

Report To People Select Committee

Scrutiny Overview Report 2014/15



Big plans, bright future

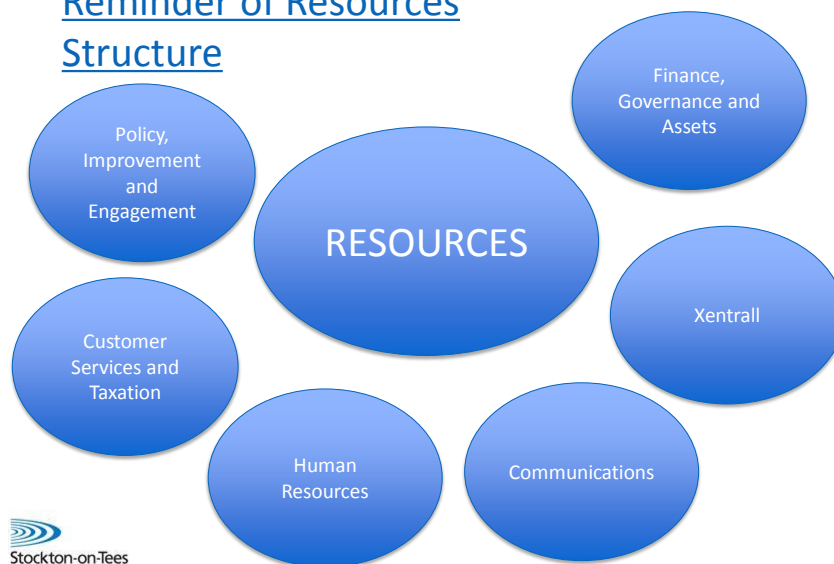
Resources Service Overview

- Indirect role in relation to the achievement of the vision for the Borough.
- Direct/key role to play in the delivery of the organisational vision.
- “Resources” refers to people, physical assets, finance, technology and information.
- There are 6 main service areas within Resources and an outline of their specific responsibilities follow.



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Reminder of Resources Structure



Policy, Improvement and Engagement

The service has two teams which oversee the following:

Community Engagement

- Development and sustainability of our partners in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector
- Leads, supports and develops Stockton Local Strategic Partnership and the locality forums
- Lead the Council's approach to resident engagement and consultation
- Supports the work to deliver the Asset Transfer Strategy
- Promotes equality of opportunity and community cohesion

Policy, Improvement and Engagement

Business Support and Improvement

- Council's key policies, strategies and plans ensuring we deliver excellent services and comply with legislation
- Provides timely and accurate information and data to Members, officers and partners on key policy/legislation
- Leads the Council's approach to performance management and reporting
- Leads the development of key service area business plans
- Manages Freedom of Information (FOI), complaints and data protection for Resources Service Grouping and Children, Education and Social Care and co-ordinates FOIs for the Council
- Develops the content for the Member Policy seminar programme
- Facilitates access to and analysis of customer insight data and intelligence to support service delivery



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What has been achieved?

- Support has been provided to continue to promote and develop the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector.
- The Stockton Borough Compact 2014 – 2017 which defines the relationships between sectors in Stockton Borough, has been refreshed and agreed.
- Although the complexity of Information Requests has increased a 94% response rate has been maintained for Freedom of Information requests and 100% for Data Subject Access requests.
- Developed an Information Toolkit which was a recommendation following a Scrutiny Review.
- An agreed Council Plan, measures and targets made public on time.
- Developed and organised the Members Policy Seminar programme.



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What has been achieved?

- Community centre management committees and the wider VCS are being supported to positively engage in the Community Asset Transfer process, in partnership with Catalyst. Some examples of achievements are:
 - Ragworth Neighbourhood Centre was advertised for Community Asset Transfer;
 - Four youth and community buildings were transferred to On-Site
 - Hardwick Community Centre transferred to Hardwick in partnership
 - The Community Centre forum continues to support management committees. For example in areas of work including becoming breast feeding friendly and health & safety.
- Support to the Tees Valley Armed Forces Forum, with many successes delivered over the last year. For example supported a successful Community Covenant Bid for £70,000.
- Conducted The Employee Survey 2014
- Commissioning IPSOS Mori for the Residents Survey 2015
- Disability Advisory Group (DAG) have contributed to numerous focus groups, scrutiny reviews, events and input into partner organisations, all of which influences service provision across our Borough.



