

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Date of Meeting:** 17<sup>th</sup> September 2018

**Present:** Cllr Lythgoe (Chair)  
Cllrs Essex, Gill, Johnson, Kempson, Kenyon, Morris, Procter,  
Robertson and Stansfield

**In attendance:** Sam Plum, Director of Communities  
Phil Seddon, Head of Finance  
Clare Law, HR Manager  
Mick Coogan, Strategic Housing Manager  
Guy Darragh, Economic Development Manager  
Carolyn Sharples, Committee & Member Services Manager  
Jenni Cook, Committee & Member Services Officer  
Dawn Cardwell, Neighbourhood Manager, Calico

**Also Present:** Cllrs Ashworth, Haworth, Lamb  
0 press  
2 public

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### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABENCE & SUBSTITUTIONS

1.1 Apologies for absence had been received from:

- Councillor Lynda Barnes – Councillor Stansfield substituting
- Councillor Janet Eaton – Councillor Essex substituting
- Zieda Ali – Co-opted Member

### 2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

**Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2018 be approved as a correct record.

### 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

### 4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

4.1 The Chair confirmed that there were no urgent items of business.

### 5. CHANGE TO AGENDA

5.1 The Chair noted that the East Lancs CCG were unable to attend the meeting to provide the Rossendale Birthing Centre update. This was due to unforeseen circumstances and would be brought to the October meeting.

## 6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

- 5.1 The Chair noted that he would allow questions to be asked on each item as it was discussed.

## 7. CHAIR'S UPDATE

### Update from last meeting

- 7.1 Following the last meeting, the following update was given:-

- Enforced Sales Policy: Cllr Essex had enquired about the process if an elected member wished to purchase a property under the policy. The Legal Services Manager had responded as follows:-  
*“Where properties are sold by tenders, Cabinet must approve any winning bid where it is submitted by a Member or Officer of the Council. When properties are sold by auction the reserve price is agreed between the Monitoring Officer and the auctioneers instructed in conjunction with the Head of Finance. As this will be considered a routine sale Cabinet will not need to be consulted as the property will go to the highest bidder in the auction process which in itself is open and transparent although such sales should be reported to Cabinet on an annual basis.”*

### Excess Winter Deaths Task and Finish Group – Cabinet Response

- 7.2 The Excess Winter Deaths Task and Finish Group report was heard at Cabinet on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2018. The formal response of the Cabinet is that they fully accept all the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group. A press release is on the Council's news website. As a final action O&S will be asking to see the Health and Wellbeing Action Plan at a future meeting.

## 8. CALICO UPDATE

- 8.1 Dawn Cardwell from Calico provided an update to members as follows:-

- The make-up of the Calico group was summarised and included Calico Homes, Enterprise, Ring Stones, Hobstones, Acorn, Safenet and Delphi.
- The group consisted of over 700 employees and 4500 homes were owned and managed across Pennine Lancashire.
- 203 properties within the initiative were managed by Calico
  - 60 Burnley
  - 29 Blackburn with Darwen
  - 23 Hyndburn
  - 51 Pendle
  - 40 Rossendale
- Calico's roles and responsibilities were outlined and included empty property management and letting, rent and arrears collection, tenancy management and customer support, contact centre services, responsive repairs, property owner liaison, anti-social behaviour prevention and management and management of the lease-end process.
- 50 properties had been refurbished by Ring Stones, with 13 available for re-let and a further 22 currently being prepared.

- Calico supported its customers and dedicated services to supporting customers through the roll-out of Universal Credit.
- The application process for applying for a Calico home was outlined and two case studies were read out.
- In terms of Calico's performance the following statistics were noted:
  - 96% of customers happy with the lettings process
  - 100% gas safety certificates
  - 95% routine repairs completed within 20 working days
  - 92% available rent collected
  - 87.25% available rent collection for customers claiming Universal Credit

## 8.2 Members and members of the public commented as follows:-

- Customers could pay their rent by a variety of methods including weekly, monthly and directly via their housing benefit.
- Services such as Acorn had become part of the Calico group.
- Arrears had risen in areas where Universal Credit had been introduced and intensive work was being carried out to support claimants. More arrears were expected with mass migration to Universal Credit. It was noted that debts were not written off and Calico worked with customers to collect the rents.
- It was confirmed that Calico used the B-with-Us service.
- The relationship with the Council had been challenging at first but was in a much better place than 12 months ago.
- The Chief Executives of the Council and Calico had met to review current arrangements and to look at mutual opportunities for social housing going forward.
- Turnover levels were discussed and out of 4500 homes there were currently only 77 voids. The bidding process for homes was clarified.
- Calico had supported the Syrian Refugee Programme and hoped to do so again next year.
- Calico was a values-led organisation and balanced its policies against the 'right thing to do'.
- It was confirmed that some of the remaining properties were being returned to owners. The biggest issue with condition of properties had been damp.
- Responsibility for the homes for continuing repair and rent roll collection lay with Calico.

