

Performance/Administration Cabinet Committee

Thursday, 9 November 2017

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Leslie Hills (Chair)
Cllr John Knight (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs: Brian Francis
 Gary Harding
 David Hurley
 Brian Sangha
 Peter Scollard
 Derek Shelbrooke
 Narinder Thandi

Stuart Bobby	Director (Corporate Services)
Mike Bytheway	Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits)
Ben Turner	Corporate Performance Manager
Chris Wakeford	Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny)

8. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Conrad Broadley and Cllr Colin Caller; Cllr Derek Shelbrooke and Cllr Brian Sangha attended as their respective substitutes.

9. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2017 were signed by the Chair.

10. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

11. Corporate Performance Update – Quarter Two 2017-18 (July - September 2017)

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 Two 2017-18 (July to September 2017).

The Corporate Performance Manager explained that although two performance measures hadn't been met; overall the performance is strong and in many of the areas the Council is ahead of the Kent average.

The Director (Corporate Services) the Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) and the Corporate Performance Manager fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- Internal Audit and Counter Fraud are monitored through the Finance & Audit Committee which receives biannual reports. Management Team also receive quarterly updates and Audit reports are issued to relevant Directors.
- 32 Internal Audit recommendations have been completed, leaving 16 outstanding. The remaining recommendations largely relate to constitutional updates which take time to progress.
- PM 11: The outturn for Q2 is 2.7 days below the stretching target of 18 days put in place for 2017/18, albeit 1.3 days ahead of the equivalent Kent average (as at Q1 2017/18). In Q2 resources were stretched primarily due to staff sickness and the summer holiday season. As in previous years we will be looking to improve and reach our target over the course of the second half of the year.
- Analysis has been completed on staff sickness and stress and anxiety levels were found to be considerably lower than initially thought. There is a sub-group of the Overview Scrutiny Committee that is currently looking at sickness and stress and the impact on staff at GBC.
- Benefits change of circumstances can be processed quicker because a lot of information is now provided electronically.
- PM 9 – PM10: Council Tax collection is on track to achieve the target. Business rates collection: last year the Council achieved a record level of performance for the authority, 99.11%. The team will continue to work towards matching this success.
- As long as people inform the Council about a change in their income / ability to pay; GBC can help and, if necessary, change the arrangement to suit their financial situation.
- Debt will only be written off in circumstances where there is clearly no chance of recovering the debt.
- PI 45: the percentage of posts involved in shared services arrangements increased from 4% to 6% (equating to around 25 to 30 officers) with the launch of the shared legal service. Looking forward; Revenues and Benefits shared service with Tonbridge & Malling is expected to be in place by July 2018. The shared HR service with Medway is progressing and a three way shared Environmental Health service with Medway and Tonbridge and Malling is also being explored.
- Processes are in place to ensure that 'voluntary resignation' is a last resort for those officers who do not wish to transfer to another authority as part of a shared service arrangement. In the case of the Revenues and Benefits shared service; a satellite hub will be established at GBC, home working capabilities will also be assessed as well as redeployment opportunities.
- Canterbury will be joining the STG Building Control Partnership.

The Committee noted the Annual Corporate Performance Update – Quarter Two 2017-18 (July September 2017).

12. Corporate Register of Partnerships 2017-18

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) informed Members of the Performance & Administration Committee of the council's involvement in partnerships that are within the remit of the committee.

The current partnerships that most directly relate to the work of the Performance & Administration Committee are as follows:

- Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service
- Revenues & Benefits Shared Management Arrangement

The Committee considered each partnership and noted the information provided within the report.

13. Draft Procurement Strategy

The Director (Corporate Services) provided Members of the Performance and Administration Committee with a copy of the updated draft Procurement Strategy before it is formally approved by Cabinet, and to provide any comments the Committee may have to the Portfolio Holder for Performance and Administration.

The Procurement Strategy is intended to set out the principles that the council will follow in the acquisition of goods, works and services from third-party and in-house providers. The current strategy was last fully reviewed and updated in 2011.

The draft Procurement Strategy is presented at appendix two to the report and has been prepared with the assistance of procurement colleagues from Medway Council. The strategy sets out, at a high level, how the council will ensure its procurement activity is legally compliant and supported by economic and efficient processes, whilst also seeking to support local businesses in bidding for opportunities with the council.

The Procurement Strategy will be presented to Cabinet on 8 January 2018 for approval. At that meeting, suggestions made by the Overview Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 19 October will also be considered.

The Director (Corporate Services) explained that the Council no longer has an in house procurement arrangement; instead GBC have a shared arrangement with Medway, on an hourly-rate basis, and consider opportunities for joint procurement across Kent when appropriate opportunities are identified.

The Committee noted the Draft Procurement Strategy.

14. Oral Update on Universal Credit

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) provided the following update to the Committee on Universal Credit:

Since implementing the Universal Credit (UC) **live** service on 18 May 2015 we have received 362 notifications from JCP where a claim has been made for UC. This includes HB claimants and non-dependants.

We have actually cancelled 40 Housing Benefit claims where they rent from the Council and 33 Housing Benefit claims where they rent from a private landlord. Based on the current caseload count this equates to 1.176% of 3,401 rent rebate (council tenant) claims and 1.049% of 3,147 rent allowance (private tenant) claims.

We have calculated 220 Council Tax Reduction claims which equates to 2.976% of our current caseload of 7,391.

