

People Select Committee Overview Meeting 2016

7 November 2016

Report from Director HR, Legal and Communications

HR, Legal and Communications Directorate

Context

Members are well aware that as a Council we have had to adapt to funding reductions of £52 million over the last five years and that we are still confronted with having to find further savings. In relation to the HR, Legal Communications, Consultation and Engagement services this has meant delivering efficiencies and savings across all areas.

Whilst we acknowledge that we have a strong track record of sound financial management and we have been dealing with these problems successfully for many years, it will not be easy to address the additional loss of government funding of over £20 million by 2019/20. Moving forward, expectations will need to be realistic as many more difficult decisions will need to be made.

It is both acknowledged and accepted that we can't continue to do all the things we currently do and that we won't be able to work in the same way. For our services this may mean reduced engagement activity, new approaches to staff training and development and communication activity.

The challenge for all Members is to ensure that decisions about the basis on which services will be delivered are within the resources available, taking account of a number of factors such as reduced budget allocation, changing demographics, increasing demand, new national legislation and policy direction. Members are reminded of the four policy principles that support our decision-making:

- **Protecting the vulnerable through targeted intervention**, particularly those people in our communities who are subject to, or at risk of harm, people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and those who are financially excluded or whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- **Promoting equality of opportunity through targeted intervention**, specifically in relation to tackling health inequalities, meeting the skills gap and improving access to job opportunities, tackling fuel poverty, improving education and training opportunities, access to affordable housing and financial and digital inclusion.
- **Developing strong and healthy communities** through the provision of mainstream and preventive services that are available to all those who choose to access them.
- **Creating economic prosperity** across the Borough

It is within this context that the select committee is invited to undertake their overview duties.

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What has been achieved?

Communications, Consultation and Engagement

1. The Communications, Consultation and Community Engagement teams were combined through a Service review in June. The review combined the Community Engagement team, the Consultation Officer and Marketing team in one new team this review delivered the target savings but has also led to improved marketing and engagement activity.
2. The Key communication campaigns are being delivered for 2016/17. These are in line with the Council vision and continue to reiterate the Big Plan ethos. In particular, The Big Picture campaign continues with a clear, open and honest view of the council budgets, how they are spent and the steps being taken to manage funding reductions.
3. The Rediscover Stockton - Town centre campaign has been actively engaged in support of the BID, The Great British High Street Awards and the ongoing High Street developments.
4. We produced and distributed 4 editions of Stockton-on-Tees News in the last year to every household in the borough and to a range of business and other partner organisations.
5. In the year to the end of September 2016 we handled 1,043 media enquiries and issued 329 press releases as well as handling the year round events programme and the proactive management of a number of contentious issues.
6. We continue to develop the core SBC website and 39 social media platforms as a way of keeping residents, businesses and visitors informed about the Council and the borough. Developments in 2016 include an accessibility audit, a new home page and introduction of an improved search function.
7. Extensive work to analyse and present the findings of the 2015 MORI Residents has been undertaken. The Survey results were presented to Cabinet and at a Members Seminar in March 2016 and thereafter to the public. Work continues to use the results to provide information for service design and improvement.
8. The new "My Views" consultation portal has been launched and is providing an improved online platform to support consultations on service changes and proposals.
9. The Viewpoint residents' panel continues to provide a valuable route for consultation on services across the borough.
10. The Review of the Local Strategic Partnership and the updated Brighter Borough for All – Tackling Poverty Framework were agreed by Cabinet in May. The Framework is being used by the Locality Forums as the basis of work to tackle poverty in the borough. The focus of work this year has been on providing support to those under 35 years of age living in poverty.
11. Catalyst continue to co-ordinate The Volunteering Partnership to deliver the Volunteering Strategy in the borough. The new hub website "stocktonvolunteers.co.uk" is developing well as a site to bring together all volunteering opportunities in the borough.
12. We continue to provide support to 46 Community Centres across the borough. The programme of Community Asset transfers continues with the successful transfer of Ragworth Neighbourhood Centre and Norton Grange Community Centre to OnSite Building Trust in July.

Legal

13. A review of the Service was completed in June following the Senior Management review. A new team structure is in place and succession plans are in place for Monitoring Officer functions.
14. We have completed a full review of social care workload and processes as this continues to be a challenging and demanding area of work.
15. We are currently recruiting for a new Trainee Solicitor (the first in a number of years) to continue the tradition of “growing our own” talent for the future.