### **Resolved:**

The update was noted and Calico were thanked for their time.

Note: Dawn Cardwell and Phil Seddon left the meeting.

## **9. QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT (APRIL-JUNE 2018)**

- 9.1 The Chair noted that the structure of the performance report was good and was still a work in progress; some targets and monitoring still required development.
- 9.2 The HR Manager introduced the report which provided members with an overview of the council's performance against its targets for April-June 2018. The format had

been reviewed to include 17 corporate projects which were monitored by monthly Programme Board meetings and targets had been linked to the corporate priorities. The 'RAG' (red, amber, green) status was clarified and it was noted that officers had attended the meeting to answer questions on their targets, if required. Members noted that it was nice to see officer names in the document and targets/comparables.

9.3 Comments were made on the report and queries were answered as follows:-

- Priority 1.2-1 – '3<sup>rd</sup> party service providers' was clarified and it was noted that a report would be at the next Cabinet meeting regarding additional services for enforcement work. It was noted that Civic Pride carried out incredible work and the availability of the litter picking equipment was helpful.
- Priority 1.4-1 – Recycling contamination issues were highlighted and education was taking place to tackle this.
- Priority 1.5-1 – Flood grant funding could only be used for that purpose.
- Priority 2.2-1 It was clarified that the 'Service Action' was missing a word and should read "Develop Digital Strategy to set direction and prioritise work needed to achieve *transformation*."
- Priority 2.3-3 – Clarification was given on the work being undertaken for a bid for Haslingden Town Centre. Meetings had taken place with traders and feedback from a previous bid had been taken on board.
- Priority 2.4-3 – Discussion took place on the Rawtenstall-Manchester rail link. This was a very long-term project and the work being undertaken to convince the Department for Transport to consider it a viable project was outlined. It was noted that in order for the project to be considered viable, then a 1:5 cost/benefit ratio must be achieved. November was the target for the results on the cost/benefit ratio to be clear. It was noted that it was not anticipated that the rail link could result in extra housing being built.
- Priority 2.6-2 – Clarification was provided on the progress of the Trail Head project and the negotiations taking place with LCC.
- Priority 3.2-1 – Discussion took place on community forums and an event had taken place to mark the end of the Living Well Living Better project. Similar events could be considered for the future.
- Priority 3.2-2 – Work was ongoing with regards to CCTV and mobile CCTV was being purchased to target fly-tipping hotspots. Phil Morton would be asked to send a briefing note to members once established. It was noted that a new Chief Inspector was being appointed and could be invited to O&S. Police representation was available at Neighbourhood Forums and O&S received an annual update.
- Priority 3.4-2 – Involvement in the Syrian Refugee Programme was clarified. It had been a struggle to find social housing within the time frame given and private rented had been sourced with Assured Shorthold Tenancies for a minimum term of a year. The Local Integration Fund was outlined and could only be awarded to a constituted group.
- Priority 3.6-1 – It was confirmed that the Works Employability Officer had engaged with Syrian Refugees as part of this project.
- Page 16, targets 2.3 through 2.8 – These targets had been included following meetings with officers and would be available in the Quarter 2 report.

- Page 17, planning targets – ‘Other’ planning applications were clarified as TPOs, extensions and prior notifications.
- Page 17, staff turnover – The Council’s small workforce contributed to the high turnover figures. Recruitment was an issue in some areas and it was noted that the number of vacancies was contained within financial reports to Cabinet. Agency/consultants were used in some circumstances, where a business case had been put forward.
- Page 18, complaints and compliments – There had been an increase in quarter 1 and this was due to online complaints signposted via the new website. The function to complain by post had not been removed. The procedure for logging complaints was clarified.
- Page 21, implications of homelessness legislation – There had been a 45% increase in enquiries to the service, which included both homelessness and advice cases. The obligations of the homelessness service were outlined. Resources were an issue and a temporary Housing Options Advisor had been recruited. A bid had also been submitted to extend a contract for a further 18 months.
- Three dispersed houses were being commissioned by LCC in partnership with the Council, singles are signposted to the Calico’s Gateway in Burnley and under 21s could be directed to PAC’s SafeSpace in Rawtenstall.
- It was noted that those items monitored by the Programme Board were shaded in a pink/lilac colour on the Q1 report. Some narrative should be included to clarify this.

