

# Scrutiny Overview Report (2010/11)

## Corporate, Adult Services and Social Inclusion Select Committee (CASSI)

### *Resources Service Overview*

The following services are all within Resources' remit:

There are six main service areas within Resources and an outline of their specific responsibilities is given below:

#### **Communications**

Following the EIT Review of Communications, Consultation and Engagement, the new centralised Communications team has been established to provide a single point of advice and support to all parts of the Council on all issues relating to communications.

#### *Media relations*

The *Media Relations* team: issue press releases relating to the council; publish Stockton News four times a year; coordinate all responses to media, including Freedom of information requests; organise press briefings on specific topics; arrange media launch events and photo opportunities; arrange photographic support for press releases; provide guidance on media issues; arrange media training for members and officers; provide a daily roundup of local and national stories relating to Stockton Council and local government.

#### *Internal Communications*

The *Internal Communications* team: produce the weekly electronic 'Keeping You in Touch' (KYiT) internal newsletter; oversee the content of the Council's intranet, which is to be redeveloped by summer 2011 to be easier to use and navigate.

#### *Marketing*

The *Marketing* team: develop and deliver innovative, exciting and targeted marketing campaigns; coordinate print and design to ensure value for money; enable residents and visitors to find information faster through traditional media, the website and their own social media channels; arrange all photographic requests by service areas through the newly agreed photography contract; continually assess new product development to ensure clients are offered the most up-to-date means of relevant communication; project manage all marketing campaigns with a named officer.

#### **Customer Services & Taxation**

The *Taxation Service* is responsible for the administration of local taxation - Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) and for cashiering functions. It fulfils the requirements placed on the Council by the 1988 and 1992 Local Government and Finance Acts, the Local Government Act 2003 and hundreds of statutory instruments associated with these Acts.

*Customer Services* is responsible for the development and implementation of the Council's corporate "Customer Service Excellence" programme, which defines standards and promotes a customer-focused culture for the whole authority. The Customer Services Team is also developing and delivering the Council's Access to Services programme, which aims to make it easier for customers to get in touch with the services they require, through a range of access channels. They operate the corporate contact centre for incoming telephone enquiries for a

wide range of services, and the Thornaby Customer Service Centre, which is the first of three planned service centres to cater for face-to-face enquiries. The second Customer Service Centre, based within Stockton Central Library is due to open in autumn 2011.

The *Administration Service* provides central support services to all the Service Groupings of the Council. The duties of the Administration Team are very varied, requiring interaction with all other Council Service Groupings and involvement in a range of corporate initiatives. Services provided include: courier, personal assistant (PA), general administration and maintenance of the Council's local land and property gazetteer.

## **Finance**

The *Finance Service* is focused on safeguarding and maximising financial resources, supporting the strategic aims and objectives of the authority. The Service also includes responsibilities for Capital and Asset Strategy, Corporate Procurement and Land and Property to ensure a wider deployment of resources as a whole and greater integration of the strategic planning process. Services provided are: Strategic Financial advice; Financial support; Land & Property; Capital Planning; Asset Management; Financial Planning, Risk Management & Insurance; Corporate Procurement and Internal Audit. It also maintains direct links on financial issues with Xentrall Shared Services

## **Human Resources**

The *Human Resources Service* is integral to the continued success of the Council, through its role in the development of a skilled, committed and well-managed workforce. The Service endeavours to build organisational capacity, through effective workforce planning, and enable employees to perform their duties more effectively, develop their personal potential and equip them with the knowledge, understanding, skills and awareness they need to achieve the Council's objectives. It also assists the Council in the provision of a safe working environment, in line with Health & Safety legislation. In addition training and welfare programmes are provided, through this service, to the general public. Services provided are: Organisational Development; Diversity; Advisory Services and Health & Safety. Like Finance, it also maintains links with Xentrall Shared Services.

## **Policy, Improvement and Engagement**

Following the EIT review of Communications, Consultation and Engagement the functions previously within Policy, Performance and Partnerships, Community Development (previously within Housing) and Neighbourhood Management (previously in Community Safety) have been centralised. Alongside this the EIT review of Admin and Business Support has seen the policy and performance functions combined into a single team.

