

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 7th November 2016

Present: Councillor A Lythgoe (Chair)
Councillors, Bromley, Eaton, Essex (substituting for Lynda Barnes) Kempson, Kenyon, Johnson, McMahon, Robertson and Steen (substituting for Roberts)

Zieda Ali, Co-opted Member

In Attendance: Clare Law, HR Manager
Katie Gee, Media and Engagement Officer
Andy McGhee, Fraud and Compliance Officer
Ian Walker, Service Assurance Officer
Andrew Buckle, Head of Customer Services and ICT
Councillor Ashworth, Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Health
Councillor Marriott, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance (part of the meeting)
Councillor Lamb, Portfolio Holder for Operational Services and Development Control
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

2 members of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Lynda Barnes, Roberts and Alyson Barnes.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 10th October 2016 be agreed as a correct record signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Lythgoe declared an interest as he sat on Capita's Operational Governance Board.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow the members of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair informed Members that the Scrutiny Support Officer had circulated a paper that highlights the changes requested at the last meeting to the Drug and Alcohol Policy and the Whistleblowing Policy. In relation to whether the policy would apply to Councillors, the Scrutiny Support Officer indicated that she had emailed the Leaders of each group to ask that they discuss this at their group meetings. The Chair commented that as far as he was concerned it was not targeted at Councillors. The Scrutiny Support Officer agreed to inform the HR Manager if she hears any different from the Leaders of the groups.

RESOLVED:

1. That Members noted and accepted the changes to the Drug and Alcohol Policy and Whistleblowing Policy.
2. That any future minor amendments be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

7. HR POLICIES – REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The HR Manager provided a number of HR policies which had been revised as part of the Council's policy review cycle in line with best practice, following research with other Local Authorities, industry experts and professionals, professional bodies and organisations. Equality Impact Assessments were included for each of the policies.

a) Recruitment and Selection Policy and Manager's Guidance

The policy was presented by the HR Manager who said that the policy was last reviewed in November 2008. A summary of the amendments to the Policy was presented to Members.

Members asked the following questions.

- Was there any comments from the Union and the HR Manager confirmed that there were no comments.
- Does the policy include Directors for which the HR Manager explained that Directors fall under the Constitution although the principle was the same. Directors are appointed by a panel of Councillors.
- Should risk management be included in the general statement? The HR Manager confirmed that this would be included.
- Following a question by Members the HR Manager explained the probation process which was included in a separate policy

- When asked how the Council monitors recruitment, the HR Manager indicated that in terms of equality all applicants are asked to complete a form and these are looked at following the recruitment process to see who is applying for particular jobs.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Recruitment and Selection Policy and Manager's Guidance be noted.
2. That the HR Manager makes the changes to the policy as suggested by members and present them to the next meeting in December.
3. That any future minor amendments be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

b) Disciplinary Policy

This Policy was last reviewed in September 2014, slightly ahead of the planned review of the policy in 2017, as part of the wider review of Council policies. A summary of the amendments were presented to Members.

Members asked the following questions:

- To ensure consistency, all policies should have a section indicating that employees have a right to be accompanied to a meeting.
- In relation to bullet point 1.2 it was agreed to phrase this more positive
- That section 7.5 and section 8.7 should remain in the policy

RESOLVED:

1. That the Disciplinary Procedure be noted.
2. That the HR Manager makes the changes to the policy as suggested by members and present them to the next meeting in December.
3. That any future minor amendments be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

c) Grievance Procedure

The policy was last reviewed in September 2014, slightly ahead of the planned review of the policy in 2017, as part of the wider review of Council policies. A summary of the amendments were presented to Members

Members asked the following:

- In relation to Section 6 – Formal Stages, members agreed that employees should have the right to be accompanied at any formal meeting within the procedure.

RESOLVED:

1. The Grievance Policy was noted.
2. That the HR Manager makes the changes to the policy as suggested by members and present them to the next meeting in December.
3. That any future minor amendments be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

d) Absence Management Policy

This Policy was last reviewed in September 2014, slightly ahead of the planned review of the policy in 2017, as part of the wider review of Council policies. A summary of the amendments were presented to Members.

The HR Manager indicated that this policy forms part of the employee's contract of employment.

All Managers will agree with the employee how to report sickness absence.

Members asked the following questions:

- In relation to a question about the process for contacting someone off with stress related illness, the HR Manager explained the process, indicating that each case is dealt with separately.
- With regard equality considerations, this should include adoption and paternity.
- In relation to sickness absence/unauthorised absence, it was agreed to send all Managers a Personnel Briefing explaining the 2 separate forms of absence and how this should be addressed
- It was felt that the report needed to be called the Sickness Absence Policy and not Absence Management Policy as this policy related to sickness absence and there was a need for policy guidelines to cover other absences which are in line with sickness absence eg staff interviewed by their manager after any unauthorised absence.

