

Minutes of: **PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 26th September 2011

PRESENT: Councillor Aldred (In the Chair)
Councillors L Barnes, Cheetham (substituting for Stansfield), Morris, Roberts

Irene Divine (co-opted Member)

IN ATTENDANCE: Andrew Buckle, Head of Customer Services and ICT
Sian Roxborough, Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

Councillor Serridge (Portfolio Holder for Customer Services)
Councillor Marriott (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources)
Councillor Essex

1 Member of the public

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair, Councillor Aldred chaired the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors McInnes, Robertson and Stansfield.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minute of the meeting held on 25th July 2011, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items for discussion.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Aldred declared a personal interest as he was on the Board of Capita.

Councillor L Barnes declared a personal interest as she was on the Board of Capita.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow the member of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

There was nothing to report.

7. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT AND OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL LETTER

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services outlined the report which informed members of the Local Government Ombudsman Letter for the period 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011, together with the annual report regarding complaints and compliments received by the Council for the same period.

The Local Government Ombudsman had made decisions on 14 enquiries during the year and 8 complaints had been forwarded to the investigative team (the figure includes any carried forward from the previous year). It was noted that 4 had been resolved with a local settlement, 1 had been resolved as no maladministration (no report) and 3 had been closed at Ombudsman's discretion (no report).

In addition, the Council were required to respond to initial enquiries within 28 calendar days. During 2010/11 the average response time was noted as 18.0 days which was an improvement on the previous year's figures of 22.3 days (2009/10) and 44.0 days (2008/09).

It was noted that when complaints were open, regular liaison meetings took place between the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Liaison Officer to ensure deadline compliance and to discuss any issues.

Clarification was provided regarding premature complaints and it was confirmed that if the Council had not had sight of a complaint prior to its submission to the Local Government Ombudsman, then the Council was usually given the opportunity to progress it through its formal complaints system for 12 weeks.

The Local Government Ombudsman currently had 1 full investigation ongoing.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services outlined the complaints and compliments received by the Council during 2010/11. A weekly summary report was circulated to the Senior Management Team and Councillors, which displayed progress with deadline compliance.

It was noted that there had been an overall reduction in complaints received, being 85 during 2010/11, compared with 110 in 2008/09. In addition the overall average time to deal with complaints across all service areas had decreased slightly from 6.6 days in 2009/10 to 6.5 days in 2010/11. The use of email had become a popular method of registering complaints; however during 2010/11 a resurgence of complaints by letter had been recorded.

It was highlighted to Members that 2010/11 had seen a significant increase in the number of compliments received, being 237, which was an increase from the 2009/10 figure of 89. It had been determined that there were two main reasons for this, being the inclusion of data from satisfaction surveys (e.g. STAN and Building Control) and the inclusion of internal customer compliments (e.g. Legal Services).

The following questions were raised by Members, which the Head of Legal and Democratic Services responded.

- If the word 'justified or unjustified' was used nationally or if it was the terminology used by Rossendale. Members suggested that the words substantiated or non-substantiated be used as alternatives.
- Could future reports include the number of people who had requested a review? – The Head of Legal and Democratic agreed to include this in future annual complaint reports.
- As members were not able to compare with past years reports, could future reports include comparison year on year?
- Clarification was asked on the number of days (35 days) to respond to 1 complaint (Regeneration).
- Does the Council audit the service provided by Capita? – the Head of Customer Services and ICT confirmed the monitoring process

Members expressed disappointment regarding the generic wording of the Ombudsman Annual Letter, which did not reflect the continuing improvements in response times.

Resolved:

That Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report.

8. CAPITA MONITORING AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Head of Customer Services and ICT presented the Capita Monitoring and Performance Report.

Since October 2006, Capita had been contracted to deliver revenues, benefits and associated customer contact services on behalf of Rossendale Borough Council. Back office services were delivered from

Capita's offices in Blackburn, with customer contact by telephone being provided through a call centre in Coventry. Capita staff also delivered face to face customer service in the Council's One Stop Shop and provide the telephone switchboard service for all of the Council.

In April 2009 there were 6746 live benefit claims, rising to 7179 (+6.4%) by the end of March 2010 and further rising to 7238 (+0.8%) by the end of March 2011. Despite these continuing increases, Capita's performance against key indicators was very good for the 2010/11 financial year and has remained so for Q1 of 2011/12.

The Head of Customer Services and ICT gave an overview and Capita Performance Targets and Outturns and informed Members that the Benefit Fraud delivered by Capita had from 1st July been brought back into the Council and was under the Public Protection Unit.

Members noted that there would soon be one system for all processes ie data protection, freedom of information, complaints etc.

A number of questions were raised, which the Head of Customer Services and ICT responded.

- The location of the Council's switchboard – it was confirmed that this was located in the One Stop Shop
- Do staff record telephone conversations and was the person informed that the call would be recorded? – it was confirmed that calls were recorded within revenue and benefits, mainly for training purposes. Switchboard calls were not recorded at the present time, but hopefully the Council will have the ability to do this in the future.
- There was a need to speed up messages as people who use a public phone lose half of their money listening to a message before having the opportunity to speak to a person.

The Head of Customer Services and ICT confirmed that this would be last report the Committee would be receiving as the performance figures would be included in the integrated performance report which was reported to the Committee on a quarterly basis.

Members thanked the Head of Customer Services and ICT for the explanations and updates he provided to the Committee.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

9. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1 (APRIL – JUNE 2011)

In the absence of the Head of People and Policy, the Head of Customer Services and ICT agreed to answer any questions.

The report highlighted the achievements made in the Performance Indicators for quarter 1, which had showed improvements in the following service areas:

- Community Safety which had shown improvements from the same period last year
- Council Tax collected which was up on the same period last year
- Accuracy of processing HB/CTB claims where work to improve accuracy rates continues to be undertaken with refresher training for staff on a regular basis
- STAN 2 is a new indicator and of 37 questionnaire returned 100% of customers stated that they were satisfied with the service and 81% were very satisfied.

The report also highlighted a number of achievements to projects carried out in the 1st quarter.

Members agreed that Officers need to ensure that all information in the note section of the report was up to date. Concern was raised particularly in relation to the following areas:

LI 82bi Household Waste Composted – awaiting information from various sources including Lancashire County Council.

NI 16 LAA - Serious acquisitive crime rate PSA 23 and NI 20 LAA - Assault with injury crime rate, which are new indicators currently being developed for reporting on crime.

The Head of Customer Services and ICT highlighted the tremendous amount of progress made in relation to NI 181(a) time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit new claims – which a few years ago was 120 days and was now 18 days.

In relation to risk (page 67 of the report) and failure to determine planning applications in line with Government targets, concern was raised that major applications were below target due to the impact of purdah. Members indicated that other local authorities continue to meet through purdah and that to ensure targets were met, the Council should allow meetings to go ahead during this period.

A number of questions were raised as follows:

- Why the Council charge 1.8% surcharge to people who pay their Council Tax by credit card
- Explanation of the meaning of 'phantom tenants'
- In relation to ICON upgrade and concerns regarding income receipting abilities should hardware fail, a question was raised about timescales for issuing the software. The Head of Customer Services and ICT confirmed that a live upgrade should go ahead in November or December 2011. Once this is delivered then the targets should be met.

A member congratulated the Council on bringing back in-house the homelessness and homelessness prevention service and also the work on the Disabled Facilities Grants.

Resolved:

1. That the Quarter 1 Integrated Performance Report be noted.
2. That the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to monitor performance of those indicators that are under-achieving targeted levels of performance.

Signed
(Chair)

Date