

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday 4 September 2014, at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Roger Hickford – Chairman
Councillor Jose Hales – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: David Bard Alison Elcox
Lynda Harford Philippa Hart
David Morgan Bunty Waters
Simon Edwards David Whiteman-Downes
Kevin Cuffley

Officers: Rachael Fox-Jackson Customer Contact Manager
Dawn Graham Benefits Manager
Alex Colyer Executive Director, Corporate Services
Victoria Wallace Democratic Services Officer
Graham Watts Democratic Services Team Leader

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jose Hales and Councillor Douglas de Lacey

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2014, were **AGREED** as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions had been received.

5. CONTACT CENTRE HALF-YEARLY PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Councillor David Whiteman-Downes, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Customer Services, presented the Contact Centre's Half-Yearly Performance report, informing the committee of the Contact Centre's performance for January to July 2014.

Problems with the Contact Centre's performance had been identified, such as the call wait time and number of calls lost during times of peak demand. Dawn Graham, Benefits Manager, presented an improvement plan to resolve these problems. Proposals outlined in the plan were:

- Times of peak demand had been identified. Ten members of staff from the Revenues Team would provide additional resource to the Contact Centre during these periods. This would be in place by 22 September 2014, ready for the next anticipated time of peak demand.
- Recruitment: three new full time members of staff would be in post by 20 October

- 2014 and fully trained by the end of November 2014.
- Proposals to reorganise the Contact Centre:
 - Contact Centre staff would provide the reception service with headsets so they could support call handling colleagues by taking general enquiry calls when less busy, and in turn reduce call handling times. Members were assured that a face to face reception service would continue to be provided but that staff would be multi-skilled and multi-tasking. Residents visiting the Council offices would not experience a difference in service provision at the front desk.
 - Following analysis of call volume and call patterns, staff working patterns would reflect the call volumes. There would be more staff available on busier days and fewer members of staff on quieter days.
 - Work would be undertaken in October 2014 to review call wrap times, in order to establish the reasons for the length of wrap times and ways to reduce these. Process mapping and e-form requirements would be established as part of this.
 - Self-service Benefit forms would be introduced at the end of September 2014, to increase the number of residents able to self-serve, and to provide easier and quicker options for Contact Centre staff to deal with calls.
 - Residents were encouraged to set up online accounts in order to access their business rates, benefits and council tax accounts. 1013 residents were registered with their own accounts.
 - Work was ongoing with service areas to increase email contact with residents. Members were assured that other means of contacting the Council would still be available, to ensure multiple channels of communication with the Council suiting all residents.
 - A simple system enabling Members telephoning the Contact Centre to be transferred to the appropriate officer, would be implemented immediately.
 - Work was ongoing with the software supplier to improve the reliability of the Call Centre's software. A significant number of calls were being lost on a daily basis due to software issues.

A formal consultation with Contact Centre staff was taking place regarding the proposed changes to improve the service. This closed on 12 September 2014. The results of the consultation would be published on 22 September and changes implemented in October 2014.

Discussion around the figures outlined in Appendix A of the report ensued. Councillor Whiteman-Downes would review and reissue this.

The Chairman expressed the Committee's disappointment in the report, but committee members acknowledged the efforts that had been made by Dawn Graham, Benefits Manager and Rachael Fox-Jackson, Customer Contact Manager, to address the problems with the Contact Centre.

Contact Centre staff retention was discussed. Members were informed that various options to encourage staff to remain within the Contact Centre were being considered, such as offering NVQ qualifications which would keep staff members in post for two years. This idea was supported by committee members.

Councillor David Whiteman-Downes would circulate the Contact Centre Action Plan to committee Members.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **AGREED**:

- a) An interim report would be presented to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at its November 2014 meeting, to include a revised Appendix A.
- b) A further full report on the Contact Centre would be presented to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at its meeting in January 2014.

6. PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Councillor Simon Edwards, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Staffing presented the Council's People and Organisational Development Strategy and Action Plan for 2014-2017.

