

## People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday, 26th February, 2018.

**Present:** Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell (Chair), Cllr Sonia Bailey, Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Lynn Hall (vice Cllr Hampton), Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Norma Stephenson (vice Cllr Hewitt), Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley

**Officers:** Reuben Kench (CL&E); Garry Cummings (F&BS); Beccy Brown (HR&L); Ian Miles, Margaret Waggott, Gary Woods, Annette Sotheby (DCE).

**Also in attendance:** Cllr Bob Cook (Leader), Cllr Norma Wilburn (Cabinet Member)

**Apologies:** Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Di Hewitt, Cllr Stefan Houghton

### **PEO Evacuation Procedure**

**54/17**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

### **PEO Declarations of Interest**

**55/17**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

### **PEO Overview Reports 2018**

**56/17**

Members were presented with an overview of Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services. The key issues for the service were highlighted together with emerging issues as follows:

#### Administration

- Ability for the Corporate Administration Service to respond effectively to requests for support will require innovative and proactive ways of working which ensures we have a multi-skilled service which understands the customers' administration needs.
- The service must continue to develop in line with the Authority's digital agenda and reinforce the professionalism of Administration Services, lifting the burden and not detracting from the specialist frontline – this also includes ensuring full use of e-channels within the Authority and in particular the services which we support.

#### Democratic Services

- In readiness for the new Council term 2019-23, a new 4-year Democracy Diary will also be produced reflecting the required frequency of meeting of Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny, Quasi-Judicial, Police & Crime, Health & Wellbeing, SLSCB and Consultative fora.
- Principles of smarter ways of working are to be applied to make the publication of Officer-delegated decisions and declarations of interests and gifts and hospitality paperless, making the process more immediate and transparent for all through use of the Council's Egenda system.
- Member Support will continue to be provided to equip Members with the necessary knowledge and skills in order to fulfil their role.
- The Mayor has been supported throughout the year in delivering the aims of his Mayoral Strategy which has seen his attendance at over 300 engagements.
- A review has been undertaken of the Council's support for its Armed Forces

Covenant, with stronger links forged within both the Tees Valley and North East to support our Armed Forces.

#### Scrutiny

- Another busy year in 2017/18 and the process is underway for the setting of the 2018/19 work programme (to be completed ahead of the purdah period for the 2019 Local Elections).
- Review and consider response to the CLG Select Committee Report on the Effectiveness of Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- Busy programme of consultations on health service changes and reconfigurations.

#### Electoral Services

- Revised Register was published on 1 December 2017 – maintained 92% of adult population registered. Slight decrease in attainers from 30% to 27% - challenge to continue to improve registration levels and registration of under-registered groups through data mining and democratic engagement work.
- Relentless programme of elections and by-elections over the last 12 months successfully delivered.
- Preliminary work has commenced on Polling Districts, Places and Stations Review (statutory process to commence in October 2018).
- Intention for ID in polling stations to be in statute and implemented in time for the next scheduled General Election - will have a significant impact on the planning and resourcing of future events.

The following points were raised by the Committee:

- Proposal to move next Planning Committee cycle to four-weekly instead of three-weekly.
- Try to avoid scheduling meetings during all school holidays where possible.
- The service were commended for the support provided over the last year.

Members were presented with an overview of Culture, Leisure and Events. The key issues for the service were highlighted together with emerging issues as follows:

- The number of events planned for 2018 has shown a significant increase from 2017 – over 90 events being delivered or supported by the Council, with an increasing number of event proposals coming from commercial organisations and community groups who have limited event management experience/knowledge. Reviewing how the current event programme is supported and delivered, whilst maintaining a robust Independent Safety Advisory Group (ISAG).
- Leading arts projects linking communities together across the Tees Valley, such as the 3-year Greater Tees project for which £1.35m was secured in 2017.
- Preparations for the celebration of the bi-centenary of passenger rail in 2025 are already generating a significant workload, reflecting the huge potential of the anniversary event for this globally significant invention. In addition, preparations for the development of a UK City of Culture bid for the same year are under way and will need to engage and harness the involvement of many thousands of local people in the coming 12-24 months.
- The Library Service will open two new 'Innovation' spaces at Thornaby Central

and Stockton Central Libraries, and will be working with community partners to introduce new audiences to digital and immersive library experiences.

- Preston Park Museum & Grounds priority is to develop a more cohesive and quality visitor experience.
- Tees Valley Museum Group (TVMG): Stockton Council secured 3 years of Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding from April 2018 to lead on the development of a collaborative programme of exhibitions, collections interpretation, marketing and access improvements for the five Tees Valley Museums Services.
- Working on the design and provision of high quality Customer Services delivered through a set of efficient and effective customer access channels supported by a set of strong, consistent service standards that are compliant with Customer Service Excellence.

The following points were raised by the Committee:

- With reference to the preparations for the celebration of the bi-centenary of passenger rail in 2025, it was a shame that we do not have the original ticket office building, as this would provide an opportunity to improve the visitor offer. It was however noted that the world's first railway tavern is still standing, though many people do not realise this – that building has potential for future development.
- Compliments to the department, but disappointing to see cuts being felt in parts of the service, along with a greater administrative burden.

