

Overview Report

People Select Committee

Overview Meeting 2020

2 March 2020

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 future funding is uncertain.

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 the uncertain financial position, changing demographics, increasing demand, new national legislation and policy direction. Members are reminded of the four policy principles that support our decision-making:

- **Protect the vulnerable by**
 - protecting people who are subject to or at risk of harm
 - helping people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
 - supporting people who are financially excluded
 - assisting people whose circumstances make them vulnerable

- **Create economic prosperity by**
 - ensuring the businesses and people of Stockton-on-Tees are part of a thriving and productive Tees Valley economy

- **Tackle inequality through improving**
 - health
 - job opportunities, skills and training
 - educational attainment for all
 - affordable housing and fuel poverty
 - financial inclusion

- **Help people to be healthier by**
 - providing mainstream services that are available where needed
 - providing preventative services that are available where needed

It is within this context that the Select Committee is invited to undertake their overview duties.

Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis. This was reported to Executive Scrutiny Committee in July and November 2019, and then forwarded to members of each Select Committee with key issues highlighted by the Chair at their next meeting.

Overview Report

HR, Legal and Communications Director – Beccy Brown

Relevant services include:

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

Council Plan 2019-2022

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

The 2019-22 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 for the HR, Legal and Communications Directorate are summarised as follows:

HR

The HR Service remains focussed on delivering the Council Plan Key Objective to – “*Continue to attract, develop and support diverse, capable and resilient employees*”:

Attracting employees

Overall, we continue to perform well in the recruitment market and to attract strong applicants for vacancies. We recruited over 400 employees in the last year and continue to be an employer of choice. However, we currently face a number of opportunities and challenges:

- We still have a number of “Hard-to-Recruit” roles – we continue to face challenges in recruiting to Children’s Social Worker roles, IT roles and experienced Solicitor roles. We recognise that these are market challenges affecting the whole sector however we intend to carry out a review of our approach to recruitment in these areas.
- We are still falling short of our aspiration to achieve a more diverse workforce. We aim to achieve a greater diversity in the age, ethnicity and disability profile of the workforce. The achievement of Disability Confident Leader status in last year provides reassurance that our approach to recruitment in this area is at best practice level and we have seen a slight improvement to 5.2% of the workforce. The successful Apprenticeship recruitment campaign in 2019 led to the recruitment of 40 apprentices with a younger age profile. We will run a 2020 Apprenticeship recruitment programme and whilst not exclusively aimed at school-leavers we anticipate that this will again attract a cohort of younger employees. However, the age profile of the workforce remains a challenge, with almost half of the workforce over the age of 50 so we continue to monitor succession planning across all Directorates. BME recruitment remains a challenge and we continue to deliver the action plan resulting from the scrutiny review in 2018.

Overview Report

- The replacement of the current PSE recruitment system with the North East Recruitment Portal (provided by NEREO) will take place in April 2020. This provides an initial implementation challenge, however also an opportunity to implement new approaches and flexibility to the recruitment process.
- We continue to review our pay and reward package as we recognise it is a key aspect of our ability to recruit and retain employees. The national negotiation of the 2020 pay award is still ongoing and we are aware that the proposals for a fundamental review of pay spines are still being considered, we keep this under constant review and feel confident that we will be able to assimilate the outcome of the national agreement to our local pay spine. We continue to review the LGPS pension scheme as this is increasingly less attractive to employees. There are currently approximately 15% of employees who are not members of the pension scheme and this is particularly marked amongst younger and lower paid employees. We will carry out a review of the pensions benefits and approach in the coming year to consider whether any improvements can be made.

Developing Employees

We continue to offer a comprehensive and wide-ranging programme of employee development through the Shaping a Brighter Future (SBF) programme and through the delivery of the annual training and development programme. The priorities for 2020/21 are to:

- Establish the new mainstreamed SBF approach following completion of the initial 5-year period. Work will continue in 3 workstreams:
 - *“Valued ,Trusted and Supported”* This team will work on employee engagement, and support delivery of the Employee Survey. It will oversee and supports the Staff Forums, Health Advocates and delivery of the Better Health at Work action plan. It will provide a sounding board for the Workforce Development programme, provide input and challenge in HR policy development and the new approach to coaching and mentoring.
 - *“A great place to work”* This team will lead on the development and dissemination of the Culture Statement, train and support the SBF advocates, take part in the Corporate Induction process, lead on the Inspirational Speakers programme, deliver Setting The Scene, develop a programme to support Directorate team days and provide a pool of people to take part in interviews during recruitment
 - *“More than just a job”* This team will lead on delivery and development of the Talent Network and the new No Limits project to support Children in Our Care.
- Support employees through the Smarter Working transformational programme which is changing the way we work through improved digital access for customers, flexible technology, improved document storage and office accommodation.
- Deliver a 2020 Apprenticeship Recruitment programme and continue to ensure that we are developing the growing cohort of apprentices in the organisation. We are beginning to see the benefits from new apprentices and also the development of existing employees who have taken on apprenticeship learning opportunities.

