

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 27 January 2020** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor R Crute (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors A Batey (Vice-Chair), E Adam, R Bell, A Hopgood, P Jopling, B Kellett, H Liddle, L Maddison, R Manchester, C Martin, C Potts, J Robinson, H Smith, F Tinsley, J Turnbull, M Wilkes and A Willis

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O Milburn, J Rowlandson and A Savory.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 16 December 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to an amendment to minute 8 paragraph 7, the last sentence to read:

“He expected the SPF to be dealt with at a national level and would not expect it to be at the level of current EU funding”.

The Head of Strategy, Jenny Haworth noted matters arising included:

- Minute seven, paragraph two - Councillor C Martin had asked about a complaint upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), concerning a delay in responding, resulting in a £300 payment. The Customer Relations Team Manager, Victoria Murray explained the payment had been made in accordance with the Council redress policy.

The Head of Strategy explained that the matter concerned adaptations to a home, subject to a complaint. It was added that the initial complaint became a formal complaint and investigations were undertaken which confirmed the adaptation had been installed in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. She added the LGSCO found that there had been a delay by the Council in responding to the formal complaint and had suggested an offer of £300 time and trouble payment be made. It was noted the Service had written to formally apologise for the delay.

- Minute eight, paragraph eight – Councillor M Wilkes referred to the key employment rate statistics highlighting that County Durham had a higher than national average percentage of those working 'without a disability' with a lower than national average percentage of those working 'with Equality Act core or work limiting disability'. He had asked whether this was an issue of underreporting or another reason, The Head of Strategy had confirmed the indicator was a national measure. Further to this, the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager had responded noting that employment rates were taken from the annual population survey which was a continuous household survey ran by the Office for National Statistics. He had also noted that annual population survey data was combined with the labour force survey and the reported figures for people in employment who have a disability were therefore self-reported. The Head of Strategy noted the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager had also explained that the questionnaire asked the following questions which were used to determine the disability employment rate:
 - Did you do any paid work in the 7 days ending Sunday the [date], either as an employee or self-employed? (Yes/No).
 - Do you have any physical or mental health conditions of illnesses lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more? (Yes/No Don't know/Refuse to answer).

It was noted the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager had also explained that the two independent questions were asked, and as the methodology was consistent right across the country, there could be no undercounting of people with disabilities.

Councillor M Wilkes noted that an update on what the Council was doing to tackle this, as well as the figures, would be helpful.

- Minute nine, paragraph two – Councillor M Wilkes asked for further details on ICT Services figures, £407,000 overbudget of which £381,000 was direct revenue financing.

The Head of Strategy explained that the Finance Manager - Resources and Transformation and Partnerships, Ian Herberson had provided full details, and these were e-mailed to Councillor M Wilkes on 6 January 2020, those being:

Application Delivery System	With the introduction of a mixed estate of cloud, hosted and on-premise services, the delivery of corporate applications has become complex and difficult to maintain. Investment in this system from underspending in the wider ICT budget in 2019/20 reduced the need for a bid into MTFP10.	£133,000
Core Routing Upgrade	As part of the 2019/20 work program, the DCC LAN will be replaced and core routing kit also updated. Investment in this important infrastructure from underspending in the wider ICT budget in 2019/20 reduced the need for a bid into MTFP10.	£248,500
TOTAL		£381,500

- Minute 9 paragraph four – Councillor R Bell had asked if underspends on Neighbourhood Budgets were held in reserve or lost to the general budget.

The Head of Strategy explained the Principal Partnership and Community Engagement Funding Officer, Stephanie Morgan had provided a response:

“Unspent Neighbourhood Budget was rolled over within the Members term of office. The only time it needs to be fully committed or it will be lost to the central pot (unprogrammed) is in the lead up to the local elections. At the end of the last term of office this amount was a total of £36.28. The Area Action Partnership (AAP) teams worked with the Councillors to ensure that budgets were fully committed. New budgets start on 1 April once all our commitments spend and carry forwards are agreed. Councillors can work with the AAP team to develop a project ready to submit on 1 April although not before this date”.

Councillors H Liddle and L Maddison entered the meeting at 9.35am

Councillor R Bell noted his concern had been that the cash would build up, adding the answer provided by the Officer gave assurance that it was being spent.

He added it was necessary to get ideas on the table early in order to ensure the budget was allocated.

