

## **Performance & Administration Committee**

**Thursday, 10 November 2016**

**7:30pm**

### **Present:**

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

Cllrs:            Brian Francis  
                     David Hurley  
                     John Knight  
                     Bronwen McGarrity  
                     Narinder Thandi  
                     Harold Craske  
                     Jenny Wallace

Stuart Bobby	Director (Corporate Services)
Mike Bytheway	Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits)
Ben Clarke	Committee & Scrutiny Assistant

### **32. Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Colin Caller.

### **33. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 08 September 2016 were signed by the Chair.

### **34. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **35. Corporate Performance Update – Quarter Two 2016-17**

The Director (Corporate Services) presented Members of the Performance and Administration Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as set out within the council's Corporate Plan 2015-19, for Quarter Two 2016-17 (July to September 2016).

The Director (Corporate Services) advised the Committee that on Monday 07 November 2016 Cabinet considered the overall Performance Measures and Indicators; there were fifteen measures and eight were discovered to be falling short of their target however only one of those measures fell within this portfolio.

Appendix Two to the report provides Members with an overview of the Councils performance against the Performance and Administration portfolio for Quarter Two 2016-17 (July to September 2016) including a commentary for each area and measure.

The Chair noted on Page 12 that Q2 outturn had increased from 81% to 94.34% for the *percentage of internal audit recommendations* implemented and the Director (Corporate Services) advised that the 100% target is aimed for consistently but the two outstanding recommendations have gone to Management Team and a satisfactory way forward has been discussed and agreed.

The Chair questioned why there had been a decrease in Quarter Two for the performance measure *percentage of Council tax collected*. The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) explained that collection rates fluctuate frequently and to gauge a more accurate understanding of performance it would be best to look at the year-end percentage.

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) added that if a customer does not pay their Council Tax then recovery action automatically happens with reminder letters being sent out and further letters resulting in summons to Magistrates Court and referral to enforcement agents etc if none payment continues. As a result collection rates fluctuate every month and nationally there has been a dip since the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was introduced earlier this year.

One Member noted the mention of direct debit being advocated for schemes such as collection of garden waste and questioned whether or not direct debit could be pushed for the payment of Council Tax.

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) advised that at the moment 60% of payments collected are through direct debit and the figure is rising as direct debit is encouraged and promoted on all correspondence including the bills sent out, the website and social media etc.

Following several questions the Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) explained that:

- Staff actively encourage E-billing and direct debit payments whenever they discuss payment of Council Tax or business rates with customers
- The reason letters have been sent out asking residents to set up direct debit for June 2017 payments for the collection of garden waste has been caused by a movement of the payment date for collection of the Direct Debits, with this leading the need for all existing Direct Debits to be set up again.
- People who continuously miss payments have a note put against their name advising officers that its more practical to try and work with them to find out why they keep missing payments and rectify it rather than keep on pursuing recovery and adding further costs
- With regard to the decrease on the indicator *total amount of housing benefit overpayments raised* GBC generally raise more debt in a year than can be recovered

in year albeit recovery methods are applied according to the financial circumstances of each customer

- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have created two initiatives in order to combat fraud and error in the benefit system which has increased the amount of overpayments raised
- The amount of overpayments received has now plateaued and debts are being increasingly recovered but the full amount is often very difficult to recover
- GBC also receive 40% back in the form of Government subsidy on any payment which is found to be claimant error or fraudulent and local authorities get 100% of the subsidy back on any local authority error if it is below a certain total value which it constantly has been for GBC in recent years
- All residents on Universal Credit received their housing benefit money themselves without going through the landlords however the Housing team can request from the DWP that the resident's housing benefit be given straight to GBC as the landlords if there is a genuine reason to do so such as a history of rent arrears
- Residents on zero hour contracts often have their benefit claims reassessed on a regular basis which causes problems for GBC and the residents alike as their housing benefit can go either up or down on a regular basis
- With regard to the indicator *percentage of Council Tax accounts signed up for e-billing* the 8.5% recorded for quarter two represents roughly 3500 accounts
- Receipts for payments are not currently sent out electronically but the Council is looking at digital software so this option will be looked into further in the future

One Member raised concerns over the older people who are computer illiterate and may find a new on line digital system too hard to use and fall behind on their payments.

