

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4(a)

Minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory and Support Services Committee held in the Council Chamber, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Monday 20th October 2014 at 4:30pm

PRESENT

Councillor Anna Bailey (Chairman)
Councillor Allen Alderson
Councillor Colin Fordham
Councillor Jeremy Friend-Smith (as Substitute for Councillor Lorna Dupré)
Councillor Tony Goodge (as Substitute for Councillor Derrick Beckett)
Councillor Tony Parramint
Councillor Charles Roberts
Councillor Mike Rouse
Councillor Hazel Williams, MBE
Councillor Sue Willows

OFFICERS

Kathy Batey – Head of HR & Facilities Management
Mark Chadwick – Principal ICT Officer
Rob Fysh – Team Leader Building Control
Linda Grinnell – Financial Services Manager
John Hill – Chief Executive
Emmanuel Orekogbe - Accountant
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
Annette Wade – Customer Services Manager

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Lis Every
Councillor Gareth Wilson

16. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

17. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sue Austen, Derrick Beckett and Lorna Dupré.

Councillor Jeremy Friend-Smith substituted for Councillor Lorna Dupré for this meeting. Councillor Tony Goodge substituted for Councillor Derrick Beckett for this meeting.

18. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

19. **MINUTES**

The Chairman noted that a report had been expected back on the Handyperson Service for consideration, so this should be added to the Committee's forward agenda plan for its July 2015 meeting.

Councillor Hazel Williams informed the Committee that the matter had been delayed, as the County Council were waiting for a response from Huntingdonshire District Council.

It was resolved,

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1st July 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

20. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman did not make any announcements.

21. **SERVICE DELIVERY PLANS**

The Committee received a report, reference P93 previously circulated, detailing the proposed Services Plans for Services under the remit of the Committee.

The Chief Executive, in introducing the Service Plans, stated that a common approach had been taken with all the Service Plans and that they were working documents. It was important that the Committee considered them and raised service issues for consideration by the officers. The colouring of the reports was important in highlighting their core values. The intention was to focus on the key issues for the forthcoming year and to plan a forward agenda, so that this would lead to relevant performance indicators.

The Chairman, in referring to the Introduction, asked that it was worth mentioning how and when the Committee would receive reports back on progress. As some service plans would not be agreed until November, it would be better to complete a year-end report next March. Although this would mean the Committee would not see these reports at its June/July meeting, the service plans would be monitored.

An excellent approach to the service plans had been taken resulting with an 'at-a-glance' feel to the plans. They showed who was involved, staffing levels and what the services aimed to achieve. However, the plans should also include details of the service lead officers and the relevant Member Champions. There were a lot of typographical errors in some of the service plans that needed to be tidied up. On page 9, a better title than 'Improvement review' should be used. Councillor Mike Rouse suggested 'Progress Review'.

The Chairman asked if there would be a review of external communications and where this would fit in the service plans. The Chief Executive explained that this issue would be dealt with by the new Assistant Director. It had come via the Corporate Governance and Finance Committee and related to the contract with the County Council. Although there was no separate service plan for this, this issue would be looked at.

Building Control Service Plan

The Team Leader Building Control advised the Committee the Building Control consisted of five members of staff, who had all been consulted on the service plan, as had the Service Champion Councillor Derrick Beckett. The focus would be on delivering an excellent service and there were no key issues, as the service was reactive.

Councillor Allen Alderson asked that if outside approved inspectors were not able to enforce building regulations people though people were paying for this, would taxpayers have to pick up the bill as the Council had a statutory duty to ensure this happened? In reply, the Committee was informed that local authorities had to enforce the regulations, although the cost could be claimed back. In the last ten years there had been no occasions when this had happened.

Councillor Anna Bailey questioned whether the service could charge for its services, although it was meant to be non-fee earning. What would be the consequences if the targets for responding to demolition notices were missed? Must the service have to respond to out-of-hours calls? Was the target relating to application acknowledgements conforming to performance and was it ambitious enough? Why was the target for plan checking set at 50%? Was the 55% target for building control services used on applications correct?