Discussion and questions ensued:

- Susan Gardner Craig, Human Resources Manager, confirmed that the Council had already achieved Silver accreditation from Investors in People and was confident that sufficient progress had been made to achieve gold accreditation.
- Councillor Lynda Harford thanked the Human Resources Manager for the time taken to incorporate her comments into the Organisational Development Strategy, and recognised the work that had been done by the Human Resources Team on this.
- Concern was raised over replies to staff surveys remaining anonymous, with the use of web surveys to survey staff opinion and views. Members proposed that staff also be given the option to reply by paper copy, with ballot boxes provided for completed surveys to be returned. The Human Resources Manager clarified that staff surveys would be themed and conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the year, and that they would be anonymous. Ballot boxes could be provided for surveys to be completed by paper copy. Online surveys would be conducted using Survey Monkey, which would enable staff to complete the survey at home if they preferred. The first survey would take place in November and would be announced at Corporate Brief in September.
- Remote working was discussed briefly. The Human Resources Manager confirmed that officers working remotely would still be contactable by telephone, with the expectation on staff that their office telephones would be transferred to a mobile or home phone number.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the progress made on the People and Organisational Development Strategy and Action Plan 2014-2017, and indicated their support for this.

7. QUARTERLY POSITION STATEMENT ON FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK

The Portfolio Holders for Finance and Staffing, and Corporate and Customer Services presented the Council's Quarterly Position Statement on Finance, Performance and Risk. This would be presented to Cabinet on 11 September 2014 and provided a statement on the Council's position with regard to its General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital budgets, corporate objectives, performance indicators and strategic risks.

Councillor Simon Edwards, Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder informed the committee that there was a large variance in the General Fund as planning fees had increased and trade waste activities had been very good. The risk of business rate appeals being successful remained.

Discussion and questions ensued:

- The Executive Director (Corporate Services) confirmed that the Council had not yet

paid anything out in planning appeals. Councillor Lynda Harford confirmed that costs would only be incurred against the Council if the Planning Inspector confirmed the Council's reasons for refusal were unfair.

- The timescale to issue planning decision notices was queried following complaints made by constituents. The Portfolio Holder for Staffing confirmed that staffing issues in the Planning department had been reflected in some poor performance, but assured the committee that recruitment to the department had been undertaken. The committee was informed that the new Planning Portfolio Holder was undertaking work to address planning performance and this would be discussed at Cabinet on 11 September 2014.
- Waste was discussed:
 - Members were informed that the Council was keen for the amount of household waste to be reduced.
 - Christmas bin collections were being incorporated with all changes being made to waste services.
 - Members were informed that the Council received an income from blue bin refuse and had achieved a good price for paper. It was clarified that the Council did not make a profit from blue bin waste.
 - The cost of the amount of waste going to landfill was the important issue, with more waste needing to be disposed of in blue and green bins and less to landfill.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **NOTED** the report and had no further specific comments or recommendations.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

Graham Watts, Democratic Services Team Leader, presented the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's work programme, which was discussed:

- The Scrutiny Working Group (lessons learnt from Orchard Park) would have its first meeting on 9 September 2014.
- Mears – The Scrutiny and Overview Committee should write to Mears regarding how it had reviewed its complaints procedure, following consideration of this issue at a previous meeting of the Committee.
- Two City Deal workshops would be taking place in October. The first would be at 6pm on 3 October, in Cambourne. The second would be on 10 October in Cambridge City; the time of this was to be confirmed. The Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee requested these dates be circulated to all Members via email, in addition to notification in the Weekly Bulletin.

9. MONITORING THE EXECUTIVE

Councillor Lynda Harford updated members on the Leaders Portfolio Holder meeting, and informed members that decisions on Community Chest funding were now being made at these Portfolio Holder meetings.

10. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Dates of future meetings were noted. The next meeting would take place on Thursday 6 November 2014, at 6pm

The Meeting ended at 7.55 p.m.

