Rother District Council

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	11 December 2023
Title:	Performance Report: First and Second Quarters 2023/24
Report of:	Anna Evett, Corporate Programme, Risk and Improvement Manager
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Jeeawon
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of Report:	To consider the recommendations arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 November 2023, regarding the Council's Performance Report: First and Second Quarters 2023/24. The report and recommendations arising are reproduced below and the Minutes of that meeting (Appendix C) should be read in conjunction with this report.
Decision Type:	Non-Key
Overview and Scrutiny Recommendation(s):	It be **RESOLVED:** That the target for processing all types of planning applications be 80%.
Reason for Recommendations:	To ensure the Council's targets are set at realistic and achievable targets.

Background and Introduction

1. In January 2023, this Committee selected a set of measurements in order to shift performance monitoring back towards corporate operations and service delivery. It is important that Members remain assured that the various departments of the Council providing core services are functioning effectively, have sufficient resources, and delivering within expected parameters.

2. As a result, this Committee recommended to Cabinet the selection of 26 KPIs, broken down into eight service areas as listed below:

    - Environmental Health
    - Housing
    - Customer Services
    - Neighbourhood Services
    - Estates
    - Corporate Core
    - Planning Development Management
    - Revenues and Benefits

3.   In addition, Members will receive an annual report on the state of the district. This report will be wide ranging and will seek to ensure that Members are kept informed of changes to the profile, demographic, and housing and economic landscape of the district.

Reporting by Exception

4.   This year, in order to focus on priorities, the intention is that the narrative concerning performance against target will be by exception. This means a commentary from a Service Manager will be included when the performance is significantly above or below the target.

Exception: Percentage of Scheduled Food Inspections that were Carried Out

5.   This measurement is the number of food safety inspections that were completed expressed as a percentage of the inspections scheduled to be completed in that quarter. The target is 90% completed; the result in the first quarter was 81% and in the second quarter it was 79%. By the end of quarter two, 2,128 food premises inspections had been carried out.

6.   The introduction of Idox (software) greatly delayed the roll out of the alternative enforcement questionnaires this year. None were sent out in the first quarter because of the introduction of the new Quick Response (QR) code procedure; businesses can use the QR code to complete the on-line form. This is now in place and is working very successfully.

7.   There were high numbers of applications for new food business registrations – 59 initial food inspections have been carried out in this time period. These inspections are not part of the planned programme. New business applications are very time intensive and must be done within 28 days of receipt and so slow down the programmed work.

8.   Eighty-five complaints were received and investigated about food businesses in this time. Ten enforcement notices were served, and a voluntary closure undertaken.

9.   There are the usual pressures of annual leave during the summer months. The Head of Service is confident that performance will get back on track by the end of the year if staffing levels are maintained.

Exception: Percentage of Environmental Health Service Requests Completed on Time

10.   This measurement is the number of completed service requests that were completed within the required number of days, expressed as a percentage of all completed service requests. The target is 90%; the result for the first quarter was 88.2% and in the second quarter was 71.04%.

11.   Quarter two is the busiest period for the number of pollution complaints. During the third quarter, officers should be able to resolve outstanding cases. Half of

the cases that were not resolved within the target date, were resolved within 10 days of this date.

Exception: Revenues and Benefits - Average calendar days to process a change to an existing Housing Benefit Claim

12. Current performance is not within target and could continue to dip in quarter three due to being 2.5 officers down. This is being addressed, however, recruitment will take time and therefore performance is likely to continue to be affected in the meantime.

Performance Board

13. A Senior Leadership Team led Performance Board was established in July as part of the new Governance arrangements. This sits alongside the (officer led) Risk and Programme Boards to improve performance management, risk management and accountability in the Council. This brings together Heads of Service and relevant Service Managers to discuss performance and service risks collectively and individually across the Council. The individual sessions allow for a detailed look at any issues impacting performance and the collective sessions allow for any cross-cutting issues to be identified.

Recommended Change of Target for Two Planning KPIs

14. A change to the target for major planning applications determined is recommended. The current target is 95% and the proposal is to reduce this to 80%; this is higher than the national target. In this report, the overall target set has been revised for the service to operate at 80% for major development in 13 weeks, pending approval.

15. It is also proposed to change the target for minor housing development determined in eight weeks to 80%. On this basis, the service is currently operating above those set targets.

Office of Local Government's Local Authority Data Explorer

16. The Government has created a new Office of Local Government as part of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This new body is tasked with understanding and supporting local government performance. The intention is to improve data transparency in order to increase accountability.

17. Oflog, as it is commonly called, is in the process of creating the Local Authority Data Explorer. It is a dashboard or online tool with sets of key measurements selected by Oflog. However, more than half of the current set of measurements do not apply to district councils.

18. The sections for waste management and finance have measurements relevant to district councils. For Members' interest, we have supplied the published data for Rother District Council in Appendix B. Currently, what has been published is limited to the annual figures for 2021/22.

19. Oflog have pledged to add more service areas and expand existing areas 'as the metrics are developed'. Members may wish to consider if they want to monitor the data explorer's development and if they wish to monitor the data it reports. Options might be reporting to this Committee or through the Members' Bulletin.

20. If Members (or residents) are interested in seeing published local government figures as well as a lot of contextual data, there are other publicly available sources. The Local Government Association provides the LGInform website. As Members may be aware, in addition, East Sussex County Council has a data observatory called East Sussex in Figures. These websites have both local government performance and many demographic, economic and environmental statistics relevant to providing services in wards, parishes, districts and county.

Conclusion

21. This report sets our performance against the agreed key performance indicators for the first and second quarters of 2023/24. It includes an update on the Government's approach to council performance.

22. Members are requested to consider the Council's performance and recommend to Cabinet the proposed change to the Planning KPIs, together with any other recommendations for action to Cabinet for consideration.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	External Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	No	Exempt from publication	No

Chief Executive:	Lorna Ford
Report Contact Officer:	Joanne Wright
e-mail address:	joanne.wright@rother.gov.uk
Appendices:	A – Summary KPI Table B – OfLog Dashboard on Council performance C – Extract from OSC Minutes
Relevant previous Minutes:	Cabinet 27th February 2023 Overview and Scrutiny Committee 5th June 2023, 4th Quarter Performance 2022/23
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None

Summary of All KPIs

A summary of the KPI performance is set out in the table below. Performance is compared to the previous quarter result and to the same quarter the previous year. Results that can be prepared monthly are included with the quarter's result.

	Status	Target	Q1	Q2	Commentary
Environmental Health					
E1 - % of scheduled food inspections that were carried out	🛑	90%	51%	79%	See paragraph 5 of report.
E2 - % of service requests completed in the required timescale	🛑	90%	88.2%	71.04%	See paragraph 10 of report.
Housing					
H1 - Number of households either prevented (P) from homelessness or relieved (R) from homelessness	✅	30 (quarter) 120 (year)	52: 26 P 26 R	49: 26 P 23 R	Q2 last year = 19(p) 10 (r) Total 29 The rise in number of homelessness cases, as well the complexity of cases, continues to create challenges for the Housing Service. The recent increase in investment into prevention services is having a positive effect and we have seen a 70% increase in homelessness preventions and reliefs compared to the same quarter last year. In particular, the increase in staff assigned to the Rother Tenant Finder Service and specialist Homelessness Prevention Officers doing more intense case work early on in homelessness journey.
H2 - Average cost of placing household in temporary accommodation (TA)	✅	£1,200	£766	£1,154	The measure is a useful way of demonstrating the impact of the acquisition of TA on the average unit cost. In the same quarter last year, the average cost of TA was £1,130 per unit. The 2% reduction in average unit cost is positive, considering the impact of inflation on the cost of provision since Q2 2022. It is important to note that as this is still a relatively new metric, we are developing a means of adjusting how the figures are presented, as due to accounting processes, Q1 presents an artificially low average cost and Q4 an artificially high one.
H3 - Average weeks a household was in temporary accommodation before placement	✅	Not set	23	16	While a reduction in the average number of weeks a household has stayed in TA is positive, the number of households in TA at the end of Q2 was 165, compared to 129 in the same quarter last year. The increase comes despite the positive impact of the recent improvements to the Prevention Service.
Customer Services					