**Resolved:**

1. The report was noted.

## **10. COUNCIL FEEBACK REVIEW AND LGO ENQUIRIES**

10.1 The Committee and Member Services Manager introduced the report which detailed feedback received by the Council in the form of compliments, formal complaints, and also Ombudsman enquiries during the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018.

- 93 compliments had been received with the majority of these being relation to a member of staff or a team (56). Legal and Democratic Services had received the highest of these comments which mostly pertained to Elections. A breakdown of the figures was highlighted on page 2 of the committee report.
- 109 formal complaints had been received with the majority being in relation to action, response or communication, bins/bin collection and council decision.
- Following feedback on last year’s report, actions had been put in place including attempting deal with the complainant directly to ensure the information is correct.
- No complaints had been received regarding the telephony system following changes implemented.
- Changes were planned to the refuse collection round workloads and to the staffing to reduce complaints.
- During 2017/18 the average response time to complaints was 9.5 working days which was within the target of 10 working days.

- 89 of the 109 complaints were resolved at stage 1 and there were 20 stage 2 reviews. Of the 20 stage 2 reviews 5 were subsequently referred to the Ombudsman.
- Of those 5 referrals 2 were closed after initial enquiries, and 3 were awaiting an Ombudsman decision and would be carried over into the 2018/2019 period, and appear as decisions in next year's figures.
- In relation to Ombudsman complaints 12 complaints and enquiries were received, which were detailed at 5.9. And the Ombudsman made 12 decisions which were detailed at 5.10, of these decisions the Ombudsman:
  - Referred 4 back to the Council as the customer had not made a formal complaint
  - Closed 4 after initial enquiries
  - Closed 1 as it was either incomplete or invalid
  - 3 complaints were investigated.
- Of the 3 investigations:
  - Two related to Environmental Services and Public Protection and Regulation.
  - One related to large items of rubbish on a piece of land and potential obstruction of a footpath – this was not upheld.
  - The other related to the processing of a hackney carriage licence and was upheld. All recommended actions have now been completed and the new policies which have been introduced will ensure that the issue is not likely to occur again.
  - The final investigation related to Corporate and Other Services and was upheld. This related to a payment of outstanding rent. Actions relating to this complaint have also been fully completed.
- The number of complaints received by the Ombudsman and the number of decisions made has reduced significantly when compared with the previous year

#### 10.2 Members and members of the public commented on the report as follows:-

- The report was very detailed and informative.
- When compared to the volume of contacts with the Council on a daily basis, the number of complaints was low in that context.
- The Local Government Ombudsman now covered social care, however social care was not within the Councils remit and would be passed onto the relevant authority.
- With regards to refuse collections, officers had kept members informed of any failed collections/rounds which had enabled them to keep residents updated.
- The Ombudsman had a large number of investigators and regular contact with the same people hardly ever occurred.

#### **Resolved:**

1. The report was noted.

## **11. REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES (HOME WORKING POLICY AND FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES)**

11.1 The HR Manager introduced the two policies. The first was a refresh of the Home Working Policy and the second was the Family Friendly Policy, which contained several existing policies which had been refreshed and amalgamated into one, overarching Family Friendly Policy.

11.2 Members and members of the public commented on the policy as follows:-

- Homeworking was supported where necessary but the impact on those in the office should be considered.
- The Council had a flexitime policy which allowed staff to balance their hours.
- Quiet rooms and working areas were available.
- It was noted that the version control would be updated before the policies went to Cabinet.

### **Resolved:**

1. That the Home Working Policy and Family Friendly Policies are recommended to Cabinet for approval
2. That should Cabinet approve the policies, that all future minor amendments to the policy are delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

## **12. ANNUAL EQUALITY REPORT 2017/18**

12.1 The HR Manager introduced the report which was an overview of equality information that the council was required to publish on an annual basis. The information submitted to this report was done on a voluntary basis. A further questionnaire would be circulated to staff this year. It was noted that there was an error in the councillor figures in the committee report and 38 councillors had been noted, when the correct figure was 36.

12.2 Members and members of the public commented as follows:-

- Did the ethnic mix of the staff reflect the local population? This information would be checked.

### **Resolved:**

That the update is noted.

## **13. THE FORWARD PLAN**

13.1 The Committee and Member Services Officer updated members on the forward plan and the agenda for the October meeting. The query raised by a member of the public would be answered directly.

**The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 8.30pm**