

Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Notes of a virtual discussion about the development of performance measures for the refreshed Organisation Strategy (called Everyone's Essex: The Plan for Essex 2021-25) held via Teams on 23 September 2021

Present:

Councillors:

Chris Pond (Chairman)
Jane Fleming
Ivan Henderson
Sam Kane
David King
Mike Mackrory (Vice Chairman)
Aidan McGurran
Anthony McQuiggan
Chris Siddall
Mike Steptoe (Vice Chairman)

Contributors:

Councillor Kevin Bentley (Leader)
Councillor Louise McKinlay (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance)
Suzanne Barcz - Head of Performance and Business Intelligence
Patrick Guthrie, Head of Profession Strategy
Alastair Gordon, Head of Profession Research and Citizen Insight
Richard Puleston, Director, Policy.

Also in attendance:

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Key points made during introduction

- The meeting had been scheduled to facilitate discussion on the draft performance targets and measures so that comments could be incorporated into the finalised draft going to Full council in October for approval.
- Targets being set should be seen in the context of ongoing Government spending review and settlements still to be decided, and other impacts such as the aspirations arising from the Climate Change Commission and other national developments and direction.
- The proposed performance framework would try and combine stability and dynamism. The framework was being set for 4 years but there remained significant uncertainty and/or missing data about some matters which could impact on aspirations and targets. This was particularly challenging in some aspects which had changed quite markedly as a result of Covid and made using the past 18 months as a base-line period for assessing future performance not relevant or appropriate.

- Within the overall performance framework, there was a distinction between the following types of performance measures:
 - **Contextual measures** – Securing change in these measures may require long-term changes in local social and economic conditions. Whilst ECC had a role in influencing these changes, no single agency could directly affect, or be meaningfully held to account, for these outcomes.
 - **Strategic measures** – these measures were critical to delivery in the coming years and reflected ECC's contribution to improving wider outcomes and were selected on the basis that ECC could influence performance improvement over the coming year.
 - **Operational measures** – in addition to the strategic measures used to track progress towards ECC's strategic outcomes, each ECC function had access to an array of operational data and business intelligence which could be used to monitor and manage the effectiveness of specific services and programmes. Reporting on these service-specific, operational metrics was focused on functional leadership teams and within individual cabinet portfolios.

During subsequent discussion the following was confirmed:

- That performance data for all measures would be available and updated at least on an annual basis. However, it was stressed that there was a distinction between strategic and contextual objectives and that data for the former would be sourced from within the County Council or local partners so the ability to respond to timely data for those was high. Contextual objectives were important as a balance to understand what was happening in the county as a whole but were more a wider aspiration and data was not so easily or regularly available for those.
- As a result of Covid lockdowns, data for the last 18 months would not give a reliable base line for modes of transport being used and then assessing future trends. Further work was underway to better understand that challenge and put something stronger in the strategy to reflect the ambitions of ECC.

Points raised and suggestions made by committee members:

- Should look at what measures can be established to highlight the importance of activity and exercise including its alignment with a sustainable transport policy incorporating 'Active Travel' and cycling and walking initiatives.

- Should look at incorporating further measures reflecting the focus of the County Council's recent work with Sport England on promoting activity in four key demographic groups (ethnicity, long term health conditions, disability etc) .
- Should look at incorporating a wider wellbeing measure in the framework along the lines of a happiness index.
- Whilst acknowledging that the strategy was a corporate plan to set corporate course direction, members requested that targets needed to be further broken down to identify local variations in both the objective being set and local performance. This would be an aspect on which the scrutiny committees would need to challenge Cabinet Members in future. It was highlighted that work already underway on Levelling Up would be looking at data collected for particular geographical areas and known demographic challenges and be able to give more localised performance data going forward.
- Members challenged the extent of benchmarking both nationally and regionally that was going to be done. The County Council did undertake some comparative work with family groups and other local authorities and would be able to drill down and draw out these comparisons for future analysis. Members requested that performance data should show intra-county variations where possible.
- However, the County Council was doing some things that other local authorities were not doing so comparisons would not be possible.
Action: Further information and links to LGA comparative data would be provided.

Conclusion

It was agreed:

- (i) The Scrutiny Board would co-ordinate the scrutiny of monitoring the progress being made and how scrutiny work would be split between the four scrutiny committees and/or any opportunities for joint working on some aspects. It was possible that the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee could take the lead on this.
- (ii) Members were given the opportunity to feed-through any further comments over the next couple of days ahead of finalisation of papers being presented to full Council in October.
- (iii) A note would be made of the discussion for presenting to the formal meeting of the Committee on 30 September 2021.

Further suggestions from members after the close of the meeting:

- Number up each measure for clarity
- New subsidiary (non-strategic) environmental measures were needed as important for public perception. For example:
 - Mileage of cycleways completed
 - Milage of footways repaired
 - Number of school streets completed
 - Cycle parking stacks completed.
- Economic measures should also include data on the difference between best performing District and worst. Convergence being desirable
- An independent form of verification to assess the quality and sustainability of highways repair work being undertaken.
- being clearer about some of the baselines being used.
- Some targets could benefit from further context such as the percentage of need a particular target would meet (Strategic Measures).
- Some age group definitions for some of the personal qualification targets (Contextual measures).
- Further definition of some of the climate/environment measures to be clearer what they do and do not include (High Quality Environment).