	Status	Target	Q1	Q2	Commentary
C1 - Telephone calls answered by customer services (= sum of answered AND abandoned calls) *Aim: channel shift towards digital*	⚠️	Reduce (baseline year)	11,606	13,181	Calls answered for Q1: 8,535 (74%), Calls Abandoned Q1:3,071 (26%), Calls answered for Q2:8,517 (65%), Calls Abandoned Q2:4,664 (35%). If you compare calls received for 2023/24 Q1 & Q2 total 24787 to the previous year 2022/23 Q1 and Q2 of 35,464 we have received 30% less phone calls. However, our calls answered rate for 2023/24 is 30% higher than the previous Q1 & Q2 of 2022/23 (17,052 compared to 13,032). The same trend is seen in abandonment rates when compared to the previous year 2022/23 Q1 and Q2 figures (17,222 compared to 7,735) and there were 55% less abandoned calls in 2023/24. This is due to better staffing levels than the previous year as sickness and vacant posts attributed to the 2022/23 performance level. More work will be done on the presentation of this data.
C2 - Percentage of enquiries that are resolved on the first contact with customer services	✅	85%	87.53%	85.82%	Our first contact resolution rate is performing as expected with customers receiving assistance when they call us rather than having their call referred to the department for assistance.
C3 - Average call waiting time for the contact centre	✅	Reduce (baseline year)	00:11:57	00:06:33	The average answer time of 9 minutes 19 seconds for 2023/24 Q1 & Q2 compared to 2022/23 Q1 and Q2 of 16 minutes 45 seconds is 7 minutes and 26 seconds less. This indicates better performance. There are still calls that are having to wait an extended time to be answered as the maximum wait time is 50 minutes and 5 seconds for 2023/24 Q1 and Q2. The max wait time is 8 minutes and 50 seconds less than 2022/23 Q1 and Q2 results of 58 minutes and 55 seconds. April 2023 average answer time of 25 minutes and 7 seconds was higher and caused by a combination of sickness, vacant posts and peak council tax contact following annual billing.
C4 - Customers who say they were satisfied when surveyed (annual measurement)		85%	Not due	Not due	This data will be provided in quarter 3.
C5 - Total number of customer contacts to the Council *Aim: channel shift towards digital*	✅	Monitor (baseline year)	25,349	23,969	The total contact indicator is a combination of phone calls, emails, face to face, web, self-service and our chat bot 'Aimee.' Below is a breakdown of each contact for Q1 and Q2. **Total Contact Q1 25,349** Phone calls answered Q1:8535, Face to face contact Q1:1,765, Email Contact Q1: 1,775, Web self-service Q1:10,113, Aimee Chat bot Q1: 2,758, Other Contact Q1: 403

