

Performance/Administration Cabinet Committee

Thursday, 4 February 2016

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Leslie Hills (Chair)
Cllr Julia Burgoyne (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Colin Caller
Brian Francis
David Hurley
John Knight
Bronwen McGarrity
Peter Scollard
Narinder Singh Thandi

Darren Everden Service Manager (IT Services)
Ben Turner Corporate Performance Manager
Mike Bytheway Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits)
Sue Hill Committee & Elections Manager

17. Apologies

None were given.

18. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2015 were signed by the Chair.

19. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

20. Digitising Council Services Update

The Service Manager IT Services reminded members of the IT structure in place within the authority and how responsibility was divided between IT Services and the Digital Team.

A number of projects laid out in the IT Strategy in April 2015 had already been implemented and work was ongoing on several others. A key intention was to ensure that where appropriate online services can use data from back office systems. Another was the importance of ensuring that the latest versions of software were being used and training for all staff was provided.

Recent improvements included

- the Live Chat service
- a Disaster Recovery facility hosted at Medway
- the availability of online service request forms

Future works will include the installation of a new Customer Contact Platform (Firmstep) in April 2016; a review of the existing IT network and telephone infrastructure at the Civic Centre and the encouragement of wider use of Cloud services.

A further interesting development will be the outcome of a study being undertaken on behalf of the Joint Kent Chief Executives' looking into the future provision of ICT within Kent and what the role of County, Districts, and existing Partnerships (such as Kent Connects) will be. This study will look at the

- adoption of a standard wireless system across all public service buildings in Kent
- promotion of technology for economic and business development in Kent
- a single view of the citizen between district and county Councils and
- adoption of a new approach to ICT procurement in Kent to provide a more joined up approach in realising savings from the acquisition of goods, services and staff.

Members asked officers to ensure the issues listed below were kept in mind when considering future options.

- the accessibility of services for all – including those who did not have access to or preferred not to use IT related services
- the security and privacy of users of any service had to be maintained at all times.
- any review of computing devices by staff should account for the posture and health issues caused by extended use of tablet devices which should not be a direct replacement for laptop or desktop computers
- the need to consider alternatives to the Microsoft suite of software and the use of open source alternatives.

In relation to the query concerning the incorrect connections being made via the switchboard system – members were asked to ensure they obtained the date and time of any incidents in order for IT services to ascertain if there were any external matters that may have caused the failure in that service.

21. Corporate Register of Partnerships

The committee considered the six specific partnerships falling under the Performance and Administration portfolio.

Members did query why some partnerships were being looked at by the Scrutiny committee and not others. It was confirmed that this was because the Chair and Vice-Chair of Scrutiny had already looked at all formal partnership arrangements the Council maintains and had determined what ones that committee would look at in more detail. The Scrutiny Committee Work is ongoing and there maybe the opportunity for partnerships relating to the Performance and Administration Committee to be selected for review in the future.

The fact that each Partnership page failed to show the date it was last reviewed was highlighted and the request made that this should be incorporated into the Register in the future.

Internal Audit and Fraud – Shared Management Arrangement

This partnership worked well however this has been superseded by the new fraud arrangement with Medway and is likely to be removed from the register for 2016/17.

Council Tax and Business Rates - Shared Management Arrangement

This partnership was working well with no detrimental impact on performance.

IT Services – Shared Management Arrangement

Officers confirmed that Tonbridge and Malling will continue to be GBC's partner in this arrangement.

Kent Connects

The Chair asked that the last paragraph in the aims and objectives section be simplified.

One Customer One Team

This is a partnership whereby the investigators of GBC work closely with the DWP to ensure that one officer investigates fraud across all benefits including Housing Benefit (HB) and DWP benefits.

This arrangement has worked well since 2010 however it will be superseded by the new arrangements with regards to Fraud whereby the responsibility for investigating Housing Benefit and DWP benefits will be transferring to the Single Fraud Investigation Service at the DWP. Therefore the One Customer One Team Partnership is not expected to be included in the Corporate Register of Partnerships in 2016/17.

Revenues and Benefits

An editing change needed to be made to the Responsible officer section.

22. Performance Update – Quarter Three 2015-16

Members noted that some changes to the Corporate Plan and the associated suite of corporate objectives and policy commitments had been made. In future the bare data would be submitted to Cabinet with the appropriate data and associated contextual information being submitted to each cabinet committee.

In considering each Performance report and its associated indicators – members noted that **Performance Measures (PM) were target based** measures concerning delivery of certain objectives whereas **Performance Indicators (PI) provided contextual information**.

Officers were also reminded of the need to avoid the use of acronyms UNLESS they had first stated the name/description in full and then provided the abbreviation in brackets.

Members stated that overall the new information was clear and easy to read although there appeared to be some anomalies in the use of the direction arrows.

Comments were made about

- **Sound and self-sufficient Council**

In relation to any PM's there was some discussion as to the good fraud performance and the annual savings of Housing Benefit payments. Members asked what Adpens were, it was explained that residents had accepted an Administration Penalty (Adpens) as an alternative to prosecution were it was proven that fraud had been committed.

Officers advised members that the increase in time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council tax benefit changes in circumstances had been caused by information provided by the DWP through Real Time Information (RTI) which is sent to us electronically, it informs us of fluctuating earnings such as zero hours contracts from information supplied by HMRC. Each change generated a "case" that had led to a significant amount of work to amend the claim. It was also confirmed that this work had caused an increase in workload even though the caseload had reduced.

- **Quality Frontline services delivered on time and to the right people**

The narrative showed that both were performing adequately.

- **Work to maximise income collection through the robust management and recovery Council Tan and Business Rates owed to the Council**

The fluctuation in figures in Quarter 1 to others was simply down to the calculation of the target figure. Officers assured members that collection was on track to meet the target.

- **Implement genuine channel shift through an enhanced IT infrastructure enabling customers to access key services online, anytime, anywhere.**

Noted

- **Delivery on opportunities for the sharing and selling of council houses**

Noted

- **Continuously review and adapt how we deliver our services to achieve financial efficiencies and improved performance.**

Noted

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm

