

POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 10th September 2012

Present: Councillor J Oakes (Chair)
Councillors Gill (substituting for Bleakley), Kenyon, Milling,
Pilling and Smith (substituting for Hughes)

In Attendance: Rebecca Lawlor, Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager
Fiona Meechan, Director of Customers and Communities
Councillor Barnes, Leader of the Council, substituting for
Councillor Serridge, Portfolio Holder for Customers, Legal and
Licensing
Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

3 Members of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bleakley, Creaser, Hughes and Councillor Jackson, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health and Councillor Serridge, Portfolio Holder for Customers, Legal and Licensing.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 2nd July 2012 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

Councillor Gill declared an interest in item D3, as she was Chair of Licensing Committee.

Councillor Kenyon declared an interest in item D3 as she was a member of the Taxi trade.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair noted that members were informed at the last meeting that the Committee would be receiving the Park Homes Enforcement Policy.

Rebecca explained that there had been a number of recommendations made by a recent select committee looking at Park Homes and how they operate. Some of the recommendations that the Government are looking to accept include; better enforcement legislation for LAs; licencing fees for LAs; and powers to undertake Works In Default where breaches are not remedied by the Park Owner. The Government have announced a new Bill which should have its second reading in October, where it should be clearer on the implications of the Bill, and what they mean for Councils, operators, and residents.

An update would be presented at the next meeting if a second reading had been held.

The Abolition of Council Tax Benefit and replacement with a Local Scheme will now be presented to Policy in November.

7. CUSTOMER SERVICE REVIEW

The Director of Customers and Communities presented a progress update report of the results and recommendations from the Customer Services Review which began a few months ago with information gathering and looking at demands and engaging with staff at Henrietta Street to look at how they work and proportion their time.

The Council will have cuts of 39% in its revenue budget by 2014. At the same time they are looking at improving the customer experience and aim to facilitate more self-service, so that customers can carry out transactions or find information at a time and place that suits them best, and resolve more queries at the first point of contact to save customers having to contact the Council multiple times.

The purpose of the project is to review all the various customer service functions across the Council with a view to consolidating them to improve the customer experience and deliver efficiencies.

20% of customers contact the Council on a regular basis and of the 20% only 6% use face-to-face contact at the One Stop Shop, 55% use the telephone and 39% use the website.

It has been proposed to move to a 3 tier model of customer services as follows;

Tier 1 – enable customers to be self-sufficient as far as possible, to allow them to access the service or information that they need at a time and place that suits them. This would be achieved by further development of the Council's website.

Tier 2 – staff the telephone customer service centre with multi skilled staff who are able to deal with a wide range of queries at the first point of contact.

Tier 3 – enable customers to deal with more specialised members of staff who can resolve more specific issues.

There is a proposal to combine the call centres run by Capita, the Operations Team at Henrietta Street and other similar customer service functions into one unit at Futures Park Business Centre. It is also proposed to move the face-to-face contact centre at the One Stop Shop to Futures Park and consolidate the staffing of this reception with the call centre and Business Centre reception.

The Council are currently consulting with customers on these proposals, and in addition to questions in the Citizens Panel questionnaire, a questionnaire is being given to customers in the One Stop Shop to understand any potential impact that a move may have on them.

A Unified Intelligent Desktop (UID) would bring together a number of IT packages into one and be able to produce records by address, which would be helpful to identify customer history to enable us to give them a more appropriate service for their needs.

Members were informed that research has shown that, on average, the cost of various contacts are face-to-face - £14, telephone - £5 and website - 17p. Moving all One Stop Shop and back office staff out of the current building in Rawtenstall into the existing offices at Bacup would save around £250,000 in capital building costs, and approximately £35,000 in annual running costs.

Members raised a number of questions, which the Director of Customer and Communities responded to, and overall everyone was in favour of the new proposals and the centralisation of services.

There was a suggestion that the Council would need to think about how they would communicate the new enhanced service to the customers.

In relation to the needs of people in outlying areas such as Rising Bridge, the Director of Customer and Communities indicated that at present the staff at the One Stop Shop have surgeries in Whitworth which is some distance from Rawtenstall, and STAN the van provides mobile outreach. In the same way, if the One Stop Shop were moved to Bacup, we could look at options for providing surgeries in Rawtenstall, perhaps using our STAN the van service, or possibly other venues.

The staff in the customer services team would be trained to answer a wide range of telephone queries.

Members briefly discussed the Community Impact Assessment and the Director of Customer and Communities indicated that a complete CIA would not be completed until the consultation was complete.

The Chair thanked the Director of Customer and Communities for the presentation.

Resolved:

That Members note the current results and recommendations from the Customer Services Review, which would be updated following further customers and community consultation, which was currently ongoing.

8. COMMERCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY AND ENFORCEMENT POLICY

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager presented to Members an overview of the process to develop workable service plans around the statutory functions and legislative requirements of Commercial Environmental Health Team.

The service concentrates on a number of legislation areas that the Council must act on, aimed at protecting members of the public, employees and employers. A majority of the teams' work is focussed on working with businesses to ensure they have the right safeguards in place to operate safely and efficiently.