	Status	Target	Q1	Q2	Commentary
					Total Contact Q2 23,969 Phone calls answered Q2:8,517, Face to face contact Q2:2,257, email Contact Q2: 1,972, Web self-service Q2:8,551, Aimee Chat bot Q2: 2,367, Other Contact Q2: 305 *(other contact includes letters, back office generated work and outreach contact.)* Looking at the contact breakdown of digital methods versus traditional method, digital contact makes up of 56% of our contact compared to 44% traditional methods. Traditional methods of contact for Q1(10,703) and Q2 (11,079) total: 21,782 Online/digital contact for Q1 (14,646) and Q2 total (12890):27,536.
Neighbourhood Services					
N1 - Missed bins per 100,000 collections	✅	62	24	30	The number of missed bin collections is a Biffa contractual requirement. Effective contract management supports the continued positive performance.
N2 - Percentage of public land found with unacceptable levels of litter when surveyed	✅	2.5%	n/a	1%	The % level of litter visible on roads is a Biffa contractual requirement and is assessed on a triannual basis by an independent contractor – Q2 figure as of July 2023.
N3 - Percentage of public land found with unacceptable levels of detritus when surveyed	✅	7%	n/a	8%	The % level of detritus visible on roads is a Biffa contractual requirement and is assessed on a triannual basis by an independent contractor – Q2 figure as of July 2023. The result for the 1st triannual is above target but an improvement on previous year of 9%.
N4 - Fly tips recorded each month, cleared from public land (number)	✅	69	62	57	Fly tips peaked at an average of 91 per month in 2021/2022 and have been reducing gradually ever since, helped more recently by the appointment of National Enforcement Solutions (NES) and the closure of bring sites.
N5 - Fly tip fines issued (number)	✅	Monitor	17	7	The use of Fixed Penalty Notices appears to be working to prevent fly tips. NES had staff shortages at the beginning of the year, but this is improving.
Estates					
E1 - Income from all assets	✅	£2,375,310 (original figure of £2,429,510 reduced by £54,200 as Amherst Rd reclassified as not	£2,408,642	£2,459,032	There is a positive variance overall at Q2 compared with the original budget of (£84k) and an improvement from Q1 of (£50k). While the Council has lost the income from the East Sussex County Council vacating the second floor of Amherst Road, the tenant at 35 Beeching Road is still in place as they have experienced delays in moving to a new site. These factors, coupled with some positive rent reviews, have resulted in the additional income.

	Status	Target	Q1	Q2	Commentary
		investment property)			
Corporate Core					
CC1 - % of freedom of information requested answered in 20 days	✅	95%	87%	96%	Q1 performance slightly dipped below the 20 working days due to several complex FOIs requiring a time extension to complete the requests (this was due to the amount of information required and the need for legal advice.) Whilst the 20 working day response time is a statutory requirement, we were able to seek additional time based on the type of request received. Therefore, we fully complied with our statutory duty in terms of response time.
Planning Development Management					
P1 - Percentage of major development applications determined in 13 weeks or agreed extension	✅	*80%* (original target 95% but recommend to change)	100%	100%	Exceeding national target. The service handled a total of 707 applications with 412 decisions issued; and 98% of the decisions at delegated level.
P2 - Percentage of minor development applications determined in 8 weeks or agreed extension	✅	*80%* (original target 95% but recommend to change)	81%	92%	Exceeding national target. Staff leaving and the inability to recruit into those positions in a timely manner has impacted performance. There is also the issue of outdated software which means more time is taken to complete tasks that can be automated using modern software, in particular to validating applications in timely manner and moving it along the process in timely successions.
P3 - Major development planning appeals allowed by the Planning Inspector	✅	10%	Nil*	Nil*	Exceeding government target. The target is set at 10% of major and non-majors decisions overturned (i.e., refusals allowed) on appeal. Currently our figures are 27% allowed and 73% dismissed (where PINs upholds our refusal.)
P4 - Minor development planning appeals allowed by the Planning Inspector	✅	30%	18%	23%	There is no separation for major or non-majors, the set target is a combination of both - see above.
P5 - Total number of PS1 and PS2 planning applications (live cases)	✅	349	284	294	This is an upward trend although nationally there has been a decline in application numbers, due to external factors such as the cost-of-living crisis, economy, and cost of borrowing.
Revenues and Benefits					

	Status	Target	Q1	Q2	Commentary
RB1 - Percentage of council tax owed for the year that has been collected	✅	Yr: 98.3%	30.02% (quarterly target 29.81)	57.1% (quarterly target 57.13)	Quarterly target based on previous year's results. (2022/23) Q1 29.81, Q2 57.13, Q3 81.13 Q4 98.30. Collection is becoming more challenging, resulting in performance being slightly down as a percentage of collectable debit, compared to the same period in 2022/23. Although, in pure monetary terms, an additional £2.8m has been collected over Q1 and Q2 compared to the same period last year. Collection will continue to be closely monitored.
RB2 - Percentage of business rates owed for the year that have been collected	🔺	Yr: 98.3%	29.38% (quarterly target 29.71)	58.62% (quarterly target 59.17)	Quarterly target based on previous year's results. (2022/23) Q1 29.71, Q2 59.17, Q3 84.57 Q4 98.30. The Business Rates collection is also challenging, resulting in collection being down as a percentage of collectable debit compared to the same period in 2022/23. However, with the number of different reliefs available to businesses over the past few years, it is difficult to compare collection year on year.
RB3 - Average calendar days to process a new housing benefit claim	✅	20	20.29	19.06	Current performance is within target; however, performance could dip in Q3 due to being 2.5 FTEs (full time equivalent) down. This is being addressed; however, this will take time and therefore performance is likely to be affected in the meantime.
RB4 - Average calendar days to process a change to an existing housing benefit claim	🛑	14	9.18	16.65	See paragraph 12 of report.

