

Corporate, Adult Services & Social Inclusion Select Committee

A meeting of Corporate, Adult Services & Social Inclusion Select Committee was held on Tuesday, 14th June, 2011.

Present: Cllr Mick Stoker (Chairman), Cllr Derrick Brown, Cllr Julia Cherrett, Cllr Michael Clark, Cllr Terry Laing, Cllr Tracey Stott, Cllr Norma Wilburn

Officers: Mrs A Kelly (C); Mrs J Danks, Mrs J Spittle (R); Mrs L King (PIE); Mrs S Daniels (DNS); G Birtle, Mrs T Harrison (LD)

Also in attendance: No other persons were present

Apologies: Cllr Mick Womphrey and Cllr Eileen Johnson

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of absence.

2 Minutes of 18th January 1011 to be signed by the Chairman

The minutes of the 18th January 2011 would be signed by the Chair at the office of Democratic Services after the meeting.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 15th March 2011

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 15th March 2011.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th March 2011 be agreed as a correct record.

4 Resources, and Registration and Bereavement Service Overview

Members received a presentation detailing service areas that report to the Committee. Members were informed of performance, highlights and achievements of those services in the last year which included:-

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 Administration

- Developed and implemented a number of ICT system enhancements and integrations including the launch of an on-line self-service system.
- Co-ordinated and supported all Council services through the assessment process for the Government’s Customer Service Excellence standard.
- 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.
- 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.

Human Resources

- Sickness Absence levels for 2010/11 were the lowest ever recorded in Stockton, with 8.21 days lost per Full Time Employee (FTE). The 2010/11 target of 8.57 days per FTE was achieved, which demonstrates the success of

new approaches to absence management.

- The corporate Staff Suggestion scheme was developed and launched.
- Industrial relations have improved through the implementation of a Partnership Agreement with Unite and Unison.
- 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.

Members queried how deliverable the Consultation and Engagement strategies are given they were developed before the implementation of the review. Members were informed that the engagement strategy is a set of principles and the structure for the team was developed with those principles in mind and the consultation strategy will be deliverable.

The use of social media (i.e. Facebook) was raised and the Committee was told that this was being investigated as it was hoped to introduce an electronic Viewpoint panel.

Xentrall

- Five service areas in Stockton and Darlington have been reviewed for possible joint working arrangements.
- A fundamental review of all Xentrall Services has been carried out the findings have been implemented.

- A major ICT infrastructure programme is currently being implemented.
- The business case for Printer Consolidation has been developed and the procurement process is nearly complete.

Registration Service

- Registration of Births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships is mandatory and was first introduced in England and Wales in 1837.
- The Committee received details of the numbers and wide range of statutory services provided including births, deaths, marriages and citizenship ceremonies and the non-statutory services also provided.
- The service is heavily regulated and is overseen by the General Register Office (GRO) who have in place national standards of delivery. The service achieved all the General Registry Office delivery standards in 2010/11.

The Committee was also made aware of emerging issues over the next year:-

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.

Registration Services

- Implementation of the 'Tell Us Once' service – This new service enables customers to report a death or birth just once and, (with the customer's consent), the information is shared with a number of central and local government organisations so the customer does not have to contact each of the individually themselves.
- EIT Review of Registration and Bereavement Services.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

5 Quarterly Progress Updates on Previously Agreed Recommendations

Consideration was given to progress of the implementation of previously agreed recommendations. There were outstanding recommendations from the reviews of:

- Meeting Venues
- Voluntary Community Sector
- Older People's Services
- EIT Review of Communications, Consultation and Engagement
- EIT Review of School Catering
- Officer Lead EIT Task and Finish Review of Customer Services and Taxation
- Officer Lead EIT Task and Finish Review of Human Resources

The Committee requested the following further information:

- Meeting Venues – Recommendation 5: The cost of setting up/running video conferencing and the level of use of telephone conferencing.
- EIT Review of School Catering: Staffing cost savings achieved so far.
- Officer Lead EIT Task and Finish Review of Customer Services and Taxation – Recommendation 8: Clarify the meaning.
- EIT Review of Communications, Consultation and Engagement – Recommendation 6: Change assessment from 2 (on track) to 1 (Achieved).

CONCLUDED that:

1. The Progress Updates be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed subject to the amendments outlined above.
2. Further information be provided as requested.

6 Work Programme

Members were informed that the scope and project plan for the EIT Review of Commissioned Carers and Independent Living Services would be presented at the next meeting on 28 June. Members asked that the list of contracts be circulated.

CONCLUDED that the Scrutiny Officer circulate the list of contracts.

