

People Select Committee

Overview Meeting 2018

Monday 26th February 2018

HR, Legal and Communications

Context

Members are well aware that as a Council we have had to adapt to funding reductions of £68 million over the last seven years and that we are still confronted with having to find further savings.

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 £6 million by 2019/20. Moving forward, expectations will need to be realistic as many more difficult decisions will need to be made.

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.

Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan has been reported on a six-monthly basis. This was reported to Executive Scrutiny Committee in September 2017 and January 2018, and then forwarded to members of each Select Committee with key issues highlighted by the Chair at their next meeting.

HR, Legal and Communications – Director – Beccy Brown

Relevant services include:

- Human Resources
- Legal Services
- Communications, Consultation and Engagement

Council Plan 2017-18

The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis.

The 2017-18 objectives for the Stronger Communities and Our Council themes are attached at **Appendix 1**.

Emerging Issues

Service delivery is influenced by a range of internal and external factors that develop over time. Emerging challenges and opportunities across HR, Legal and Communications are summarised 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. Initial analysis of the first three quarters of 2017/18 indicates that the annual corporate target of 8 days average per FTE may be achievable. If so, this would be a significant turnaround from the actual level of 8.8 days average per FTE in 2016/17 which was also a rising trend. National, regional and public sector trends continue to rise so we are not complacent, and delivery of the action plan to support employees will take significant work. We are also very aware that 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 and will focus on this support in 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. It is expected that the programme will continue throughout 2018 as the MTFP savings targets are delivered.

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The Shaping a Brighter Future programme which is supporting and developing the workforce to increase capability, resilience and flexibility to deliver greater capacity will continue to be a priority as the reduction in workforce continues. The programme continues to deliver major benefits and will continue to grow throughout 2018.

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. A new approach to recruitment is being developed and will be rolled out in 2018.

The annual pay award is currently subject to ballot by the Unions and negotiations are ongoing. However it is anticipated that if the final offer is agreed in line with the proposals made then significant work will be required to accommodate the new pay scales and adapt current grading structures. The impact of the award on agency workers will also be assessed.

Legal Services

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. Additional capacity is available from a partner provider and a restructuring of the team is underway.

The continued 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. There are benefits to be derived from improved technology and processes. The opportunities and challenges arising from new ways of working with the Courts continue to take up significant resource.

Communications, Consultation and Engagement

Communications activity continues at very high levels 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 and from the significant programme of events and major capital projects. We issued 353 press releases and handled 640 media enquiries in the last year. We anticipate that this level of interest will continue.

We continue to adapt and respond to the continually emerging changes in local media and the reduction in reporting capacity. Since Mike Blackburn left the Gazette in October 2016, followed soon afterwards by Chris Webber leaving the Echo (late 2016), the local reporting resource has continue to decline. We have adapted to this by increasing our own publicity through social media channels and the Council website. The total number of unique page views of our news pages in 2017 = 114,106, this compares with 89,869 in 2016 and 68,250 in 2015). This is a trend that will be of increasing importance.

Set against the trend above is the recent introduction of the BBC funded Local Democracy reporters. The Gazette have recruited two 'democracy reporters' who will be focussing on local Councils. We will work to make best use of this new opportunity.

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The increasing importance of a broader range and use of social media channels continues. We support 40 social media accounts as a way of keeping residents, businesses and visitors informed about the Council and the borough. New accounts will be trialled and added in 2018 (specifically a core Council instagram account and Snapchat account for events).

The 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. The opportunities to promote the borough through these channels will be maximised.

Delivering effective consultation remains a priority and we are clear that we need to refresh the Viewpoint panel and process in 2018 and we will be rolling out the new approach to consultation with young people in the borough through the Bright Minds Big Futures programme.

The biggest challenge in terms of Community Engagement is the support to the LSP and the VCSE sector in delivering programmes to tackle poverty in the borough and to work to be prepared for the introduction of Universal Credit later in the year.

Potential Areas for In-Depth Review

Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2018-19. Using the information provided as part of the performance updates and this Overview meeting, the Committee is invited to identify potential topics for review within this theme.

Potential topics will be considered at Executive Scrutiny Committee on 27 March.

Some potential topics for review are as follows:

It is proposed that a review of the recruitment of more employees from the BME community may be a suitable topic for a Scrutiny Review – this is an issue that we have been trying to address for a number of years and the focus and input from a review may bring new evidence and input to the issue.

Appendix 1

Council Plan 2017-18 – Stronger Communities

Our vision is for communities that are diverse, cohesive, caring and vibrant.

Key objectives and activities

Objective: **Deliver effective Consultation and Engagement**

Council Plan 2017-18 – Our Council

Our vision is of a Council that prides itself on being open, honest and fair. On leading by example. On having big plans and the determination to see them through. We're facing difficult financial challenges and we can't do all we used to do so we're facing some tough decisions. Throughout this we'll stay focused on delivering genuine value for money, on setting the highest standards of public service, on communicating clearly and regularly with the community we serve and on being challenging, innovative and well organized.

Key objectives and activities

Objective: **Continue to attract, develop and support diverse, capable and resilient employees**

Objective: **Deliver effective communication**