Key:

Performance on target or better than target ✅   Performance not on target and getting worse 🛑
Performance not on target but improving towards target 🔺

n/a = not applicable, such as not measured at this frequency

* There were no planning appeals for a major housing development from April to September. We cannot report any figures.

Oflog Dashboard

	2021/22 Result	CIPFA* Nearest Neighbours Median	England Median
Waste and Recycling			
Household waste sent for reuse, recycling, composting as % of collected	46.5%	46.97%	41.9%
Residual households waste average kilograms collected per household	469.8	430.1	502.4
Household recycling contaminated rate	2.81%	3.83%	5.6%
Finance			
Reserves (unallocated or non-ringfenced) as a proportion of what the Council spends on services (net revenue expenditure)	67%	142.7%	150.9%
Non-ringfenced reserves as a proportion of service spend	70.3%	154%	131.5%
Total core spending power per dwelling	£233.88	£227.19	£242.49
Level of Band D Council Tax rates paid to local services (excluding parishes)	£207.10	£181.77	£192.04
Council Tax revenue per dwelling (average charge per dwelling)	£1,783.07	£1,688.33	£1,555.61
Debt servicing as percentage of core spending power	5.7%	6.6%	9.9%
Total debt as percentage of core spending power	218.6%	133.3%	500.4%

Note: only information published for Rother District Council has been included in this appendix.

* CIPFA refers to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the professional body for people working in public finance.

CIPFA creates groups of similar local authorities termed 'nearest neighbours', based on a range of criteria, to help local authorities make reasonable comparisons. Relevant factors include being a borough or district council, similar population size, rural against urban and so on. Geographic location is not a factor and most of the authorities are from other regions in the country. The term neighbour does not refer to other authorities in Kent and Sussex, but how similar the district is to Rother.

Median is the figure that appears at the halfway point or the middle of any sequential list of figures. It is often a similar number to the average, but the figure is not calculated the same way. Using median removes the risk of an average being distorted by outliers in the data, especially extreme outliers. A good example is where using the average income for an area can be raised by just a few people having a multi-million income and disguising a more accurate portrait of the general population. Using median means a more accurate representation that half of the residents earn less and half of the residents earn more. For example, in Rother in 2021 the average gross annual earnings for all residents was £30,171 but the median gross annual earnings were £22,401.

<u>**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting – 20 November 2023**</u>

OSC23/36.
(5)

PERFORMANCE REPORT: FIRST AND SECOND QUARTERS 2023/24

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Programme and Improvement Manager on the Performance Report of the First and Second Quarters 2023/24. Members were given the opportunity to scrutinise progress towards corporate operations and service delivery and make any necessary recommendations to Cabinet for future service delivery.

A summary of the Council's performance against the selected 26 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) broken down into eight service areas was included at Appendix A to the report. Performance was compared to the previous quarter result and to the same quarter the previous year.

Environmental Health: During quarters one and two, both measures had not met their target (Percentage of scheduled food inspections that were carried out; and Percentage of service requests completed in the required timescale).

Housing: During quarters one and two, all measures had met their target (Number of households either prevented from or relieved from homelessness; Average cost of placing household in temporary accommodation (TA); and Average weeks a household was in TA before placement). Officers advised that verbal updates could be provided at future meetings concerning further property acquisitions for TA. The Council was on target to reach 50 units by the end of the financial year and a report would be taken to Cabinet in due course to request further funding to acquire more units. The property acquisition target would then be increased accordingly.