HR

16. We continue to support colleagues from across the Council in the delivery of the Shaping A Brighter Future programme to support and develop employees to help them continue to deliver excellent services and cope with the pressures which arise from the reductions in funding and the increased demands for services. The programme goes from strength to strength with employees actively involved in the delivery team in addition to their day jobs. A new workforce Culture Statement and set of behaviours has been developed for the organisation and personal and team development programmes rolled out. Employees have also been working through the SBF programme to improve recruitment processes and employee wellbeing programmes.
17. We continue to deliver the programme of Service Reviews as part of the programme to achieve the savings needed to cope with the reduction in funding. Including the major and wide reaching senior management review in December 2015 which saw structural changes across the organisation. We continue to support employees at risk of redundancy with support from a close and constructive relationship with Trade Unions and with support from Job Centre Plus and the National Careers Service. We have managed 23 reviews in the last year and 11 TUPE transfers with only 46 compulsory redundancies.
18. The biennial Employee Survey took place in October 2016. The results will be used to help us support and develop employees.
19. We continue to improve the Intranet as a means of ensuring effective communication with employees during change. A new peer-to-peer recognition system and Staff Forum will be launch this month.
20. We continue to facilitate the annual Innovation Challenge event, which is now in its 4th year, with 200 employees taking part in real-life challenges outside their area of work.
21. We continue to actively manage sickness cases and to provide support through a wide range of preventative and wellbeing services:
22. A new counselling provider, Insight, was appointed from 1st April 2016
23. Body2fit were appointed as the Council’s physiotherapy provider
24. Targeted support, including proactive support, is being provided in areas where there are sickness absence trends
25. The Council’s Occupational Health Advisor continues to work closely with Health and Safety, and Service Managers, to provide an appropriate work place environment for our employees, ensure appropriate health surveillance is in place, as well as to offer advice and

- support to employees and the Council regarding on going employee health conditions
26. The Council achieved the Better Health at Work Award (Silver) last year and is now working towards the Gold award accreditation this year.
 27. The Council's training and development programme has been updated. Current courses include appraisal training, coaching for managers, stepping in to management, planning for retirement, mindfulness, Headway and Equality and Diversity Training Support. Updates to corporate induction have taken place and the Setting the Standard programme continues to run for 270 employees four times a year
 28. In February Council agreed the next step in their commitment to introducing the Living Wage in Stockton. Updates and amendments to the pay and grading structure to build in these new arrangements have been completed.
 29. We continue to provide a pro-active and positive HR Advisory service across the Council and the last year has seen a continued low level of grievance and disciplinary. Disciplinary rates remain low at 59 cases (1.6%) of the workforce and grievances at 11 cases. There were no Employment Tribunal cases.

Challenges

30. Sickness absence continues to be challenging. Initial analysis of the first 6 months of this year indicate that the annual corporate target of 7.6 days average per FTE may not be met. It is clear that this is a national trend and actual levels continue to be relatively good when measured against regional and public sector averages.
31. Children's Social Care workload continues to be a challenge in Legal Services. We continue to handle a high level of complex cases through legal proceedings and work is in hand to provide greater resilience in this area.
32. Communications activity continue at a high level as we continue to receive a high demand for proactive communication and reactive work relating to service changes and reductions arising from the work to deliver the savings programme.
33. HR activity relating to service reviews continues at very high levels with 74 employees leaving the organisation through redundancy last year. Headcount reduction is now at 959 (22.5%) over the past 5 years.
34. We continue to seek to increase recruitment from under-represented groups and to attract candidates to hard to recruit areas, particularly in Social Work. Work is underway to ensure that the Council is able to meet its commitments under the new Apprenticeship changes (including the employer levy and public sector quotas). However this remains a challenge.
35. We are continuing to see signs of stress in staff (as evidenced in the sickness absence numbers) we are tackling this through the support programmes and training and development programmes.

Emerging Issues

36. We continue to monitor and contribute to a number of HR policy development relating to Exit Payment caps, pension changes and the new national pay spine (including the Living Wage).

37. Legal developments in both case law and guidance continue to affect both Children's and Adults services and we continue to work with colleagues in both Services to monitor developments.

Possible Areas for In Depth Review

38. Members may wish to consider a review of sickness absence in 2017. This is a continuing challenge and is an issue which affects all services.