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What has proven more difficult?

- Increased demand/expectation balanced against reduction in staffing and financial resource.
- Supporting commissioners and VCSE sector providers to come together to develop innovative solutions.
- Understanding and implementing at local authority level the change of policy legislation from central government.



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Emerging Issues

- Implementing review of corporate and information governance.
- Improving consultation/engagement with young people.
- Developing the VCSE to respond to opportunities presented through “Big Picture”- linked to Social Value.



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Customer Services and Taxation

Customer Services:

- Manages the Council’s corporate “Customer Service Excellence” programme.
- Delivers the Council’s Access to Services programme

Administration:

- Administration support to all the service groupings of the Council, namely:
 - Delivery and collection of mail and the courier service
 - Production of ID badges
 - Meeting room bookings
- Reception services for 5 buildings

Taxation:

- Billing, collection & recovery of Council Tax and Business Rates
- Operation of the Council’s in-house enforcement function
- Cashiers



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What has been achieved? (1)

- Successfully retained the corporate Customer Service Excellence accreditation for another year, following an assessment in May 2014.
- Billingham Customer Service Centre and Cash Office opened in January 2015. The project was completed on time and within budget.
- 'My Stockton', a single sign-on personalised customer account that residents can access through the new website went live on 31st March 2015.



What has been achieved? (2)

- Implemented new arrangements for dealing with 'Back on Track' enquiries and operating the new 'Adults Service Front of House'.
- Completed a number of technology developments to improve customer service, encourage channel shift and improve efficiency.
- Launched "Stockton Collections", in-house enforcement service in September 2014.

What has proven more difficult?

- Council Tax collection:
 - The amount (£) collected each year is increasing, but the amount collected as % age of the annual debit has fallen each year since Local Council Tax Support replaced the national Council Tax Benefit Scheme in April 2013.
- Business Rates collection and tackling empty rate avoidance tactics:
 - North East local authorities are now working together to combat empty rate avoidance in a more proactive way. We are pursuing cases through court where appropriate, but this is resource intensive.
- Estimating future Business Rates income:
 - Forecasting the impact of appeals is extremely difficult and is an aspect of the business rates system that we have no influence over.
 - The impact of the 2017 revaluation adds to the uncertainty.



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Emerging Issues

- Balancing demands of the “day-job” with implementation of Big Picture savings plans.
- Knock-on effects of service reviews taking place elsewhere across the Council on Customer Services and Administration
- Recent Government announcement that local authorities will be able to retain 100% rates income by the end of this Parliament – still waiting for more details to emerge.
- Outcome of the Stockton Town Centre BID (Business Improvement District) ballot will impact on Business Rates workload, in the event of a YES vote.
- Effect of the introduction of Universal Credit on Customer Services and Taxation is uncertain, as are the timescales.



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Human Resources

The overall vision and priorities for the Human Resources service are set out in the People Strategy 2013-16 and in the HR Business Unit Plan. The service is delivered by 5 teams:

Advisory Service (Corporate)

- Advice, guidance and support on all employment issues including terms and conditions of service/ policies and procedures
- Supporting proactive management of staff absence and improving working lives, including flexible working
- Supporting staffing restructures and reviews, including TUPE transfers
- Trade Union negotiation and consultation
- Pensions and retirement
- HR Policies and Procedures

Advisory Service (Schools)

- Advice to schools, supporting Head teachers/managers, school governors and employees in all HR matters.

Occupational Health Service

- In-house Occupational Health nurse supported by contracted Doctor service



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Human Resources

Workforce Development

- Staff Induction
- Supporting and developing the Staff Appraisal Scheme
- Providing Employee development programmes
- Supporting Coaching
- Delivery of the Investors in People accreditation
- Support to the Apprenticeship Programme
- Supporting and promoting Equality and Diversity in the workplace

Workforce Planning

- Providing workforce data reports and analysis to assist the Council in the management and planning of the workforce
- Responding to Freedom of Information requests on behalf of HR
- Management of Employee benefit contracts
- Management of Health and wellbeing contracts, including Occupational Health, Physiotherapy and Counselling Services
- Pay and Reward including Job Evaluation, Single Status and allowances.