RESOLVED:

1. The Absence Management Policy be noted.
2. That the HR Manager makes the changes to the policy as suggested by members and present them to the next meeting in December, along with policy guidelines for other absences.

3. That any future minor amendments be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

The Chair informed Members that it was agreed to establish a small group of members to look at the Equalities Policy which was in need of a review and at the same time look existing EIAs.

The group would include the HR Manager, Zieda Ali, Councillors Lythgoe and Essex. Any other member wishing to be on the group to contact the Scrutiny Support Officer.

It was suggested that the above group have sight of other local authorities EIAs.

8. QUARTER 2 INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Media and Engagement Officer presented the Q2 Integrated Performance Report and highlighted the key areas.

Members were informed that 84.4% of actions were Green in status at the end of Quarter 2, which was a decrease on Quarter 2 last business year (by 3%). No actions finished this Quarter red in status.

There was a very slight decrease in the number of Green performance indicators compared to this quarter last year (down 5.5%). However, the number of red PIs had increased compared to the same quarter last year.

In relation to Risks, 64% were green in this quarter compared to 86.7% in the same quarter last year.

Key achievements identified within the report include:

- A vast amount of work has been undertaken around tourism and events, with data from Visit Lancashire showing the benefits this was having on Rossendale's tourism industry.
- The number of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered as a percentage of the total amount of Housing Benefit overpayment debt is performing above target by almost 4%.

Five PIs were identified as not achieving their targets at the end of Quarter 2 and action plans had been completed by the relevant officer.

A number of questions/comments were made as follows:

- It was agreed to provide an update to the Committee on discussions that are ongoing around the East Lancs Railway and a Community link.

- An update was requested on the cuts to community and library services and what positive steps have been done to reduce the impact on provision of these services.
- In relation to LI1 – low void levels on empty homes project, an update on this was requested for the next meeting.
- There was discussion around the difference in the number of days taken to process Council Tax Benefit claims (22days) and Housing Benefit claims (21days). The Fraud and Compliance Officer explained that this extra day for CT was to allow for an account to be created, he also confirmed that Rossendale is the 3rd quickest in Lancashire and 4th for processing change in circumstances claims.
- There was concern about % of household waste recycled which was below target again this quarter. The Portfolio Holder for Operational and Development Control indicated that they are in the process of benchmarking with other authorities but the Council need to do promotional work expressing the need to recycle more and include information in the collection leaflet distributed to all households within the Borough.
- A member asked a question about ‘risk’ as we do not have a code within the risk report on the Council’s reputation. The Media and Engagement Officer indicated that there had been discussion on this and it would be included within the People and Policy Business Plan.

The Committee congratulated the Planning Department on the 100% of minor and major applications determined on time.

RESOLVED:

That the Quarter 1 Integrated Performance Report be approved.

9. COUNTER FRAUD UPDATE

The Fraud and Compliance Officer provided the Committee with an update on the Cabinet’s recommendations from the Counter Fraud Task and Finish Group and highlighted the following.

- A draft Scheme of Delegation has been provided to hopefully allow the Fraud and Compliance Officer to continue in his role.
- The Corporate Support Team now undertaken Land Registry checks instead of using Rochdale’s Land Registry
- Regarding the Analyse Local, in terms of financial gain, it was clear that the Council have benefited from the RV Finder and over the last ten months have seen 53 cases referred from the Analyse Local team. As of 20th September 2016, 33 of the 53 cases have been referred to the Valuation Office and have come back to the Council will revised rateable values of £316,815 and once billed and collected would see the Council receive approx £62,000 per annum
- Cabinet supported the Council Tax and Council Tax Support Penalty and Prosecution Policy in March 2016 and at 21st October 2016, 22 civil penalties and one administration penalty had been issued.

- A question was asked that if changes/alterations to non domestic properties were reflected in revised bills straight away. It was confirmed that this was the case.
- A further question was also asked if changes were reflected in domestic properties. Band changes only take effect when a property is sold, it is at that point that the house is rebanded based on its value back to 1991.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee notes the Counter Fraud Update Report.
2. That Overview and Scrutiny support the need for the Fraud and Compliance Officer to continue in his role on a permanent basis.

10. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2017/18

The Service Assurance Officer presented the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/18, indicating that the proposed scheme is to remain the same, based on the housing benefit regulations with a maximum 80% level of support for working age customers. A series of amendments proposed mirror changes introduced to the housing benefit regulations in order to maintain the link between the two.

The Scheme went out to public consultation and 300 responses were received.

The Local Council Tax Support Scheme was a national benefit until 2013 and is now technically a discount decided up on by each Local Authority. When the Scheme became localised in 2013 there was a drop of 10% in funding, although pensioners cannot be affected, so the whole of the 10% reduction falls to working age customers who make up half the caseload. This means that a 10% overall reduction translates to a 20% reduction for those customers of working age.

