

# Support Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 18 March 2010

## PRESENT:

Councillor James, in the Chair.

Councillor Lowry, Vice Chair.

Councillors Berrow, Browne, Dann, Sam Leaves, Stark, Stevens and Thompson.

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 12.40 pm.

*Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.*

## 59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in accordance with the code of conduct.

## 60. MINUTES

Resolved that the minutes of the 21 January 2010 be approved as a correct record.

## 61. CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

## 62. FEEDBACK FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

The Chair provided feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. It was reported that the Growth and Prosperity Scrutiny Panel would lead on a task and finish group on homelessness and housing needs in the new municipal year, members of the Support Services Scrutiny panel had been requested to join the task and finish group. The Chair and Vice Chair had been invited to join with their counterparts from the Growth and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Panel in the new municipal year to draft a project initiation document.

## 63. ACCOMMODATION BUSINESS PLAN

The panel received a presentation from the Head of Corporate property on the developing business case for the Accommodation Strategy. It was reported that –

- (i) a director and member lead had been appointed;
- (ii) all floors in the civic centre were open plan;
- (iii) positive outcomes from the floor five pilot had shown that telephony had worked in a flexible environment, meeting rooms were working well, perimeter storage and the welfare room had been a success and communications across teams had improved ;
- (iv) there had been issues with Information Technology, which included problems with roaming profiles, system speeds and server based software;
- (v) the business case preparation was still underway and would reflect lessons learned from the floor five pilot, options for freeing up accommodation and capital and revenue implications. It is expected that submission to CMT will take place at the end of March 2010.

In response to questions from the panel, it was reported that –

- (vi) initially work on the IT systems had been carried out by contractors but had now transferred to in house technicians, servers have not been configured correctly across the council and solutions had been developed for problems that had arisen;
- (vii) the costs of IT infrastructure improvements would be built into the business case, money saved on accommodation could be invested into IT;
- (viii) funding for the programme had not yet been identified;
- (ix) 75 staff were involved in the pilot project, the programme would be rolled out in phases with the first phase affecting around 650 staff;
- (x) Plymouth Community Homes had moved from Windsor house which made it an ideal site for the first phase of the accommodation strategy;
- (xi) Ballard House was the most expensive site in the Council's portfolio. To leave Ballard House early would cost in the region of 6 million pounds, to leave Windsor house could see a receipt in the region of 2 million pounds. Leaving Ballard House would see significant revenue savings whereas leaving Windsor house could provide a substantial capital receipt.
- (xii) the authority currently co-locates with partners in approximately 24 buildings, work is continuing with the Primary Care Trust, Police and University to identify further opportunities for co-location. Partners understood the benefits and IT systems were starting to link together.

Resolved that the Panel invite the lead officers for the Accommodation, People and ICT strategies to a single item meeting to scrutinise the development of business cases and how the strategies will work together.

#### 64. **COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

The Panel received a presentation on the work of Corporate Communications from the Head of Corporate Communications. It was reported that –

- (i) the internal and external communication strategies are in the process of being updated and would be presented to CMT at the end of March 2010;
- (ii) the department plays a key role in supporting the communications work of all directorates;
- (iii) the reputations campaign had focused the Authorities communications on managing the media, developing a consistent brand and communicating well with staff and residents;
- (iv) survey results had highlighted that communications had to be targeted demographically so that residents are able to receive information and engage with the council in the medium which best suits them;
- (v) satisfaction survey results tend to be poor in large urban areas;
- (vi) 70% of the residents panel felt well informed about the work of the council;
- (vii) work is ongoing to improve the information around scrutiny and the consultation portal.

In response to questions from members of the panel, it was reported that –

- (viii) there is clear guidance in place within the council's communications protocol on councillor's media and public relations;
- (ix) committee and panel chairs are able to authorise press releases;
- (x) it was standard practice that corporate communications would not be involved in public relations for ward members;
- (xi) Corporate Communications had been involved in the little teds nursery case and had run a press conference and provided press releases;
- (xii) Corporate Communications would receive feedback and comments from members which could highlight priorities in wards and lead to more focused and relevant information on the website and in print publications.

Resolved that-

1. the Head of Corporate Communications investigate how non-executive ward councillors' relationships and interaction with his department can be improved;
2. the Head of Corporate communications returns to the panel at a future date;
3. press releases be added as a standing item to this panels agenda.

**65. UPDATE ON CONSULTATION EVENTS**

Resolved that this item was deferred by the panel for the next meeting due to time constraints.

**66. QUARTERLY REPORT**

Resolved that the quarterly report for the panel be approved.

**67. UPDATE ON APPRAISAL PROCESS**

The Assistant Director for Human Resources gave a presentation on the current status of the authority's staff appraisal process. It was reported that -

- (i) 90% of employees had received an appraisal 6% were either due to have one before the end of March and 4% could not be done due to issues such as maternity leave or new employees.
- (ii) 66% of appraisal forms completed and returned, there had been variations in return rate across directorates;
- (iii) actions that are being taken include continual tracking by HR of numbers being returned, by department / team / and individual name, reminders of need to return forms being sent to Team Plymouth and departments being sent specific data on which appraisal forms have been returned, by which managers.
- (iv) findings had shown 13% of staff have exceeded expectations. 78% have met expectations and 9% do not meet current expectations;
- (v) feedback from managers, employees and the unions has shown that the framework has helped to reaffirm required standards and had made staff who had not previously had appraisals feel more included, valued and motivated;
- (vi) feedback had also shown that the process took too long;

- (vii) next steps identified will be the streamlining of the appraisal process including the reduction of the working in the competency descriptions and a simplified process.

In response to questions from members of the panel, it was reported that –

- (viii) Levels are challenging to achieve although the authority's use competency framework the authority is demonstrating its commitment to high quality public services;
- (ix) there has been variations in return rates across the directorates, it was thought this was due to the laborious nature of the paperwork which would be changed;
- (x) the appraisal process would normally take place between April and October, the first round had taken place between December and January the process could be evaluated and lessons learnt;
- (xi) it was anticipated that annual pay increments would be performance based this process would begin in October.

68. **WORK PROGRAMME**

Resolved that the panels work programme be approved.

69. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS**

Tracking resolutions were noted by members of the Panel.

70. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.