### *Policy*

Reviewing national policy and legislation, analysing its potential impact on the Council and the Local Strategic Partnership and providing appropriate briefings and reports for CMT, Cabinet, elected members and officers; Co-ordinating local policy through the Policy Officers Group; Leading on policy relating to Equality and Diversity on behalf of the Council including implementation of the Single Equality Scheme and Community Cohesion Strategy; Developing the Sustainable Community Strategy on behalf of the LSP; Developing the Council Plan; Responding to national consultations on policy and legislative changes; Development and operation of the Member policy and information seminars.

### *Improvement and business support*

Developing the performance management framework for the Council and the LSP; Monitoring and reporting on achievements against the SCS, the Council Plan, Service Delivery Plans, the

Single Equality Scheme and the Community Cohesion Strategy; Developing the local intelligence framework, bringing together performance information with demographic data, outcomes from consultation, Mosaic data and local knowledge into community profiles; Support for service inspections; Co-ordination of responses to Freedom of Information requests, comments, commendations and complaints on behalf of resources service grouping.

### *Community Engagement*

Guidance and support across the council in relation to consultation with the public; Management and development of Viewpoint and Youth Viewpoint; Development and support for the Local Strategic Partnership infrastructure; Development and implementation of a borough-wide approach to neighbourhood/community working; Co-ordination of the Disability Advisory Group; Development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Councils package of support to the Voluntary and Community Sector; Relationship development with key community engagement partners; including Catalyst, Community Empowerment Network Provider, LINK and key engagement officers in other public sector services; Management of Ragworth Neighbourhood Centre and 98 Dovecot Street; Responsibility for the community engagement element of the Council website.

### **Xentrall Shared Services**

**Xentrall Shared Services** is a partnership with Darlington Borough Council for the delivery of a number of “back-office” services.

The Partnership, which went live on 1 May 2008, includes the following services:

#### *Xentrall ICT Services*

The Service guides and advises on the strategic direction of ICT services and is proactive in identifying opportunities to exploit information and communication technologies. In addition, it ensures that solutions are made available and maintained to their optimum capability and it maintains a service that responds and adapts quickly to change. Services provided are: Project Support; Service Centre; First Line, Second Line Support; Server and Network Support, Systems Support; Systems Development; Member’s ICT Services; Information Security Management; Information Governance; Project Management; Technology and Process Excellence.

#### *Xentrall Design & Print Service*

The *Design and Print Service* offers a range of design and print solutions. It has a range of different print equipment and is capable of producing high quality print solutions. In addition to the design and print services, it also delivers a purchasing service, which can be used to procure externally for any work that can’t be undertaken by the in-house team.

#### *Xentrall Transactional Finance Service*

The *Transactional Finance Service* provides efficient and effective transactional services to its customers. It embraces new technology maximising benefits from it and ensuring a smooth interface with operational/front line services. Services provided are: Creditors, Debtors, Banking, Income, Car Mileage processing and the development and support of the Financial Management System, Agresso.

#### *Xentrall Transactional HR Service*

The *Transactional HR service* provides efficient and effective transactional services to its customers. It embraces new technology maximising the benefits from it and ensuring a smooth interface between operational and frontline services. Services provided are: Payroll, Recruitment, Contracts, Absence Reporting, and the development and support of the HR Management System, PSE.

*What has been achieved?*

## **Communications**

- The team has developed a series of key campaigns and messages that it will prioritise its efforts and resources on throughout the year. With fewer, more targeted campaigns the team aims to help residents understand better the role of the Council and the difference we make - it also helps build a stronger 'brand' and identity for Stockton Council.
- As part of this, a centralised budget has been established to deliver these key campaigns and to achieve maximum efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's overall communications spend.
- One of the main routes to achieving this has been the Communications team coordinating all requests for print and design work and directing them through the in-house unit provided by Xentrall, rather than sourcing to external providers.
- By working with individual services to understand their needs and developing communications plans to support this, the Communications team aims to maintain a clearer overview of the messages we are giving out both internally and externally and to improve the quality, consistency and pro-activity of communications overall.

Particular achievements include:

- Press enquiries/press releases - increased volume from 2010.
- Events guide produced bi-annually and circulated in Stockton News.
- Winter Maintenance Communications.
- Launch of Town Centre Prospectus and continued proactive media on Stockton High Street.
- Increased promotion of Business, Regeneration and Employment issues.
- Internal Communications - support for Budget/EIT reviews.
- Marketing Campaigns for FACS, Stockton Sparkles and SIRF.
- Budget Control/new centralised way of working/ Design and Print.
- Web/Social media - Business Briefing/gritting twitter updates/corporate website improvements to 'look and feel'.