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What has been achieved? (1)

- HR Support has been provided to the Shaping a Brighter Future programme.
- A workforce development programme has been provided to further enhance the skills and capacity of our workforce. In 2014/15 584 employees attended training.
- Continued support given to the programme of organisational and structural change being delivered to meet the financial challenge. 29 Service Reviews were completed. Continued success in redeployment and management of reviews with only 8 compulsory redundancies.
- The Council's Occupational Health Nurse has been appointed and has established the in-house service, supported by the Occupational Health Physician.
- 17 new apprenticeships have been supported.



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What has been achieved? (2)

- Effective management of grievance and disciplinary matters has resulted in continued low levels of formal action (32 disciplinary cases, 14 grievances, 8 capability cases and 1 successfully defended Employment Tribunal) - low levels for an organisation of 3,336 people.
- Improvement in sickness absence levels - 7.8 days per FTE compared to 8.1 days per FTE in 2013/14.
- Trade Union relationships have been maintained throughout the Service Reviews.
- Successful implementation of the LGPS pension changes
- Successful implementation of the move towards the Living Wage agreed by Council for 2014/15



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What has proven more difficult?

- Did not achieve the target of 7.6 days per FTE for tackling sickness absence
- Recruitment and retention of under-represented groups. The current BME workforce is only 2% of the total compared with 5.4% in the borough

Emerging Issues

- Further Service reviews to meet the ongoing Financial Challenge will be increasingly difficult.
- Implementation of the national Living Wage between 2016 and 2020
- Provision of a service to Schools with the uncertainty of the Academy and Free school agenda.
- Implementation of Statutory Officers Disciplinary Procedures
- The potential impact of the Trade Union bill

Communications

The centralised Communications team provides a single point of advice and support to all parts of the Council on all issues relating to communications. This includes:

The Media Relations team

- Issue press releases relating to the Council
- Publish Stockton News 4 times a year
- Provide social media monitoring and engagement on all of the Council's social media platforms (including out of hours cover)
- Coordinate all responses to media, including FOI 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



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Communications

The Marketing and Corporate Communications team

- Develop and deliver integrated, targeted communications and marketing campaigns
- Oversee the content of the Council's internet and intranet alongside the web authors for each service area (including social media accounts, video content and photography)
- 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
- Produce the weekly electronic 'Keeping You in Touch' (KYiT) internal newsletter.
- Coordinate design and print to ensure value for money
- Champion the Stockton Borough Council visual identity (also known as branding and logos).

A centralised budget has been established to deliver key campaigns and to achieve maximum efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's overall communications spend.



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What has been achieved? (1)

- Positive coverage has been secured for a number of Council projects in the local, regional, national and trade media while handling intense media interest in issues such as high profile Serious Case Reviews, road traffic accidents on Stockton High Street, proposed school admissions arrangements and the filming of Benefits Street in Stockton. The team have issued 470 press releases and responded to 900 press enquiries.
- The Social Media and Website Policies have been reviewed with a new process established.
- New Out of Hours social media monitoring arrangements have been put in place.
- Reforming and redesigning campaigns based on more market research, evaluation and measurement.



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What has been achieved? (2)

The Council's intranet has been completely redesigned and rebuilt on a new content management system



The Phase 2 redesign of the Council internet has been successfully delivered alongside a move to a new content management system allowing for a more fundamental overhaul of the site, including the new My Stockton feature



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What has been achieved? (3)

- Promotion of the major events has generated increased television coverage - including regional, national and international coverage. Children in Need, Fireworks, Stockton Sparkles cycling festival, SIRF and Town Centre Launch gained most coverage in 2014/15.



What has been achieved? (4)

The quarterly editions of Stockton News have been well received and new print and distribution arrangements have been procured at reduced cost.



What has been achieved? (5)

The psst... campaign launched in response to Benefits Street has generated huge interest, pride and support in the Borough and won an APSE award.




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What has proven more difficult?

