

Minutes of: PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 22nd October 2012

PRESENT: Councillor Procter (in the Chair)
Councillors Fletcher, Knowles, Morris, Oakes
(Substituting for McInnes), Shipley, Roberts

Irene Divine (Co-opted Member)

IN ATTENDANCE: Phil Seddon, Head of Finance and Property Services
Anita Hall, Service Assurance Manager
Lesley Lowe, Capita Contracts Manager
Andrew Buckle, Head of Customer Services and ICT
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

2 Members of the Public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor McInnes.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th September 2012, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items for discussion.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Morris declared an interest as he was on the Board of Capita.

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 informed members that at the last meeting Members had requested the attendance of a number of Officers to explain the underachieving targets within their service area and clarification on a number of Performance Indicators. An action plan had been circulated to Members, which gave an indication of when the Officers would attend.

7. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS & THE CAPITA CONTRACT

NB: Items D1 and D3 were taken together as one item.

The Head of Customer Services and ICT gave a brief overview of the Capita contract, which was a 10 year contract that commenced in 2006 to oversee the Revenues, Benefits and Customers Contact services on behalf of the Council.

Performance against annually set targets was closely monitored by the Service Assurance Team and reported quarterly to the Operational Board and annually to the Strategic Governance Board and Performance Scrutiny.

The current Welfare Reform, including the introduction of a Local Council Tax Support Scheme, and the introduction of Universal Credit would present new challenges to the Council and Capita. The Capita contract would be reviewed and modified, where necessary, to meet the needs of any proposed changes. The Head of Customer Services and ICT agreed to provide members with a more in-depth presentation at a future meeting.

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

- Was a 10 year contract too long?
- Is the contract cost effective?
- Benchmarking against other authorities and where does the information go?
- The need to communicate to customers about any changes

The Head of Customer Services and ICT explained that some authorities have 15-20 year contracts. Through the Governance Structure and associated meetings that support the Capita contract, on which sit three of Rossendale Borough Council's elected members, there is provision to review/evaluate and make changes to the contract.

The Council benchmark costs/performance and in comparison to other local authorities, Rossendale is the 4th highest on council tax recovery, in Lancashire for 2011/12. A comment was made, that whilst benchmarking was good, it was not always comparing like with like. The Head of Customers and ICT indicated that there is both an Operations Board and a Strategic Board to oversee the contract and how Capita is performing and maximising what is spent.

The Service Assurance Manager circulated information on up-to-date performance indicators for LI 79b(i) - % of recoverable overpayments recovered and LI 79b(ii) – housing benefit overpayments recovered as % of the total amount of HB overpayment debt outstanding.

The reason for showing as underachieving was that the computer system software (Northgate) was reporting incorrect performance and therefore showing red on the system. This had now been rectified.

The Council tries to minimise overpayments by encouraging people to inform the Council of any change in circumstances. This prevents overpayments getting into the system, which inevitably are harder to collect once raised.

A number of questions were raised as follows:

- How often were customers challenged about possible changes in circumstances?
- Was there evidence of people giving up their homes and moving into rented accommodation?
- Are Northgate viable when things go wrong?

There was discussion about the new proposals which would encourage people to be responsible for their own rent. Members were informed that safeguards were in place for people who may fall into arrears.

Resolved:

That the Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance.

8. Risk – Unmanaged Open Space

The Head of Finance and Property Services circulated a briefing note which provided information on unmanaged open space which was defined as, any land owned by the Council that is not maintained or managed by a service department and therefore of a non-operational use.

In 2008, the Council put on its risk register space that the Council owned. Rossendale Borough Council own 4.1% of the Valley.

The Head of Finance and Property Services explained the 'risks' associated with unmanaged open space, indicating that it was important for all Council land to be registered.

With regard to history of claims against the council, there had been very few claims, with minor payouts. Public Liability Insurance was £15m and costs the Council £71k per year.

The Council undertakes a number of methods to minimise risk, some of which were as follows.

- In-house inspections (car parks, garages, colonies)
- Drive-by inspections of its land, when possible
- Repairs – the budget for 2012/13 being £160k

- Visual inspections if in an area
- Communities Team reporting incidents (misuse of land)
- Member ward walks, neighbourhood meetings

The Council work closely with and respond to LCC, United Utilities and the Environmental Agency, when it is Council responsibility.

A number of questions were raised, mainly in relation to insurance and claims, which the Head of Finance and Property Services responded.

Resolved:

That the Chair thanked the Head of Finance and Property Services for attending.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.25pm

Signed
(Chair)

Date