

Support Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Monday 2 July 2012

PRESENT:

Councillor Murphy, in the Chair.

Councillor Bowyer, Vice-Chair.

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

Apology for absence: Councillor Stevens.

Also in attendance: Councillor Evans, Leader of the Council, Councillor Peter Smith, Deputy Leader, Councillor Lowry, Cabinet Member for Finance, Adam Broome, Director for Corporate Services, Malcolm Coe, Assistant Director for Finance, Efficiencies, Technology and Assets, Giles Perritt, Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships, Martine Collins, Revenues and Benefits Service Manager, Emma Rose, Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing, Simon Arthurs, Strategic Finance Manager (Lead Officer) and Katey Johns, Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 3.30 pm and finished at 5.45 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 CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR**

The panel noted the appointment of Councillor Murphy as Chair and Councillor Bowyer as Vice-Chair.

2. **CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed all those present to the first meeting of the new municipal year for the Support Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel. She commented that she was looking forward to the year ahead and was confident that, working together, the panel would be able to deliver successful and effective scrutiny. In order to get the best out of meetings members were asked to –

- keep questions clear and to the point and directly related to the item under consideration; and
- be courteous to each other and to the officers attending the meetings.

In addition, the Chair drew members' attention to the glossary of abbreviations that had been circulated at her request advising that that this would now be a regular feature on the panel's agenda.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

4. **APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED REPRESENTATIVES**

Agreed that co-opted representatives would be appointed as and when required.

5. **MINUTES**

Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2012.

6. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

7. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The panel noted its terms of reference, as submitted, subject to the replacement of "production of quarterly progress reports" with "production of bi-annual progress reports" being recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

8. **OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SICKNESS ABSENCE**

Councillor Peter Smith, Deputy Leader, and Emma Rose, Head of Health Safety and Wellbeing were in attendance to present a report on Occupational Health and Sickness Absence. The report provided –

- background information for OH and sickness absence;
- an overview of the Council's OH service;
- details of OH services performance management;
- information on benchmarking: family group and region (OH investment and sickness); and
- details of future developments.

The Deputy Leader commented that sickness absence was recognised as having a negative impact on productivity and staff morale and work was in hand to improve attendance in a number of ways, such as –

- improved reporting mechanism;
- tracking emerging issues;
- enhanced case management;
- investment in OH (change of provider);
- improved pre-employment screening;
- confidential employee assistance;
- introduction of an employee flu vaccination programme.

He further added that whilst sickness levels had reduced by an average of 3.8 days, from 12.8 days per year per full-time equivalent to 9 days, this was still thought to be too high and work would continue to drive this figure down.

In response to questions raised, the panel heard that –

- (a) a business case had been prepared in respect of the flu vaccination programme which was actually an invest to save scheme. The cost of the initial outlay for the vaccines would be £4,000 but the total cost would depend on the uptake as the scheme would be voluntary, not compulsory. The plan would be to target high risk employees in the first instance in order to maintain business continuity and then rolled out to other employees. It was anticipated that the scheme would prevent up to 60% of employees taking time off sick;
- (b) a review panel had been established in order to address the top 100 sickness absence employees. Managers were called before the panel and asked to explain how sickness absence cases in their area had been managed and what additional steps could be taken to improve attendance or otherwise conclude a case;
- (c) referrals to OH were made within the first four weeks, depending on the case;
- (d) the Bradford Factor score system was used to monitor sickness absence and this method would look at the total number of occasions of sickness combined with the total number of days off work – the more occasions of sickness combined with a high number of days, the higher the score;
- (e) whilst figures from the Office of National Statistics indicated that a fifth more of employees taking sickness absence were female, the primary reason for this was not due to childcare issues but due to the nature of the work that they undertook;
- (f) a breakdown of sickness absence between administrative staff and manual workers was available and could be provided;
- (g) full absence management training was available to managers, however, a programme of enhanced training to better enable managers to tackle problems earlier on was also being rolled out;
- (h) planned sickness absences such as for surgical procedures were included, however reasonable adjustments were made and discussion took place with the employee to bring them back to work as soon as possible even if that meant them taking on a different role until they were fully fit;
- (i) the authority was not responsible for paying agency staff.

Agreed that a further update report is submitted to the next meeting to include –

- the Sickness Absence Policy;
- the action plan to address the top 100 sickness absence employees;
- a breakdown of sickness absence between administrative staff and manual workers;
- information on what the private sector is doing to tackle sickness absence;
- supporting evidence from the flu vaccination scheme business case.