The rollout of Universal Credit is currently not expected to be completed until 2022, therefore local authorities are expected to retain a duty to manage housing benefit claims until that time. It may be that once housing benefit ceases to be a local authority function, and then councils will adopt a different basis for CTS schemes entirely.

Six of the seven changes highlighted within the report are proposed in order to maintain the underlying principle of the current scheme. Proposal 5, relating to dependent children will only be adopted if it does become part of the Housing Benefit regulations.

Another change is to Proposal 7 relating to self-employed claimants. After an initial startup period of one year, it is proposed that claims would be assessed on the basis of an assumption of minimum wage income.

A member commented that there was a clear majority in support of the scheme but asked about the approach of South Gloucester who have adopted a banded discount scheme and the Service Assurance Officer explained that they have said

that anyone with an income of £150 or less would get 90% support, if they had an income of £150-£250 they would get 50-60% of their council tax paid.

RESOLVED:

That Overview and Scrutiny recommend Full Council to approve the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/18.

11. CAPITA MONITORING AND PERFORMANCE

The Head of Customer Services and ICT briefly presented the report on the Capita Monitoring and Performance indicating that Capita has been contracted since October 2006 to deliver revenues, benefits and associated customer services on behalf of the Council. Back office services are delivered from Capita's office in Blackburn, with customer contact by telephone being provided through the Council's One Stop Shop. Capita also provide the telephone switchboard service for all of the Council. Telephone calls were provided at the Capital call centre in Coventry until February 2016 when calls transferred to the One Stop Shop. The Capita contract was initially awarded for 10 years 2011-16, with a 3 year extension having been agreed in 2015.

The Capita contract is monitored by the Service Assurance Team who report to an Operational and Governance Board comprising 3 members. The lead member is the Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Health, with two members drawn from each of the two largest groups.

Update on general performance indicators are brought to each of the Board meeting, described above, alongside two detailed reports which focus on a particular aspect of the service, for example, effectiveness of the property inspection function or benefit claim review controls.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the content of the report and the ongoing standard of performance achieved by Capita in delivering revenues, benefits and customer service contract services on behalf of the Council.

12. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HEALTH

Councillor Barbara Ashworth, Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Health provided the Committee with an update on her role and responsibilities as a Cabinet Member.

She explained that Environmental Health was the only statutory and direct Health service the Council actually provides. Although each team member has a lead or speciality area of work, they are sharing cases in different ways to enable expertise to be gained in more than one area. They have seen a 25% increase in enquiries over the last year – and are averaging 90 new case starts a month. These are prioritised to enable them to respond in time.

Corporate Support now takes all EH calls on 01706 252565 (as quoted on the website). There is no option for EH with the current telephone system although this will probably change when the new system comes on board.

The Food Team within the EH department are in the 10 top across the Country for publishing food ratings on time.

Portfolio meetings are held approximately every 2 months, but when high profile cases arise, this will be more frequent. It is recognised that it would be good to do more specific project work and network more but there are time constraints. There is a vacancy within the team but this will be filled shortly.

In relation to her other duties regarding Health, the Portfolio Holder has responsibility to attend the East Lancashire Health and Wellbeing Partnership and also LCC's Health Scrutiny Committee. There are also bi-monthly meetings with the East Lancs CCG Locality Manager and the Rossendale lead GP.

The Portfolio Holder has set up and Chairs the Council's own Health and Wellbeing Partnership with high profile members from the CCG, public health and other outside bodies, with 25-30 people attending each meeting.

There is also a Living Well, Living Better project, funded by LCC as a joint pilot with Chorley Council. There are now 4 people working on the project looking at amongst other issues, social isolation and loneliness. This is a very 'hands on' project and comes with a small grant pot directed at organisations who will deliver "mini projects" in their local area.

In relation to Customer Services and ICT, they are in the process of having a new telephone system installed, with recently having gone out to tender. The new system would include having a queuing system when calling the council, transformation around calls and a proactive messaging system.

In addition, a tender has also gone out for the procurement of a new website. This in addition to new telephony should ensure a better customer experience, with much more business being done on line than is possible at the moment.

Customer Services and the Revs and Bens "call centre" within the One Stop Shop are delivered under the Capita contract. The Portfolio holder Chairs the quarterly Capita Operations and Governance Board meetings where RBC Service Assurance staff report back.

Statistics are available on a monthly basis and as an example, 1400 personal callers came into the OSS about Licensing issues in October, this is a typical figure, yet very few callers (18) called in about Operations matters as these enquiries seem to be made by phone.

RESOLVED:

That the Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Health be thanked for her presentation.

13. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee noted the information within the Forward Plan and agreed that there were sufficient items on the agenda for the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the information be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.05pm

Signed

Date: **Date**