

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE ISSUES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 11 July 2016 at 11.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Lethbridge (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Alvey, J Armstrong, G Bleasdale, J Carr, E Huntington, N Martin, J Rowlandson, P Stradling, M Wilkes and R Young

1 Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Armstrong, L Armstrong, P Crathorne, K Henig, J Hillary, J Lethbridge, A Shield and L Taylor.

2 Substitute Members.

There were no substitutes.

3 Minutes of the meeting held 20 April 2016

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman with the inclusion of Councillor J Carr as being in attendance.

Matters Arising:-

The Head of Planning and Performance in referencing page 3 of the minutes and in particular comments raised regarding return to work interviews by Councillor Hillary advised that performance in relation to this was included as part of the Quarter 4 report to be considered later on the agenda.

In reference made to comments raised by Councillor Martin relating to housing benefits the Head of Planning and Performance advised that there had been a downward trend over the last 3 years and full details had been emailed to Councillor Martin. The response would be forwarded to the committee for information.

In referencing page 7 of the minutes and in particular the timing of scrutiny's role in the MTFP and budget setting process, the Head of Planning and Performance advised that comments had been taken back to the Assistant Chief Executive for her consideration.

Councillor Wilkes at this point commented that he was disappointed that the meeting had been rescheduled to accommodate a lead group meeting, given that meetings of the committee were scheduled a year in advance. He asked that assurances be given that meetings would not be rearranged again to accommodate such. Councillor J Armstrong advised that he would take the comments raised back to the group secretary.

4 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Customer Feedback: Complaints Compliments and Suggestions 2015/16 - Year-end

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services which presented for consideration the Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions year-end report (for copy see file of minutes).

The Customer Relations, Policy & Performance Manager presented the report which provided a breakdown of all corporate complaints received during the 2015/16 financial year, an overview of complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), as well as compliments and suggestions relating to all service areas.

Councillor Lethbridge commented that he was extremely impressed with the breadth of analysis undertaken in compiling the report.

Councillor Wilkes in referring to discussion at a previous meeting relating to accessibility of information for members via the CRM system, asked whether a facility which would enable members to view reported issues within their area would be available this year. In response the Customer Relations, Policy & Performance Manager advised that the new CRM system would be going 'live' later this year and it was hoped that this information would be available for members from around Quarter 2.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

6 Quarter 4 2015/16 Performance Management Report

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which presented progress against the council's corporate basket of performance indicators (PIs), Council Plan and service plan actions. It further reported other performance issues for the 2015/16 financial year (for copy see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager presented the report highlighting key performance achievements and key performance improvement issues for the quarter.

Councillor Wilkes in referencing the performance of FOIs, suggested that a recommendation should be made to Cabinet to review staffing so that services were adequately staffed in order to meet demands in light of the high number of requests now being received.

He further made reference to page 41 of the report and indicator 185 (proportion of households in fuel poverty) commenting that there was a significant time lag on this indicator. The latest data relates to 2013 and a lot of changes had taken place since this time and therefore suggested that the indicator was no longer accurate or appropriate. He also mentioned indicator 184 (percentage of children in poverty) where there was a similar issue with data relating to 2013. In response the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager advised that these were national indicators which are published by the Office for National Statistics. The time lag related to the time the ONS take to collect the data and carry out data cleansing processes on it and the council had have no control over the time taken for ONS to publish this data. However, the council developed a local proxy indicator number 183 for child poverty which gave a close approximation to the nationally published data and was based on more recent data (August 2015). The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager said that he would work with officers dealing with fuel poverty issues to see whether a similar proxy measure for the national indicator can be developed.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

7 Scrutiny review of Attendance Management - Update on progress against recommendations

The Committee considered a joint report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Interim Corporate Director Resources which provide an update on progress made against the recommendations from the Scrutiny review of Attendance Management (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Head of Corporate Finance and HR provided a detailed presentation highlighting the key changes to the policy and what measures had been put in place to support Managers. He further provided a summary of progress against recommendations relating in particular to; targeting long term sickness absence, training, MyView alerts, review of OHS referral processes, staff surveys, better health at work and evaluation and review.

In summary he further provided an overview of current performance highlighting that Quarter 1 had indicated that performance was still slightly below target however there were early signs that performance was improving. In addition he reported that there had been a reduction in long term absence during the quarter and further details would be reported alongside regular performance updates.

Councillor Huntington added that she was pleased to see that there had been some improvement and applauded the team for their efforts.

Councillor J Armstrong commented that this had been an extensive piece of work and acknowledged that a lot of hard work had been undertaken by the team. He further added that he appreciated that a full picture of any changes in performance may not be possible to obtain for the next meeting due to the timing of the next meeting and quarter reporting timescales.

Councillor Wilkes raised a number of queries, the first relating to recommendation 4, regarding escalation messages to senior managers. He asked when and how it would be known, whether escalation was being undertaken within the prescribed period. In referencing recommendation 5 and the issue of OHS immediate referral, he added that if services were allowing managers to determine when referral should take place, then in his opinion performance would not improve to the desired level. Moving on, he further added that he felt mental health training for managers should be mandatory, especially if they were to be making determinations on referrals.

In conclusion Councillor Wilkes added that he also felt that the annual staff survey should be made mandatory as it was likely that figures could be skewed otherwise.

In response to the questions raised the Head of Corporate Finance and HR advised that early referral was vital in the right circumstances as it was also important that mental health was not stigmatised. Dr Wynn, Occupational Health was in attendance to provide further clarification on referrals and the effectiveness of early referral.

Councillor Wilkes further reiterated the point that training for managers should be compulsory. In response the Head of Corporate Finance and HR advised that to date 200 staff had participated in training. It was noted however, that there were approximately 1,400 managers employed.

In response to the comments made regarding the annual staff survey the Head of Planning and Performance added that members would be aware of the annual staff survey which was carried out by ACE and Communications and advised that members would have the opportunity to comment on the draft survey and provide input prior to it being circulated to staff.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

8 Review of the Committee's Work Programme 2016-17

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an updated work programme for the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2016-17 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Planning and Performance advised that as per discussions at the previous meeting held on 20 April the following topic had been highlighted for in depth scrutiny review activity:-

- Major focus on MTFP and that early involvement is important.
- Other possible areas for consideration were:
 - Overview of ICT
 - Systematic review of Attendance Management, update on recommendations
 - Progress on appraisals performance
 - Consideration of succession planning.

It was further noted that a review of the CRM system was ongoing and an update would be reported following the next meeting of the group which was likely to be held in September.

Councillor Armstrong added that all work picked up by the committee would need to be completed by the end of January 2017 ahead of the election and new council. He further added that savings identified as part of the MTFP were expected by October and therefore felt that this would allow the committee more time to debate the savings proposed. With regard to succession planning which had been raised by Councillor Hillary at the previous meeting he agreed that this was an important topic for consideration.

Councillor Wilkes commented that he was less confident than Councillor Armstrong regarding the timing of receiving MTFP reports and added that there was no reason why every two months the committee could not be offered the opportunity to comment on proposed savings in line with current practice which had been adopted by Gateshead Council.

Further debate took place regarding the timing and content of information received relating to savings and although Councillor Wilkes felt that the information received did not offer enough detail nor was received early enough for scrutiny to debate fully, Councillor Armstrong added that the committee could not discuss guesstimates and only concrete detail (figures and information) could be considered in order for it to be a valued process.

Resolved:

That the work programme 2016-17 as attached to the report be agreed.