

Your Plymouth

Monday 13 July 2015

PRESENT:

Councillor Jordan, in the Chair.

Councillor Kate Taylor, Vice-Chair.

Councillors Churchill, Damarell, Drean, Martin Leaves, Michael Leaves, Morris, Rennie, Riley and Sparling.

Apology for absence: Steve Meakin, Co-opted Representative.

Also in attendance: Councillor Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Co-operatives and Housing, Matt Garrett, Head of Housing Services, Helen Morris, Lawyer, Faye Batchelor-Hambleton, Assistant Director for Customer Services, Peter Honeywell, Transformation Programmes Manager, Di Charlton, Lead Officer, and Katey Johns, Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 4 pm and finished at 5.50 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.

1. TO NOTE THE APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

The panel noted the appointment of Councillors Jordan as Chair and Kate Taylor as Vice-Chair, as agreed by City Council on 22 May 2015.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES

Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2015.

4. CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

5. YOUR PLYMOUTH TERMS OF REFERENCE

The panel noted its terms of reference.

6. **APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED REPRESENTATIVE**

Members were advised that at the request of the Chair, Steve Meakin, Money Advice Co-ordinator, Devon and Cornwall, had been invited to continue in his role as co-opted representative. Unfortunately, as he was currently away on holiday, he was unable to attend today's meeting nor confirm his acceptance.

The panel recommends that, subject to his acceptance of the invitation, Steve Meakin, Money Co-ordinator, Devon and Cornwall, is appointed as its co-opted representative for the municipal year 2015/16.

7. **CUSTOMER SERVICES TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The panel welcomed Faye Batchelor-Hambleton, Assistant Director for Customer Services, and Peter Honeywell, Transformation Programmes Manager, who were in attendance to provide an update on the Customer Services Transformation Programme. The panel received a presentation which highlighted –

- the Transformation Programme's successes so far;
- set out the requirements for Digital Services and Digital Delivery along with their benefits;
- other customer service benefits such as extended opening hours, improved telephony service and system and process improvements;
- that a project was under way to identify and explore opportunities for change within the library service;
- that the Registration Service improvement proposals had now been reviewed and assessed, and a number of identified work streams would be delivered this year;
- particular projects which the panel may wish to include for review within its work programme for 2015/16.

In response to questions raised, Members heard that –

- (a) the purpose of the web platform was to connect customers, staff and partners to council services in a way that met their needs whilst reducing staff effort and eliminating unnecessary back office work;
- (b) members of the public would still be able to access services via personal contact where customer services assistants would process their enquiry on their behalf through the same digital service platform so that all enquires, whether digital or non-digital, were contained within the same database;
- (c) the digital service platform had been purchased from a provider called 'Firmstep' and, whilst it was not currently envisaged that the system would be used to provide a breakdown of cases on a ward by ward basis, it was possible as it was something that the system was capable of doing;
- (d) whilst stakeholder involvement hadn't been extensive to date, staff within

the Corporate Communications and Customer Services Teams had been asked to work with those on the tender shortlist to come up with some ideas and develop a number of forms. Now that the contract had been awarded, training on the system was under way on the automated business process and a customer panel would be established prior to roll-out;

- (e) in order to ensure that any post coming into the Council was registered promptly, there would be reinvestment of savings to ensure timely data entry was embedded throughout the council. In addition, officers would explore why the customer was choosing to communicate that way and discuss the benefits of the digital service;
- (f) 'Firmstep' was also capable of allowing/recognising communications from different social media platforms , such as twitter and Facebook, however, social media could be unstructured and some fine tuning of the system would be required before this could be taken further;
- (g) a significant amount of work had been done to address the problems in the call centre. Staff rotas were checked to ensure adequate staff were in place to cover peak periods and the automated response service was working well to help reduce pressure. Callers could still opt to come out of the automated service at any time and speak to a member of staff;
- (h) there was high confidence that when Amey saw the benefits of the system they would want to use it too. Officers had seen it working in other authorities and it was in Amey's interests to follow. It would also have the benefit of providing one consistent face to the customer;
- (i) all libraries were seeing a decline in visitor numbers and it was therefore necessary to explore opportunities to extend their use by providing alternative customer services, such as registration of births, marriages and deaths, renewing parking permits etc.;
- (j) the City's most visited libraries were Central, Plymstock, Plympton and St. Budeaux;
- (k) performance relating to the processing of benefit applications was monitored every week and was currently at –
 - 7 days – 60%
 - 8-29 days – 30%
 - 30+ days – 10%

Delays were caused when further information was required;

- (l) initial problems with the First Stop Shop had now been resolved by a change in its layout and staff providing a meet, greet and complete service.

Councillor Kate Taylor thanked the officers for the presentation and congratulated them on the format which had made the project one of the easier transformation programmes to understand.

The panel recommended that in taking the project forward consideration would be given –

(1)	to enabling the Firmstep system to provide a breakdown of cases on a ward by ward basis for the benefit of councillors and their casework;
(2)	to including with libraries links to other government websites to help point customers using the facilities in the right direction.

8. **UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS UPDATE**

The panel welcomed Councillor Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Co-operatives and Housing, Matt Garrett, Head of Housing Services, and Helen Morris, Lawyer, who were in attendance to provide an update on the Unauthorised Encampments review.

In response to questions raised, the panel heard that –

- (a) with regard to the repeated encampment at Prince Rock, a fence would shortly be erected around the site. This chain-link fence option had been chosen as boulders on other sites had been moved;
- (b) prosecutions could only be pursued when criminal damage was actually witnessed taking place so although locks may have been broken to access sites unless the person physically breaking into the site is witnessed doing so the police cannot act;
- (c) once a court order had been obtained an eviction notice could be issued which was enforceable for up to three months. If an encampment were to return within that period another eviction notice could be issued immediately at any time within that three month period;
- (d) the council's processes had been speeded up following the last review and, on average, encampments were being moved on in 8 days instead of 10. However, dealing with the problem faster often resulted in the city having more encampments for shorter periods affecting more communities rather than fewer sites affecting fewer communities but for longer periods;
- (e) if members were aware of vulnerable sites where padlocks had been removed they should report them at the earliest opportunity;
- (f) once the City had an established transit site it would be possible to revisit the council's policies and procedures as having a transit site would give the Council and police more powers to move any unauthorised encampments on even quicker;
- (g) there had been some confusion by the police over who was responsible

for criminal damage caused on council land and they were now clear that it was their responsibility to deal with any incidents reported to them;

- (h) the council would clean up a site after it had been occupied by an unauthorised encampment and would try to identify those responsible for flytipping, however, as it was difficult to prove responsibility in a court of law the merits of taking any case forward had to be seriously considered;
- (i) Cabinet had rejected the panel's recommendation to provide weekend staffing and resources to deal with unauthorised encampments due to the estimated £64,795 service cost;
- (j) a new transit site for the City would shortly be confirmed and announced.

The panel noted the report and thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their attendance.

The panel recommended that –

(1)	where the council has placed locks on gates restricting access to its land, a sign is displayed providing contact details for the keyholder;
and <u>agreed</u> that –	
(2)	the link to the report's background paper is circulated to the panel.

9. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair invited members to put forward ideas for inclusion in the work programme and, in the absence of any proposals, suggested that, should they think of anything after the meeting, they e-mail himself and the Vice-Chair.

The panel noted its draft work programme.

10. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.