People Select Committee

Overview Meeting 2023

31 July 2023

Corporate Services

Context

Members are reminded of the Council's Vision that supports decision-making:

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm where:

- This means the Borough will be a place where:
  - o People live in cohesive and safe communities
  - o People are supported and protected from harm
  - o People live health lives

- This means that the Borough will have:
  - o A growing economy
  - o Improved education and skills development
  - o Job creation and increased employment

- This means we will enjoy:
  - o Great places to live and visit
  - o Clean and green spaces
  - o Rich cultural experiences

The Council plays its part in making sure this is achieved by being a Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve.

Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis to Executive Scrutiny Committee. Please see the link:

http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=SCR

Corporate Services
Director – Ged Morton

Relevant services include:

- Communications
- Human Resources
- Legal Services
- Procurement and Governance
- Democratic Services

Council Plan 2023-2026

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

The key priorities for Corporate Services 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 are summarised as follows:

Communications - Priorities for the year ahead

- Deliver the media and social media requirements of the 2023/24 annual communications plans, including plans to support delivery of a full year of events and activities across our borough in 2023/24.
- We continue to develop our Social Media presence. For example, monthly reach figures for June 2023 showed over 1.1million impressions across our main corporate accounts. We will continue to develop new approaches across all platforms recognising that they key to successful engagement with our residents is ensuing that we generate relevant, high quality and interesting material.
- Social media metrics are collected monthly to ensure that we are reaching our residents appropriately and to inform future content.

Communications – Challenges and opportunities

Whether it is in respect of urgent public information, such as a school closure or dealing with a significant incident, responding to media enquiries, or ensuring our residents are aware of our latest events and activities in the borough the team operate in a fast-paced environment. Ensuring effective communication and engagement with our diverse communities and stakeholders and how we extend our reach to ensure that none of our residents are excluded remains at the forefront of the team's work, balanced at all times by the sensitivities of working in a political environment.

Human Resources - Priorities for the year ahead

The HR Service team of remains focussed on providing a proactive HR support service to the whole organisation. We will

- Lead the development of a new workforce strategy which will address organisation wide issues encompassing
  - Workforce planning
  - A Great Place to Work
  - Employer of choice
  - Employee Recognition
  - Employee Engagement
  - Supporting our employees
  - Developing our Employees
  - Developing our Future Leaders
- Continue to provide a professional, responsive HR Advisory Service across the Council and to Schools & Academies in relation to Sickness, Disciplinary, Capability and Grievance issues.
- Develop an action plan for the Employee Health, Wellbeing & Engagement Team including a calendar of events and activities for 2023/24 and run a regular Blog/Newsletter via KYIT and on service Plasma Screens.
- Deliver the Council's Corporate Training & Development programme including mandatory training for Employees and Managers
- Deliver the annual apprenticeship programme, and support ad hoc recruitment of apprenticeships within the Council and maintained Schools to support workforce planning

Human Resources – Challenges and opportunities

The Council face a number of workforce challenges which the development of a workforce strategy will help address capacity is frequently highlighted by managers as a significant area of concern

Attracting talented people and retaining them continues to be an area of focus. In common with many public sector organisations difficulties are faced in attracting and retaining the right skilled and diverse workforce, particularly in areas where the private sector can offer more competitive pay and benefits or where there are only limited number of qualified people to draw from.

As of 31 March 2023, the Council employed 62 Apprentices on apprenticeship contracts. This is an increase from 56 apprenticeships at March 2022 and 42 at 31 March 2021. Opportunities to "grow our own" will address pressures of recruitment and retention over time, but it is important to ensure that apprentice opportunities are created in the areas where the future demand is predicted by effective workforce planning.

We continue to face the challenge of Sickness Absence. Sickness absence has steadily increased since 2014 with levels remaining challengingly high at 10.1 average days lost per FTE last year compared with 9.8 days in 2021/22. Absence due to Stress, Anxiety, Depression & Mental Health is the lead reason for absence (27%). Musculoskeletal is the second highest reason (17.4%) and is particularly high in some manual roles.

Legal Services - Priorities for the year ahead

The Legal Services team remains focussed on providing a proactive and broad-based 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.

Legal Services – Challenges and opportunities

We continue to face operational demands arising from pressures which are mirrored right across the organisation this year has seen increasing demands in adults' litigation and across SEND (supporting our statutory duties) as well as commercial and property work. Investment in the legal team around children's services is now showing real dividends with a much-reduced reliance on external support. We will continue to review workload and operating arrangements. Recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced lawyers remains an ongoing challenge. More than ever there is a need to grow our own and invest in opportunities that bring in new colleagues such as apprenticeships.

Procurement and Governance - Priorities for the year ahead

- Develop Children's services Brokerage (Transformation Programme)
- Commission training to support RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act)
- Manage the Councils responsibilities with regard to complaints, customer feedback and comments FOI/ DSAR, information requests and MP enquiries.
- Deliver annual programme of corporate and bespoke health and safety training
- Support development of Power BI Corporate Dashboard and management information to CMT/ SMT/ CGG and Operational Dashboards.
- Ensure adequate insurance arrangements are in place
- Review claims handling requirements
- Support the regional OPEN project. OPEN is the new e-procurement platform launched by NEPO and the north-east local authorities of which our Council is an important part. During the course of 2023 the system will be rolled out across all of the authorities and will be used to advertise tendering opportunities.
- New Public Contract Regulations
- Risk Management development.

Procurement and Governance – Challenges and opportunities

New legislative changes will necessitate a range of updates to work including in respect of the Council's contract procedure rules contained in the constitution. Supporting services to adapt, change, challenge and become more efficient in the use of public money will continue to be an important part of how the team supports the Council particularly through the transformation reviews. The successes of for example in the efficiencies created by a move to brokerage services in adults will be expanded out to support children's services.

We will continue to develop and improve upon our approaches to risk management providing services with live data and assurance around the risks that they face, helping council services to better proactively manage their risks in a timely way and deliver improved outcomes.

The team have recently completed a service review and restructuring to ensure that they are more agile and fit for purpose for the demands now faced by the Council.

Democratic Services - Priorities for the year ahead

- Prepare for the delivery of the 2024 elections programme ensuring a high-quality experience for voters and candidates and that the Electoral Commission performance standards are achieved.

- Prepare for the implementation of the Parliamentary boundary review and ensure election readiness in the event that a general election is called;
- Continue to Implement the requirements of the Elections Act 2022 and promote awareness with voters;
- Deliver the Electoral Registration service ensuring that electoral registers are as accurate as possible and ensuring that everyone who is eligible and wants to vote is able to do so and that the Electoral Commission performance standards are achieved;
- Implement the replacement for the Governance and Meeting Management system moving from E-genda to the modern.gov system;
- Promote and enhance the Scrutiny function to drive service improvement and hold policy makers to account;
- Promote and support the Civic Mayor as first citizen of the Borough;
- Continue to provide efficient and effective support for Council and Committee meetings and to all members supporting them in their role and personal development.

Democratic Services – Challenges and opportunities

Through 2023 and into 2024 the elections team will operate at a state of preparedness in respect of any general election, as well as planning for the Police and Crime Commissioner and Tees Valley Combined mayoral elections in 2024. Election planning at pace usually begins in the September before the election.

The introduction of a new Governance and Meeting Management system with the modern.gov system replacing E-Genda has been a major project for the team, the system will support the core functioning of the Council's democratic processes. The system is intended to support governance and meeting management that is paperless, secure and straightforward. Modern.gov is used by over three hundred clients in a wide range of sectors including local authorities, housing associations, fire authorities, health and higher education.

APPENDIX 1 – COUNCIL PLAN - KEY PRIORITIES 2023-2024 – CORPORATE SERVICES

A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive means we will enjoy:
- great places to live and visit
- clean and green spaces
- rich cultural experiences

We have identified these key priorities for 2023 to 2024 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

➢ develop and implement the 2023 borough-wide events programme, incorporating celebrations for the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and ongoing preparations for Stockton & Darlington Railway Bicentenary

We will play our part in bringing about this vision for the Borough by being A Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve. This means that we will make sure that we provide:
- financial sustainability and value for money
- dedicated and resourceful employees
- strong leadership and governance

We have identified these key priorities for 2023 to 2024 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

➢ launch a new Council Volunteering Strategy to support our employees to volunteer in the community and to provide additional volunteering opportunities at the Council

➢ implement the new flexible working arrangements to capitalise and build on the technological advancements and new working practices developed during the pandemic

➢ respond to and implement the Local Government and Parliamentary Boundary Reviews