People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Thursday, 25th October, 2018.

Present: Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell (Chair), Cllr Louise Baldock (Vice-Chair), Cllr Sonia Bailey, Cllr Barbara Inman and Cllr Eileen Johnson.

Officers: Reuben Kench, Lorraine Dixon (C,L&E); Jill Douglas (HR,L&C); Julie Auffret (F&BS); Ian Miles, Gary Woods, Peter Bell (DCE).

Also in attendance: Cllr Chris Clough, Alison Hughes (Wigan Council), Jim Lowden (Newcastle City Council).

Apologies: Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Elsi Hampton, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Mick Moore and Katie Slack.

PEO 35/18	**Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and the evacuation procedure was noted.

PEO 36/18	**Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

PEO 37/18	**Minutes of the Meetings held on 21st May, 18th June and 16th July 2018 - For Approval/Signature**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 21st May, 18th June and 16th July 2018.

AGREED that the minutes of the meetings held on 21 May, 18 June and 16 July 2018 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

PEO 38/18	**Scrutiny Review of Under-represenation of BME Communities in the SBC Workforce**

Members were presented with the draft Scope and Project Plan for the Scrutiny Review of Under-representation of BME Communities in the SBC Workforce.

It was proposed that the Committee assess the Council's performance against the 'Roadmap to Success', recommended to organisations in the independent McGregor-Smith Review (2018) – Race in the workplace to assist leaders to move positively towards a more diverse workforce:

1)   Consider our Data
2)   Take Accountability
3)   Raise Awareness
4)   Examine Recruitment
5)   Change Processes

AGREED that the draft Scope and Project Plan be approved.

PEO 39/18	**Scrutiny Review of Digital Optimisation**

Members received further information in relation to the ongoing Scrutiny Review of Digital Optimisation from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Revenue and Benefits Service, Xentrall Shared Services and a number of other Local Authorities.

Other Local Authorities

To understand and learn from the approaches and experiences of other Local Authorities, Members considered contributions from representatives of the following Councils:

Alison Hughes (Assistant Director – Strategic ICT Partnerships) from Wigan Council (LGC Digital Council of the Year 2016) was in attendance at the meeting and outlined the following:-

• Wigan was one of the hardest hit Local Authorities in terms of savings required following changes to government policy around Council funding, and it was within this context that Wigan Council embarked on a digital journey that had gained national recognition and a number of awards.
• Digital Taskforce was established involving people from the private, public and voluntary sector, as well as those who lived and/or worked in the Borough, and Cabinet funding was granted for community investment to increase digital skills, improve digital infrastructure and appoint a Digital Growth Advisor.
• Key components in Wigan Council's digital strategy include 'My Account' (personalisation of service), 'Destination Digital' (free events in the Town Centre to showcase WCs digital journey so far and promote Wigan Borough as the destination for a digital future), 'My report it' (reporting environmental issues) and 'iDEA' (The Duke of York Inspiring Digital Enterprise Award, the digital and enterprise equivalent to the Duke of Edinburgh Award, this was a free online tool where people earn badges for digital skills development).
• Local businesses who did not embrace digital did less well, so Wigan Council had encouraged organisations to develop and grow via its Digital Growth Service (providing a fully-funded programme of specialist digital growth advice through 1:1 support, masterclasses and workshops) and Digital Business Network Concept (investigating the potential of an online platform to support digital growth).
• Due to the huge pressure on budgets, building self-reliance in Health and Social Care had become a big area of focus for Wigan Council.   Initially working with a North East company (Alcove) to get started, embracing home technology was changing lives and saving on costs.

Jim Lowden (Head of ICT) from Newcastle City Council was in attendance at the meeting and outlined following:-

• Newcastle City Council had Invested in 'digital' to support transformation of services, improvement of the customer experience and delivery of challenging budget reductions, and provided an overview of their 'digital narrative' reflecting current strengths and globally recognised assets, in addition to ambitions for the future.
• Moving forward, Newcastle City Council were seeking the support of an external tech partner to provide financial resource and technological expertise for the development and deployment of financially compelling business cases

which utilise innovative technology to reform public service delivery.

• This was not all about ICT, this was about business solutions which ICT could enable. Collaborative approaches (internally between service areas and ICT staff; externally by sharing experiences and working with other Council's and partners) are vital, as was Senior Management and political buy-in/support.

A written submission outlining Milton Keynes Council's (LGC Digital Council of the Year 2018) digital journey was tabled for information.

Members then made the following comments/questions/discussion:

• Newcastle Council's Cabinet investment had been on a separate team that should pay for itself (and then some) in terms of savings identified through changes to the way services were delivered – funding driven on 'invest-to-save' basis.

• Was there a shortage of technology experts in the North East? Filling development roles was more challenging than filling technology roles. Lost expertise to DWP was an issue when they came to Newcastle as they paid more and it was hard for Local Authorities to compete regarding salaries. Newcastle Council was looking more at growing own technology people and succession planning.

• Staff culture was important so employees were not frightened / threatened by digitalisation.

• Wigan noted that whilst a lot of work went into how residents use services, a Council must be able to step back and review their offer, particularly if things were not right for the customer. Have previously put something online without thinking of residents and how they would use it. It was crucial to think from the customer perspective.

• One of Wigan's biggest success stories had been the implementation of an online Registrars Service only 10% of transactions took place face-to-face. Feels that residents expect digital transactions (culture change).

• How was the balance struck between staff dealing with digital requests and staff actually delivering a service? Need to undertake work at the start around service priorities and how then to balance resources this must be constantly monitored.

