



**To:**  
**Cllr Andrew Stevens**  
**Cabinet Member for Business**  
**Improvement and Performance**

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Overview & Scrutiny

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8<sup>th</sup> February 2021

## **BY EMAIL**

**Summary:** This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Business Improvement and Performance. The letter concerns the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and the Q1 Performance Monitoring Report 2020/21

Dear Councillor Stevens,

On the 20<sup>th</sup> January, the Panel met to discuss the Q1 Performance Monitoring Report 2020/21. The Panel are grateful to Richard Rowlands, Corporate Performance Manager, for attending to present the report. We also thank Adam Hill, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Resources for attendance at this meeting.

The Panel heard that Paragraph 2.1-2.6 (P61) of the report sets out the context and highlights the unprecedented nature of the pandemic and its impact. It was noted that the report itself is later than usual, due to suspension of reporting during March/June as focus and diversion of resources went elsewhere during the pandemic response.

Officers explained to the Panel that such reporting has again been suspended under the latest wave of the pandemic, and the subsequent pressures on staff and officer resources. The Panel understand that this is likely to be the only performance report this year, and, similarly, no targets have been set for 2020/21 due to the uncertainty of the pandemic situation.

The Panel heard, as reported on Page 72, a summary of the impact of the pandemic on safeguarding. The chart showed 52% of indicators improved or stayed the same as the comparable period last year.

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Officers explained that, as shown on Page 74 (AS11) more adults aged over 65 received support. This demonstrated an increase of 77% compared to the same period last year. Notable also was the increase in looked after children (Page 80, indicator CFS2).

The Panel heard that there had been fewer assessments of children completed within statutory guidelines, due to the impact on social services not being able to meet with families and complete assessments (Page 85, measure 24).

It was explained that Education remains a key priority. The Panel expressly noted the exceptional efforts of school/education staff, commenting that many schools remained open during difficult periods, and that the work done by all staff has been truly extraordinary. The Panel wished to express their admiration and respect for this continued hard work.

The Panel heard that under Economy and Infrastructure (Page 96) the majority of indicators improved or stayed the same as compared to the equivalent period last year.

The Panel discussed Page 99 (EP28) and that the (performance) percentage of planning applications had fallen by nearly 13% due to the impact of the pandemic. The Panel queried EC2, planning applications approval, and whether this was the correct context in which to report. Members raised concerns over reporting data from this perspective as it seemed that performance is being measured against the number of positive approvals. Members queried whether applications that were turned down would reflect negatively on the performance data. It was noted this data applied only in the context of planning applications with a major economic imperative.

Members heard that there had been an increase in longer processing times for Council Tax reduction claims and new housing benefit claims (Page 102/3), claims having increased as a consequence of the lockdown.

Officers explained how the report reflected changes in how the Council was responding to online requests. Page 108 (CUST2a) reported an 8% reduction in online payments and (CUST2b) shows large increases in the use of online processes, such as online recycling requests.

The Leader commented on how Council staff had embraced extra duties whilst maintaining high standards, helping to deliver services during very difficult times. The Panel also recognise this and are grateful for the continued efforts of staff across a broad range of services.

We note that current performance data will not provide the usual comparisons going forward, due to the continuing pandemic situation. We anticipate that due to the lack of current performance data, there will be no comparable data set for next year's performance indicators to be measured against. This is an issue the Panel will take into account during next year's discussions around this topic.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter. We

would be grateful if you could please provide a written response to the following by 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021:

- 1) The Panel would like further information on the performance monitoring of major planning applications (with an economic imperative) that are approved. Councillors queried whether this was an appropriate way to measure such performance. We would welcome your views on this indicator and how this service might be better represented.

Yours sincerely,

**Councillor Chris Holley**

**Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel**

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