

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 **Tuesday 17 November 2015 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Lethbridge (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors G Bleasdale, J Carr, P Crathorne, K Henig (Vice-Chairman), J Hillary, E Huntington, N Martin, J Rowlandson, A Shield, P Stradling, L Taylor, M Wilkes, S Wilson and R Young

1 Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Armstrong, J Armstrong, L Armstrong and H Bennett.

2 Substitute Members.

There were no substitute Members.

3 Minutes of the meeting held 28 September 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

The Head of Planning and Performance referred to the matters arising from the previous meeting and in particular, paragraph 1 and the point raised by Councillor L Armstrong, regarding child poverty statistics. It was noted that this information had now been provided.

Moving on to paragraph 3 it was reported that Councillor Shield had now met with the Corporate Improvement and Scrutiny Manager regarding the presentation of graphs. Councillor Shield added that he was not satisfied with the response however would accept that he would agree to differ.

The Head of Planning and Performance referred to Item 7, relating to Quarter 1 Performance and in particular paragraph 1, of page 6. She advised that Councillor Martin had now spoken to the Revenues and Benefits Manager and the query on Discretionary Housing Payment figures had been resolved.

In addition issues raised by Councillor Wilkes and J Hillary in paragraphs 3 and 4 of page 6, had been addressed and would be discussed under Item 6 of the agenda. In addition the Head of ICT Services was in attendance to answer any ICT related issues.

With regard to Item 8, paragraphs 4 and 5 of page 7, it was reported that the Finance Manager had now provided detail to Councillor Wilkes regarding the re-profiling of capital budgets. In addition details regarding ICT overspends had now been provided to Councillor Hillary.

4 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Report on the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 - Quarter 2 - 2015/16

The Committee received a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed members of the Council's use of powers under the Regulation and Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ('RIPA') during the period 1 July 2015 until 30 September 2015 (Quarter 2) to ensure that it was being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remained fit for purpose.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

6 Customer First Task and Finish Group Review - Update on progress against recommendations

The Committee received a joint report and presentation of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update on progress made against recommendations from the Customer First Task and Finish Group Review (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Head of Projects and Business Services provided a presentation which provided an update on the following:

- Telephony
- Digital: Website, Digital Durham, E-Store and Information Durham
- Social Media
- CRM & planning.

With regard to telephony it was reported that the council had in recognising that there were too many numbers in the public domain, conducted a review and had reduced the councils published numbers by 90. In addition any 0845 numbers previously used by the council had now been switched over to 03000 to harmonise contact numbers across the authority. In addition a number of services had been transitioned to ACD (Automatic Call Distribution) and to date this had proved very successful across the following schemes:-

- Blue Badges
- Sustainable transport

- Sundry Debt
- Housing Solutions.

It was reported that the council's new website had now been launched creating a more efficient layout which made it easier for residents to access council services. It was further reported that data showed that more visits to the website were now being made by mobiles and tablets.

The Head of Projects and Business Services then went on to provide an update on Digital Durham and its successes to date. A query was raised regarding the abbreviation THP and The Head of ICT Services advised that this stood for Total Households Passed and included both business and residential properties.

Moving on an update was provided in respect of channel shift and it was reported that 78% of sign ups and payment was completely automated. This showed that there was an appetite for automated payment lines.

Further details were provided regarding ongoing work to introduce an E-store within the council's website which would take card payments for a transportable basket style checkout, allowing the customer to pay for more than one service at a time, similar to that used by Amazon. The facility would also allow for customers to store their details for returning transactions and provide customers with a payment history and access to copy receipts.

In addition to the above, it was reported that the service had carried out a full review of Customer Service Access Point provision following which, Information Durham, a consistent identification of information and self-serve opportunities had been introduced.

With regard to social media it was recognised that this was a growing customer contact channel which was now filtered through Customer Services and addressed by the relevant service.

As a larger piece of work the council had conducted a review of CRM (Customer Relationship Management). Phase 1 of the review saw developments being made to various aspects including; introducing 115 new webforms, 13 new web payments and a review of all business processes. The Head of Projects and Business Services advised that Phase 1 would see a huge improvement to back office services and it was planned that this phase would be completed by April 2016. It was further reported that Phases 2&3 were progressing very quickly and it was anticipated that this would be completed by April 2017. Other service features would also be incorporated into the system further down the line including Culture and Sport.

