

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD MINUTE 97



29 February 2012

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 R11 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.)