

MINUTES

FINANCE & RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 JUNE 2012

Present:

Adeleke	Marshall
Ayling	Sutton (Chairman)
Clark	Taylor
Collins	
Doole	

Also in attendance:

Councillor Tiley, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources

Officers:

Brian Cox	Foresight Consulting
Shane Flynn	Assistant Director - Finance and Resources
David Gill	Group Manager - Partnerships, Policy and Citizen Insight)
Ben Hosier	Group Manager - Commissioning, Procurement & Compliance
Linda Dargue	Insurance & Risk Manager
James Deane	Group Manager - Financial Services
Jim Doyle	Group Manager - Democratic Services
Mark Brookes	Group Manager - Legal Governance
Steve Baker	Assistant Director - Legal, Democratic & Regulatory
Janice Milsom	Assistant Director - Strategy & Transformation, Community & Organisation
Louise Dolphin	Member Support Officer (Minutes)

The meeting started at 7.30pm.

OS/115/12 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 20 March 2012 were confirmed by the members present and were then signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment: Councillor Doole said that the Part II Minutes from the meeting held on 20th March were not received by any of the Councillors and would like them included in the next agenda.

OS/116/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor W Wyatt Lowe. Councillors Organ, Townsend and White were absent.

OS/117/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

OS/118/12 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

OS/119/12 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN

None

OS/120/12 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT – FINANCE & RESOURCES DICTORATE

S Flynn introduced the quarter 4 performance information. He explained that there were many system changes that are due to take place over the next few months within Revenues and Benefits. He highlighted that in the 1st 6 months all issues would be addressed.

Key points of discussion

Councillor Ayling requested that the following amendments be noted:

- Page 4 2.4 - To amend the wording 2010/2012 to 2010/2011
- Page 5 2.5 – To remove the word “the” in the third paragraph and add the word “complete” after the word “now” in the second sentence.
- Page 5 3.2 – To replace the word “offers” with the word “orders”.

S Flynn said that he was happy to make the suggested amendments.

Councillor Ayling asked the Officer if he could explain to the Committee the Government Procurement card in more detail.

S Flynn highlighted that fact that this card would allow more control over purchases as well as allowing all transactions to appear on financial systems on a more timely basis. The card functions in the same way as a credit card, but with enhanced security, which means that we do not have to process purchase orders and invoices in the same way as at present, thereby speeding up the procurement processes. However, there is still a reconciliation between the purchase, the receipt of goods by the budget holder and the financial records, so there is no loss of financial control.

Councillor Doole asked how many people would be located in the Customer Service Unit to deal with the ongoing enquiries. S Flynn explained that there would be a 2 people as the main point of contact that would be available to deal with Benefit enquiries. A pilot project would enable the Revenues and Benefits staff based in the Customer Service Unit to deal with enquiries and to see if any problems occurred from it. He said that they had come a long way in moving towards a better system.

Councillor Doole referred to point 4.6 on Page 6 and asked if there would be a need for a revaluation on how things were run in the Customer Service Unit. S Flynn explained that all performance measures were in place to adhere to any complications that may arise. However, a report on Revenues and Benefits performance will continue to be provided twice a year to enable the committee to scrutinise the performance and quality of the service.

Councillor Taylor asked S Flynn if he was aware of the Revenue and Benefit's front desk that was previously located at the front of the building in the past as it proved a

success in the past. S Flynn said that he was not aware of the Revenue and Benefits front desk they had in the past but said that he would be happy to share Councillor Taylor's previous experience. .

Councillor Adeleke referred to Page 5, 2.5 regarding the flexible working arrangements amongst the Cemeteries Team which may include opening cemeteries for burials on a Saturday. He asked if this was due to demand and if any laws were being contravened. S Flynn said that there was no legal reason or religious reason for the burials to take place on a Saturday. It was mainly due to lack of resources that it had not been done previously.

Councillor Adeleke referred to Page 7, 4.7 and asked if apprentices would be recruited locally and if so how. S Flynn explained to the Committee that they would be recruited either as part of a corporate scheme or one departmental basis. In either case support by the local college would be required as part of the training. All apprentices would be guaranteed training for a fixed period. Decisions would be made at a later stage as to whether they would retain them. However, the main focus would be on local support.

Councillor Marshall referred to Page 4, 2.4 regarding the total car parking income received and asked for clarification on the car parking income as per the budgeted income as per the outturn report.

Actions:

S Flynn to provide responses to the following queries:

1. To arrange an appointment with Councillor Taylor to discuss the CSU Revenues and Benefits pilot and
2. To reconcile between the statement that car parking income was marginally below target (as per the performance report) and the above budgeted income (as per the outturn report).
3. To arrange for Revenues and Benefits performance reports to be provided to future meetings, to include details of the Liberata intervention and performance monitoring.

Outcome:

The performance for quarter 4 was noted and the comments noted above taken into consideration.