The presentation further gave an illustrative example regarding the cashable benefits to the authority and it was noted that any savings made as a result of such would either be filtered back into the service or identified as savings revenue. With regard to non-cashable benefits it was noted that the key aim would be to provide better services and improve customer satisfaction.

Further progress updates would be provided quarterly as outlined in the action plan along with providing an annual update to Cabinet.

Councillor Martin raised a query regarding Superfast Broadband commenting that although Fibre had been installed at Neville's Cross, properties in the areas surrounding the Cock of North site were receiving worse service now than prior to its installation. In referencing page 84 (iii) of the report he further commented that every effort should be made to encourage central government to change current planning legislation to ensure that all new homes allowed for the inclusion of broadband/digital connectivity.

In addition Councillor Martin raised a query regarding the App 'Looking Local' which linked into the CRM system and asked whether this would still continue to be in use once the updates to CRM and website were complete. In addition he felt that councillors should be able to access CRM data in order to better assess local issues and asked whether this would be possible in the future.

In response The Head of Projects and Business Services advised that the new system would have this feature fully integrated and with such there would be no requirement for the existing 3rd party app. It was further noted that work with elected members would be ongoing to ensure that the new system met those needs and requirements as identified. The Head of Planning and Performance advised that it was the intention to establish a task and finish group specifically looking at how CRM can support councillors and nomination from interested members was sought.

At this point the Head of ICT Services advised that the laying of fibre for new developments was a continuous problem as BT were reluctant to use other fibre, however it had been suggested that housing providers simply provide ducting to allow the process to be completed more efficiently. He further commented that by next year 98% of properties in County Durham would have access to superfast broadband, equal to 82,000 properties.

Councillor Hillary made reference to paragraph 122 and asked what the main reasons were for the significant decrease in footfall at CAPs. In response the Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager advised that there was a reduction in those visiting and this could be partly attributed to less repeat visits and taking less cash for services.

Councillor Wilkes commented that in previous meetings he had requested a full list to be provided of all services offered online by other councils. This could be compared against what DCC were offering online along with an explanation as to what DCC were planning to do to either introduce these features or reasons as to why they were not required or feasible. In response the Head of Projects and Business Services advised that this information could be provided to a future meeting.

In conclusion the Head of Planning and Performance reminded members that nominations were sought from those wishing to take part in the CRM Task and Finish group.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

7 Q1 2015/16 Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions (including LGO reporting)

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services which presented the Customer Feedback; Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions for Quarter 1 2015/16 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Customer Relations, Policy & Performance Manager advised that between 1 April and 30 June 2015, 721 stage 1 corporate complaints, 256 compliments and 91 suggestions were received by the council. 57 of those complaints were escalated to stage 2. This represented a 17% increase in complaints received during the quarter against the comparable period last year. It was reported that there had been some changes to the complaints process following agreed changes at Cabinet in July 2015 and that it was likely that a shift in figures would start to be seen in the coming months. It was noted that the increase could be partly attributed to the introduction of the garden waste scheme during its period of bedding in.

Moving on, details were reported in respect of each service grouping highlighting complaints, compliments and comments for the quarter. With regard to Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Activity it was reported that during Q1 the LGO made initial enquiries / initiated investigations into 33 matters. Decisions were delivered on 22 investigations and another 18 were ongoing.

The Customer Relations, Policy & Performance Manager in conclusion advised that reporting would continue on a quarterly basis and further details would be reported in future reports regarding learning outcomes.

Councillor Wilkes in referring to bin complaints commented that some were in fact quite serious and could impact upon elderly or vulnerable people. In addition he made reference to parking issues at Abbey Road in Pity Me and commented that it was likely that further complaints regarding this issue would be forthcoming.

Councillor Wilkes in referencing paragraph 61 of the report further asked whether it was possible to have details of any financial settlements made so that members were aware of the outcome. In response the Customer Relations, Policy & Performance Manager advised that this detail would be included in the new style reporting following the policy review.

Councillor Martin asked for clarification regarding the publication of ombudsman decisions and whether the council had a duty to publish this information on the council's website. It was noted that the council's website did include a link to the LGO site where decisions were published, however Councillor Martin's comments were noted and would be fed back to the Monitoring Officer.

Councillor Martin further made reference to page 100 of the report and in particular the issue of contaminated waste. He commented that it would be useful for residents if the council's website incorporated a chart outlining which numbers (which were displayed on all plastic items) could be recycled and those which could not. In addition he commented that he found many pages of the council's website quite flat and did not provide adequate information in order for the resident to resolve their query, without the need for direct contact.

