

## **RESOURCES AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, 2 MARCH 2020**

**PRESENT:-** Councillors Brian Mattock (Chair), Steve Allsopp, Matthew Courtliff, Claire Crilly, Robert Jandy, Adorabelle Shaikh, Timothy Swinyard and Rahul Tarar.

Also in attendance were Councillors David Renard (Leader of the Council) and Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Operational Excellence).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steve Weisinger (Vice-Chair) and Vinay Manro.

### **21. Declarations of Interest**

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

### **22. Minutes**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### **23. Public Question Time**

Mr Roy Worman, a resident of Haydon Wick, asked questions at the meeting in respect of:

- a) The number of online transactions having increased to 64%, all of which were completed successfully.
- b) How the proposed £6m of funding for the IT and Digital Strategy will help achieve the 85% goal of online take-up amongst other things.
- c) The 75% reduction in internal major incidents from 79 to the mid-20s.
- d) The demand for, and future proposals regarding, the automatic audio recording of public meetings at the Council.
- e) The 'Chat Bot' automated process currently on the Council's website (which aims to direct users to the correct page more quickly) and possible options for introducing and resourcing a live-chat function.
- f) That 87% of complaints are now being handled within ten days, showing that improved training, templates and processes are helping the Council reach service level agreement deadlines.

Councillor Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Operational Excellence), the Head of Digital and Business Change, the Head of IT Operations and the Head of Customer Services, Registrars and Bereavements responded to the questions at the meeting.

Mr Jim Boyd, a resident of Old Town, asked questions at the meeting relating to the review of leisure contracts, in particular the £2m and £1.5m one-off payments made by the Council to GLL for maintenance costs at the Health Hydro, and the expectation in the number of improvements and attractiveness to users that the proposed £7m spend may achieve at the site.

Councillor Williams responded to the questions at the meeting.

## **24. Digital Programme - successes and lessons learned**

The Committee considered a report providing an update on the progress made on the Digital Programme from October 2017 to April 2019. The report set out how the Digital Programme, as part of Organisational Excellence, had transformed the back-office and front-of-house services for residents, and had been a key part of delivering the Swindon Programme.

The Head of Digital and Business Change introduced the report and highlighted how the Programme had been led by the Digital Hub, focussing on the discovery, design and delivery of high volume, resource-heavy, paper based, or low Service Level Agreement type processes. He advised that over sixty processes across twenty service areas had been reviewed from beginning to end to improve efficiency. The Committee noted some of the Programme objectives achieved such as 95% of processes now being online (with 64% of transactions received in to the Council now coming through that route) and the reduction of printing from 15m to 6m copies a year. The Head of Digital and Business Change also referred to the lessons learnt from the Programme, which included increasing digital leadership, embedding continuous learning across the organisation, and utilising emerging technologies.

Following the presentation of the report, the following matters arose and were discussed:

- How 95% of the Council's processes are now offered online but only 64% of residents are choosing to use an online transaction to communicate with the Council. The Committee noted that the main gaps are within housing repair and green waste services where the significant proportion of customers still call the contact centre.
- Achieving a 60% reduction in printing and the plans to reduce this further to 1m copies a year, recognising the environmental benefits.
- How around a third of the £30m savings across the project as a whole were realised from the digitisation of services (in its broadest sense) and included the reduction of paper usage, improving processes and changing policies.
- The initial resistance from some service areas to the Programme and how this has been resolved.
- How the lead times for projects were being delayed by IT but that measures have been put in place to ensure that IT support for a system will already be in place before a project is started.
- The process issue whereby reported problems are showing as completed to the online user without the work having actually been undertaken yet. The Committee noted that the term 'closure of case' is used to show that the case has been referred to the relevant service area, meaning it has been closed on the case processing mechanism (which the online user can view) but the actual work still needs to take place.
- How communication with residents is being improved through the escalation process in the revised Complaints Policy, and the use of more customer-facing processes and functions.
- The management of spikes in service demands which enables the call centre to deal effectively with any subsequent increase in the volume of calls.
- How the numbers of full time employees has been increased within Customer

Services, with five vacancies currently being advertised within the service. The Committee noted that it takes around nine months to replace and train a new member of staff and so retention has become a priority.

- The challenges of improving recruitment and retention within the IT Team given the salary offers across the private sector, and the measures taken to address this such as the introduction of career progression and the opportunities provided to staff to learn new skills.

Resolved – To note the contents of the report.

## **25. IT and Digital Strategy**

The Committee considered a report outlining the Council's IT & Digital Strategy for 2020-2022. The report set out how a robust IT & Digital strategy is crucial to ensuring the Council delivers against the vision, priorities and pledges, and delivers modern services in an efficient and financially sustainable way.