Supporting Employees

We continue to offer a comprehensive range of support to our employees through:

- the Occupational Health service,

Overview Report

- Body2Fit Physiotherapy and Podiatry services,
- The Employee Wellbeing Service provided by Redcar and Middlesbrough Mind,
- The Tees Active, eye test, travel and mobile phone discount schemes
- The cycle to work scheme.
- The LGBT, Young Staff, BME and Disability Staff Forums,
- Childcare support
- Carers support.
- Access to Moneywise

We continually review the support we provide. The Better Health Award Continuing Excellence accreditation, the 'Everyone's Business' Accreditation for our services to support employees affected by domestic abuse, the Council's adoption of the TUCs Dying to work Charter, the participation in the North East Regional Employers Organisation (NEREO) and the IIP accreditation all provide excellent ways for us to keep up to date and to learn from and share best practice in the area of employee support. We have identified the following priorities for this year:

- Sickness Absence levels remain high at 8.3 days average per FTE in the last year. It is looking unlikely that we will meet the current year target of 8 days average per FTE. We will review the action plan that we have been working on since the Scrutiny Review of this area in 2017 and consider areas for further development.
- We will review our packages of support for employees affected by Mental Health issues – we are identifying this as a growing underlying issue in workplace capability and disciplinary cases and in sickness absence. We will carry out a review of our early help, support and wellbeing services and the impact of the Mental Health First Aid training and the evidence from the first year of the Counselling and Wellbeing service provided by Mind.
- We will undertake the bi-annual Employee Survey in October 2020 to test how employees feel about working at the Council and to identify the areas we can focus support and development.

Legal

The Legal Service remains focussed on providing an excellent and proactive legal service to the organisation through:

The Property, Contracts and Regulatory team

The Children's Social Care team

The Adults & Litigation team

The Legal support team

And, through the delivery of Monitoring Officer and Proper Office functions.

The Legal Service also plays its part in delivering the Council Plan Key Objective "*to develop and ensure delivery of a robust governance framework*". The Service currently faces the following key challenges and opportunities:

- Ongoing operational demands arising from pressure across the Children's Social Care. The high levels of demand (we currently have 104 open cases in formal Legal process) this challenge is exacerbated by the pressure in the court process and the long-running challenge of recruiting experienced solicitors in this specialism.
- The Committee on Standards in Public Life published its report on local government ethical standards in 2019. The report looked at the current framework governing the behaviour of local government councillors and executives in England and made a

Overview Report

number of recommendations to promote and improve ethical standards in local government. The Committee recommended a number of changes to primary and secondary legislation, which are subject to Parliamentary timetabling and to the Local Government Transparency Code. We continue to monitor developments and expect to implement changes in 2020. Work has also begun on a model Code of Conduct for Local Authorities. This work is being led by The Local Government Association (LGA). The model code will cover public-to-member, member-to-member and officer/member interactions and overall behavioural standards and expectations in public debate, decision making and engagement. We are currently involved in early consultation and it is anticipated that a formal consultation will begin soon with the outcome of the consultation and a draft final model code presented to the LGA Leadership Board and General Assembly at the LGA annual conference in July 2020.

- We have received confirmation from HM Land Registry that we have been approved for the 2020/21 programme for migration of local land charges data to the national Land Registry. The migration represents a significant investment in the coming year however it will provide long term benefits for record management.

Communications, Consultation and Engagement (CCE)

The CCE Service remains focussed on delivering the Council Plan Key Objectives to “Deliver effective communication”, to “Support the continued development of a strong and vibrant voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) Sector”, to “Deliver effective consultation and engagement and to “Develop a community cohesion strategy”.

The CCE Service currently faces the following key challenges and opportunities:

- The continuing developments and changes in Social Media and the associated changes in traditional media present challenges and great opportunities for the Council. We continue to develop our Social Media presence with 102,207 followers across our 21 Facebook, 9 Twitter and 9 Instagram accounts and achieved a record reach of 1.1 million in the first month of 2020. We will continue to develop and trial new approaches across all platforms in the coming year.
- We continue to work closely with colleagues in Customer Services and Xentrall on the development of a new core Council website and improved online services for customers. The development of the new site and digital services will be made alongside a revamp of the Stockton Information Directory and is expected to be launched in 2021.
- We have carried out a review and refresh of the Visual Identity system for the Council and will launch the updated approach in March 2020. This update follows 8 years of use of the current branding guidelines. The refresh aims to further improve brand recognition for the Council and to support effective communication across all channels.
- Work is underway to launch a new Communities Strategy. The proposal is to integrate the Brighter Borough For All framework with the proposed Community Cohesion strategy into a single strategic focus on communities. The key elements of the new strategy will be focused around community cohesion and tolerance and tackling Poverty. The Communities Strategy will be underpinned by a refreshed approach to delivery which will update the Locality Forums with 7 Community Partnerships. Consultation is ongoing and it is proposed to launch the new approach at a new Big Community Get Together annual event on 1 April 2020.

Overview Report

Potential Areas for In-Depth Review

Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2020-21. 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 24 March.

The current Scrutiny review of Public Consultation activity has just started and it is planned to report by the end of 2020.

It is proposed that the scrutiny review of the Tees Credit Union is reconsidered for the 2020/21 programme as it was delayed due to operational issues at the Credit Union this year.

Overview Report

Appendix 1

Council Plan 2019-22 – Stronger Communities

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

Key relevant objectives:

- Support the continued development of a strong and vibrant voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) Sector
- Deliver effective consultation and engagement
- Develop a community cohesion strategy

Council Plan 2019-22 – 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 relevant objectives:

- Develop and ensure delivering of a robust governance framework
- Continue to attract, develop and support diverse, capable and resilient employees
- Deliver effective communication