

People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday, 16th November, 2015.

Present: Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell(Chairman), Cllr Eileen Johnson(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Lisa Grainge, Cllr Di Hewitt, Cllr Ben Houchen, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley

Officers: Julie Danks (Corporate Director of Resources), Debbie Hurwood (Head of Customer Services & Taxation), Beccy Brown (Head of HR & Communications), Lesley King (Policy, Improvement and Engagement), Mark McGivern (Public Health Registrar), Margaret Waggott (Head of Democratic Services), David Bond (Director of Law & Democracy)

Also in attendance: Cllr Steve Nelson (Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety), Cllr Bob Cook (Leader of the Council)

Apologies:

**PEO
28/15** **Evacuation Procedure**

The Evacuation Procedure was noted.

**PEO
29/15** **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Steve Nelson declared a personal non prejudicial interest as a Member of the Catalyst Board.

AGREED that the declaration be recorded.

**PEO
30/15** **Minutes for signature - 14 September 2015**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2015 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

AGREED that the minutes were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**PEO
31/15** **Draft Minutes - 19 October 2015**

Consideration was given to the draft minutes of the meeting(s) held on list date/s.

AGREED that the minutes be approved subject to minor amendments.

**PEO
32/15** **Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations**

The Committee was presented with progress updates on previously agreed recommendations.

Additional points were highlighted as follows relating to the review of Wellbeing:

- It was noted that the community based arts project was on-going
- Work was being carried out with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) that involved visits to General Practices in order to provide updates and raise

awareness of social prescribing

- The Health Initiatives Offer was re run by the CCG. More bids were requested to address specific health issues

- The Town Choir was used as a method of breaking down barriers with the community along with other methods

- Work was on going with Stockton Riverside College focusing on body image and mental health in addition to work which was on going with young people focusing on smoking cessation

Members raised the following points/questions:

- The Committee requested detail of the difficulties relating to the budget allocation of seed fund resources with a focus on reducing social isolation and improving mental health and wellbeing. It was noted that the recommendation would now be actively progressed over the next six months. It was noted that Members of the Committee were keen to contribute to the on going work

- Members were keen to understand the impacts of electronic cigarettes, it was asked whether there was any evidence to suggest whether electronic cigarettes encouraged people to smoke. In response, it was noted that electronic cigarettes were not seen to be a gateway for smoking. Research was on going focusing on whether or not electronic cigarettes should be used to address smoking

AGREED that the progress updates be approved.

PEO 33/15 2014-15 Performance Overview for Corporate, and Access and Communities Portfolios

The Committee was presented with a presentation which provided an overview of each of the following departments:

- Resources
- Customer Services and Taxation
- Human Resources
- Communications
- Legal Services
- Democratic Services

Key points were highlighted relating to Resources:

- Resources operated 6 main areas as follows:

Policy, Improvement and Engagement
Customer Services and Taxation
Human Resources
Communications
Xentrall
Finance, Governance and Assets

The Committee heard that across the six main areas, responsibilities included:

- People, physical assets, finance, technology and information
- Strategic input to the Medium Term Financial Plan(MTFP)
- Involvement in Wider Partnership Strategy's such as Brighter Borough For All
- Overseeing the development of the Council Plan
- Playing a key role in the delivery of the organisational vision

The Committee noted key achievements and emerging issues.

Members raised the following points/questions:

- Members were keen to receive a breakdown of where Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests originated. It was noted that work was being carried out around FOIs, however it was difficult to locate where those submitting FOIs were based as not all applicants provided a postcode. It was highlighted that an alternative method to responding FOIs should be considered for those seeking information in order to be more time and resource efficient. The Committee were informed that the Government were currently reviewing FOI Requests and Executive Scrutiny Committee was involved in an officer led review to review Stockton's processes. The Baseline information would be shared with People Committee.

The Committee received an overview on Customer Services and Taxation. Additional key points were highlighted:

- The department managed the Council's corporate Customer Service Excellence Programme and also delivered the Access to Services Programme
- Administration supported all service groups across the Council in addition to providing reception services for 5 buildings
- Taxation services were responsible for billing, collecting and recovering council tax and business rates and also managing the operation of the in house enforcement function
- The Customer Service Excellence award lasts for three years with annual checks during the period to ensure the criteria continue to be met. It was noted that the next full assessment was due to take place in May 2016
- It was highlighted that merging the taxation and benefits service was a current challenge within the service
- Service reviews taking part in other service areas across the Council often had an impact on the workload of customer services and this needed to be considered at an earlier stage in such reviews

The Committee noted key achievements and emerging issues.

Members raised the following points/questions:

- Questions were raised around financial planning, It was noted that there were difficulties around financial planning as Business Rate Appeals and Revaluations are dealt with by the Valuation Office, sometimes at a national level but with local implications.
- In relation to the planned 100% Business Rate Retention Scheme, Members asked whether SBC would receive more from the scheme than they contributed. In response, it was heard that the current position was that Stockton was currently a 'tariff' authority which meant slightly more in rates was collected locally than returned back in grants from government but the details of the new scheme would need to be explored further.
- It was highlighted that business rate incomes differed on an annual basis, factors such as businesses closing down had an impact on the local authority, and this meant that it would become increasingly difficult to plan income levels.
- The Committee sought information on the process of the Stockton Town centre BID (Business Improvement District). It was highlighted that both a majority of individual businesses and of the rateable value that would vote in 2016 had to be in favour of the BID in order for it to proceed.

