

To: Cabinet

Date: 11 November 2020

Report of: Finance and Performance Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Title of Report: Performance Monitoring 2020/21 Q1

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Finance and Performance Panel recommendations concerning Performance Monitoring 2020/21 Q1
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor James Fry, Chair of the Finance and Performance Panel
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management. Response referred to Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet member for Customer Focused Services
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020 - 24
Recommendation: That Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations made in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 29 September 2020, the Finance and Performance Panel considered a Performance Monitoring Report for 2020/21 Q1. This report details the Council's delivery against a number of Scrutiny-selected performance measures.
2. The Panel would like to thank Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement, and Liz Godin, Corporate Governance Manager, for compiling the report and

supporting the meeting, and Rachel Heap, Corporate Governance Officer for helping to compile the report also.

Summary

3. Owing to the effects of the pandemic, a number of changes have been made to the performance measures monitored by Scrutiny. For the current civic year, Scrutiny has not selected its normal suite of corporate and service-level measures. Instead, the measures from the previous year have been rolled over. Due to the uncertainty surrounding targets in light of Covid, no new targets have been set but rather previous years' targets have also been rolled over. Those measures completely undermined by Covid – the number of people using the Council's leisure centres, for example – have been removed.
4. Given the provisional nature of the targets themselves, discussion by the Panel over the various results against those targets was fairly general. However, with initial work to develop corporate and service-level measures and targets for next civic year due to start shortly, the Finance and Performance Panel suggests that measure CH001 (days lost to sickness) might be usefully amended and supplemented to provide clearer feedback on its two primary areas of relevance: the Council's support for the health and wellbeing of its staff, and also the Council's overall capacity.

Health and Wellbeing

5. Sickness figures are a useful barometer of staff health and wellbeing. Workplace accidents, back problems and repetitive strain injuries, and stress or other mental health conditions are common causes of absence from work due to sickness. Organisations with high rates of sickness are liable to have systemic issues around the environment in which their employees work or the way their jobs are done. Such issues lead to the higher incidences of sickness, which can lead to long periods of absence. High rates of short-term absence, however, are also problematic, being particularly disruptive for those staff having to provide cover, as well as possibly suggesting low rates of motivation or troubles with work by those absent.
6. Recognising its importance, the Panel is supportive of monitoring staff sickness. However, given that short and long term sickness are very different in nature, pointing to different problems and requiring very different management and types of intervention, the Panel considers that splitting out, setting and monitoring targets for short and long term sickness absence would enable the Council to pick up on changes more quickly and efficiently. This is particularly the case for short-term illness, where long term absences have the capacity to obscure or drown out significant changes in short-term absence levels.

Recommendation 1: That in the setting of its corporate performance measures for next year, the Council introduces targets for short and long-term sickness levels.

Measuring Productivity

7. In addition to what they say about staff health and wellbeing, sickness rates can also be used as an inverse proxy for productivity and overall organisational capacity. The more days staff are in the office, the more capacity there is to do the work the Council requires. With almost all staff working from home presently, and the possibility that numbers will remain elevated compared to pre-pandemic levels, the Panel questions whether in this new environment the link between being at work and output will remain as useful as it has in the past.
8. The office is designed to provide an environment conducive to productive working. On the other hand, not every home environment can be modified to reach that same level. Insufficient desk space, slow or intermittent internet connection, lack of printing facilities, or the presence of young children or other dependants are all examples of the sorts of issues that might impair a staff member's productivity, possibly significantly. With staff homeworking environments differing so markedly in the amount of support they provide to productivity, the Panel feels that the simple measurement of whether or not someone is working may be a rather blunt measure of whether there is sufficient capacity to cover the work required. It has no specific suggestion of an alternative, but simply wishes to raise the issue and recommend that alternative measures of productivity and sufficiency of staffing be considered when new targets are set.

Recommendation 2: That the Council investigates ways of measuring and monitoring productivity which take homeworking and the variable suitability of homeworking environments into account.

Further Consideration

9. The Panel is scheduled to hear quarterly updates on its suite of performance measures for the remainder of the civic year.

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Cabinet response to recommendations of the Finance and Performance Panel made on 29/09/2020 concerning the Performance Monitoring 2020/21 Q1 report

Provided by Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services, Councillor Nigel Chapman

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That in the setting of its corporate performance measures for next year, the Council introduces targets for short and long-term sickness levels.	Partially	Whilst it is clearly important to monitor long and short term absence and manage it effectively and persistently, It is not considered that introducing individual <u>targets</u> for long and short term absence would be realistic or help to manage absence. Numbers of long term cases can vary and are unpredictable. It is however proposed that there is regular <u>reporting and monitoring</u> of absence, split by long and short term absence, which would help to identify patterns or trends. It would also be useful to report on COVID and non-COVID related absences to see if the former drives up overall sickness levels.
2) That the Council investigates ways of measuring and monitoring productivity which take homeworking and the variable suitability of homeworking environments into account.	Not agreed	This is already in hand. One of the first actions arising from the recently developed People Strategy is to ensure that managers are well equipped to manage staff in a remote environment. This involves ensuring staff health and wellbeing, guarding against feelings of isolation from colleagues, managing performance and supporting staff with relevant training and equipment. There is an existing management and appraisal process in operation, which in effect monitors how productive staff are and will capture evidence of any drop in / increase in productive work as a result of more home based working. All of this is to ensure effective service delivery and meeting of Council objectives.