The Customer Relations, Policy & Performance Manager advised that the Strategic Waste team would be made aware of the suggestions and detail could be reported back at a future date. With regard to online content it was noted that the review of the CRM system would see the introduction of a number of new webforms which would reduce the number of calls related to issues such as pest control etc.

Councillor Wilkes further commented that the search function on the council's website did not recognise Councillor names. It was noted that this issue had been recognised and was being picked up via the Website Working Group.

Councillor J Carr on a separate point commented that when issues were raised and answers could not be provided at the meeting, that responses were not just directed to the councillor who posed the question, but to all members and that the response be recorded accurately.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

8 Children and Adults Services Annual Statutory Representations 2014/15

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director Children and Adult Services which provided a summary of statutory representations relating to children's and adults social care services during the period 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Complaints Officer CAS began by providing some background to complaints and the process by which they were managed. She advised that the main message from the Annual Report for 2014-15 was that statutory complaints fell by 23.1% from the previous year, as detailed within the report. It was further reported that 176 complaints were received, in comparison with 229 in the previous year 70% of which related to children's social care services and were resolved within the statutory timescale of up to 20 working days from receipt. This showed an improvement from the previous year's figure of 58.7%. Of the total number of complaints received 44.9% were not upheld.

Further detail was reported regarding the predominant 3 categories of complaints as detailed within the report and it was interesting to note that Lack of Communication/ Information featured as an element in 24.4% of all CAS complaints.

The service continually strived to mitigate against complaints in the top 3 categories, and details of those actions were detailed on pages 131 and 138 of the report.

The Complaints Officer CAS advised that a benchmarking exercise had been undertaken with other Local Authorities in the North East region. The information received was summarised in the tables on pages 107-108 of the covering report, which showed that of the 10 authorities in the region which provided the requested information:-

- Durham had the second lowest rate of children's Stage 1 complaints (0.876) per 1000 population aged 0-19 years.

- Durham had the second lowest percentage (5%) of children's complaints progressing to Stage 2. This is an improvement on 2013/14 when Durham had the fourth lowest rate.
- Durham had the fourth lowest rate of adult complaints (0.183) per 1000 population aged 18 and over. This is an improvement on 2013/14 when Durham had the fifth lowest rate.

It was noted that the data presented was anonymised and it was explained that this was due to the information being provided by colleagues in regional authorities on a reciprocal information sharing basis, prior to the information being published. It was further acknowledged that Members had in previous years, raised queries regarding why comparisons were not shown in relation to statistical rather than regional neighbours, and it was reported that the team did not have similar arrangements with statistical neighbours for sharing unpublished information and therefore it had only been possible to gather any *published* comparator information, which referred to the *previous* reporting year 2013-14.

It was noted that as the information was not relevant to the 2014-15 period which the representation report related to, it was not included within the main report. It was reported however that in 2013/14, in relation to the County's 10 statistical neighbours in the children's demographic, 7 local authorities had published the relevant information. Of those, Durham had received the fewest complaints per 1000, 0-19 population, and also had the second lowest percentage of stage 1 complaints taken to stage 2.

In relation to the 15 statistical neighbours in the adult's demographic, 12 local authorities had published the relevant information. Of these, Durham had received the second fewest complaints per 1000 - 18+ population, with a rate of 0.216 complaints per person.

With regard to representations in the form of compliments about social care services, it was noted that they had increased by 23.9% in 2014/15 compared with the previous year, from 451 compliments to 559.

It was further reported that complaints which had been upheld or partially upheld, wherever possible were given actions and were identified for service improvement. The system thereby 'closes the circle' in relation to the journey of a complaint. Some examples of learning outcomes following investigation were detailed at points 24 and 25, of pages 109 - 110 of the report.

In summary the Complaints Officer advised that during the period 2007-2012, there was an overall upward trend for complaints, followed by a reduction from the 2012 level in 2013/14. In 2014/15, the reduction in complaints continued, and total compliments increased. Members were further asked to note the content of the Annual report, provide any feedback and endorse the publication to key stakeholders of the Service.

Councillor Wilkes queried whether Corporate Issues was the most appropriate Committee to receive this report and felt that CYPS would be better equipped to receive this information. It was noted that complaints came under the remit of Corporate Issues and had been a previous function of the standards committee who had passed responsibility to CIOSC.

Councillor Martin made reference to the data presented regarding benchmarking, and added that he felt that the rank position was irrelevant and it was more important for the committee to receive information regarding the rate of complaints as this year had improved, although the rank position had not changed. Further discussion took place regarding this issue and it was agreed that the numbers were more important although it was still useful to display the ranking in the report.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

9 Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Attendance Management Working Group Review

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which presented the Attendance Management Working Group review report and recommendations (for copy see file of minutes).

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that the review group was set up following consideration of a performance management report where reference had been made to performance in respect of sickness absence targets not being met within Durham County Council.

The review group over the course of 5 meetings considered attendance management issues including sickness absence and it was agreed to:-

- Receive an overview of current policies and procedures including the role of Occupational Health;
- Examine statistics relating to attendance management across the council including profiling;
- Consider research and examples of best practice re attendance management;
- Receive information from staff, trade unions and managers on sickness policy and management.

It was reported that the review group had produced 9 recommendations as detailed on pages 162-163 of the report and in addition Key Findings and conclusions were detailed on pages 160 – 162 of the report and included a summary of those issues identified.

A summary of the recommendations were as follows:-

- The Council to target long term sickness absence;
- Compulsory training to all managers on the new Attendance Management Policy, including the identification of links with other associated policies and procedures including stress awareness, workstation assessment and appraisals;
- Proposed amendments to Sickness absence trigger alerts to managers and the establishment of a corporate target for referral into OH;
- A more comprehensive Council wide staff survey to be undertaken;
- The review of the Council's approach to Better health at work, and
- The engagement of Trade Unions, staff and managers in the proposals recommended by this review.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that the review report concluded by recommending that following implementation of the Attendance Management policy and in the event that it does not deliver improved attendance performance, a review of all trigger points within the policy be undertaken. This had been raised with Management and a commitment had been made by the service to monitor the impact of recommendations once implemented and report via scrutiny quarterly performance. The review report was to be submitted for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 December 2015.

Councillor Wilson commented whether there were any details as to the types of illness by service area. The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred to paragraph 56 of the report which provided a breakdown by directorate.

Councillor Martin commented that he had noted that stress and mental health were main contributors to long term illness in CAS, however he added that long term absence may not always be attributed to work-related stress/illness and in these cases there was little that the authority could do to prevent this.

Councillor Shield complimented the Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer on the report, however added that the fact could not be ignored that sickness absence had increased over the last 5 months. He therefore asked whether it was known what the cost of this absence was to the organisation and its viability, as he felt that the authority was obliged to address any misuse and abuse of the policy.

The Head of Planning and Performance advised that as staff within the service often covered duties of those on sick leave it was extremely difficult for HR to quantify the cost to the authority. She further commented it was important that the well-being of any staff picking up additional duties was monitored to ensure that any early indicators of stress were identified.

Councillor Hillary commented that regardless of whether staff were picking up additional duties to cover sick leave, the council were still issuing sick pay and this should be easily identifiable via the payroll system.

Further discussion took place regarding long term absences and the undue pressure that some employees may face about returning to work early if faced with information about how much their absence was costing the authority. Councillor Shield commented that it was not his intention upon suggesting this course of action to target those individuals with genuine reasons as to why they were unfit for work.

Councillor Stradling then asked whether each of the recommendations could be taken in turn and commented upon where appropriate. Councillor Wilkes submitted detail of amendments in respect of recommendations 3, 5 & 7 and were considered and discussed accordingly. Recommendations were agreed as follows:-

- 1 Agreed
- 2 Agreed
- 3 To add a final sentence, to read *“That the percentage of managers trained be reported to Scrutiny at appropriate intervals”*.
- 4 Agreed
- 5 To read *“The Working Group recommends that a review of the current OHS referral process be undertaken to include establishing a target for referral into the OHS*

service of 30 calendar days; an analysis of the impact upon OHS of implementing this target and an immediate referral into OHS for those employees whose absence has been due to mental wellbeing”.

6 Agreed

7 To add a final sentence to read *“With councillors having direct input into the content of the questions via Scrutiny”.*

8 Agreed

9 Agreed

Resolved

That the content of the review report be agreed with the above amendments to recommendations 3, 5 and 7 and that the report be forward to Cabinet for consideration at its meeting schedule to be held on 16 December 2015.

Signed.....

Date.....