

At a Meeting of the **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Kilworthy Park, Drake Road, **TAVISTOCK** on **TUESDAY** the **27th** day of **JANUARY 2015** at **2.00 pm**.

Present:

Cllr M V L Ewings - Chairman	
Cllr D E Moyse – Vice-Chairman	
Cllr A Clish-Green	Cllr L J G Hockridge
Cllr D M Horn	Cllr J B Moody
Cllr D K A Sellis	Cllr J Sheldon
Cllr D Whitcomb	

Executive Director (Service Delivery and Commercial Development)
Finance Community of Practice Lead
Strategic Lead for Transformation Programme
Natural Environment and Recreation Manager
Senior Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer
Customer Services Manager
Member Services Manager

Substitute: Cllr P R Sanders substituted for Cllr C Hall

In Attendance: Cllr M J R Benson, Cllr W G Cann OBE, Cllr C R Musgrave and Cllr T G Pearce

***O&S 25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr C Hall for whom Cllr P R Sanders acted as substitute.

***O&S 26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members and officers were asked to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of this meeting but none were made.

***O&S 27 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 14 October 2014 and 27 November 2014 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

***O&S 28 UPDATE ON TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME T18**

The Strategic Lead for the Transformation Programme presented a report that set out progress to date of the T18 Transformation Programme, in order to ensure effective scrutiny. She reminded Members that a detailed report had been presented to Council in December 2014 that outlined the revised business case. She then took Members through the main sections of the presented report that updated the Committee on progress of the Programme.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- Some Members were concerned at the impact of a paperless environment. The Strategic Lead confirmed that there was a separate project group looking at paperless environment and Member IT provision and the Locality Member Group were also looking at IT. The aim was to have IT devices in place in time for the new Council in May 2015;
- One Member stated that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should receive detailed information on the financial position of the Transformation Programme. The Finance Community of Practice Lead advised that the financial monitoring information up to the end of November had been included in the detailed business case report to full Council in December. The Leader noted that para 2.6.3 of the presented report stated that future reports to Overview and Scrutiny would show the monitoring position against the updated business case;
- One Member asked if the Council was able to deal with the outcome from the work on channel shift. In response, the Strategic Lead stated that where there was an awareness through the Sprint work of additional demand then it could be dealt with;
- One Member asked if plain English could be used in the report as there was some terminology that was not straightforward. He asked for clarity on re-engineering of processes. In response, the Strategic Lead advised that there were a number of processes currently being reviewed by the staff who currently undertook them. Most of the savings for the Programme had arisen from the processes, not from IT, although IT would enable them.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress to date on the Transformation Programme T18.

***O&S 29**

UPDATE ON LOCALITY AND COMMISSIONING MEMBER GROUP

The Strategic Lead for the Transformation Programme updated the Committee on the progress of the Locality and Commissioning Member Group. She explained that the Group had met earlier that day to assess proposals put forward in terms of what the Localities would look like. There would be ten Locality areas across the West Devon Borough and South Hams District and they would be loosely based on PCSO areas. It was accepted that to make a difference this model needed partners to work with the Council. Locality Officers would be attached to each of the areas, and there would be specialist officers who would spend some of their working week on strategic matters. Members of the Group had been broadly receptive to this proposal which was the starting point for further discussion. This way of working was new and it was expected that it would evolve. The proposals were within budget and the activity analysis had led to this level of resource. In future, it was hoped that Operations staff could also be utilised as a support resource.

