

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 **Wednesday 19 February 2014 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Lethbridge (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Alvey, J Armstrong, L Armstrong, P Crathorne, K Henig (Vice-Chairman), J Hillary, E Huntington, N Martin, A Shield, T Smith, P Stradling, L Taylor and R Young

Also Present:

Councillor J Brown.

1 Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Wilkes and S Wilson.

2 Substitute Members.

There were no substitute members.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes of the meetings held on:

The minutes of the following meetings were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman:

- (i) 25th November 2013
- (ii) 27th January 2014, Special Joint Meeting with Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

5 ICT Strategy 2013/16

The Committee considered a report and presentation from the ICT Services Manager which provided background to the ICT Strategy which covers a three year period from April 2013 (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Head of ICT Services advised that 270 staff were employed within the service, which included; Design and Print, Business Support and School staff, providing assistance to

over 10,000 users and 70,000 pupils. In addition the service dealt with approximately 10,000 calls on the service desk per month.

140 members of those staff were employed to deal specifically with corporate ICT.

ICT Services had five main functions which were to:

- Maintain
- Fix
- Supply
- Change; and
- Inform

Each of the above assisted the council in achieving its Altogether Better themes and to provide reliable and robust services which in turn helped residents to get more out of technology and support the regeneration of County Durham.

It was reported that 75,000 service desk calls were handled during the period. 93% of which were dealt with within the Service Level Agreement timeframe.

Moving on the presentation provide in detail information relating to the ICT Strategy and its key aims which were to:-

- Focus on Durham
- Better Technology
- Better Engagement
- Better People
- Better Processes.

Details of the actions associated with these aims were contained within the slides alongside the associated timescales for implementation.

Councillor Martin commented that within the presentation reference was made to Digital Durham and how superfast broadband would be delivered to all business and homes. He commented that this was inaccurate as only 98% would be achieved. In response the Head of ICT Services advised that 98% of businesses and homes would be achieved by 2016 with an aim to achieving 100% in the longer term.

Councillor Martin further commented that a local school who had taken the decision to operate a paperless administration had incurred difficulties in their Ofsted inspection, as the body were not prepared to deal with that approach. He therefore commented that if the council were encouraging schools and other organisations to operate on a paperless basis, it was important to factor in the associated risks and only use technology where appropriate.

He further asked when the council would be launching a better functioning website. It was noted that testing and consultation on the new website would commence the following week and would be launched ;later in the spring.

Further discussion then took place regarding the use of members ICT equipment and the training resources which were available to them. Councillor J Brown, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services advised that to date members ICT training sessions had been poorly attended and subsequently one to one training was now being offered. She further advised that ICT were now able to log which members were using which pieces of equipment that they had been provided with. It was noted that appointments could be made by contacting the PA to the Head of ICT Services.

Councillor K Henig queried whether the new website would link to the CRM system and also offer extended online services. In response the Head of ICT Services advised that extensive work was being undertaken in relation to council customer relationship management and on procurement to replace the existing CRM system.

Councillor Smith asked whether the service was looking into mobile developments and applications as she was concerned that Durham County Council were being left behind in that regard. She further queried whether consideration had been given to developing an app purely for Members use. In addition queries were made regarding wifi access in council buildings and e-learning to upskill staff and members.

Councillor L Armstrong commented that in his opinion the council's website was good in comparison to some other local authorities, however he appreciated significant improvements could be made. He suggested that 'How to' videos were an excellent tool to include in the website.

In response to the comments made the Head of Planning and Performance advised that all the points raised at this meeting would be fed in to the consultation. In addition she advised that the Customer First Task and Finish Group would also be looking into this subject in more depth and a specific session was to be held to look at the new website.

Councillor J Armstrong added that the issues of some members not accessing various pieces of equipment should be addressed. In addition he questioned what plans were ahead to rationalise the service in line with the MTFP, from the top down. In response the Head of ICT Services advised that the service were operating with 42% less staff than in 2009, in addition management had been halved. With regard to the future cuts, the service would be continuing to review licences and assess ways in which savings could be achieved through the better use of ICT across the authority.

Further discussion then ensued regarding mobile working and plans to further encourage this where possible in the future.

Councillor Shield raised a query regarding the recent change over of servers from BT to Plusnet and asked whether the cost of changing over all Members' computers was being absorbed by the council or by BT. In response the Head of ICT Services advised that Plusnet was a subsidiary part of BT and it was noted that the new technology was significantly cheaper than that currently used, therefore there was a net saving.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

6 Report on the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 - Quarter 3

The Committee 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 2000 ('RIPA') during the period 1 October 2013 until 31 December 2013 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).

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

7 Fit for Purpose, Fit for the Future - A Review of Durham County Council's Area Action Partnerships - Final Update

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided a final update on progress of the recommendations of the scrutiny review of Area Action Partnerships – 'Fit for Purpose, Fit for the future' (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Planning and Performance advised that the report provided an update on the 2011 review and actions which had been implemented since that time. She welcomed both Shealagh Pearce and Sandy Denney, Principal Area Action Partnership Co-ordinators who were in attendance to provide detail on those recommendations.

S Denney, Principal Area Action Partnership Co-ordinator advised that the majority of the 14 recommendations were now completed with the remaining on target to be completed by the end of the financial year.

Councillor Armstrong commented that the AAPs had been an unmitigated success and the main focus should now be on what path the AAPs take in the future. In addition he also commented that due to their success, interest in the AAPs had been seen as far as Sweden. In addition the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government had made his interest in the AAPs known. In conclusion he asked that the report be signed off and an executive summary of the report be taken to Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

Councillor Martin commented that he welcomed the participatory budget sessions and added that he found the sessions to be very good. He added however that he found some of the consultation to be inadequate, with presentations and questions only reaching the 'usual suspects' who attended forum meetings. In his opinion this did not fairly represent the views of an area.

In response Councillor Stradling commented that he felt that the strength of the AAPs was their individuality and his AAPs area's approach to consultation was very different and had good levels of participation.

Councillor Martin added that in his opinion this was only effective when the issue was specific to the area, and he found that more general county wide issues generated less interest.

In responding to comments raised by Councillors Martin and Stradling. S Pearce, Principal Area Action Partnership Co-ordinator advised that the definition of consultation was sometimes so broad that it could leave some feeling frustrated. It was also reported that in many cases consultation carried out at AAP Forum meetings was delivered by partner organisations and therefore the AAP had little control over how this was delivered.

Councillor Smith added that in her experience AAP Forum meetings were an amazing vehicle for engagement and also helped her massively in her role as Councillor to gain a better understanding of issues in her area.

Councillor Huntington also commented that the AAP also had presence at other community meetings such as PACT meetings, Resident and Community Association meetings.

In conclusion it was noted that members were happy that all actions within the report were being addressed. Councillor Armstrong added that it would be useful for the Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement and the Portfolio Holder to attend a future meeting to provide a presentation on the direction of travel and what the plans were for the future of AAPs.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

Signed.....
Date.....