

Support Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Monday 4 March 2013

PRESENT:

Councillor Murphy, in the Chair.

Councillor Bowyer, Vice Chair.

Councillors Churchill, James, Michael Leaves, Rennie, Singh, John Smith and Stark.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Casey, Martin Leaves and Parker.

Also in attendance: Dave Saunders – Lead Officer, Mark Grimley – Assistant Director for HR and Organisational Development, Eve Skuse – Head of Organisational Development, Richard Longford – Head of Communications, Neville Canon – Programme Director for ICT Shared Services, Martine Collins – Revenues and Benefits Manager and Amelia Boulter – Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 3.30 pm and finished at 5.40 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.

49. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations of interest were made in accordance with the code of conduct -

Name	Minute Number and Issue	Reason	Interest
Councillor John Smith	Minute 56 and 57 – Revenues and Benefits Performance Update and Revenues and Benefits Customer Service at the Civic Centre	Tenants claiming housing benefit.	Personal

50. **MINUTES**

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2012.

51. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

52. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel noted the work programme and agreed to include the following items –

- Staff Sickness;
- Community Engagement and Value for Communities;
- Budget Monitoring;
- Monitoring performance and delivery plans.

53. **'THE VIEW FROM YOU' EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS**

Mark Grimley, Assistant Director for HR and Organisational Development and Eve Skuse, Head of Organisational Development briefed the panel on the results of the 'The View from You' Employee Survey Results. It was reported that -

- (a) the organisation had gone through several restructures and this was reflected in the number of surveys completed, however, staff felt engaged and results were showing a positive trend. It was also reported that frontline staff were less inclined to participate and this was an area of focus to engage frontline services to complete future surveys;
- (b) the survey ran in November. The results were analysed and the information was shared with Cabinet and then Team Plymouth. Communication of the results then followed on staff room, team briefs and were included in the January pay packet;
- (c) managers were provided with templates to produce action plans and HR were providing support to managers with the aim of action plans being completed by the end of March.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (d) the majority of the workforce had moved to hot-desking. The perception of hot-desking and the reality was very different, it had been difficult for employees to adapt and change management was in place to address this;
- (e) enrichment of work for the older workforce was important. The older employees do have a lot of knowledge but also have reached the top of their grade and we need to ensure they feel valued;
- (f) there had been significant change in leadership with the recent senior management restructure and it was pushed through very quickly which resulted in disengagement with staff;
- (g) these findings do reflect half of PCC staff and PCC currently employ 4,008 members of staff. The take up rate of benchmark comparators is 37 per cent return rate and PCC achieved take up of 53 per cent;

- (h) this was the third year the staff survey had been undertaken in-house. The survey was previously run by a private company at a cost of £25k.

Agreed to request the officers to provide the panel with an update on the employee survey results action plan every six months.

54. **SOCIAL MEDIA UPDATE**

Richard Longford, Head of Communications gave a presentation and update on social media. It was reported that –

- (a) the Council has made good progress in extending its use of social media over the last nine months and this has been reflected by the large increases in Twitter followers and Facebook fans;
- (b) use of social media is being extended in a controlled way, with teams and services being supported in setting up official channels when they have a good business case;
- (c) the LGA highlighted Plymouth as an example of good practice for keeping people updated by social media during the flooding incidents at the end of last year. The council was also cited as an example of good practice for its social media guidelines in the 2013 Socitm 'Better Connected' report;
- (d) social media is now one of the main drivers of traffic to our website and a new email marketing tool will promote our social media channels.
- (e) despite recent growth in use, the numbers using the Council's social media channels is still relatively low compared to other communications channels. However, it is enabling the Council to reach new audiences – particularly younger people – and to communicate news and information more quickly than previously possible.

The Panel raised concerns that BlackBerrys were not user friendly for use with social media and that training would be required for members on how to get the best use out of social media.

Agreed that the officer explores social media training for members.

55. **ICT SHARED SERVICES**

Neville Cannon, Programme Director for ICT Shared Services provided the Panel with a report on ICT Shared Services. It was reported that -

- (a) three councils had signed up to shared working. A meeting had taken place with the NEW Devon CCG with a view to the whole service coming on board their governing body to decide on 20 March 2013;

- (b) PCC currently have 4,000 users and including the other three organisations would take the number of users up to over 6,000;
- (c) in terms of governance scrutiny should consider how the Panel could work alongside other committee structures and how it might wish to proactively input to the establishment of the new company;
- (d) they were on track to deliver the business case for the June 2013.

Agreed to request the officer provides the panel with the business plan in June.

56. **REVENUES AND BENEFITS PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

The Panel received the Revenues and Benefits Performance Update for information. The Panel welcomed and noted the report.

Agreed that the panel noted the report and to receive a revenues and benefits performance update at every meeting.

57. **REVENUES AND BENEFITS CUSTOMER SERVICE AT THE CIVIC CENTRE**

Martine Collins, Revenues and Benefits Manager provided the Panel with the results of the customer survey carried out in relation to Revenues and Benefits Customer Services. It was reported that -

- (a) a restructure took place 12 months ago with the view to providing better services for customers. During the last 12 months staff undertook training to be more generic and to provide a wider service to customers;
- (b) processing times were reduced to less than 15 days;
- (c) they were aware that customers had to wait a long time before being seen and as a result more staff were placed on the frontline. They were investigating why customers were making contacting in the first instance;
- (d) the significant changes with Welfare Reform had led to further staff training to help understand what support and could be provided to customers and looking at alternatives for customers to access services more readily.

In response to questions raised, it was reported that -

- (e) they do not know the number of abandoned calls and why the calls were abandoned e.g. a customer could have started to come through the process and then decide to take an alternative route. They were also unsure whether it was the same customer or different customers;

- (f) they balance the resources to cover the counter service, telephones and post. There was a resource plan in place to deal with the queries relating to Welfare Reforms;
- (g) question 7 - table detailing waiting times could be presented in a better format;
- (h) they were currently working alongside social landlords and making proactive telephone calls to those affected by under occupancy. Social landlords were making visits to tenants and looking at what help could be provided. Plymouth City Council were looking at individual circumstances and looking at how additional support could be provided;
- (i) there would be additional funding but would not be enough to cover the shortfall and difficult decisions would be made on how we help people. An event is being on 8 March 2013 and PCC are joining up with partners to give more rounded advice and support;

Agreed to request the officer to return to the panel in May with a further update on the results from the revenues and benefits customer survey.

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

The Panel noted the tracking resolutions.

59. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

To consider passing a resolution under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it (they) involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

60. **DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF (E3)**

Martine Collins, Revenues and Benefits Manager briefed the panel on Discretionary Rate Relief. It was reported that Discretionary Rate Relief is for businesses that require extra financial help and was not long term. Any business applying for rate relief would complete an application form and a strict process would be followed. A panel would look at each application and apply the same criteria when determining whether a business was eligible.

Agreed to request the officer returns to the next panel meeting with a report on the decision making process for hardship relief.