The Head of IT Operations introduced the report and highlighted how the previous ICT Strategy had run from 2014-19. This had covered the in-sourcing of IT in 2016, the embedding of industry best practise, the building of a new website, the replacing of older business systems and hardware, along with networking changes. He confirmed that there has been a significant increase in user satisfaction following the implementation of this Strategy, as demonstrated via customer surveys.

The Committee was advised of the IT challenges over the next couple of years, which included IT availability, cyber security, cloud services and skills, and noted that approximately £6m of capital and £500k of revenue will be required to deliver the new Strategy.

Following the presentation of the report, the following matters arose and were discussed:

- Plans for the introduction of a progressive webapp, which would increase the functionality of the Council's website and allow users to use the website like a mobile app. The Committee noted the work already undertaken to build the functionality of an app in to the Council's current online forms and processes, and the mobile first policy of Jadu, which provides the platform the Council uses.
- How the Council, following on from the cyberattack at Redcar and Cleveland Council, has been using learning points provided by the Local Government Association and the services of the National Cyber Security Centre, and has also demonstrated Public Sector Network Compliance – part of which involves 'ethical hacking' to demonstrate where there are any issues.
- How data sharing can be used to address demand management in services such as adult social care by allowing officers to be counter-intuitive and deal with issues in a more sophisticated way.
- That the proposed £500k revenue as set out in the report will be used to purchase the licenses required to run the different software needed in order to deliver the Strategy over its two year lifespan.
- How the upgrade during 2019 to the network infrastructure, both on the Civic Campus and at satellite sites, will support the proposals within the Strategy and also cope with any future growth and demand.
- The Committee noted that this Strategy will now be presented to Cabinet for

consideration.

Resolved – To note the content of the IT & Digital Strategy.

## **26. Customer Service - The Plan for 2020**

The Committee considered a report setting out the progress of the Customer Services function in 2019 and the Council's plan for 2020 and beyond.

The Head of Customer Services, Registrars and Bereavements introduced the report and highlighted some key achievements during 2019. These included: the modernised Customer Service reception opening to the public; the Council's Web Content Team having become a core part of the Customer Services department (which has significantly improved the connection between customers and the content / usability of the website), and; a new Customer Feedback and Complaints Handling Policy having been implemented with a significantly improved response time to complaints being seen as a result.

The Committee was advised of the focus for Customer Services during 2020. This included: ensuring that residents are at the centre of everything that the Council does, particularly when designing and redesigning services; making sure that customers are kept up-to-date with all the information they require about issues they have reported; continuing to improve and develop the online processes by using a range of emerging technologies such as chatbots, smart speaker skills and artificial intelligence, and; continuing to work with colleagues on the handling and analysis of complaints.

Following the presentation of the report, the following matters arose and were discussed:

- The extent to which feedback from frontline staff is taken into account when designing or redesigning services.
- How the Business Improvement Team supports those services undertaking improvement projects requiring service redesign, and how the Performance Team look after data and management information. The Committee noted that there is an expectation on managers now that continuous improvement should be part of their day to day job, using management information to identify where efficiencies could be made.

Resolved – (1) To note the contents of the report.

(2) To note the significant progress made in the development of the Council's Customer Services function over the course of 2019.

(3) To note the areas of focus for 2020.

(4) To note the nature of demand for Council services, and how it affects provision of good customer services.

## **27. Review of Leisure services**

The Committee considered a report that set out information on the Council's leisure contracts. Councillor Keith Williams (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Operational Excellence) introduced the report and referred to the £1.5m annual revenue savings resulting from GLL having taken on its leisure contract, as well as the millions GLL has invested in to the facilities in Swindon. Councillor Williams also

highlighted that Highworth and Broome Manor golf courses had been leased to Twigmarket, with the operator now stating that the course at Highworth is no longer viable. The Committee noted that the operator has a duty of responsibility to the Council after the surrender of the lease and until 2028, and that preliminary conversations are taking place with Highworth Town Council regarding future possible options for the site.

Following the presentation of the report, the following matters arose and were discussed:

- How any options appraisal for an asset transfer of the Highworth site cannot place firm restrictions on the use of the facility, noting that any change of use would have to go through the planning process.
- The use of the £1.5m funding from the Council (for essential backlog maintenance) to attract match funding for generating the £7m required for the long term sustainability of the Health Hydro.

Resolved – To note the contents of the report.

## **28. Work Programme 2019-2020**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer setting out the topics for inclusion in its 2019/2020 Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019 and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

Members of the Committee positively commented on the theming of each meeting across the year and suggested that members of this Committee, in the new Municipal Year, be recommended to continue this approach. It was also suggested that a visit to the new Contact Centre be arranged for members in the new Municipal Year. The Committee also discussed the possibility of, in future, adding an item to its last meeting of the year to look at potential items which could help populate the Work Programme for the Committee to consider at its first meeting of the next year, and requested that officers be asked to investigate this.

Resolved – That the Work Programme for 2019/20 be noted.