Members received an overview of HR and Communications. Key points and emerging issues were highlighted as follows:

- There were five teams within the HR service which included:

Advisory Service (Corporate)
Advisory Service (Schools)
Occupational Health Service
Workforce Development
Workforce Planning

- The Council's Occupational Health Nurse had been appointed and had established the in house service, supported by the Occupational Health Physician. It was heard that the Occupational Health Nurse provided a valuable service including clear and timely advice, useful reports and contributed to the Health and Wellbeing Programme
- The HR service provided support to the Shaping a Brighter Future Programme (SBF)
- Sickness absence levels improved during 2013/14
- It was highlighted that HR service was currently being reviewed
- The Centralised Communications Team provided a single point of advice and support to all parts of the council on all issues relating to communications which included the Media Relations Team and the Marketing and Corporate

Communications Team

- Members noted that the new Out of Hours social media monitoring arrangements were in place
- A new process was established for the Social Media and Website Policies
- The Council's Intranet had been redesigned and rebuilt on a new content management system
- Phase 2 redesign of the Council internet had been successfully delivered alongside a move to a new content management system

The Committee noted key achievements and challenges within the service. The following points and questions were raised by Members:

- In relation to the Advisory Service for Schools provided by HR, Members asked whether schools bought into their own service once converted to an Academy. In response, it was heard that when a school converted to an Academy, they bought into their own services however there was opportunity for the school to buy back into Council services. Generally the trend was for Schools to retain Council services for the first year of their existence.
- Members were keen to understand the point in which HR took action relating to sickness absence. It was noted that there was a trigger for sickness before action was taken, it was highlighted that stress was the largest cause of sickness absence across SBC but there was a growing number of cases across all sickness types. A full breakdown of the causes of sickness was requested by Members.
- The Committee asked whether the Occupational Health Nurse was involved in sickness absence cases. In response, Members were informed that the Occupational Health Nurse was involved in sickness absence cases and played an extremely supportive role
- It was recognised that more could be done in terms of increasing the percentage of staff recruited from the BME population to bring it in line with the local population.

The Committee received an overview of Xentrall Shared Services. Key points were highlighted as follows:

- Xentrall Shared Services was a partnership between Darlington Borough Council and SBC which delivered a number of back office services
- The partnership which was formed in 2008 included the following services:
 - ICT Service
 - Design and Print Service
 - Transactional Finance Service
 - Transactional HR Service

The Committee noted key achievements and emerging issues within Xentrall Shared Services, some of which included:

- An extension of the software and services agreement for the PSE HR and Payroll system
- Roll out of self service via HRonline for absence reporting which resulted in improvements in the quality and timelines of absence information
- Service reviews had increased the projected savings from £7.4M to £13.6M
- Wi-Fi services were implemented in main Council buildings
- Xentrall Shared Services were experiencing the highest levels of recruitment activity by Stockton and Darlington councils in Xentrall's history

Members raised the following points/questions:

- Members discussed the possibility of reducing paper work used by Councillors by offering alternatives such as ipads, tablets and other forms of technology. It was noted that Officers would consider alternative options on a case by case basis and would be keen to work with Members to explore alternative options.

The Committee received an overview of Legal Services. Key objectives were noted as follows:

- To support the Council's Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officers in discharging their statutory functions and duties to secure compliance with the law, prevent maladministration and to promote high standards of conduct, ethics and probity
- To provide an effective legal service that delivers the Council's statutory functions and corporate objectives
- To deliver the Local Land Charges Service

Achievements, challenges and emerging issues were noted by the Committee.

Members raised the following points/questions:

- It was asked whether money was made as a result of Land Searches? In response, it was highlighted that there were restrictions in place as to the type of information that could be charged for.
- Questions were raised around benefit offences. It was highlighted that the mentioned offences were dealt with by Housing Benefits
- Members were keen to understand how often Legal Services employed barristers for court cases. In response, it was heard that while the service aimed to provide as many services as possible in house, there was a need in particular cases for the employment of outside professionals

The Committee received an overview of Democratic Services. Key points were highlighted as follows:

- It was noted that Democratic Services operated 5 main services as follows:

Electoral
Scrutiny
Democratic Services
Member Development
Civic and Community Engagement

Achievements, challenges and emerging issues were noted by the Committee.

The following points/questions were raised by the Committee:

- It was asked whether Ward Boundaries and number of Councillor would be reviewed within the next 5-10 years due to the growth of residents per ward across the borough. It was noted that such issues were dealt with by legislation when matters arose and it was not currently on the agenda. The Boundary Commission advised that the numbers of residents per Councillor in Stockton was not breaching recommended guideline limits.

AGREED that:

1. The information be noted
2. A breakdown of sickness absence be provided to Committee including age, grade, length of absence and reason
3. Information on the Freedom of Information Review be provided

**PEO
34/15** **Work Programme 2015-16**

The Committee gave consideration to the work programme 2015-16.

AGREED that the Work Programme be approved.

**PEO
35/15** **Chair's Update**

The Chair provided no update.