OS/121/12 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT – PERFORMANCE, IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION DICTORATE

J Milsom introduced the quarter 4 performance information. She said that the 2 main service areas where they needed to continue to work with HR to reduce sickness absence – ICT and the Customer Service team. She explained that there was ongoing improvement work in the CSU with major market changes taking place in the future and the CSU service would need to prepare in advance for the fluctuation in calls etc. She explained that the HR team had invested time in supporting managers to reduce the amount of sickness absence across the Council. The outturn for sickness absence this year is 8.6 days per fte, which is the second best result in the last nine years. In terms of staffing across the Council, training plans are in place on a range of subjects through the corporate training programme and additionally, a new apprenticeship scheme is being introduced, following Cabinet approval in May.

Key points of discussion

Councillor Doole asked if an explanation could be given on what the Customer Service Unit Improvement plan consisted of.

Dave Gill highlighted the key areas to the Committee. He said that we had seen an improvement on queue busting, correct forms being given to customers and voicemail issues being tackled.

Councillor Doole asked how other areas within the Council have an impact on the Customer Service Unit. J Milsom said that all Group Managers have been interviewed and trained on managing their staff more effectively. An improvement plan will be put in place which will look at some of the key areas that need improvement.

Councillor Sutton said that it would be helpful if a project timetable could be brought to the next meeting.

Councillor Adeleke asked why it was so difficult to retain staff in the Customer Service Unit. D Gill explained that the staff turnover was not excessive but that there are issues around keeping staff because Customer service jobs are an 'entry level' job, they become trained in Council services and often move on to other areas of the Council to work; there is a difficulty in attracting trained staff even though we have improved our recruitment procedures and training staff from start to finish can take 6 – 12 months. This inturn had a dramatic impact on the department as it used up many of their resources to train and support staff.

Councillor Adeleke asked what changes had been put in place to prevent this happening in the future. D Gill said that each new recruit would have a buddy to help them with their training. Team Leaders would also be appointed to act as the first point of call for any queries or questions that staff had. He also mentioned that there would be apprenticeship schemes put in place and staff would be encouraged to do an NVQ in customer service to further their knowledge and qualifications.

Councillor Adeleke referred to Page 13, 3.5 and asked whether the sickness absence results in the last nine year's had anything due to the fact that less staff were taking less time off. J Milsom explained that staff surveys were used to keep on top of staff well being. She mentioned that the Council compared well with other Public Sectors and would continue to provide staff well being initiatives.

The Chair asked if there was a higher period of sickness and absence at different times of the year. J Milsom reported that usually this was not the case however; they are looking at providing preventative measures for the coming Olympics 2012 by allowing staff time out sessions to watch the games.

Councillor Collins referred to Page 13, 3.3 and asked if there were any other areas that could be used as a good success. D Gill said that they were working with other services to make improvements and hoped that there would be more taking place next year.

The Chair asked if the apprentices would come directly from schools and if there would be any work experience offered. J Milsom said that the Council would be taking part in the National Apprenticeship Scheme taking place over the next year which would be funded in year one. Thereafter, they would seek funding to help support the scheme. Work experience is also offered through local schools wherever possible. Induction programmes would be introduced to help maintain support and learning for young people joining the organisation.

Actions:

J Milsom to provide responses to the following queries:

1. To provide a project timetable to take to the next Finance and Resources meeting.

Outcome:

The performance for quarter 4 was noted and the comments noted above taken into consideration.

OS/122/12 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT – LEGAL GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

S Baker introduced the quarter 4 performance information for the Legal Governance and Democratic Services. He apologised that the report in the agenda was incomplete but that the proper version had been circulated to members before the meeting. He said that there were no significant performance issues to highlight. He mentioned that a new web based system for processing Corporate Customer Complaints had been developed in-house and went “live” in April. Customer complaints were the subject of a more detailed report elsewhere on the agenda.

The Committee were informed that on 2 April 2012 Mark Brookes replaced Noele Pope as the Group Manager (Legal Governance) as Noele left the Council at the end of March 2012. It was brought to the Committee’s attention that although the management of the Licensing Service now comes within the remit of Legal Governance, it still remains within the Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Therefore the performance of the Licensing Service will continue to be reported to that Committee.

S Baker referred to the high level service objectives for 2012/13 set out in the report and explained that it was intended to report on the progress in meeting these objectives in future quarterly performance reports in addition to the usual performance data.

Outcome:

The performance for quarter 4 was noted.

OS/123/12 PROVISIONAL REVENUE OUTTURN REPORT 2011/12

Shane Flynn outlined the report and referred to Page 22, paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4. He said that the variance between the outturn and the revised budget had been reported to Members in February 2012 as part of the 2012/13 budget report and that this report presents only further draft variances against the revised budget.

Key points of discussion

Councillor Marshall referred to Page 25, 3.3 and said she was surprised at the under spend in Revenue and Benefits relating to reduced court fees and bailiff usage. She asked if the number of debtors had fallen as a result of these findings. J Deane/S Flynn to come back to Committee with answer.