9. **EXTRACT FROM PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE REPORT
(INCLUDING CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE)**

Councillor Lowry, Cabinet Member for Finance, was in attendance to present an extract from the Performance and Finance Report, along with Simon Arthurs, Strategic Finance Manager (Lead Officer). The report detailed how the Council had delivered against its key indicators in terms of performance and its financial measures using its capital and revenue resources.

Members were informed –

- (a) that the report was historic as it detailed the final performance and finance monitoring position of the Council as at the end of March 2012;
- (b) that improvements to revenues and benefits processing times were starting to materialise and further details on this were available in the presentation provided under minute 10 below;
- (c) of recent Treasury Management Activity, including an update on current investments and the Icelandic Bank situation.

In response to questions raised, the panel heard that –

- (d) it was hoped that the panel would take up the opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny;
- (e) the Cabinet Member supported the panel's request for monthly finance and performance updates and would keep challenging officers to bring this to fruition;
- (f) with regard to the Capital Programme, details of membership and how targets for delivery would be set and monitored would be provided before the next meeting;
- (g) in terms of ICT, major work was under way to deliver £3m of investment in customer transformation. The initial phase of this project was to make sure the Council's own internal systems (of which there were 227) were joined up prior to looking at sharing information with other service providers such as health.

10. **CORPORATE SERVICES DEPARTMENTAL OVERVIEW**

Councillor Peter Smith, Deputy Leader, Councillor Lowry, Cabinet Member for Finance, Adam Broome, Director for Corporate Services, Malcolm Coe, Assistant Director for Finance, Efficiencies, Technology and Assets, and Martine Collins, Revenues and Benefits Service Manager, were in attendance to present the panel with an overview of the Corporate Services Department functions and challenges.

Members heard details of -

- the Welfare Reform Act and its implications for Plymouth;
- Revenues and Benefits performance;
- how the council had modernised and streamlined the way it procured its goods and services;
- the current situation with regard to shared services and the vision for the future;
- ICT provision;
- Human Resources and Organisational Development;
- Invest to Save Projects;
- progress made on the Accommodation Strategy.

The Director for Corporate Services reported that Welfare Reform had also been identified as a possible work programme item by the Customers and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Councillor Mrs Aspinall advised that Welfare Reform would be looked at by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members and the officers for their attendance advising that the panel would not be asking questions at this time but would instead use the information presented to help inform the panel's discussions around setting its work programme.

11. **EXECUTIVE OFFICE DEPARTMENTAL OVERVIEW**

Councillor Evans, Leader of the Council, Giles Perritt, Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships, and Richard Longford, Head of Communications, were in attendance to provide the panel with an overview of the Chief Executive's office functions and challenges.

Members were informed that –

- (a) the Chief Executive's department provided support to functions that were not delegated to any of the council's three directorates, namely –
 - Corporate / Senior Management Team decision and agenda planning;
 - policy, performance and partnerships;
 - emergency planning and business continuity;
 - communications;
- (b) the department comprised a total of 52 full time equivalent staff and had a

budget of £2.54m;

(c) in terms of challenges –

- with less regulation and fewer regional bodies there would be a greater need for partnership working and service transformation;
- significant changes in terms of communication and access to information, such as increasing use of social media (facebook and twitter);
- increasing public engagement by making democratic process more accessible and transparent and taking greater account of public feedback;
- incentivising ideas for cuts and efficiencies.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council and the officers for their attendance advising that the panel would not be asking questions at this time but would instead use the information presented to help inform the panel's discussions around setting its work programme.

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

The panel noted its tracking resolutions document.

13. **WORK PROGRAMME 2012 - 2013** (Pages 1 - 2)

The Chair commented that she would welcome input from the whole panel with regard to populating the Support Services' work programme. Members were advised that they could put forward issues at any time outside of the business meetings by contacting the Chair direct via e-mail, telephone or in person outside of meetings or Democratic Support who would then arrange for their consideration at the next agenda setting meeting.

Having considered the issues presented to the panel in respect of Health and Sickness Absence, Corporate Services and the Council's Executive Office, the panel's Lead Officer summarised the key areas of concern which had been identified. This information is attached as a supplement to these minutes.

Agreed that the panel's work programme for 2012-13 is recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board for approval as follows –

- Shared Services – Task and Finish;
- ICT – update;
- Accommodation – update;
- HR Workforce – update (see minute 8 above);
- Community Engagement – update;
- Revenues and Benefits Service – update (as part of performance monitoring report);
- Carbon Management – update.

14. **FUTURE DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS**

The panel noted the dates of future meetings for the municipal year 2012-13 as follows –

Monday 6 August 2012
Monday 1 October 2012
Monday 19 November 2012
Monday 11 February 2013
Monday 8 April 2013

All meetings commencing at 3.30 pm.

15. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.