• Members were struck by Wigan's work on 'big ticket' (Adults and Children's) items – Stockton Council and Newcastle Council seem to be looking more at environmental things. Stockton Council and Newcastle Council were aware of issues within Adults and Children's Services, though it was not easy to make in-roads in these areas due to their people-centric nature and the significant change to the working practices of the Social Care workforce. Stockton Council had been successful with a recent expression of interest to the Local Digital Fund in relation to a Social Care project proposal.

• GDPR impact on digital service provision? Identifying data held had been a huge job and staff had been trained / educated on the new regulations. Ability to be selective about future data coming into the organisation, the challenge was around what information is already held.

Xentrall Shared Services

The Assistant Director – Xentrall Shared Services (public sector partnership between Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and Darlington Borough Council delivering key back office transactional services) was in attendance at the

meeting and contributed on the following aspects:

ICT Strategy 2017
Based upon 8 principals of how the Council should be managing its ICT assets, the ICT Strategy also sets out three strategic themes for ICT:

•   ICT Governance and Service Development
•   ICT Strategic Architecture
•   Council Service Development and Transformation

All three themes tied into and form part of the Council's smarter working programme and digital agenda. The customer-facing digital experience, although service lead, was wholly reliant on effective ICT and those commissioning and using it.

Future Digital Development and Implications on ICT Service Capacity
•   Xentrall's national benchmarking exercises showed that it performed very well.
•   The digital developments of the Council could take many forms and would call on all areas of the ICT service, from project management right through to end-user support.
•   Should capacity or capability emerge as potential issues, this would be addressed through the service governance mechanisms to raise awareness and understanding, and to seek a resolution.
•   When peaks in workload occur, the ICT service takes on additional capacity through temporary contractors and temporary roles.   Whenever specialist help is brought in, the opportunity to shadow and skill-up Xentrall's own team is taken where possible.

Security
•   The volume or increasing amounts of digital data was not an issue, as the Council needed to ensure all of its data was held, shared, used and disposed of in an appropriately secure manner, no matter how large or small the volumes.
•   The ICT service and the ICT infrastructure were regularly tested and audited to confirm suitability, with a comprehensive regime including regular internal audits, compliance with national and international standards, and monthly vulnerability scanning to identify any potential security weaknesses.
•   However, actions of the end-user can serve to undermine investment in secure infrastructure.

Coping with Increased System Demand
•   The ICT architecture was designed in such a way to be able to be right-sized in terms of both capacity and performance, capable of being increased or decreased as and when required.
•   The network inside and between buildings, and the connections to the outside world and the internet, were also high performing and resilient.

Members then raised the comments/questions/discussion:

•   Microsoft was not the only browser, and all of the Council's systems would need to work with various operating systems/browsers.   Xentrall build in compatibility for all devices.

•   Vigorous patching control programme ensures up-to-date security and less susceptibility to cyber threats.

SBC Revenues and Benefits Service

Further to the contributions from representatives of the Council's Environmental Health and Care For Your Area teams at the last meeting, the Revenues and Benefits Service (the service with the highest number of customer contacts) provided the following:

•   Service offered an array of provisions including Council Tax billing / discounts / support, in-house enforcement, business rates, housing benefit, and welfare rights.
•   There was a recognised requirement to support vulnerable residents who could lack the technology and/or skills for digital platforms.
•   Digital and self-serve options for customers include viewing Council Tax accounts online, electronic billing, benefit calculator, online payment facility, self-serve telephone payment facility, Post Office payment option, and the Council's website (e.g. Council Tax band look-up).
•   Developments in online forms and transactions included change of address, reporting a change in circumstance, providing evidence online, and authorisation to share information with landlord.
•   Efforts made in mitigating for digital exclusion through the Infinity Partnership (digital mapping exercise with Voluntary Sector partners, particularly ahead of the recent Universal Credit roll-out across the Borough), new claim interviews, home visiting service and partnership working.
•   Plans for enhancing future digital provision centre around giving customers access to the services they want some ideas include text messaging (to broaden the Council Tax recovery approach), improved access to online accounts, e-notifications (allowing Housing Benefits notifications to be provided if desired), an open portal (lessening the need for residents to contact Customer Services), and Housing Benefit and Council Tax support applications.
•   To encourage increased take-up of digital services, internet access opportunities, ICT skills development (of residents) and support for vulnerable clients were all key considerations.   From an organisational perspective, investment in resources (financial and staffing) to develop and implement change, smarter working principles (what's right for the customer, not what's the most expensive tech), training needs for staff and enhanced customer awareness (marketing/promotions/ communications) of the services available were vital factors.
•   A crucial message was that one size did not fit all, and that providing positive customer experiences whilst recognising differing customer needs was perhaps the biggest challenge.

Members raised the following comments/questions/discussion:

•   When considering vulnerable customers, potential exists for more to be excluded if more information was moved online need to be careful that problems were not created.
•   Staff use these systems everyday so were familiar but residents use them less frequently so there was a need to design forms that were easy to understand and use so the Council gets the information it needed and customers were clear on what they needed to provide.

AGREED that the information and Members comments be noted.

PEO 40/18

Work Programme 2018-2019

Consideration was given to the People Select Committee Work Programme 2018-2019.   The next meeting would be held on 19 November 2018.

AGREED that the People Select Committee Work Programme 2018/19 be noted.

PEO 41/18

Chair's Update

The Chair had nothing further to update.