The Team Leader stated that the service had signed up to an advisory group, which advised about what charges could be made, for example, charges could be made for work done regarding dangerous buildings. There was a statutory duty for local authorities to be notified about demolitions, as the service had to notify neighbours and other statutory bodies. With all out-of-hours calls the intention was to respond immediately, as there was a very high risk to the Council if this was not done. Systems were in place for this, including agreements with other neighbouring authorities. The acknowledgements for application were completed quickly, as this was an 'easy win'. There were a number of issues around plan checking, even though there was a statutory requirement for these to be done in five weeks. Other companies did not have this duty. They did have to consult the Fire Service, but any delays by them could mess up our figures. There was also the possibility that legislative changes could affect the service's performance. The target for building control services used on applications should read 50% and there was competition for this service from national companies.

Councillor Charles Roberts queried the services' involvement in the safety advisory group. It was revealed that the service were involved in numerous

events to advise on the construction of temporary structures, stages or marquees, such as at Newmarket July racecourse or at the Lodestar Festival. By attending the group meetings the service became aware of upcoming events.

Councillor Hazel Williams asked whether the service had a choice rather than having to break even. The Team Leader Building Control stated that the service was not allowed to make either a profit or a loss.

Councillor Charles Roberts offered his congratulations on the service's performance, particularly as it had to compete for its market share.

The service plan was agreed, subject to minor amendments.

Customer Services Service Plan

The Customer Services Manager advised the Committee that the Service delivery Champion Councillor Elaine Griffin-Singh and the team had been involved in drawing up the service plan. The key issues for the service related to a review of the service, the development of a Customer Service Charter, the implementation of a new self-service portal and improvements to the reception area.

Councillor Mike Rouse hoped this would address some concerns he had about the service provided in Reception for visitors. There was a lack of 'human signposting' to help visitors. The service would be monitored, but would this be done by a human and the use of a factual database? The Customer Services Manager agreed with those concerns and plans were being prepared to introduce a 'meeter-greeter' and to gauge customer views from the point of contact.

Councillor Allen Alderson had been contacted by people who had contacted the Council with their problems but had not received an answer in reply from Customer Services. This had happened enough times to be worrying. It also appeared telephone calls were taking longer to be answered. The Committee was re-assured that the situation, where customers were not getting a response, was being monitored. A message was played on telephone calls, giving legal and data-protection reasons for the delay, but 90% were answered within 20 seconds. The scripts that the staff were using was being reviewed, so that the staff could resolve calls at the point of contact.

Councillor Charles Roberts thought that judging customer satisfaction would be quite difficult, as it would be difficult to separate satisfaction with Customer Services staff and the overall Council response. The staff are fantastic but sign posting was needed.

The Chief Executive said that this was common problem for support services. A measure of satisfaction corporately was not wanted but this service was measured on things beyond its control. Therefore, it was important to identify satisfaction surveys for individual services.

Councillor Jeremy Friend-Smith noted that the Council was being fined for non-compliance over payment cards and hoped steps were being taken to resolve that. The Customer Services Manager explained that card payments were being taken but cards should not be handled by staff. A new chip-and-pin service would be introduced to rectify the situation.

Councillor Anna Bailey asked what the plan was concerning the transfer of Anglia revenue Partnership staff and whether all staff would be able to provide all services. Did resolving issues at the first point of contact include only members of the public or other people, such as members or from external partners? It appeared ambitious to implement the new customer service portal by January. The Committee was advised that once the staff were transferred over everybody would be expected to multi-task. All issues would be resolved at the first point of contact, when possible, irrespective of who called in. Although there was an existing portal, a new portal was needed and would be in time for when the new Customer Relationship Management system.

Councillor Hazel Williams reminded the Committee that when the Customer relationship Management system was brought in it was supposed to deal incoming calls to ensure none were missed, as previously the departments did not know if any had been missed. The Customer Services Manager stated this would be measured in the new system. The Chief Executive pointed out that there were two different issues involved: the point of contact and the back office staff who dealt with more complex matters.

The service plan was agreed.