During discussion the following points were raised:

- A number of Members were concerned at the reported cuts to numbers of PCSOs and whether this would result in the Locality Officers taking on PCSO responsibilities. Members asked if the PCSO boundaries were co-terminus with the Ward boundaries and other Members suggested that the PCSO boundaries should not be used as they could change;
- One Member was interested in knowing the criteria for the areas and whether it was based on geographical size or population for example;
- The Strategic Lead reminded Members that the Locality Model was based on expecting many residents to self serve but to help those who were not able to do so by responding to their needs in the locality. Research at Eastbourne had found that eight out of ten issues reported to the PCSOs were also reported to the Council. Work had been undertaken to split the issues so the area of responsibility was clearly defined. As every agency was faced with smaller budgets it would be more important to work together;
- Some Members noted that the Locality Officer model had worked in Eastbourne but this was a more rural area which would have different challenges. One Member also noted that it was likely that Devon County Council was going to lose its Locality Officers, which could increase the workload on the Council Locality Officers.

Following further discussion, it was agreed that a Single Topic Discussion Forum would be set up to enable a full discussion for all Members on this subject.

***O&S 30**

S106 FUNDS UPDATE/REVIEW IN TERMS OF FUNDS AVAILABLE

The Chairman introduced a report that had previously been requested by the Committee to outline the s106 funds available for projects.

The Natural Environment and Recreation Manager set out how the funds were secured and advised that in the future, 'Our Plan' would set the context for future infrastructure. The tables attached to the presented report had since been updated and would be circulated to Members of the Committee.

The Chairman queried why an 'expected to receive' column was not included. In reply, the Strategy and Enabling Officer responded that in terms of 'expected to receive dates', this was usually 50% due on commencement and 50% due on completion.

The Natural Environment and Recreation Manager added that it would be difficult to put forward a systematic way of knowing when every site had been started.

One Member stated that Members should work more closely with the Building Control Partnership as officers should not be expected to pick up everything that was going on. The responsibility sat with the Planning team but the Building Control officers would know the timeline. The Natural Environment and Recreation Manager welcomed the suggestion of collaboration with the Building Control Partnership however not every site was a relevant consideration for the Partnership. Another Member suggested that the property being rated for council tax would be another opportunity to collect data about the completion of that property.

The Chairman advised that the total of s106 funds was a significant amount and close monitoring should take place to ensure the available funds could be used to help communities. The Executive Director added that collection of money was on officers minds as monies were collected for a number of different things, often from the same client base, so synergies across all areas were being explored.

In response to a query regarding whether s106 responsibilities could be waived, the Strategy and Enabling Officer confirmed that some applications were accompanied by a viability assessment and the requirement for s106 funds could be waived if there was evidence to support that decision.

Finally, it was agreed that annual reports on S106 Funds should be presented to Overview and Scrutiny.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

***O&S 31**

HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENT PROCESS AND RECOVERY

The Customer Service Manager presented a report that had been requested by the Resources Committee to outline how Housing Benefit Overpayments arose and the processes that Council went through to recover the debts before they were presented for write off.

One Member noted the example in the presented report and suggested that a robust structure be put in place to ensure information was readily available to let people know when they should declare income and grants to the Council and when the DWP may do that on their behalf.

The Customer Service Manager advised that DWP errors were rare, and more often overpayments arose through local authority error. In addition, the amount of overpayment stated was not all lost to the Council as it would depend on how the overpayment was classified.

One Member asked if the T18 Programme would change the way the process currently worked. In response, the Customer Service Manager confirmed that the process would go through the Reengineering work.

She added that the most effective way to collect overpayments was by attaching to existing benefits.

The Executive Director explained that discussions had taken place and work was ongoing to involve staff in a project to look at generating income and more efficient ways of working. A report could be presented to a future meeting later in the calendar year.

One Member stated that it would be helpful to identify the classification of monies overpaid. Whilst officers would not be expected to assess every debt written off, perhaps a sample exercise could be undertaken to give the Committee an indication. In addition, a benchmark with other similar districts of the percentage amount written off would be helpful.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

***O&S 32 PERFORMANCE REPORT – PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (Q2 2014/15)**

The Chairman introduced a report that provided Members with information on Key Performance Indicators at the end of quarter 2 for 2014/15. The information was set out with the Balanced Scorecard showing broad performance levels. She advised Members that the only indicator at 'red status' was 'Average Call Answer Time', however, she asked that it be noted that many Members had concerns related to the Planning Department. She had raised this with the Executive Director who commented that the new rules relating to affordable housing s106 contributions would help to bring performance back on target as these applications required assessment of viability.

