

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Meeting held 18 April 2019

PRESENT: Councillors Denise Fox (Chair), Ian Auckland, Penny Baker, Douglas Johnson, George Lindars-Hammond, Pat Midgley, Mick Rooney and Cliff Woodcraft

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Booker and Ian Saunders.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5th February 2019, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no questions raised, or petitions submitted, by members of the public.

6. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME - UPDATE

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications containing an update on progress regarding the implementation of the Customer Experience Programme. The report contained details in terms of progress made since the last report was presented to the Committee, in April 2018, and also set out a range of forthcoming activity.

6.2 James Henderson (Director of Policy, Performance and Communications) reported that a reasonable level of progress had been made, with officers focusing specifically on improving the Council's on-line services, with recent improvements being made to the on-line payment system and a new Intranet. In terms of future activity, Mr Henderson stated that a focus for the Programme for the year ahead was reviewing the Council's approach to customer access through face to face and telephone provision. He referred briefly to the interim results of the recently undertaken customer survey, which had been undertaken in order to get a better understanding of the changing levels of expectation of both Council officers and the

public.

6.3 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- Whilst there was no data available at the meeting regarding how those residents who had English as a second language were accessing the Council website, there was a general belief that there would be some issues for them in terms of accessing, and reading information on the website. This was one of the reasons why the Council would be focusing on improving its face to face and telephone services. The website met all relevant accessibility standards to ensure that it could be used by people with sight difficulties.
- The Council was looking at how it could improve its telephone services, particularly with regard to how staff interacted with members of the public and, in particular, how staff might be enabled to consider the wider circumstances of the customer, rather than simply providing a transactional service. This issue had also been raised as part of the initial results of the customer survey.
- Whilst a focus for the year ahead would be on improving face to face and telephone services, work would continue on improving the Council's on-line services. It was acknowledged that despite improvements over the last few years, customer satisfaction was not yet high enough for online services.
- Mystery shoppers were used as part of the drive to monitor and improve customer service. This practice had been adopted as part of the scoping work for proposed improvements to the face to face and telephone services.
- Information as to whether the Council, as part of its telephone service, provided members of the public with the option of ringing them back if they so requested, would be provided to Members.
- Whilst it was difficult to provide a precise answer, it was estimated that the Council was still using between 100 and 200 paper forms. Whilst efforts were being made to convert these forms to online versions, it was not a simple process as there was a need to ensure that the e-forms automatically interacted with back office systems. It was accepted that further work was required in this area.
- The Council was mindful that an 'invest to save' approach would be beneficial, both for the Council and for the public, and officers were looking at submitting a business case for this at present.
- Although the forms used by the Council would be designed by officers, the design was based on customer feedback.
- Whilst every effort was being made to improve the Council's online customer experience, there was only a small team of officers working in this area, meaning that careful prioritisation was required in terms of which areas to focus resources on.

- Whilst Capita were still providing the Council's IT services, transitioning arrangements would commence within the next few months in terms of the new provider.
- Details as to whether members of the public were able to register a death by phone, and not only on-line, which it was believed was presently the case, would be forwarded to Members.

6.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the responses to the questions now raised;
- (b) thanks James Henderson for attending the meeting, and responding to the questions raised; and
- (c) requests that this issue be placed on its Work Programme for 2019/20, and that the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications attends a meeting during that Municipal Year to provide a further update on the progress made under the Customer Services Programme, focussing on the issues raised at this meeting.

7. WORK-BASED DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING

7.1 The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Resources, containing an update on progress of the health and wellbeing, and learning and development elements of the Council's Workforce and Organisational Development Strategy.

7.2 In attendance for this item were Mark Bennett (Director of Human Resources and Customer Services) and Lynsey Linton (Head of Human Resources).

7.3 Mark Bennett reported that whilst a reasonable level of progress had been made in terms of the health and wellbeing, and learning and development elements of the Council's Workforce and Organisational Development Strategy, which were considered the two main priorities for Human Resources, there was always a lot more work that could be undertaken.

7.4 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- Following the 2017/18 sickness absence statistics, it had been agreed with the Council's Executive Management Team that there was a greater organisational focus on employee absence in order to reduce levels of sickness absence. A small team of Human Resources Advisers had been established to work with those Council services having higher rates of sickness absence, which included Repairs and Maintenance (Place), Customer Services (Resources) and Children's Services (Place), and interventions were being targeted at such Services. One such intervention included "day one reporting", whereby employees going off on sickness

absence were asked to report the absence to the Occupational Health Service, who then provided help and advice in connection with the absence.