Financial Services Service Plan

The Financial Services Manager advised the Committee that the service plan had been produced by the Financial Team and Councillor Gareth Wilson, their Service Delivery Champion. A lot of the work done was cyclical and the main objectives this year were to implement a new bank contract and identify tenancy fraud cases. The Council had been informed that the Co-Op Bank, the Council's current bank service provider, no longer wished to provide those services. This resulted in a re-tendering process to find a new bank provider, as from next April. Unfortunately the Co-Op Bank did not want to help by running the current bank account in parallel with the new bank account. This would result in a lot of additional work, to get everybody to pay into the new bank account rather than the old. The Council would work with local housing associations to help identify housing fraud.

The key decisions to be taken this year relate to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the finance for the new leisure centre.

Councillor Gareth Wilson stated that much was going on, a lot of which was regular work which had to be done correctly. The Council accounts had been completed on time and had received an unqualified report. A lot of people paid the Council by direct debit, though some paid by standing order or via BACS. This meant that some had to amend the bank details once the new bank account was being used, otherwise payments would still go into the Co-OP

Bank account. This would cause some hassle and, as this was very significant change and a very big job, problems could be expected.

With regard tenancy fraud, the Council would link in with Sanctuary and other housing associations as around 2% of all tenancies were involved in fraud.

Councillor Hazel Williams knew housing associations worked on fraud and was unsure why the Council would want to get involved. What benefit would it be for the Council? The Financial Services Manager explained that the people committing these offences were likely to also commit housing benefit fraud as well.

In reply to Councillor Jeremy Friend-Smith's query, it was revealed that if people paid by direct debit they need do nothing. There were potential budget problems but hopefully by April the problems would have been ironed out. The service was liaising with the Co-Op to identify relevant people.

The service plan was endorsed.

Human Resources and Facilities Service Plan

The Head of HR and Facilities Management advised the Committee that office services, the document management system (DMS) and reprographics were part of Facilities. Between them they dealt with emergency planning, corporate health and safety, The Grange, mail, printing and graphic design. The DMS and Reprographics services would be reviewed to see if they were fit-for-purpose.

Human Resources had to contend with the implementation of the new staffing structure, including contractual changes and updating all policies, looking at internal communication, staff training, pay and grading, attendance management and employee engagement. In relation to this, the staff survey would be replaced by quarterly surveys on specific subjects.

A number of big decisions would be needed on home working, internal communication, business continuity and updates on the Pay Review.

Service Champion Councillor Jeremy Friend-Smith was aware of the difficulties faced by this small department. Su Field, Personal Assistant, had been very helpful in supporting Human Resources (HR) due to the absence of one HR officer. It was good that internal communication was identified as it needed to be looked at and improved. The smaller staff surveys would help provide a greater response, as clearly the massive ones did not. These surveys would be focussed to encourage staff to get involved.

Councillor Charles Roberts asked about the scope for home working. This could be a positive thing but had to be planned properly. So there should be a business case or plan for every piece of home-working. He was pleased with the proposed internal communications strategy, but this should be linked to all the service plans.

The Head of HR and Facilities Management stated that potential home working was being reviewed, as a pilot scheme had been run some time ago. It was not proposed that staff be allowed to work from home permanently but only on an ad-hoc basis. The review would see the effect on current working practices and whether any other staff could benefit, as well as the Council. Two surveys on this had been sent out: one for staff currently using the system and one for staff with the potential to use it. The review would be open to everyone.

Councillor Tony Goodge consider home working a way forward but was concerned how the departments would be covered with staff away. Changes in the organisation had resulted in some agency staff being taken on, which cost money. Councillor Anna Bailey thought that home-working needed to be embraced, as people could be more productive, but it would need close monitoring.

The Chief Executive stated that home working was not just about that. There had to be a balance between individual and staff responses to customers. Home-working would be a challenge on how to deal with customers. A comprehensive approach would be needed.

Councillor Hazel Williams was appalled that HR had only one senior officer and one support officer to do all this work. The Council had gone through a big upheaval over its staffing, which had a knock-on effect on Council policies. So there was a worry about the capacity to deal with these issues. The Committee was informed that the Council had tried to recruit additional staff when one HR officer had her first maternity leave, but without success. This time it was felt that with more administration support internally the remaining two officers could manage. So far this was working.

