

## OVERVIEW PANEL

27 September 2021

**Commenced:** 14:00

**Terminated:** 15:00

**Present:** Councillors Naylor, Costello, Glover, Kitchen, Owen, Sharif and Warrington

**In Attendance:** Sandra Stewart      Director of Governance and Pensions  
Julie Speakman      Head of Executive Support  
Simon Brunet      Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillors Boyle, Fairfoull, Fitzpatrick, Ryan and Smith

### 8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### 9. MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview Panel meeting on the 26 July 2021 were approved as a correct record.

### 10. SCRUTINY - DESKTOP REVIEW ON HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Pensions / Assistant Director for Policy, Performance and Communications. The report summarised and gave an insight of publications and research, which aimed to highlighted current and projected pressures for local authorities regarding access to quality housing and the impact of Covid-19 on demand for statutory homelessness.

Members were advised of the recent publications, research and findings that were publically available from the following sources:

- Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Crisis
- Shelter
- National Housing Federation
- Local Government Association
- UK Collaborative for Housing Evidence
- Centre for Ageing Better

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence reported that as a desktop review to inform the Executive of key issues, Scrutiny requested a service response to the impacts of Covid-19 on homelessness and the effects of recent changes to safeguarding measures for residents at risk of eviction, to include updated data and insight on demand for housing support.

It was explained that future challenges associated with Covid-19 had potential to be profound and far-reaching for the resilience of households and communities. This related to a range of expected and delayed external factors such as uncertainty of future employment, housing, education and timely access to healthcare and support. Covid-19 had applied added pressure to people on low income and those paying disproportionately high housing costs.

The Head of Policy, performance and Intelligence highlighted that there was a growing need for on-going assessment and earlier identification of households at risk of eviction; and to mitigate known inequalities and range of almost predetermined outcomes for vulnerable residents.

Members of the Panel discussed the scope of the review and requested that the publications and research referenced in the report be shared with the Panel.

## **RESOLVED**

- (i) That the Overview Panel agree that subject to any further comments the report be shared with the relevant Executive Member for information and to inform future strategy and service delivery where necessary.**
- (ii) That Scrutiny receive a service response to the impacts of Covid-19 to homelessness and the effects of recent changes to safeguarding measures for residents at risk of eviction.**

## **11. SCRUTINY UPDATE**

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Pensions / Assistant Director for Policy, Performance and Communications. The report provided a summary of the work undertaken by the Councils two Scrutiny Panels for July to September 2021.

Members were advised that the Place and External Relations Panel and the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Panel had both held two meetings since the last Overview Panel meeting.

It was reported that on the 27 July 2021 the Place and External Relations Panel met with the Executive Member for Finance and Economic Growth, the Director of Growth and the Economic Growth Lead to receive an update and overview of the economic impact of Covid-19 the response, recovery and future priorities. Within the same meeting of the Panel a Working Group was established to review the Council's Management Framework and Policy.

In regards to the meeting of the Place and External Relations Panel on the 7 September 2021 the Panel met the Executive Member for Lifelong Learning, Equalities, Culture and Heritage, Assistant Director, Operations and Neighbourhoods and the Head of Cultural and Customer Services, to receive an update regarding the Council's cultural offer and strategy.

The Panel also met with the Executive Member for Finance and Economic Growth, Assistant Director of Finance and Director of Finance to receive an update on the 2021/22 budget.

Members of the Panel heard that at the meeting of the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Panel on the 29 July 2021 the Panel met with the Deputy Executive Leader and the Director of Children's Services to receive an update on outcomes from the recent Ofsted Focused Visit. The Panel also agreed that a Working Group should be established to review mental health provision and impacts of Covid-19.

It was stated that at the meeting of the Integrated Care and Wellbeing Panel on the 9 September 2021 the Panel met with the Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health, Director of Commissioning, Head of Mental Health and Pennine Care to receive an update regarding the accessibility of local mental health services and responding to impacts of Covid-19 with regard to demand pressures and ongoing support for residents. I

In addition the Panel received an update from the Assistant Director of Finance on the 2021/22 budget and looking ahead.

Members were advised that in regards to training and development a training session for all Scrutiny members last took place in September. In order to account for the time that had passed,

panel members that were new to the Council and/or Scrutiny since 2018 had received an invitation to attend a training session on 4 October 2021.