Housing Rents currently have 29 Managed Payments in place.

We have a few customers who receive a monthly Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) payment to help with their rent.

The take up of the Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) service at CAB has been very slow. We currently have one case outstanding, but in the few cases that we are aware of the claimant fails to attend the PBS interviews.

In May 2016 the **full** Universal Credit (UC) service for all working age claimant types began to rollout nationally (beyond London) and in July 2016 it was announced that this rollout will complete by September 2018.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Transitional Rollout Schedule was updated in October 2017 due to changes being made to the DWP Jobcentre estate network and to coincide with the pace of rollout being scaled up to around 50 Jobcentres per month.

Gravesham Borough Council (Gravesend JCP) is scheduled to transition to the full Universal Credit service on 21 February 2018.

After the rollout process has completed, DWP will then begin moving all remaining existing benefit claimants to the full Universal Credit service in 2019.

There are effectively 3 phases for the full transition:-

- On go-live date LA's must shut down the gateway and not allow any **new** working age claimants to claim Housing Benefit (HB) from Day 1. They must claim UC unless they fall within one of the exception groups which will remain with HB. Those are:-
 - Specified/Supported Accommodation
 - Households with 3 or more children
- There will be the natural migration as a result of changes in legacy benefits (e.g. Tax Credits etc)

- Managed migration which will start for us in May 2017, 3 months after going onto the 'full' service and the caseload migration will not be completed until at least 2023/24. During managed migration customers will stop receiving UC on the 'live' service and will have to reapply within 7 days to receive UC on the 'full' service continuously and any partners will also have to complete their section of the claim.

The DWP refer to the roll-out as being an 'Agile' process with constant changes.

General feedback is that in Year 1, Working Age caseload has the potential to reduce by 15-35%. This then slows down as generally speaking if someone is likely to naturally migrate as a result of a change this tends to happen in Year 1.

On average each claimant will have an average of 12 changes in a year which will have a knock on effect to our CTRS scheme – long term in its current status it won't be sustainable. We will need to look to change the scheme probably meaning we will go out to consultation again within the next 2 years.

Although a letter was issued last year to all LA's from Neil Couling regarding exit payments there has been no movement on this. Advice is to be careful of reducing staff; the likelihood is we will need more resource to pick up the volumes coming through the data hub.

Claims Process & Payments

Applications need to be made on-line and all claimants will have an online Universal Credit account to manage their claim. They can use their account to report changes, send messages to their work coach and find support. It usually takes 5 to 6 weeks for a new claim to be assessed and the first payment to arrive, although in some instances this taking up to 8 weeks. Universal Credit is then paid once a month in arrears, usually into a bank, building society or credit union account.

This is made up of 7 waiting days (if circumstances apply), a one month assessment period and up to 7 days for the payment to reach their account.

Advance and hardship payments

If a claimant doesn't have enough to live on while they wait for their first payment they can ask for an advance payment at their Universal Credit interview or by [calling the helpline](#) after they've made a claim.

They can also ask for a hardship payment if they can't pay for rent, heating, food or hygiene needs because they got a [sanction](#). They need to pay it back through their Universal Credit payments - they'll be lower until they pay it back.

Budgeting Advance

A claimant may be able to get a Budgeting Advance to help with emergency household costs, such as replacing a broken cooker, or for help getting a job or staying in work.

They'll repay it through their regular Universal Credit payments - these will be lower until they pay it back. If they stop getting Universal Credit, they'll have to repay the money in another way.

Paying their rent

A claimant will have to pay rent directly to their landlord. The amount they get may not cover all of their rent.

They need to have a tenancy agreement and know how much their rent is when they apply.

If they're in social housing, their landlord can tell them which service charges are included and how much they can get.

Alternative Payment Arrangements

If a claimant is having financial difficulties or they're behind on their rent, they or their landlord may be able to apply for an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA).

Depending on their circumstances, they could get an APA to:

- get their rent paid directly to their landlord
- get paid more frequently than once a month
- receive split payments, if they're part of a couple

The claimant will need to speak to their work coach to apply for an APA

In Summary the Potential Impact on GBC

Increased rent arrears for Council Tenants

Customers attending the Civic for Assisted Digital Support and basically looking for help the transfer process puts the emphasis on the customer to apply again for UC even though they are already in receipt of it

Impact on CTRS and potential consultation this summer to amend the scheme

Increased Council Tax arrears due to number of CTRS changes throughout the year

Increase in paperwork and workload for back office staff

Reduction in HB caseload

Any funding will not cover the cost of delivery

Temporary accommodation costs increase

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) fielded questions from the Committee and highlighted the following:

- Under Universal Credit; every time a claimant has a change in salary or hours the Council will be notified.
- The Council is looking at working with local partners / voluntary organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau to assist with the workload.
- The Council is doing its best to make sure everyone is informed including; social landlords, private landlords, Job Centre, Citizens Advice Bureau etc. The Department for Work and Pensions has assured the Council that they will inform everyone and everyone will have a work coach. The Housing department at GBC is also committed to sending out a letter.

The Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee, Cllr Derek Shelbrooke, explained that Universal Credit will be discussed at the next Finance & Audit Committee as a potential risk to be added to the Corporate Risk Register.

The Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) advised that there will be a Member training session on Universal Credit and Welfare Reform on 16 January 2018.

The Committee thanked the Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits) for an informative update.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm