
Meeting: Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 17 October 2011
Subject: Quarter 1 Performance Report
Report of: Cllr Maurice Jones, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources
Summary: The report highlights Quarter 1 performance 2011/12 for the Corporate Health indicators recorded by Corporate Services - Resources and Corporate Services - People and Organisation.

Advising Officer: Richard Carr, Chief Executive
Contact Officer: Elaine Malarky, Head of Programme and Performance
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The quarterly performance report underpins the delivery of all Council priorities.

Financial:

None directly but there are a number of performance indicators within the corporate suite that have a strong financial link, including: Council Tax collected; Amount of debt outstanding; Undisputed invoices paid within 30 days; and Time taken to process benefits and change events.

Legal:

None

Risk Management:

Areas of ongoing underperformance are a risk to both service delivery and the reputation of the Council.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

The corporate performance suite includes indicators on sickness absence within the Council and the number of agency staff being used.

Equalities/Human Rights:

This report highlights performance in respect of how the Council and its services impact across all communities within Central Bedfordshire, so that specific areas of underperformance can be highlighted for further analysis/drilling down as necessary.

Community Safety:

None

Sustainability:

No direct implications.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the overall improvement made against this set of indicators and considers any issues from this report that could form part of their work programme.

1. Overall performance against the corporate data set demonstrates that Council services continue to be supported by strong management decisions and that appropriate actions are being taken to remedy challenging performance issues.
2. For the first time, Appendix A has a cover sheet providing an overview of performance for each of the indicators in the corporate set considered by this Committee. During quarter 1 2011/12, it has been possible to RAG score five of the seven Corporate Services indicators. Two are green, two are amber and improving and one is red and improving. The remaining two not been scored, either because no target has been set or the nature of the indicator means it is not suitable to score in this way. Wherever possible and appropriate, the cover sheet also shows the direction of travel for the indicator.
3. The following provides a brief summary highlighting key performance for Quarter 1. The tables attached as Appendix A provide the details for each indicator.

Corporate Services - Resources

4. Close monitoring of Council Tax collection has resulted in an increase in the percentage collected in quarter 1 compared to the same period in 2010/11, up from 28.79% to 29.10%. Even with this increase, the need to raise total collection to 98% by the end of the financial year means that the Council is 0.13% behind target, a percentage that equates to £184k. Arrears are being tackled through prompt action, which has already seen 9,000 reminders for late payment sent out. In addition 1,840 summonses and 1,800 Liability Orders have been issued against customers in the Magistrates Court.
5. Whilst the collection of Council Tax is vitally important, it is recognised that this is a time of economic challenge not just for the Council but also for the public. Therefore the Council's target of significantly improving the time taken to process Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefits claims is very important. Despite quarter 1 performance at 31 days being a significant improvement over last years quarter 1 performance of 54 days, we are behind in meeting our overall average processing time of 25 days for 2011/12. Meeting the 25 day average for the year, should ensure that by the close of the year we are processing claims within 19 days. As a result this indicator has been scored as Red. Additional resources have been allocated to working through the backlog of claims and whilst this will temporarily see performance dip as a larger number of older claims are processed, performance will then pick up as our capacity to deal with newer claims improves.

6. The Council's ability to pay invoices promptly is also important particularly at a time of economic difficulty, when the recipients of those payments include small companies struggling with late payments from other customers or charities whom have seen other funding streams diminish. It is therefore pleasing to be able to report that the percentage of undisputed invoices paid within 30 days rose from 86.73% in quarter 4 to 92.5% in quarter 1 2011/12. This is the third successive quarterly improvement in performance and reflects the hard work that has been put in by all directorates.
7. Whilst overall the Corporate Services - Resources indicator set shows strong performance, the increase in the level of outstanding debt during the quarter contrasts with this. The level of outstanding debt rose from £2.862M at the end of quarter 4 2010/11 to £3.59M at the close of this quarter. Careful analysis of the data shows that a small number of invoices with other public bodies in Bedfordshire accounted for just over £1 million of this debt, however chasing and negotiations are well advanced to resolve these debts.

Corporate Services - People and Organisation

8. The Council continues to carefully manage the level of agency staff that it uses; monitoring the reason for their usage and the category of job the agency worker is carrying out. The use of agency workers allows us to be flexible in our resourcing options. This is especially important during times of restructuring where skills or capacity gaps have been identified or there is a need to covering a role prior to commencing change. As the optimum number of agency staff will fluctuate from quarter to quarter due to changing needs, it is not possible to performance score this indicator. However, it is worth noting that the number of agency staff (FTE) fell by 13% in quarter 1 2011/12 when compared to quarter 4 2010/11 and is down 19.5% when compared to the same point in the previous year.
9. We continue to carefully monitor levels and patterns of sickness absence and work closely with all managers, supporting them as they follow our robust sickness absence policies. Building on the sickness absence training already provided to managers, further training is planned over the coming months. As part of this support, Human Resources works closely with Occupational Health to provide support to those identified as having higher levels of sickness absence. The figures show that sickness absence is improving, with quarter 1 2011/12 showing the second successive quarterly fall. However the indicator has been scored as Amber as quarter 1 was above the quarterly target.
10. Despite the continued high volume of calls handled by the Customer Contact Centre, (146,739 during quarter 1) a high percentage of customer calls have again been resolved at first point of contact. After removing 16,449 calls which were merely seeking redirection to a named member of staff, the Service achieved an 88.76% first point resolution rate, well above the target of 80%.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Quarter 1 2011/12 indicators for Corporate Services - People and Organisation and Corporate Services - Resources.

Background Papers: (open to public inspection) - None

Location of papers: Priory House