The Head of Strategy confirmed that the report on the Budget and MTFP process expected at this meeting would now be submitted to the February meeting on a single item agenda. She added that the delay in receiving the report was due to the general election and the late announcement of the government settlement. Councillor R Bell was pleased to note the agenda for the next meeting would concentrate on budget setting. He noted the delays had not been the fault of the Council and that there was no excuse for the delay in receiving details of settlement from the Government.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

5 Council's use of Powers under the Regulation of Investigative Powers Act 2000 - Quarter Three 2019/20

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed members about the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act ('RIPA') during the period 1 October 2019 until 31 December 2019 (quarter three) to ensure that it is being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose (for copy see file of minutes).

The Governance Solicitor advised that there had been one RIPA Directed Surveillance and three Covert Human Intelligence Surveillance (CHIS) authorisations during quarter three. The Governance Solicitor reported that the directed surveillance had been in respect of underage sales of alcohol and tobacco, with the operation having completed in November 2019. It was explained that of the three CHIS authorisations, two operations related to the supply of motor vehicles and one regarding the sale of counterfeit goods. It was noted that as the operations were ongoing an update would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee to update on the outcome.

Councillor A Hopgood entered the meeting at 9.40am

The Governance Solicitor noted that Paragraph 14 of the report set out a year-on-year comparison for information.

Resolved:

That the quarterly report on the Council's use of RIPA for the period 1 October 2019 until 31 December 2019 be received and note that it is being used consistently with the Council's policy and that it remains fit for purpose.

6 Digital Strategy and Current ICT and Digital Developments

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update presentation on the Digital Strategy and current ICT and digital developments (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Digital and Customer Services, Alan Patrickson noted the Council had adopted a Customer First Strategy in 2014 and since that time the Council's digital offer to its customers had seen dramatic improvement. He explained that the new Digital Strategy set out the Council's digital ambitions for the County under three main themes along with individual service specific ambitions, the three themes being: Digital Customer; Digital Organisation; and Digital Communities. The Committee were reminded that a link to the Digital Strategy had been included in the agenda pack and the document had been designed to be best viewed in digital format.

In reference to Digital Customer, the Head of Digital and Customer Services gave several examples of how services for the public had been moved to digital channels, including swimming lesson bookings, garden waste collections and allotment contracts. He explained that an increasing number of customers were expecting to interact with the Council digitally via their mobile devices, with work having been undertaken to make most services compatible with mobiles and tablets. The Head of Digital and Customer Services noted new legislation as regards accessibility, the need for Council services to be efficient, and the importance of giving the public confidence that their data was being held safely and securely.

Members were asked to note in respect of Digital Communications, the Digital Durham Programme was at the procurement stage for Contract Three, with some funding from Government for help for rural areas being also available. The Head of Digital and Customer Services explained as regards outreach and programmes, with help for businesses, within communities and activities such as coding clubs.

It was explained to Committee that there had been a huge improvement over the last few years in terms of new systems to support new ways of working.

The Head of Digital and Customer Services explained that the Digital Organisation included the upskilling of staff to use new software, new ways of working, and robotic process automation, giving examples of how this would aid in respect of repetitive tasks. He explained the use of Office 365 enabled staff to use new software and tools for better collaboration and the ability to access those tools from any location. It was noted that there were over 400 staff champions and 'buzz days' were used to help spread awareness through the Council.

The Head of Digital and Customer Services referred to the roll out of new digital tools across services and the refresh of the corporate website to include enhanced search, customer portal and interactivity. He noted other work included: the ability of customer services to send links to services via text message; development of an application (app) to enable ordering of drinks at the Gala Theatre; further digitisation of processes following on from the success of the Personal Development Review (PDR) and annual leave systems; a staff digital conference, a 'by staff, for staff' event to highlight examples of successful projects; developments in relation to Fibre to Premises, with works to start at Crook; and the development of programmes with Culture and Sport in relation to participation at libraries.

The Chair thanked the Head of Digital and Customer Services and noted the application being developed to enable the ordering of drinks at the Gala Theatre was a very good idea. He asked Members of the Committee for their comments and questions.

Councillor E Adam noted he had recently ordered tickets for the Gala Theatre and while this had been a good experience, he added the human factor should still be retained as appropriate within such venues. In relation to the increased use of digital tools he noted, from his experience, there was a need for safeguards around 'information overload' and to retain human interaction and not isolate people. Councillor E Adam asked if there were SMART targets associated with the Digital Strategy and whether the refresh of the website had involved a panel of residents to gather feedback. The Head of Digital and Customer Services noted that in respect of the website, a focus group had been established formed from members of the public that had been regularly in touch providing feedback on our digital services. In terms of targets for Digital Strategy, the Head of Digital and Customer Services noted it had been a deliberate decision to not set targets as it was felt that within the digital space targets could often very quickly become out of date. He added that the aspirations and ambitions were set out giving a direction of travel, with some associated 'soft' targets. The Head of Digital and Customer Services noted the comment as regards retaining face-to-face contact as appropriate, adding that the digital channels were one tool and it was to use the correct tools to best help customers and for staff.

