction is also partly due to using new software for this quarter that is a module within our integrated customer contact system and it does calculate satisfaction slightly differently from previous methodology which could explain some of the difference but not all of it. We are talking to the supplier to understand the details and also looking to see if in fact this is the best tool for this type of survey.

13) VMS3: What steps are being taken to address this gap? Are there related performance improvement plans?

This measure is an overarching measure that relates to how many of all the other performance measures are on target. As such, the improvement work will be focused on those measures which will then result in this overarching measure improving.

14) VMS5: Avoidable contact – has analysis been carried out to identify the causes for the avoidable contact? Are there specific mitigation strategies in place?

We analyse the data captured each month and ensure that it is available for service areas to work together to understand the reasons and put in place improvements to reduce the contact.

Due to a number of factors we are reviewing our process for capturing avoidable contact in order to ensure that the accuracy and validity of the data being captured is providing an accurate picture and is in fact a timely process that best understands and captures the customer experience.

15) VMS7: Which aspects of the framework are not being achieved?

The achieving level of the equality framework can only be achieved through a peer assessment which is scheduled for next year. The council has all the key policies, procedures and processes either already in place or in the process of being refreshed/ updated. We are now working on ensuring that these are fully embedded throughout the organisation and gathering examples and evidence for the peer assessment next year. One area that could potentially be perceived as an area for further work in regards to the achieving level relates to the scrutiny committee's direct involvement in equalities work (the scrutiny committee have voted against putting the council's equality strategy and action plan on their work programme previously). However, it is proposed that the next training session for scrutiny committee will be on the equalities act and the council's approach to impact assessments. Principally this will help scrutiny committee when looking at the equalities impacts of different policies and issues as part of their wider work programme. However it should also help to demonstrate direct involvement with the council's equality strategy in regards to the achieving level framework.

16) PRC6 Benefit delays - why has the time taken to process benefit claims risen to 40.59 days?

As set out in the report, despite considerable work to improve performance in this area average processing times have increased due to the combined effect of older claims being processed increasing average times, an increasing workload for the service and the implementation of a new process by the Department of Work and Pensions which should help to prevent overpayments but has drawn resource as the new way of working is put in place. Work

continues to address these issues and a performance improvement plan is in place (which has been circulated to scrutiny committee members).

- 17) Perhaps the scrutiny committee could be presented with further information about the indicators as it is not always clear what each indicator means and how it is measured.**

A document explaining this has been circulated to scrutiny committee members as explained in response to question 2.

- 18) Would it be possible to have data for past years where that data exists?**

Please see answer to question 4.