Councillor Mike Rouse suggested one outcome could be a better understanding of what people did. This would hopefully provide the ability to be flexible, so staff could offer support, which would improve things. The Council could not afford to take staff on if other staff were underemployed.

Councillor Anna Bailey wondered whether the recruitment of staff should be included in the service plan. Councillor Bailey mentioned the target of sick days and suggested that staff on long term sick leave be excluded from the calculations and that the target be reduced to mirror the private sector. The Head of HR and Facilities Management agreed to include a review of recruitment and the suggestion regarding sick days.

The service plan was agreed subject to the suggested amendments.

Information Technology (IT) Service Plan

The Principal ICT Officer advised that the Service Plan had been drafted by the IT team and had been helpful in identifying the service provided. The Service Delivery Champion had been briefed and invited to quarterly meetings with the team. The IT team would be working in partnership with King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council to provide a GIS service. This Council had been approached by King's Lynn & West Norfolk, as they had not been able to

replace their own GIS officer. All Council services IT requirements would be reviewed, including those for Members. The Street Name and Numbering service would need additional resources because of the north Ely development. There would also be a review of the ICT service, to look at future provision.

Councillor Anna Bailey understood that although the Council was a small authority the IT team supported a large number of different software programmes. The review of the ICT service would indicate the best way to provide service needs in a co-ordinated manner. What plan could be expected? The Principal ICT Officer explained that the IT team had always focussed on the here-and-now and had a very long project list. The review would look at what was needed and how this could be delivered. The Heads of Service would be met, to find out what they hoped to achieve from the IT systems and how the IT team could help that.

Councillor Mike Rouse questioned whether Members still had to use a dingle for remote access, as the County Council had abandoned its use of them and used another system. The Principal ICT Officer advised that the Members still had to use the current method, as it was fit-for-purpose for doing pieces of work. The County Council had taken a step on with their new method and this was something that this Council could look at.

Councillor Sue Willow stated that she had trouble using her dongle as she could not gain access via her Apple applications. The Committee was informed that the IT team did not have the resources to be able to test all platforms, so any Member having problems needed to liaise with the IT team.

Councillor Charles Roberts agreed a fundamental review of the IT service was needed, once the new Assistant Director was in post. The Apple platform was widely used, so the problems accessing it should be addressed. He queried why Street Naming and Numbering was within the IT service. The Principal ICT Officer informed Members that this service was sitting with the GIS officer, who was responsible for plotting land and properties, who was part of the IT team. The software developer was looking at the Apple issue and the IT team were awaiting a quick response.

The service plan was agreed.

It was resolved:

That the enclosed Service Plans for 2014-15 be approved subject to the following amendments:

- Building Control Service Plan – subject to minor amendments;
- Human Resources and Facilities – the Draft Communications Strategy should be renamed the Draft *Internal* Communications Strategy; a review about staff recruit to be included; sick days to be calculated excluding staff on long-term sick leave and the target be reduced to mirror the private sector.

22. **BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee received a report, reference P94 previously circulated, that updated Members on the Committee's financial position for 2014/15.

The Accountant advised the Committee that the increased capital expenditure had been approved for 2013/14 but had slipped, so this would be used to fund the current overspend.

It was resolved:

- (i) That it be noted that this Committee had a projected underspend of £19,718 compared to its approved revenue budget of £6,329,400;
- (ii) That it be noted that this Committee had a projected overspend of £403,100 compared to its approved capital budget of £498,494 and that this overspend was funded from the 2013/14 slippage budget.

23. **ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP MINUTES**

The Committee received copies of the minutes of the Anglia Revenues Partnership Joint Committee meetings of 30th June 2014 and 11th September 2014.

It was resolved:

That the minutes be noted.

24. **FORWARD AGENDA PLAN**

The Committee received its forward agenda plan.

It was resolved:

That the forward agenda plan be noted.

25. **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

It was resolved:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining agenda item no. 11 because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the items there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1, 2 and 4 of Part I Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

26. **EXEMPT JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE NOTES**

It was resolved:

That the notes of the Joint Consultative committee be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.24pm.