An example was given of a team meeting where staff in the same building met as usual, with one member dialling in from another site as they were working from that location that day.

Councillor R Bell endorsed the comments of Councillor E Adam in cautioning against a retreat into the digital world, noting it was an issue that would need to be managed.

Councillor R Bell asked about obtaining a map of the areas that would be covered under Contract Three of the Digital Durham Programme. He referred to capacity issues when using broadband internet, asking if there were times of the day where there was a 'pressure' within the system, and if the actual speeds advertised were always available. The Head of Digital and Customer Services confirmed that maps were available on the council's website, having been out for consultation. Issues in relation to speed and bandwidth were ultimately a matter for internet providers as the Digital Durham Programme was about getting a broadband connection in place.

Councillor A Hopgood noted concerns in terms of work-life balance and asked if there were mechanisms in place to track when staff were working. She also asked for a definition of 'rural communities' in terms of the Digital Durham Programme, as in her experience some areas that may not be considered rural could often have issues in terms of broadband connectivity. The Head of Digital and Customer Services explained the definition of 'rural' worked in favour for County Durham as the whole of the county fitted the definition it was possible to look at areas we may not consider as rural in terms of support from the Digital Durham Programme.

The Head of Digital and Customer Services noted that in respect of monitoring staff activity there were different types of working: homeworkers; and those working from home under the flexible working policy. He explained that for homeworkers, such as customer services staff, there would be specific equipment and processes in place. Staff would come into the office from time to time, or managers would visit staff so they could catch up on team issues. In respect of flexible working, the Head of Digital and Customer Services explained it enabled staff to work from home as required, helping the balance with home life. He added that while there was no specific monitoring, the issue would be managed via PDRs and managers had received wellbeing training to identify potential issues. The Chair noted that he agreed with Councillor A Hopgood in that it was important to maintain a work-life balance for staff, and elected Members. Councillor R Bell agreed with the Chair and Councillor A Hopgood that work-life balance was important as too was maintaining healthy work habits and face-to-face relationships.

The Head of Digital and Customer Services commented that Corporate and Extended Management Teams had noted the use of delayed delivery of email so that emails would be delivered first thing during work hours rather than on an evening or night.

Councillor M Wilkes noted the iPads used by Members appeared to only hold 12 months' worth of email and to look back at messages older than this he would have to attend County Hall and retrieve from a desktop machine. The Head of Digital and Customer Services advised that data retention policies required information to be stored appropriately under the Data Protection Act. He added that new ways of data storage were being explored. Councillor M Wilkes noted access to older emails was very useful for Members in managing their casework.

Councillor M Wilkes referred to articles in the press relating to companies which had a system that would generate an out of office reply that would inform the person sending the email when the employee was on leave and their email to them would be deleted. He added of course there would be a contact for any urgent issue, however, it would mean that the employee would not return to work to and face a large volume of emails.

Councillor M Wilkes noted he had experienced issues while trying to book tickets for the Gala Theatre using a mobile device, adding the website appeared to be the original site set up by the City of Durham Council 12 years ago. The Head of Digital and Customer Services advised the updated website had been developed with mobile use in mind, however, the box office service operated via a different site and he would look into the matter. Councillor E Adam noted he had recently booked tickets online and while there were some small issues, the process had worked well overall.

Councillor C Martin asked about Digital Durham and how to get broadband provision for areas that were 'off-grid'. He also asked whether a general 'Do-it-online' app had been considered. The Head of Digital and Customer Services stated the Digital Durham Programme looked to provide broadband access where there was no commercial provision. Councillor C Martin asked in cases where there was provision, albeit at a slow to medium speed, whether that was an issue to lobby internet providers. The Head of Digital and Customer Services noted it was an issue that communities could lobby providers about if they had problems in their area. He added that as regards a general app for 'Do-it-online', feedback had not shown a demand for such an app. The Head of Digital and Customer Services noted that there were currently two specific apps available, namely for Durham City Students and Swimming, with the latter to be developed further in terms of a leisure app. He noted that apps had to be downloaded to a device and this was a customer's choice.