## **Customer Services and Taxation**

### *Customer Services and Administration*

- The Council's vision for customer service is to provide residents and customers easy access to services through multi-service contact centres, providing a single point of telephone contact and 24 hour Internet access. During the year the service has developed and implemented a number of ICT system enhancements and integrations that have streamlined processes, generated efficiencies and improved customer service. This included the launch of an on-line self-service system which enables customers to log requests for service and track their progress.
- The Customer Services and Administration teams retained ISO9001:2008 certification.
- Customer Services co-ordinated and supported all Council services through the assessment process for the Government's Customer Service Excellence standard. The Council was awarded the standard at a corporate level in June 2010, one of only 6 Councils nationally to achieve this.
- An access channel strategy was developed, defining the principles for the way that the Council will interact with its customers through a range of contact channels that deliver value for money, are accessible and are designed with the customer in mind, including those that don't have access to the internet. The strategy will be fully implemented by the end of 2011/2012.

- At the National Land and Property Gazetteer Exemplar awards in November 2010, Stockton's Local Land and Property Gazetteer was awarded 'Best in North East Region' in recognition of the quality and accuracy of the data it contains.
- An EIT (Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation) "Task & Finish" Review was undertaken, including an organisation restructure which has generated efficiencies of £52,500 per annum.

#### *Taxation*

- Collected 97.9% of the Council Tax that was due for the 2010/2011 financial year, before the end of the year - our highest in-year collection performance since Council Tax was introduced in 1993. Business rates collection performance remained at 99.0% for the third year in succession despite collection difficulties caused by the economic climate.
- During September 2010, the NNDR team successfully implemented changes to the small business rate relief scheme. The changes were introduced at short notice and resulted in the issue of 1000 amended accounts.
- The service has taken a pro-active approach to helping customers that have been affected by the recession, including carrying out home visits and working with SDAIS (Stockton District Advice & Information Service) to introduce a debt advice referral scheme.
- An EIT (Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation) "Task & Finish" Review was undertaken, including an organisation restructure which has generated efficiencies of £81,000 per annum.

#### **Finance**

- A review of the Finance service has resulted in savings of £275,000 per annum.

#### *Finance and Assets*

- A review of facilities and asset management across the Council has been undertaken. The strategic focus on all areas (including schools) has transferred to Finance and the actual delivery of the service to the Council is now undertaken by Technical Services.
- Stage 1 of the Corporate Asset Review has outlined an approach for reviewing all assets, a proposed reduction of office accommodation and a draft transfer strategy.
- In November 2010, the Internal Audit section retained its ISO 9001 (2008) Systems Standards certification.
- The service has reviewed the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan following reductions in funding allocation.
- A clear approach and plan for implementing International Financial Reporting Standards is in place.

#### *Finance, Procurement and Performance*

- The Council's External Auditor reported to the Audit Committee that the Internal Audit service meet all eleven standards set by CIPFA in the Code of Practice for Internal Audit.
- Internal Audit undertook data matching undertaken to provide evidence in DWP grant dispute with the Housing Benefits service that resulted in securing an additional £1.1m of funding.
- Risk Management was subject to an independent review by Marsh Risk Consultancy during 2010. The review scored Stockton's Risk Management Framework at 4 out of 5, stating that the Council remains at/close to the forefront of best risk management practice.
- £100,000 in VAT was reclaimed from HMRC in respect of Sports tuition.
- £200m of debt was repaid during 2010/11, £150m of which was from the Stock Transfer to Tristar Homes, which reduced interest payments significantly.

- The recent EIT Review of Procurement and Commissioning led to a revised approach to procurement called Category Management. The approach, implemented during the latter half of 2010/ 11 has already delivered £127,000 in savings for 2011/12 and is on track to deliver against the target of £250,000.