Customer Services: During quarters one and two, one measure was not on target but improving (Telephone calls answered) and three measures had met their target (Percentage of enquiries that were resolved on the first contact; Average call waiting time; and Total number of customer contacts to the Council).

Neighbourhood Services: During quarters one and two, all measures had met their target (Missed bins per 100,000 collections; Percentage of public land found with unacceptable levels of litter when surveyed; Percentage of public land found with unacceptable levels of detritus when surveyed; Fly tips recorded each month, cleared from public land; and Number of fly tip fines issued).

Estates: During quarters one and two, the measure met its target (Income from all assets).

Corporate Core: During quarters one and two, the measure met its target (% of freedom of information requested answered in 20 days).

Planning Development Management: During quarters one and two, all measures had met their target (Percentage of major development applications determined in 13 weeks or agreed extension; Percentage of minor development applications determined in eight weeks or agreed extension; Major development planning appeals allowed by the Planning Inspector; Minor development planning appeals allowed by the Planning Inspector; and Total number of PS1 and PS2 planning applications).

Revenues and Benefits: During quarters one and two, two measures had met their target (Percentage of council tax owed for the year that had been collected; and Average calendar days to process a new housing benefit claim), one measure was improving towards its target (Percentage of business rates owed for the year that had been collected) and one measure had not met its target (Average calendar days to process a change to an existing housing benefit claim).

In order to focus on priorities, the narrative concerning performance against target was now reported by exception and a commentary from the relevant Service Manager included when the performance was significantly above or below the target. Two Service Area commentaries were included for Members' information:

Environmental Health:
Percentage of Scheduled Food Inspections that were Carried Out: the target was 90% completed; the result in the first quarter was 81% and in the second quarter was 79%. By the end of quarter two, 2,128 food premises inspections had been carried out, the introduction of Idox (software) had greatly delayed the roll out of the alternative enforcement questionnaires, there were high numbers of applications for new food business registrations which slowed down the programme of work, 85 complaints had been received and investigated concerning food businesses and there were the usual pressures of annual leave during the summer months. The department was currently fully staffed, but there had been additional Health and Safety accidents to deal with, causing further impact.

Percentage of Environmental Health Service Requests Completed on Time: the target was 90%; the result for the first quarter was 88.2% and in the second quarter was 71.04%. Quarter two had been the busiest period for the number of pollution complaints; officers would be able to resolve outstanding cases during quarter three.

Revenues and Benefits:
Average calendar days to process a change to an existing Housing Benefit Claim: current performance was not within target and could continue to dip in quarter three due to being 2.5 officers down. This was being addressed, however recruitment would take time and therefore performance was likely to continue to be affected in the meantime.

A Senior Leadership Team led Performance Board was established in July as part of the new Governance arrangements. This sat alongside the (officer led) Risk and Programme Boards to improve performance management, risk management and accountability in the Council. The Board brought together Heads of Service and relevant Service

Managers to discuss performance and service risks collectively and individually across the Council.

Members were asked to consider recommending a change to the target for major planning applications determined. The current target was 95% and the proposal was to reduce this to 80%, which was higher than the national target. Members were also requested to consider a change to the target for minor housing development determined in eight weeks to 80%; on this basis, the service was currently operating above those set targets.

Members were happy to recommend that Cabinet give consideration to both targets being amended accordingly; performance should not fall below 80%, the baseline minimum where customers do not experience a significant delay.

The Government had created a new Office of Local Government (Oflog) as part of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, tasked with understanding and supporting local government performance. It was in the process of creating the Local Authority Data Explorer, a dashboard or online tool with sets of key measurements. The sections for waste management and finance had measurements relevant to district councils and the published data for Rother District Council was attached to the report for Members' information. Future updates would be colour coded to indicate how the Council's performance compared to the other published data.

RESOLVED: That:

1) Cabinet be requested to agree that the target for processing all types of planning applications be 80%; and

2) the report be noted.