Members were presented with an overview of Finance and Business Services. The key issues for the service were highlighted together with emerging issues as follows:

- Achievements: savings included in Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) are on target to be achieved, work is underway to contribute to the Government review 'Fair Funding' which will influence the review of Local Government Finance including the retention of Business Rates, reviews completed in Revenues and Benefits and in relation to commissioning and procurement, shared internal audit service established (delivered by Stockton), and development of a programme for Smarter Working in Stockton using technology and improved ways of working to change working practices.
- Challenges: financial position post-2020 is significantly uncertain due to Government funding reviews, MTFP being updated to take account of the number of emerging pressures, and the implementation of Universal Credit has been delayed which means that implications are still unclear (Member seminar to follow in April/May 2018).

The following points were raised by the Committee:

- Perception that jobs commissioned by the Council can cost significantly more than a local tradesperson undertaking it.
- Will the Smarter Working in Stockton programme consider Elected Members? Noted that a report has been requested to identify potential savings, and that Members would have to buy into working differently if decisions were made around new technologies/improved methods.
- Localisation of business rates is a misnomer – noted that all money will be

redistributed across Local Authorities based on an agreed formula (to be reviewed).

- Service commended in light of a backdrop of Government cuts.

Members were presented with an overview of HR, Legal and Communications. The key issues for the service were highlighted together with emerging issues as follows:

#### Human Resources

- Sickness absence continues to be challenging. A scrutiny review of the issue was completed in 2017, and the recommendations and actions from that review are being delivered now, and will continue throughout 2018.
- HR activity relating to service reviews continues at very high levels with 123 employees leaving the organisation through redundancy between 1 April 2017 and 31 December 2017. Headcount reduction is now at 1,160 since the programme began on 1 April 2011.
- Shaping a Brighter Future programme (increasing capability, resilience and flexibility of the workforce to deliver greater capacity) continues to deliver major benefits and will continue to grow throughout 2018.
- Continuing to seek to increase recruitment from under-represented groups (review proposed around the recruitment of more employees from the BME community) and to attract candidates to hard to recruit areas, particularly in Social Work.

#### Legal Services

- Children's Social Care workload continues to be a challenge in Legal Services, with a high level of complex cases through legal proceedings – work is in hand to provide greater resilience in this area.
- Provision of legal support to the delivery of the DoLS work will continue to be a major resource requirement throughout 2018.
- Improved ways of working are being delivered through the LEAN review in Legal Services. Opportunities and challenges arising from new ways of working with the Courts continue to take up significant resource.

#### Communications, Consultation and Engagement

- Continued high demand for proactive communication and reactive work relating to service changes and reductions arising from the work to deliver the savings programme and from the significant programme of events and major capital projects.
- Continued to adapt and respond to the continually emerging changes in local media and the reduction in reporting capacity by increasing publicity through the Council's social media channels and website.
- Opportunities arising from the significant TVCA investment in Place based and Tourism promotion through the Enjoy Tess Valley brand will be explored further in 2018.
- Delivering effective consultation: need to refresh the Viewpoint panel and process in 2018; new approach to consultation with young people in the Borough through the Bright Minds Big Futures programme.
- Community engagement challenges: support to the LSP and the VCSE sector in delivering programmes to tackle poverty in the Borough, and preparations for the introduction of Universal Credit later in the year.

The following points were raised by the Committee:

- Have lost a significant number of staff which impacts on those remaining employees (stress/sickness) – need to have support services in place.
- If we want to increase BME employee numbers, how is this balanced against the decreasing trend in the amount of Council staff?
- Good to see posters up encouraging staff to support their colleagues, but need to ensure relevant contact details are included as some may want to talk to someone independent.
- What are the levels of agency workers? Noted that numbers have reduced and regular reviews of these take place.

Members were presented with an overview of Xentrall Shared Services. The key issues for the service were highlighted together with emerging issues as follows:

- Whilst Xentrall has planned further budget-saving targets, the partnership's success in terms of already ensuring its services are efficient means that additional reductions become even more difficult to achieve.
- Reductions in capacity also mean that any new external opportunities can be more challenging to investigate and develop, as teams manage the day job alongside these new projects. Similarly, not adversely impacting existing external services needs to be managed.
- Council is heavily reliant on its ICT systems and data. Although technically designed to be resilient and secure, there are ongoing and increased external threats, often targeted at end-users in the form of spam emails. An ongoing user awareness programme is ensuring that such vulnerabilities and associated risks are understood by the ICT user community across the Council.

The following points were raised by the Committee:

- IT support is good and very responsive.
- How is core internal work and external opportunities balanced? Noted that Stockton (and Darlington) Council work is prioritised, and that no high-risk external work is taken on. External work does help pay for core services.

AGREED that the information be noted.

**PEO 57/17 Work Programme 2017-2018**

Next meeting on the 19th March 2018.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.

**PEO 58/17 Chair's Update**

The Chair had nothing further to report.

Noted.

