

PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday 31 July 2023.

Present: Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley (sub for Cllr Ian Dalgarno) and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Officers: Tara Connor, Lorraine Dixon, Reuben Kench (CS, E&C), Julie Butcher, Rebecca Saunders-Thompson (DoCS) and Garry Cummings (F, D&R).

Also in attendance: Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Steve Nelson and Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE

Apologies: Cllr Michelle Bendelow and Cllr Ian Dalgarno.

PEO/1/23 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PEO/2/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO/3/23 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PEO/4/23 Overview Reports 2023

The Select Committee received annual overview reports outlining the challenges and opportunities and priorities for the year ahead from the following three directorates:

- Community Services, Environment and Culture
- Corporate Services
- Finance, Development and Regeneration

Key issues highlighted and discussed were as follows:

- Members requested if officers could provide a glossary of terms with future reports.
- Members thanked library staff for the service they provided to residents.
- A discussion was held on issues with call answering times. Officers responded that they were aware of the situation. The ongoing cost of living crisis had increased the demand for Council services and impacted on call waiting times. Staffing issues and the training of new staff had also impacted on the service. The average call waiting time had reduced from 16 minutes in 2022 to 11.5 minutes to June 2023.
- The Council had implemented a call back system to allow individuals to exit a call but retain their place in the call queue and receive a call back.
- Officers highlighted a successful recruitment campaign for Customer Services Advisors in partnership with the Council's Employment and Training Hub.

- Members thanked staff for their dedication to training customer service staff and the service provided.
- The 'My Council' feature on the Council website was discussed. As of June 2023, there were 23,579 My Council accounts registered.
- In June 2023, there were 2298 digital and 1639 manual transactions recorded for Care for Your Area.
- Members praised the Business and IP Centre and the success of the Newcastle Building Society and Yarm Library co-location and questioned if there were any plans for similar mergers. Officers responded that the Council had invited Newcastle Building Society to consider other sites for co-locations with libraries and always welcomed interest in partnerships from the private sector.
- A discussion was held on the new Stockton town centre riverside event space. It was hoped that the Riverside Park would be completed in time for the 2025 Stockton and Darlington Railway Bicentenary Celebrations.
- Members commented on the upcoming Parliamentary Boundary changes and officers reassured Members that measures to inform residents would be progressed as necessary.
- A discussion was held on staff absences and wellbeing. The new Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), which included a wellbeing support 24/7, 365 days telephone helpline, available to all staff through the Vivup partnership was highlighted.
- Members requested to view staff training. Officers agreed to follow up this request.
- The Council's apprenticeships programme was praised by Members.
- Members asked for an update on Dunedin House. Officers responded that contractors were on site and staff would start to move over to Dunedin from Autumn 2023. The process of moving staff would take approximately nine months to one year.
- A discussion was held on the financial advantages of Xentrall services for the Council and the potential for future partnerships with other organisations.

AGREED that:

- 1) the three Overview reports be noted.
- 2) the further information be provided as requested.

PEO/5/23 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2023-2024

Consideration was given to the Work Programme.

Members were informed that following approval at the meeting of the Executive Scrutiny Committee on 4 July 2023, the People Select Committee's next review would be the Scrutiny Review of Cost of Living Response.

The next meeting would be held on Monday 4 September 2023.

Members requested and approved to move the start time of People Select Committee meetings from 1:30pm to 4:00pm.

AGREED that the Work Programme and the change to the timing of Committee meetings be noted.