## **Human Resources**

- An external inspection took place in December 2010 by the PCT in respect of the regional Better Health at Work scheme, resulting in a silver award.
- The current Management Development Programme has been reviewed and evaluated.
- Disciplinary, recruitment and grievance training for managers has been implemented.
- Additional training for absence has been implemented with bespoke sessions tailored for specific groups; this has contributed to a reduction of days lost due to sickness absence across the authority.
- A review of the effectiveness of the flu vaccination programme resulted in 244 vaccines being administered in October 2010.
- Terms and conditions in respect of sickness absence have also been reviewed.
- The corporate Staff Suggestion scheme was developed and launched to encourage a culture in which employees can make a difference by making positive suggestions that will lead to improvements and contribute to the success of the authority.
- Workforce development and planning has continued to be a high priority in 2010/11. The Workforce Development Plan was updated with a view to raising the skills of the workforce and to ensure employees have the skills and qualifications required for the future. This included carrying out a qualifications audit of the workforce and completing the local government workforce survey.
- All HR policies continue to be reviewed as part of a rolling programme to ensure they are fit for purpose and fully meet legislative requirements.
- Industrial relations have improved through the implementation of a Partnership Agreement with Unite and Unison.
- The current pay and grading structure has been reviewed to minimise the risk of equal pay claims.
- The actions set out in the Recruitment and Retention action plan have been delivered in partnership with the Recruitment and Engagement Group.
- Employees at risk of redundancy have continued to be offered a comprehensive support package.

## **Policy, Improvement and Engagement**

This has been a transition year across the entire team with significant change as an outcome. During this time the team have remained focused on their core business and as a result the following are examples of what has been achieved:

- The 2011/12 Council Plan has been published.
- Quarterly performance reports have been produced.
- The team have successfully co-ordinated the delivery of the Local Area Agreement targets and secured the performance reward grant.
- The Community Engagement Strategy was developed and approved.
- The Consultation Strategy was developed and approved.
- The recommendations from an initial review of the LSP have all been implemented.
- 43 member policy briefings have been produced.
- 26 public sector news briefings for officers have been produced.
- The team co-ordinated 34 responses to national consultations from government.
- A Voluntary Sector Support package was developed, including: the voluntary sector investment fund, the Stockton Community Fund, the 'bid bank'; the asset transfer principles.

- The development of the St. Ann's Partnership Board into a community interest company was supported.
- The project plan for transition from LINK to HealthWatch was developed.
- Ward profiles have been produced for all wards in the Borough.

## **Xentrall**

- Five service areas in Stockton and Darlington have been reviewed for possible joint working arrangements.
- Xentrall supported the Building Control shared services partnership review
- A fundamental review of all Xentrall Services has been carried out the findings have been implemented.
- Xentrall ICT services have achieved ISC27001 certification.
- Gateway Review 5 - Delivery of the Business Case has been awarded Full Assurance.
- The budget target for 2010/11 was delivered.
- New working arrangements with Stockton's Communications team have been implemented, in line with the Stockton review of this service - similar changes are being implemented in Darlington.
- Sickness absence has been reduced across all services.
- A major ICT infrastructure programme is currently being implemented including the new Disaster Recovery arrangements and server rationalisation.
- The business case for Printer Consolidation has been developed and the procurement process is nearly complete.
- A major Agresso upgrade was implemented in Stockton and, at the same time, the Stockton and Darlington systems have been merged on to a single database.
- Xentrall have won work for new Academies in Stockton and Darlington.
- The HR Online self service module has been developed and successfully launched.

## **Corporate**

- Sickness Absence levels for 2010/11 were the lowest ever recorded in Stockton, with 8.21 days lost per Full Time Employee (FTE). Stockton is well below the Tees Valley average, which for 2007/8 was 10.3 days. The 2010/11 target of 8.57 days per FTE was achieved, which demonstrates the success of new approaches to absence management.
- Performance of payment of invoices has improved significantly from 65.25% in 2008/9 to 92.54% paid within 30 days in 2010/11.

*What has proved more difficult / not been achieved?*

## **Xentrall**

- The Design and Print Service has undergone a full restructure. All work for the service now comes directly from the Communications Teams, which means there is more control over the work in both Councils. Despite this, the service is still under pressure from falling demand. The service is continually being reviewed.

## *Emerging Issues*

### **Customer Services and Taxation**

- The spending review 2010 announced that Government would localise council tax benefit from 2013-14, and reduce its costs by 10%. These proposed changes to the Council Tax Benefit system will impact on both Customer Services and Taxation, and may require

major changes to ICT systems. The situation will become clearer as more details emerge from Government over the coming months.

### **Finance**

- Finance and Procurement have been supporting a number of Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) Reviews, which has placed pressure upon Resources.

### **Human Resources**

- The advisory service in the current climate is spending an increasing amount of time in consultation with the Trade Unions, supporting managers to implement difficult and sometimes complex changes and providing a range of mechanisms to help employees through these changes.