

## **Performance & Administration Committee**

**Thursday, 07 September 2017**

**7:30pm**

### **Present:**

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

Cllrs:            Brian Francis  
                     David Hurley  
                     John Knight  
                     Narinder Thandi  
                     Peter Scollard  
                     Colin Caller  
                     Conrad Broadley

Mike Bytheway	Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits)
James Larkin	Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services Manager
Ben Turner	Corporate Performance Manager
Ben Clarke	Committee & Scrutiny Assistant

### **1. Apologies**

An apology of absence was received from the Director (Corporate Services).

### **2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 02 February 2017 were signed by the Chair.

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **4. Annual Review of the Audit and Counter Fraud Shared Service**

The Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services Manager provided Members of the Performance & Administration Committee with a copy of the annual review that has been conducted in respect of the Audit & Counter Fraud shared service with Medway Council.

The Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services Manager stated that the review is carried out to find out if the service is meeting its targets and allows for any improvements or changes that may be needed to be identified; a copy of the review findings is attached at appendix two with the main objectives listed as bullet points on page 14.

Concern was raised by a Member regarding the team leader's opinions that their workload is exceeding their salary range and asked for clarification.

The Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Services Manager clarified that there is no daylight between the officer pay range and the team leader pay range and there are no incremental

rises within the range as the Medway Council pay system is different meaning that at the moment, effectively team leaders are only paid a marginal bit extra than their officers. Stuart Bobby (Director – Corporate Services) and Phil Watts (Medway Chief Finance & Section 151 Officer) have agreed that a review of the team structure and grading will be the first job for a newly appointed service manager.

A Member questioned when the appointment would be made and the Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service Manager advised that the advertising of the post should be within the week following HR getting approval from Cabinet at Medway with the position hopefully filled within a couple of months. There was then a question as to whether this had gone through Cabinet at Gravesham and it was confirmed that it had not.

Members voiced their concern over the position, even if it is a minor approval, not going to Gravesham's Cabinet meeting and asked that it be put down in writing how GBC have been involved in the decision making, if it has been carried out by the appropriate officer and will GBC continue to be consulted in the future.

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) assured the Committee that he would take the question back to the Director (Corporate Services) to discuss but Medway do have delegated authority to make the decision in conjunction with Gravesham. The Director (Corporate Services) has been in contact with Medway regarding this however a written clarification will be emailed out before the next committee meeting to address Members concerns.

## **5. Update on the Revenues & Benefits Shared Service**

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) provided Members of the Performance & Administration Committee with an update on the development of a shared service with Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council for Revenues & Benefits.

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) highlighted the following points:

- The main body of officers will be situated at T&M (Tonbridge & Malling Council) and Gravesham officers will be moved via TUPE transfer. GBC staff will remain on their current terms and conditions but will be employed by T&M
- There will still be a hub of officers working at Gravesham which means there will be no impact to residents with regards to face to face contacts
- The staff have been briefed on the decisions made so far and they will be offered the opportunity to discuss any issues or concerns with HR
- A MyAccount function will be implemented to give residents access to their Revenues & Benefits account details online 24/7 at a time that suits them. This will also provide a facility for customers to complete claim forms etc online but there will still be a service available to residents who cannot get online
- Implementation of an online staff portal to enable a central and consistent means of communicating key information to staff at both sites

## Finance

The two lead officers from both Councils met to decide upon the budget for the shared service and a proposal will be put forward for the next Board meeting; a discussion will be had with them around staffing budgets for both Councils beforehand.

## Legal

The two legal departments have worked together and have drafted a legal agreement document which is to be signed by both Councils; this will also go to the Project Board meeting.

## IT

The digital platform has been looked at, GBC has Firmstep which is an external company whereas T&M will use an in-house platform, a meeting is taking place with, Northgate on the 15 September 2017 to discuss a shared service layer being used with the Revenues & Benefits back office function..

A common E-Forms Package is also desired where customers can apply for all various discounts, housing benefits, repayments etc via an online form across both authorities; there is a meeting on Wednesday, 13 September with a potential software supplier to do this.

## Property Services

Location is key and an initial meeting has been held with T&M Property Services Team regarding where the team will be located; ideally it will be next to the Revenues & Benefits team with Housing being moved out. GBC officers will go to the location and get involved with designing a layout; Property Services have advised they will officially need four months' notice to carry out the full relocation with the help of IT Services.