Local Authorities are expected to publish and identify their service work plans for Food Safety and Health and Safety for the coming year, utilising the resources they have available. Against these work plans there is a need to have an approved, transparent enforcement approach for dealing with breaches of legislation and harm or potential harm caused or could be caused to members of the public, employees, employers and sectors. The aim is to develop transparent service plans with a three year action delivery period, which will reflect the resources available following the service review being undertaken within the department as part of the Council's overall efficiency agenda.

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager suggested that a small working group be established from members of the Policy Scrutiny Committee to work with the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager to help develop these delivery plans.

A member indicated that the Council need to be proactive to try to avoid enforcement and ensure we are meeting statutory requirements.

A number of questions were raised which the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager responded.

The Chair thanked the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager for the very informative presentation.

Resolved:

1. That Members note the development of a Commercial Service Delivery and Enforcement Policy.
2. That a cross-party working group be established to work with the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager to help develop the delivery plans.

9. CHANGES TO THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

The Committee and Member Services Manager presented a report which

highlighted the proposed changes to the democratic processes within the Council relating to the number of members and cycle of committees.

Members were asked to consider and comment on the questionnaire responses from Councillors (26 responded) and the recommendations of the Governance Working Group.

Feedback from the questionnaire indicated that the following were the preferred options:

- a) To request the Local Boundary Commission for England to undertake a review of the number of councillors, wards and ward boundaries.

One suggestion was to retain the wards but reduce councillors to 2 per ward and not going through the Local Boundary Commission. The Committee and Member Services Manager indicated that a review would still have to be undertaken by the Local Boundary Commission for any changes to be made to the number of Councillors.

A suggestion was also to reduce councillor allowances, but the leader indicated that the Council pay relatively low allowances. However, an Independent Remuneration Panel was at the present time reviewing Councillor allowances.

- b) To deal with Taxi Licence applications through sub-committees and reduce from 4 to 3 Licensing Committee meetings.

The Chair of Licensing welcome the proposals for sub committees to look at taxi licence applications as at the present time Licensing Committee can take up to 6 hours, mainly due to the number of new applications from outside of the Borough.

There was discussion on reducing Licensing meetings from 4 to 3.

- c) To change to 2 overview and scrutiny committees: one to deal with policy and performance (Corporate Scrutiny – 6 meetings per year) and one to deal with the scrutiny of partner organisations (External Scrutiny – 3 per year) and to continue with evening meetings of these Committees

The Chair of Policy indicated that it would be beneficial to make the proposed changes, as last year meetings had to be cancelled as there were no items on the agenda.

The Scrutiny Support Officer indicated that any task and finish groups looking at internal services would present their report to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and if looking at an outside body would report their recommendations to the External Scrutiny Committee, whereas at present they report to Overview and Scrutiny Management.

- d) To merge Member Development Working Group with Governance Working Group (4 per year) and keep Civic Matters Working Group as it is (to meet as and when required).

Resolved:

That the Committee recommend to Council the following;

- a) That a review be undertaken on the number of councillors, wards and ward boundaries.
- b) That the Licensing Committee reduces to 3 meetings per year, with sub committees set up as required, in consultation with the Chair of Licensing and the Licensing Enforcement Manager.
- c) To change to 2 overview and scrutiny committees, as detailed above and all meetings to continue to be held in the evening.
- d) To merge Member Development Working Group with Governance Working Group and keep Civic Matters Working Group as is.
- e) That the changes to committees commence from May 2013.

10. Petitions Scheme Review

The Committee and Member Services Manager informed the Committee that the Petitions Scheme was introduced in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, but was repealed in the recent Localism Act 2011.

The scheme was approved by Council in July 2010 with a recommendation that a review be undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny within 12 months of it being implemented.

Since the start of the Petition Scheme only 9 petitions had been submitted of which 3 were created online, with the remaining 6 being paper based. Of the 6 paper based submissions only 2 met the criteria outlined in the scheme.

There were cost implications for supporting and administering petitions through existing staff resources which equate to approximately £2,730.

It had been proposed that the petition scheme should be reviewed to make it more accessible and less onerous for members of the public to submit a petition. The process should be simplified to improve accessibility by the public. Feedback received from the few people who has used the system indicated that the process was cumbersome and difficult to use.

A number of questions were raised which the Committee and Member Services Manager responded.

Resolved:

1. That the Committee recommend Cabinet to simplify the existing process for submitting petitions by adding the following wording to the Council's Constitution and withdrawing the current Petitions Scheme:

Other petitions, either paper based or in electronic format, can be submitted to the Council, who will decide how to deal with the petition and notify the petition organiser:

*To submit a petition please address it to Legal and Democratic Services,
The Business Centre, Futures Park, Bacup, OL13 0BB.*

2. That a petitions leaflet be produced as a best practice guide for people to submit petitions.

11. FORWARD PLAN

The Scrutiny Support Officer indicated that at the next meeting the Committee would be receiving the One Stop Shop Proposals.

Also at the next meeting would be an update on the Empty Homes Pennine Lancashire project, which Rossendale Borough Council was leading on.

The Scrutiny Support Officer agreed to contact the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager for an update on the Park Homes Enforcement Policy (see Chair's Update) for the next meeting if possible.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.20pm

Signed
(Chair)

Date