Councillor Doole referred to the £82k net underspend on building works and asked if there was a programme in place to tackle this. S Flynn said that Serco had now taken over the day-to-day repairs programme and performance indicators have been put in

place to monitor process. The findings would be reported back to Committee and the Performance Board.

Councillor Adeleke referred to Page 25, 3.3 with reference to the £57k overspend in Benefits Administration. He asked why there was a backlog in processing benefit claims. S Flynn said that it was quite common for backlogs to develop in Benefits processing and for them to be cleared out and that the pattern in Dacorum was not dissimilar to the Councils. He mentioned that they are looking at a whole range of exercises from the beginning to the end to see what works best within the department. He said that a report would go to Cabinet in June which would set this out in more detail and seek additional funding to secure a longer term solution. Recently some research had been carried out to determine whether there was an increase in the volume of claims and there are clearly some 20% more now than there had been in the past. The Council has its highest benefits caseload of all time at present but resources had not kept pace with this increase.

Councillor Tiley referred to Page 32, 6.7 the HRA Capital programme. He asked if this could be explained in more detail as he had been asked by a member of the press.

Actions:

1. S Flynn to provide answer to Councillor Marshall regarding bailiff question

Outcome

That the content of the report is noted and recommended to Cabinet for approval together with any associated comments.

OS/124/12 ANNUAL RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2011/12

L Dargue summarised the quarter 4 reports on the Strategic Risk Register and the Operational Risk Registers. She said that there had been no changes to the risk scores for this quarter, although following a review it appears that some of the scores could be revised. She explained that when the report goes to CMT there may be some changes to the Strategic Risk Register. A Risk Register is not just looked at once. Any key changes will be incorporated into the Quarter 1 report.

Key points of discussion

Councillor Doole asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources if there had been any training on risk management in the last Audit/Finance meeting. The Portfolio Holder said that he was not able to recall whether the training had taken place and he would pick it up at the next Portfolio meeting.

Councillor Marshall pointed out that on Page 43, Appendix A of the report that the bottom of the table appeared to be missing. She asked if Officers checked the reports before sending to print for publishing. J Doyle said that it was Officers responsibility to check their reports and not the responsibility of Member Support.

Councillor Doole referred to the Infrastructure Risk table on Page 44 and asked if it was acceptable to have waited from January till now. L Dargue explained that she had tried to obtain this on many occasions but was still not in receipt of this at present. S Flynn said that there had been lots of work done in respect to the Health & Safety Strategy, which had been reported to the Audit Committee recently. It may be that the format of the information made it difficult to add it to the assurance column in the risk register a matter of finding the best format and seeing what worked best.

Outcome

That the content of the report is noted and recommended to Cabinet for approval together with any associated comments.

OS/125/12 COMPLAINTS REPORT

J Doyle; The Group Manager for Democratic Services presented his report to the Committee. In view of the complaints handling process, Group Managers have been advised that it will be their responsibility to manage all complaints. He said that both Cassie and Murtaza have worked very hard to streamline the complaints handling process. Both the MP enquiries and Ombudsman complaints still need to be addressed separately.

Key points of discussion

Councillor Marshall asked when the Committee would receive the next report on Complaint Handling. J Doyle said that the reports would be produced on a quarterly basis. All Group Managers would receive a copy of them.

Councillor Marshall expressed her concern over the MP enquiries and general complaint handling. She said that she was worried that the complaints would get mixed up and suggested that they should be listed separately. J Doyle said that he agreed with Councillor Marshall's comment.

S Baker said that in many cases complaints can get duplicated. The MP likes to receive a direct reply rather than just being copied in on the Council's response to his constituent. Whilst an MP enquiry can begin as a simple enquiry it can often turn into a complaint further down the line if the enquiry is not answered in a timely fashion.

Councillor Tiley said that he appreciated that in some cases complaints have to be treated with sensitivity however, it is important that they do not confuse enquiries with complaints.

Councillor Adeleke asked if there was a separate category for internal and external complaints. J Doyle said that the Corporate Customer Complaints system only dealt with external complaints. Internal complaints were dealt with separately.

Councillor Adeleke asked how press complaints are monitored. J Doyle said that all press complaints are dealt with by Communications. In the event that they are unable to deal with the complaint, it would then be forwarded onto either a Team Leader or a Group Manager.

The Chair asked how an anonymous complaint would be dealt with. J Doyle said that it is difficult to deal with anonymous complaints because there is no way of sending a response.

Councillor Collins referred to Page 51, 4.1 and highlighted that it was critical that we kept up to date within the response times for the Ombudsman enquiries.

Actions:

- J Doyle to produce quarterly reports on Corporate Customer Complaints. The first one to be brought with the next quarterly performance report in September.

Outcome

That all the statistics on the Corporate Customer Complaints system is kept separate from MP enquiries.

The meeting ended at 9.27pm