One Member noted that the number of Planning Enforcement Cases where 'no breach found' was high. He also noted the high number of Penalty Charge Notices issued and asked if we were creating demand.

Prior to the meeting, the Chairman had requested further information from the Customer Service Manager relating to Indicators within her area and the following points were circulated:

ICT &CS: Percentage of Council Tax Collected (cumulative)

- The collection rate for Council Tax is on target and currently only 0.31% down on last year's collection rate. At the end of December 2014, 85.02% of the total Council Tax has been collected.
- The collectable debt this financial year has increased by £1.5 million.

ICT &CS: Percentage of Non-domestic Rates Collected (cumulative)

- Again the collection rate for Business Rates was on target and although 1.97% below last years collection rate this could be explained by the

introduction of the option for businesses to spread their payments over 12 monthly instalments. Most large businesses had taken this option which would mean that a higher % would come in during February and March. Collection rate at the end of December was 85.58%

ICT & CS: Average Call Answer Time

- The average call answer time had been consistently over target for most of this financial year. Benefits calls had been moved into the contact centre however the Benefits team still provided a variable overflow facility to support the team.
- The introduction of the Council Tax Reduction scheme in April 2014 had seen an increase in Council Tax related calls, but most notably the calls had become more complex as officers discussed the reasons customers may be unable to pay, and explored options to access benefits or the exceptional hardship fund. This had significantly lengthened the average call time and increased the average wait time.
- Average call answer time had improved significantly in the 3rd quarter and had been under 2 minutes for the last quarter.
- The average answer time for switchboard calls was much lower, averaging between 35 and 40 seconds
- Customer Services were working with Elections to plan for the increased demand expected between now and May. A project plan had been produced and a paper would be going to the new Senior Leadership Team (SLT) requesting additional resource for this period.

The Chairman then noted the comments in relation to the expected increase in workload resulting from the forthcoming election. Another Member noted that the average call waiting time was not as effective a measure of performance as the longest call waiting time at peak hours. The Executive Director advised that customer services was a complex area and Members would always hear worst case scenarios from residents however the team were doing a brilliant job and everything possible would be done to adequately resource the team during busy periods.

One Member returned to the issue of planning and stated that officers needed Member support. Members could help by only referring applications to Committee when it was absolutely necessary. There was an issue with planning but it was being managed and it required everyone to work together.

Another Member stated that unless Members had the opportunity to bring applications to Committee then rural areas could lose out. The Chairman agreed with comments about the planning service and stated that a close eye was being kept on the team to offer support. One Member asked if exit interviews took place for temporary planning staff when they left as they may identify any issues.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

- (i) The Key Performance Indicators for Q1 be noted and actions detailed considered to improve future performance;
- (ii) Members had considered appropriate action for Indicators at 'Red' status for two consecutive quarters and in respect of 'Average call answer time' Members agreed with the action response;
- (iii) Concerns had been noted about the planning service but Members accepted that SLT was dealing with this and wanted officers to know that they had Member support.

***O&S 33 DRAFT ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME**

Members agreed the annual work programme with the addition of an annual report on s106 funds and a report later in the year in relation to write offs of housing benefit and their classification. In terms of the item listed for the next meeting on Health and Wellbeing, it was agreed that information be provided on the projects that benefited from funding. The District Council representative advised that the minutes from the Health and Wellbeing Board at Devon County Council were circulated for information.

***O&S 34 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000: REPORT ON INSPECTION AND AUTHORISATION**

As a standing item on the agenda, Members noted that there had been no requests to use the powers under RIPA during the last quarter.

(The meeting terminated at 4.30 pm)