- With regard to more serious and/or longer-term incidents of sickness absence, which were likely to have a more adverse effect on colleagues, a Workplace Stress Risk Assessment would be undertaken, whereby a Human Resources officer would speak to the colleagues, and help the Service to address the identified area of concern. It had been identified that there was a need for a more holistic approach in terms of intervention, as well as improved liaison between management and staff. Whilst Human Resources were confident that necessary support was available for both the employee off on sickness leave, and those colleagues who were likely to be affected, it was not considered, however, that such support was always best targeted at present. There was therefore a need to identify any specific issues, then target the support appropriately.
- As a result of the higher than average rates of sickness absence in People Services, a specific piece of work was being undertaken in order to identify approximately £1 million savings in this regard. This work would involve Human Resources working closely with managers in People Services to reduce sickness absence and agency spend. People Services chose to do this as it had higher than average sickness absence rates. Early indications had showed that positive steps had been made.
- There remain some issues regarding managers' skills and confidence to deal with complex individual absence issues, and more broadly supporting staff wellbeing in the workplace. Policies and procedures enable managers to use flexibility when dealing with sickness absence, but more could be done to support managers.
- Staff recruitment was now back in-house, and Human Resources had looked at employee lifecycle, which had highlighted the fact that the highest rates of sickness absence were prevalent amongst staff aged from 49 to 54. Furthermore, a recent case study undertaken in the Parks and Countryside Service had identified higher rates of sickness absence, which was due to both the age of staff and a higher proportion of staff undertaking physical work.
- There continued to be an emphasis on employing apprentices, in line with the Council's agreed organisation strategy, and a Steering Group, comprising a number of former apprentices, provided help and support to new apprentices. The Steering Group also assisted in the Council's aim to focus on the retention of existing apprentices, and not just appointing new starters. The number of apprentices being employed by the Council had increased year on year.
- Meetings had taken place with a number of equalities groups, with the aim of getting feedback from staff, in order to drive improvement in this area.
- Work had continued to promote the completion of Personal Development

Reviews (PDRs) in accordance with the 'Time to Sit Down and Talk' programme. It was considered important that all members of staff had the opportunity to have a good quality conversation with their line manager as it could help with their future development, and, in some cases, their health and wellbeing. PDRs were simple for managers to record, and 62% of staff now had completed reviews, which represented a large increase from two years ago. The main focus over the last few years had been to drive the rates of completed PDRs up, and once this had happened, work would then be undertaken to assess the quality and effectiveness of such reviews.

- Line managers were ultimately responsible for staff learning and development, and Human Resources would advise when required.

7.5 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the responses to the questions now raised;
- (b) thanks Mark Bennett and Lynsey Linton for attending the meeting, and responding to the questions raised; and
- (c) requests that this issue be placed on its Work Programme for 2019/20, and that the Executive Director, Resources, attends a meeting during that Municipal Year, to provide a further update on Work-based Development and Wellbeing.

8. ISSUES TO RAISE FROM OTHER SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

8.1 The Chairs of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committees in attendance, updated the Committee on the respective Committees' work.

8.2 Further to comments raised by the Chair, in her capacity as Chair of the Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee, referring specifically to the meeting to consider the call-in of the Individual Cabinet Member Decision on parking fees and charges on 20th March, 2019, Councillor Ian Auckland referred to comments made by Councillor Lewis Dagnall (Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport) at that meeting. Councillor Auckland stated that Councillor Dagnall had made reference to the loss of income to the Council, from car parking charges, as a result of the call-in, and considered this to be inappropriate, particularly as he was a Cabinet Member, thereby responsible for determining both the timescales of when decisions were to be made and the Cabinet agendas.

8.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the information reported by the Chairs of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committees, together with the comments made by Councillor Ian Auckland; and
- (b) reaffirms its commitment to the belief that the Council's scrutiny function is

separate from Executive functions.

(NOTE: Prior to the passing of the above resolution, an alternative Motion was moved by Councillor Ian Auckland, seconded by Councillor Penny Baker, as follows:-

'That this Committee notes that the Executive controls the Forward Plan and Cabinet agendas, therefore any adverse financial impacts of a no action call-in is in the hands of the Executive'.

The votes on the alternative Motion were ordered to be recorded and were as follows:-

For the alternative Motion (3) - Councillors Ian Auckland, Penny Baker and Douglas Johnson

Against the alternative Motion (4) - Councillors Denise Fox, George Lindars-Hammond, Pat Midgley and Mick Rooney).

9. CHAIR OF COMMITTEE

9.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee places on record its thanks and appreciation for the excellent work undertaken by Councillor Denise Fox, as Chair of the Committee during the Municipal Year 2018/19.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

10.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on a date to be arranged.