## **RESOLVED**

**That the Overview Panel note the report.**

### **12. UNDERSTANDING OUR CUSTOMER CONTACTS AND LEARNING FROM OUR COMPLAINTS, INFORMATION AND DATA REQUESTS**

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Pensions / Head of Executive Support. The report provided an update and strategic overview in relation to dealing with and responding to customer contacts. The report also provided a summary of complaints received by the organisation, information and data requests made to the local authority under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and outlined the future work of the Information and Improvement Team and how they could help drive system improvement, working alongside the Budget Turnaround Team.

Members were advised that in recognising the ongoing pressures of the organisations, need to build in capacity and ensuring there was an overarching view of this area of work it was determined that like for like tasks would be brought together into a central function. Wholly managed under the umbrella of the Executive Support Service, under the arm of the Information and Improvement Team. The organisation also agreed investment for the procurement of a new information casework system following the withdrawal of the internal CRM system in 2016 due to security compliance.

It was reported that the iCasework system was implemented by the Council and Tameside and Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group in June 2020. Although the system has been live for over a year, the service impacts of responding to the Covid pandemic had caused some delays in bringing forward information and learning reports for which this is the first. The iCasework complaints and information case management system was implemented and went live within the organisation on 15 June 2020.

Members were presented with a breakdown of Case Volumes, it was highlighted that there had been a year on year increase in the number of complaints and requests. In addition there had been 3,645 enquiries through the case management system from 1 January 2021 to the 31 May 2021.

It was explained that in regards to Complaints and Customer Care, there were three distinct areas in terms of the Council's complaints process that customers could access; these were the statutory processes for a) Children's Social Care,(Stage 1, 2 and 3 process) Adults Social Care and the corporate complaints(Stage1 and 2 process) relating to issues regarding to any other council wide service. In addition for any customer that remained dissatisfied in the handling or response to their council complaint then they could escalate their concerns to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) who were independent from the council and investigate complaints and maladministration.

It was stated that the Customer Service Excellence Standard that the local authority had held for over 15 years was pivotal to the way the Council delivered services to high standards.

Members heard that from the time that the data was input /managed through the system, for the period 15 June 2020 – 31 May 2021 (quarter end), the organisation had received and processed a total of 1,254 complaints of which 1036 Stage 1, 211 Stage 2, and 7 Stage 3. It was state that high volumes of complaints received, did not necessarily indicate the quality of the council's performance. High volumes of complaints could be a sign that the Council was an open organisation and complaints could act as an early warning of wider problems developing.

The Head of Executive Support highlighted that over the last 12 months a step change in the number and type of contacts made to the organisation had been seen. Not only were staff across the organisation dealing with high volume of contacts not just in Customer Care and Complaints, but also in other areas like the Call Centre, many of these contacts could be very challenging due to the complexity of the demand and at times could be abusive in nature. It was unclear if these challenges could be part attributed because of the Covid pandemic.

In relation to complain root causes the top 3 themes that could be seen coming through across the organisations were :

- a) Failure or delay in doing something
- b) Failure or delay in communication
- c) Inappropriate behaviour/staff conduct

It was stated that the data that was held within the system would identify the specific issues that would help to inform service improvement and where additional staff training could be required across specific areas.

Members were advised that the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) was the final stage for complaints about councils and some other authorities and organisations, including education admissions appeal panels and adult social care providers. Attached to the report at Appendix A was information published by the Ombudsman on the complaints and enquiries received published in July, which detailed individual local authorities and the decisions. The Annual Letter for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 would be reported to Overview in September 2021.

The Head of Executive Support reported that since the digital system for the central recording Compliments and Suggestions had gone live on the 15 June 2020 there had been 134 compliments logged and 78 suggestions. Examples of some of the compliments and suggestions could be found attached to the report at Appendix B.

Members heard that the information and data requests that the organisation receive were valuable insight tools as to what data was important to our customers. During 2020 the organisation received 1260 Freedom of Information Requests and from 1 January 2021 to date the Council had received 730. Of the requests received for last year and on average 82% of requests were responded to on time within the 20 working day statutory timescales.

In regards to next steps the work of the team going forward was to use the information and data from within the system to work with service areas at looking at what information and data was already published in the public domain, via the organisations' Publication Scheme. The team would also be looking at areas of improvement to service web pages to further enhance the publically available data published. Further, in relation to complaints and other service requests the outputs from the reports including root cause analysis would help identify service areas where system process reengineering support could be of assistance or where staff training in particular areas of service delivery may be warranted.

## **RESOLVED**

- (i) That the Overview Panel note the content of the update and strategic overview of complaint system/process**
- (ii) That the Overview Panel support the refreshed training offer being promoted across the organisations; and**
- (iii) receive further more detailed reports in relation to the top 5 key areas of complaints.**

## **13. URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

**CHAIR**