He added that for a limited number of one or two interactions with the Council per year the average resident would likely not see the benefit of a general-purpose app. The Head of Digital and Customer Services explained the focus was therefore on specific issues, such as swimming, and the Lumiere app, albeit the latter being externally provided. Councillor C Martin noted the point; however, he explained many commercial organisations were moving to app-based channels.

Councillor A Batey asked what follow up the Council undertook in relation to the commercial delivery of broadband.

The Head of Digital and Customer Services stated Council influence on the delivery of broadband by commercial providers was limited, however there were regular meetings with some providers and issues could be raised. He added that through variations in Digital Durham Contracts One and Two there had been some scope to help in cases where appropriate.

Councillor J Turnbull noted Councillor C Martin's comments relating to a general-purpose app, adding he felt young people would likely prefer an app as their method of contacting the Council. He added that it could be more efficient as many people contacted their local Member with an issue when they struggle to use existing contact methods.

Councillor M Wilkes commented the current online method of reporting had some anomalies, citing an example where an issue relating to a dead bird had been responded to by the system informing the resident the bird had been removed. Councillor M Wilkes noted the resident informed him that in fact the bird in fact remained in place. He added he felt that there was a disconnect between customer services and the teams on the ground. The Chair noted that the officer and Cabinet Support Member would feedback to the Portfolio Holder in respect of the issue. Councillor M Wilkes noted he felt an app which directed queries to the correct officers may be helpful. The Head of Digital and Customer Services said the process was, if possible, to go straight to the frontline service with an issue. He added that if that was not possible then it would be directed to a Manager or Team Leader in order to manage workflows. He noted that providing timely feedback was a challenge. He referred to the ability for reporting issues 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and gave an example regarding anti-social behaviour reported at night where a Neighbourhood Warden had managed to close-off an issue swiftly before regular office opening hours.

Councillor F Tinsley noted figures that reported around 20 percent of people in the County did not own a smart phone. He estimated this represented around 100,000 people and asked if impact assessments were carried out when looking at how to access Council services.

He also noted frustration in terms of the many systems and passwords Members needed, for various devices and applications and also asked if there was any potential in terms of upward integration with the Government Gateway User ID 12-digit log in. The Head of Digital and Customer Services agreed it would be very helpful if this was possible and noted work ongoing in terms of Government and other Local Authorities on this.

In respect of those without access to a smartphone or similar device, the Head of Digital and Customer Services confirmed that there would always be other methods by which customers could reach Council services such as telephony or face-to-face at Customer Access Points.

Councillor H Smith asked what changes Office 365 would make to Members' experience in using their iPad and what training would be made available. The Head of Digital and Customer Services noted that the changes would not represent as large a step-change as the initial introduction of iPads, with Member Support working with colleagues in terms of a training programme.

Councillor J Robinson stated he agreed with the comments from Councillor M Wilkes in relation to his experience of booking tickets online for the Gala Theatre, noting some December shows were still listed. He commented that some areas within his Division still have poor internet connectivity and asked about access to the maps relating to Digital Durham Contract Three. He also asked what could be done for those areas that were not covered by it. The Head of Digital and Customer Services noted the strategy for those types of areas was usually limited to the ability to identify funding.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Update in relation to Petitions

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided information on the quarterly update in relation to the current situation regarding various petitions received by the authority (for copy see file of minutes).

The Senior Committee Services Officer, Jackie Graham advised that since the last update two paper-based petitions had also been received and were currently awaiting responses from the appropriate Officers.

Councillor M Wilkes asked in reference to Petition 382 how the matter had reached a point where a petition had been required.

Councillor H Smith noted she was a local Member for the area and gave an outline of the issues involved. Councillor M Wilkes noted that perhaps there were issues in relation to the highway that needed to be addressed.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

8 Notice of Key Decisions

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided a list of key decisions that were scheduled to be considered by the Executive (for copy see file of minutes).

The Senior Committee Services Officer informed the Board that the following were new to the plan and associated timescales:

- Council Plan
- School Admission Arrangements for academic year 2021/22

Councillor A Hopgood noted she had not been aware of any Key Decision in relation to the announced leisure centre transformations having been reported at the Board, adding she had looked back at Board papers since November 2018 and not found the issue listed. Councillor R Bell noted that recurring issues such as the MTFP or admissions arrangements appeared regularly, however, one-off issues that he felt Overview and Scrutiny would wish to have visibility on did not.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

9 Information Update from the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an information update of overview and scrutiny activity from 16 December 2019 to January 2020 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.