- Workload issues arising from the need to communicate the ongoing changes associated with the Service Reviews
- The May 2015 elections attracted major attention from local, regional and national media organisations
- The growth in social media service in and out of hours continued to provide challenges and opportunities throughout 2014/15, though the new out of hours arrangements are working well.


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BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Emerging Issues

- The ongoing challenge of communicating the changes arising from the Big Picture programme
- The Phase 3 Web developments to further support channel shift
- The challenge of making the most of the new and emerging media opportunities



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Xentrall

Xentrall Shared Services is a partnership with Darlington Borough Council for the delivery of a number of “back-office” services. Like many other areas across the Council, Xentrall have also undertaken a review of service provision, rationalising teams and ensuring efficiency savings are made. The Partnership, which went live on 1 May 2008, includes the following services:

- **The ICT service**-manage the technical infrastructure including all hardware, software, network, installation, support and maintenance and to provide a single point of contact Service Centre for all customer ICT support and service requests.
- **The Design and Print service**-provides a comprehensive design and print service using high volume digital printing facilities.
- **The Transactional Finance service**-provides transactional services to customers such as Creditors, Debtors and Banking.
- **The Transactional HR service**-provides transactional services to its customers such as Payroll, Recruitment and Contracts.



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What has been achieved? (1)

- Approval of a revision of the original 10 year partnership agreement. The partnership is now a rolling agreement.
- Extension of the software and services agreement for the PSE HR and Payroll system. Savings of £318k have been realised through negotiating with suppliers for PSE HR and Payroll systems, anti-virus and web filtering solutions and the renewal of digital printers
- Original savings agreed in November 2007 were £7.4 million. Service reviews have increased the projected savings again to £13.6 million
- Transactional HR and Finance now provide services to 40 academies and multi academy trusts.
- Roll out of self service via HRonline for absence reporting has resulted in improvements in the quality and timeliness of absence information



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What has been achieved? (2)

- All PC's and laptops have been upgraded or renewed, along with the installation of Windows 7 and Office 2010
- Successfully retained ISO Information Security and Quality Management certifications
- Wi-Fi services were implemented in main Council buildings
- Following a staff survey, net Xentrall employee satisfaction is at 78%. A small improvement on previous results, but positive given the recent scale of change in the service
- Following a customer satisfaction survey, overall satisfaction was 82%. Again a small improvement on previous results



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What has proven more difficult?

- Recruitment to vacant posts in ICT
 - Likely due to concerns about local government employment prospects and competitiveness of salaries compared to the private sector.
- Experiencing the highest levels of recruitment activity by Stockton and Darlington councils in Xentrall's history

Emerging Issues

- Considerable changes will need to be implemented as a result of the Big Picture Programme, both at a detailed and strategic level.
- Provision of services to schools given the Free School/Academy agenda

Finance, Governance and Assets

The Finance Service is focussed on safeguarding and maximising financial resources, supporting the strategic aims and objectives of the Authority. The Service also includes responsibilities for 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
- Financial Planning
- VAT and Treasury Management
- Risk Management & Insurance
- Corporate Procurement and Internal Audit.
- Health & Safety

It also maintains direct links on financial issues with Xentrall Shared Services



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What has been achieved?

- Developed a robust MTFP including savings programme
- Overseen the delivery of the savings already included in the MTFP
- Received a positive annual report from our external auditors. They have issued an unqualified audit opinion and value for money conclusion recognising that we have put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of our resources
- Financial support to develop Combined Authority Model
- Achievement of Audit Programme
- Development of Asset Disposal Plan
- Creation & Governance of Better Care Fund Pooled Budget with CCG



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What has proven more difficult?

- Overall funding reductions make the MTFP more difficult to manage
 - Business Rates
 - Changes to local government finance
- Care Fee negotiations with providers

Emerging Issues

- Spending Review and Finance Settlement likely to pose further financial pressures
- Future changes to Local Government funding through further changes to the Business Rates Retention Scheme
- Combined Authority to be established from 1 April 2016 and the Devolution Deal by 1 April 2017
- A review of the service will be undertaken in 2015/16
- Accommodation reviews to be undertaken to reflect changing organisational structures