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) assured Members that even if the department goes on line and becomes paperless there will still be a facility to receive paper forms in certain circumstances

### **36. Shared Services Update**

The Director (Corporate Services) provided the Committee with an update on the Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services with Medway Unitary Council and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council:

- The indicator for percentage of posts involved in shared services arrangements has stayed at 4% and it is made up of officers from the Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services Team, the CCTV Shared Partnership and the Building Control Shared Partnership and two shared managers (Mike Bytheway and Darren Everden)
- The Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service was launched with Medway on the 1 March 2016, a month ahead of schedule and the reasoning behind it was to make a saving of £56,000 but it was actually delivered with a saving of £68,000
- The high levels of performance from the Audit & Counter Fraud team were maintained during the transition and has been steadily improving since the merging

of the departments; the Service won Partnership of the Year at the Medway Council awards

- All staff are fully on board with the shared service and are happy with the expanded hierarchy which opens increased options for further development and progress

The Director (Corporate Services) advised Members that there are two other potential Shared Services being considered at the moment which are being investigated to see if they could work well and deliver some of the needed savings:

- Last year Cabinet gave permission for officers to investigate the possibility of a shared Revenues and Benefits Service with Tonbridge & Malling Council (T&M) but this is a much more complex project due to the combining of computer systems and the MyAccount access solution, everything has to be merged so that there is consistency across the two authorities
- The MyAccount Systems Solutions are different for the two authorities; T&M carry out theirs in house but GBC are looking at external suppliers to have an off-the-shelf programme
- After talks with T&M an agreement was reached to have an off the shelf programme with the use of the same 'my account solution' for both authorities
- The current shared management arrangements work well and are consistently delivering the services to both Local Authorities; a report has been drafted and it will go to Members and Cabinet early 2017 with roughly £100,000 savings estimated at this time for both authorities

The Director (Corporate Services) explained that the other service looking to be shared is Legal Services with Medway Council which already has close ties with GBC:

- The notion was first considered in Spring 2016 and a draft structure was created with rough savings of £30,000-£50,000 estimated at this time calculated for each Local Authority
- Officers will come back to Members early 2017 with a more detailed plan of how to progress and develop the sharing of Legal Services at the two Councils
- The number of shared posts in GBC will significantly increase from 4% as it is in Quarter 2 to nearer 10% should these two additional shared service arrangements be implemented
- Overall it has been agreed that the target level of savings needed to be made is £240,000 per annum from shared service arrangements by 2020
- At the Medway Awards Katey Arrowsmith also won the Manager of the year award for her Directorate within Medway Council

Following questions from Members, the Director (Corporate Services) advised that:

- It is possible to add a third Local Authority to the Shared Service plan if it was required as the computer system that would be used is modular and a new authority can simply be added on as another module
- With regard to how the move has affected officers, it has been a stressful period and a lot of pressure was put on them but they have dealt with it well and all officers from both authorities are on board. They have received extra training and there is a significantly larger amount of space for progress up the corporate ladder now that the two teams have merged

- A significant proportion of the staff that work for the Audit & Fraud Partnership live in Medway so it is beneficial for them as they will be working closer to home
- Delivery of shared services generally is more feasible now as the digital access channels were not quite where they needed to be a couple of years ago for a shared service such as revenues and benefits but now with the technology that is available it is a much more manageable shared service to create
- The new Citrix app, which is due to be rolled out by IT Services in the near future, allows officers to access both the GBC and Medway networks at any location that they log on at
- By 2020, general Central Government Grants will have been cut off and GBC will be spending £2.5 million more than it receives in income if no changes to the Council's budget are implemented which is why a target is being worked towards to make the necessary savings of £10,000 per working day by 2020

The Chair thanked the Director (Corporate Services) for the informative update.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 8:35pm.