

Support Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Monday 15 April 2013

PRESENT:

Councillor Murphy, in the Chair.

Councillor Bowyer, Vice Chair.

Councillors Casey, Churchill, Gordon, James, Martin Leaves, Parker, Rennie, Stark and Stevens.

Also in attendance: Simon Arthurs (Strategic Finance Manager), Andrew Loton (Performance and Research Officer), Emma Rose (Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing), Dave Saunders (Strategic Manager – Customer Services) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Support Officer)

The meeting started at 3.30 pm and finished at 4.30 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.

61. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

62. **MINUTES**

Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2013.

63. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

64. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS AND FEEDBACK FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

The panel noted their tracking resolutions; there were no further comments.

65. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel noted their work programme

66. **BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

Simon Arthurs, Strategic Finance Manager, Andrew Loton, Performance and Research Officer and Emma Rose, Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing, provided the panel with an update on budget and performance monitoring for the Corporate Services Directorate.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (a) page 15 of the agenda highlighted a red rating of £0.527m attributed to the cross cutting work and offices changes; this issue would be monitored;
- (b) the 2012/13 target for collected Council Tax was estimated to be 97.50%; collection rates would be monitored and reviewed;
- (c) the delivery plan against 3rd and 4th tier management restructure was red rated at a cost of £0.527m as it had not been achieved;
- (d) compensatory savings were used as a means to offset unachieved targets;
- (e) the budget and delivery plans were set annually and reviewed on a monthly basis;
- (f) effective scrutiny meant that on-going compensations had been made;
- (g) the Strategic Finance Manager was unaware why the Democracy and Governance department had a red rating of £0.009m relating to the cost of city elections however would provide this information to Councillors once known;
- (h) the Strategic Finance Manager would confirm if there was expected to be extra pressure on members of staff in the newly formed discretionary team in Revenues and Benefits due to demand on the service from welfare reform.

The panel thanked the officers for the report and raised concerns that the monitoring of delivery plans was an important issue and should be scrutinised in the future.

67. **STAFF SICKNESS**

Emma Rose, Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing provided the panel with an update on staff sickness.

The panel was informed that –

- (a) a three month project had taken place with the aim to review and improve the Council's sickness absence levels;
- (b) in January 2013 a HR consultant was appointed on a temporary three month basis to lead the project primarily focused on reducing the top 100 current long term sick cases;
- (c) 60 long term sickness cases were reviewed, 48 have subsequently been resolved and 11 cases remain open;
- (d) during the course of the project there had been an overall reduction in full time equivalent absence and this enhanced case management has contributed towards that;

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (e) one of the four major underlying factors that contributed to on-going long term sickness absence evidenced through the three month project was lack of management competence in managing the cases. The HR management team were reviewing the actions identified through this project to enhance the work already underway to achieve required sickness absence targets;
- (f) thresholds were used as a key indicator to manage sickness levels and monitoring;
- (g) assessing managerial ability was an on-going piece of work through annual appraisals where sickness absence thresholds would be included;
- (h) stress was a contributing factor to sickness absence however the Council provided multiple areas of support to assist individuals in coping with work pressures;

The panel praised the Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing for her report and highlighted their concern that this issue should continue to be monitored in the future by scrutiny.

68. **GOVERNMENT POLICY CHANGES**

The panel noted that the new reporting procedure for Government policy changes could be accessed on the new Plymouth City Council 'Policy Hub' webpage.

69. **REVENUES AND BENEFITS PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

The panel noted the Revenues and Benefits Performance Update.

Agreed that the Chair would write a letter to the Revenue and Benefits department thanking staff for their hard work involved with the restructure and welfare reform preparatory work.

70. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.