## HR

The HR Department are contacting all staff affected by the merger in GBC and are going through various issues with them including different payments dates, travel arrangements, terms and conditions etc as well as discussing possible home working for those staff who require it, for example, transport issues.. There will still be a hub of frontline officers providing support at GBC though.

## Staff Communications

A Sub-group of Senior Revenues & Benefits Officers met on Tuesday where issues were discussed regarding how the shared service will work in practice such as Customer Services and the Scanning Index Team who currently work differently across both sites. Officers from both Councils will need to process map procedures within Revenues & Benefits such as Housing Benefit Overpayments, Council Tax Billing and Debt Recovery etc. There will also be information provided to all staff through the staff magazine Ahoy! A Member training session has been arranged to brief them fully on the shared service on Monday 04 December 2017.

Following Members questions and comments the Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) explained that:

- Every shared service that is created is judged on its own merit and it was concluded that the best option for GBC was to have the bulk of the officers based at T&M as it provides resilience for the team and is cost effective

- Gravesham residents will not be affected by the merger, there will still be officers on site to help face to face or over the phone if need be
- The number of face to face contacts with customers last year was 7823 and reviewing the figures for this on a month by month basis has shown that the same hub of officers that are already stationed at GBC are sufficient enough to provide the same support that residents are used to now ensuring that there is cover in place
- HR's 1-1 sessions with the relevant staff members will cover all issues with travel arrangements

Cllr Colin Caller asked that in future the Director (Corporate Services) should attend the Committee meetings if there are important items as he has good overview knowledge of the shared services within GBC.

## **6. Discretionary Business Rates Scheme Policy 2017**

The Service Manager (Revenue & Benefits) presented the Committee with the Council's policy for the Granting of the Discretionary Business Rates Relief and handed out a simplified version of the policy to all Members. The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) worked through the hand-out with the Committee; it is attached as a supplementary for Members consideration.

The Chair thanked the Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) for creating the simplified version and voicing it to Members and asked that if there was anything that Members didn't understand or wanted to be included in the policy should be emailed to the Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits).

Following Members questions and comments the Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) explained that:

- Central Government ideally wants all of the grant money awarded to all local authorities to be spent and our policy has been created to ensure that happens
- He would come back to Members with the statistics of the average increase in rates for them as a result of the recent revaluation
- The initial policy was compiled by an external company who were paid to do it for all authorities within Kent. It was a minimal amount of money costing only a few hundred pound or so
- Delegated responsibility was given to the Director (Corporate Services) to approve the policy so the updated policy will be in place by the time of the next Committee meeting

Members noted the Discretionary Business Rates Scheme Policy 2017.

## **7. Corporate Performance Update: Quarter 1 2017/18**

The Corporate Performance Manager 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 One 2017-18 (April to June 2017).

The Corporate Performance Manager outlined the following key points about the report:

- Since the last meeting of the Committee the 2016/17 year-end outturns were published. The 2016/17 year presented some very strong outturns for the Performance and Administration portfolio, particularly in concern of the NNDR collection rate that, at 99.1%, represented a record outturn for the council.
- As a result of the 2016/17 outturns, performance targets for 2017/18 were revisited and, in some areas, become more challenging.
- The report presents that outturns for Q1 in some areas have not met their newly revised target. Despite this it is considered that GBC is performing very well across the portfolio and are in fact ahead of respective Kent averages in many areas.
- In regards to PI 41 (Internal Audit recommendations), there are genuine reasons for the outturn falling from the last quarter that aren't related to the levels of staff performance. This includes low staff levels in certain departments resulting in an inability to fully implement audit recommendations. Despite this 4 of the 10 identified issues have now already been resolved since the end of Q1 and it is anticipated the remainder will be addressed in the coming quarter.
- In regards to the Revenues and Benefits service, performance tends to dip in Quarter One due to annual billing taking place as well as other administrative work, such as sending out benefits/billing letters etc. Despite this, in consideration of processing times (New Claims and Change of Circumstances) specifically, 2017/18 has been one of the council's best performances for a first quarter.
- At the next Committee meeting, a presentation regarding housing benefit overpayment and council tax and business rates recovery will be provided so that Members can fully understand the two areas and how they are administered. This will be supported by the provision of the methodologies for the respective performance indicators to understand how the performance outturns are calculated.
- In concern of corporate debt, a working group has been established that pulls together details of all of the debt from departments and discusses the best practice needed to recover it; when chasing debt officers of all of the departments cross check the total debt owed to all departments so that one recovery can be responsible for contacting the debtor instead of three separate ones

The Chair thanked the officers for an informative report.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 8:45pm.