

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Wednesday 29 February 2012

PRESENT:

Councillor James, in the Chair.

Councillor Stark, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Aspinall, Mrs Bowyer, Browne, Churchill (substitute for Councillor Nicholson), Coker, Lock, Lowry, McDonald, Stark, Thompson and Wildy.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Nicholson and Mr D Fletcher, Co-opted Representative.

Also in attendance: Malcolm Coe, Assistant Director for Finance, Efficiencies, Technology and Assets, Martine Collins, Revenues and Benefits Service Manager, Peter Aley, Lead Officer, Katey Johns, Democratic Support Officer and Ross Johnston, Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 2pm and finished at 3.40pm.

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.

93. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

In the absence of Councillor Nicholson, the Chair sought nominations for a Vice-Chair.

Agreed that Councillor Stark, having been proposed by Councillor Thompson and seconded by Councillor Lock, is appointed Vice-Chair for the purpose of this meeting.

94. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

95. CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

96. CALL-INS

There were no call-ins for consideration at this meeting.

97. TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT - IMPACT OF THE RESTRUCTURE IN REVENUES AND BENEFITS, CUSTOMER SERVICES, CASHIERS AND INCOMES AND CREDITORS

Councillor James introduced the task and finish Group report on the 'Impact of the restructure in Revenues and Benefits, Customer Services, Cashiers and Incomes and

Creditors' and offered a vote of thanks to all those who had been involved. Members were advised that –

- (a) the small task and finish group had worked well together over the course of the two days and focused the review primarily on –
 - the impact of the restructure on service performance and staff morale;
 - the impact of the restructure on the experience of customers and processing times of Revenue and Benefit cases;
- (b) the task and finish group were warmly welcomed by managers during the site visits of the areas under review;
- (c) the review identified a number of areas of concern and these were included in the findings of the report and addressed by the proposed recommendations, however, more work was required to ensure that relevant training functions were established and maintained and staff morale continued to improve.

Members of the Board raised a number of significant concerns with regard to the findings in the report and highlighted that –

- (d) the number of abandoned calls and potential call waiting times in Adult Social Care was unacceptable;
- (e) the lack of a training function within the service was fundamentally wrong;
- (f) staff grading issues demonstrated a flaw within the Human Resources department as role profiles and job responsibilities should have been agreed prior to the restructure;
- (g) the upcoming welfare reforms would add significant pressures to an already pressured department that relied on overtime and agency staff to complete its existing workload.

In order to respond to the concerns raised Malcolm Coe, Assistant Director for Finance, Assets and Efficiencies, was invited to update the Board. Members were advised that –

- (h) the aim of the restructure was to realise savings of £1m and improve the service structure. Staff and unions were fully consulted on the aims and the process of the restructure;
- (i) there had been a large backlog of 2600 cases in the benefits service in November which had now been cleared to 800;
- (j) the issues regarding staff training, time to process claims and abandoned calls were amongst many issues that were targeted in the

service Action Plan.

Members commented that they were reassured to hear that the service had an Action Plan but that this should have been scrutinised by the task and finish group.

Members of the board agreed –

- (1) to amend recommendation R I I contained within the report so that it contains a footnote linking the recommendation to the recent Health and Adult Social Care Task and Finish Group on Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults;
- (2) that in light of (1) above and the number of abandoned calls, an additional recommendation is included in the Health and Adult Social Care Task and Finish Group report on Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults proposing installation of a dedicated phone line to enable customers to ring directly through to the Adult Social Care department;
- (3) to recommend to Cabinet all of the recommendations contained within the report, subject to the amendment in (1) above, and the introduction of a hierarchy within the recommendations to reflect the most important being listed first;
- (4) with regard to (3) above, organisation of the hierarchy of the recommendations is delegated to Pete Aley, Lead Officer in consultation with Councillor James, Chair, Councillor Stark, Vice-Chair and Councillor Aspinall;
- (5) the report is amended so that minute 4.3 Site Visit Observations (1e) reads 'the service had a high number of abandoned calls, in total 80 on the day of the site visit with a maximum call waiting time of 21 minutes, in the Adult Social Care / Proof of Concept Teams';
- (6) to include an additional recommendation to Cabinet, that the circulation and implementation of the Action Plan be implemented with immediate effect;
- (7) the Action Plan is submitted to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 28 March 2012 for further scrutiny;
- (8) that relevant Cabinet Members and Officers are invited to attend meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board when task and finish group reports are being discussed;
- (9) to thank all the councillors and officers involved in the task and finish group.

(In response to Councillor James presenting the task and finish group report it was agreed that Councillor Stark would step into the Chair for this item.)

98. **RESPONSE TO INDEPENDENT ADVISER'S REPORT**

Further to minute 83, the Board had met informally to consider a response to the findings and recommendations of the Independent Adviser's report.

The Board agreed the response to the findings of the Independent Adviser's report on scrutiny performance.

99. **DELEGATED AUTHORITY**

Further to minutes 83 and 97, the Board discussed delegating authority to the Board's Lead Officer, in consultation with Chair, Vice-Chair and opposition lead member, in response to recommendation six of the Independent Adviser's report on scrutiny performance.

It was commented that members training sessions were not flexible, and as a result members were often unable to attend training sessions due to other commitments.

Members of the Board agreed –

- (1) that in order to expedite the decision-making process outside of the normal business meeting process, approval of work programme related matters be delegated to the Board's Lead Officer, in consultation with Chair, Vice-Chair and opposition lead member. Work programme related matters include, but are not limited to –
 - Project Initiation Documents / Work Programme Requests;
 - Task and Finish Group Reports;
 - Panel Recommendations;
 - Forward Plan items;
- (2) any future scrutiny training should be discussed with all scrutiny chairs prior to training being arranged;
- (3) that in future scrutiny training sessions should be organised with more flexibility to allow members with other commitments the option to attend training sessions.

100. **MINUTES**

It was agreed that the minutes of the 1 February 2012 are approved, subject to the amendment to minute 90 to include the following additional co-opted representatives –

- Richard Smith – Plymouth Chamber of Commerce;
- Cheryl Ward – Job Centre Plus;
- a further nominated representative from South West TUC and PABC Executive.

101. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.