

**CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
13 July 2016**

PRESENT: Councillor Donald McQueen - Chairman; Councillor Stephen Bartlett - Vice-Chairman; Councillors Derek Borthwick, Ian Clark, Nick Rose and Gill Seymour.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor John Beesley - Leader of the Council, Chair of the Cabinet and Resources, Councillor Pat Oakley.

OFFICERS:

Jane Portman, Deputy Chief Executive,
Tanya Coulter, Service Director, Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer
Tom Rennie, Interim Service Director, Transition
Maria Bourton, Major Programmes Director
Lorraine Mealings, Head of Housing and Customer
Stuart Walters, Customer Contact Manager

The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm

Note: To see a copy of the public reports that were considered by the Committee at this meeting please visit:

<http://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/CouncilDemocratic/CouncilMeetings/CommitteeMeetings/CorporateServicesOverviewandScrutinyPanel/2016/07/13/CorporateServicesOverviewandScrutinyPanel13-Jul-2016.aspx>

SECTION I - BUSINESS RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL

No items

SECTION II - BUSINESS DECIDED UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

24. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Laurence Fear, Gina Mackin and Councillor Anne Filer, Cabinet Member for Corporate Efficiency.

25. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute Members notified for this meeting.

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26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

27. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Panel reviewed the minutes of the meeting held on 6 April 2016 and considered the action points arising from the meeting.

It was acknowledged that in respect of Clause 22 of the minutes of the meeting held on 6 April 2016 - Developing Plans for the changes and devolution in Local Government it was acknowledged that there would be a special meeting in due course.

DECISION MADE:

1. That the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 6 April 2016 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.
2. That the action points arising from the above meetings were agreed.

28. PUBLIC ISSUES

A Public Questions

The Panel was advised that a public question had been submitted and with the agreement of the Panel the question was read out by the Head of Democracy. The Chairman asked the Monitoring Officer to provide advice on the question. The Panel was advised that the question put was difficult to respond to and related to a planning issue. The Monitoring Officer reported that the Panel was not constituted to consider general planning matters.

DECISION MADE:

The Panel unanimously agreed that it was not appropriate to respond to the question and asked officers to advise the resident of the outcome.

B Deputations

There were none.

C Petitions

There were none.

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29. CUSTOMER AND DIGITAL BY DEFAULT - DBD

The Panel considered a report on the current provision and strategic approach in managing customer contacts including how different approaches have been adopted to focus on the diverse set out of customer groups and their differing expectations. Members had also been circulated with an addendum which set out a brief summary of the current Customer Strategy as context.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the addendum and sought clarification on the customer needs analysis and funding arrangements for the Customer Strategic review. The Head of Housing and Customer explained that a detailed plan was being developed which would include gathering the relevant data. She noted that the development of a new strategy would be project managed.

The Chairman sought clarification on the use of a distributed model compared to a centrally focussed approach and asked how the Council had reached the current position. The Major Programmes Director reported on ensuring that the offer was reflective of the needs of the customer - for example the Kinson Hub provided such an opportunity for tenants and centralising this service would not be in the best interests of the customer. She explained that there would be implications in bringing all 'customer front doors' into one location. The Panel was advised of the 'golden number' which was an approach used by some local authorities but this option created telephone queues. The Major Programmes Director commented on Digital by Default which tracked customer needs. A Member sought clarification on what resources were needed to track the use of a central number and email addresses. The Major Programmes Director explained that following the introduction of DBD it was expected that the Lagan system would be replaced by Christmas. She explained that a consideration was the wider change initiatives and the options appraisals. Members were advised that if this was undertaken now this would unravel a number of systems and team methods of working only to change again for a linked up system. The Chairman suggested that the time for change could be for the proposed new authority.

A Member asked why the Customer Service was located in the Housing Service Unit as he felt that due to the importance of the service it should be stand alone. The Leader explained that Customer sits in the portfolio for Corporate Efficiency. The Head of Housing and Customer explained that customer sits alongside housing within the Housing and Communities Service Unit. She explained that housing delivers a number of services through the contact system and there was similar activity in terms of fielding high volumes of calls. The Deputy Chief Executive had also noted that the change had enabled some management efficiencies.

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The Chairman referred to the 5 services that initially formed the contact centre and sought clarification on whether these were the appropriate services. The Major Programmes Director reported that as the officer who led on the business case submitted to Cabinet and led the Service that there was a consideration in the context of the business needs of the service and potential economies of scale and knowledge of officers. The Deputy Chief Executive reported that there was a high level response through Adult Social Care. She explained that a paper had been submitted to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel as specialists needed to be making appropriate decisions. The process was being reviewed and it was proposed that a pilot scheme would be introduced in September providing a triage system. The Panel was invited to visit Care Direct to see how the system operated. The Deputy Chief Executive reported that as the Council moves forward with more austerity there was a necessity to continue to keep the approach under review. This was one of the many reasons that Customer was reviewed to ensure that management efficiencies could be identified.

The Head of Housing and Customer highlighted through Customer the opportunity to enable financial efficiencies. A Member asked how each issue was costed and why the appropriate service area was not billed. The Major Programmes Director reported that historically an internal recharge arrangement had not operated. She explained that the 'cost to serve' should be known and as an example work was being done in respect of parking. The Chairman acknowledged the need to look at the 'cost to serve'. The Major Programmes Director reported that we do not have the costs of face to face v telephone v online capabilities. She explained that online was cheaper however it was not clear what was included and there was an opportunity to develop an internal mechanism.

The Chairman asked for the approach on the use of systems and the history behind the choices made. In addition the Vice-Chairman asked for clarification on the direction of travel for the Council and if there had been a strategic analysis on what the Council wanted to achieve. The Major Programmes Director commented on the Customer Service transformation and the appetite to reduce the number of 'front doors' and rely on DBD. She highlighted that the review and the customer expectations need to challenge the Council's appetite. Members were informed that there was an opportunity to capture information 60% of usage which was online. The Head of Housing and Customer reported that it was early in the process with a work programme being developed in this financial year. The Panel was informed that capability would allow the Council to change its customer approach. The Leader reported that the philosophy for reducing the number of front doors was how the Council manages access for residents and explained that options needed to be considered carefully. He highlighted the need to ensure that the Council must not fail in its principle obligation to provide the best solution for residents and be accessible to the widest variety of residents who cannot and do not wish to communicate through IT.

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The Chairman highlighted that the Council was a customer orientated and focussed organisation with a strong customer ethos and he supported the above approach and the proposed efficiencies.

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that there were different channels of communications. She explained that there were a high level of contacts through Children's Services and most were via the telephone. The Panel was informed that decisions needed to be made quickly and therefore a multi-agency safeguarding hub had been established at Poole Police Station. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that there was an opportunity for the Panel to look at this model or work jointly with the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel on any future proposals.

A Member asked for an audit of all customer 'front doors' and who would undertake this piece of work. Officers commented on the use of such an audit and the resources required. The Service Director, Legal and Democratic suggested that one way forward would be to take up this issue with the Head of Internal Audit as a governance issue. The Chairman requested that an assessment of the work needed was undertaken before any action was taken. The Customer Contact Manager, in response to a question, explained that there was a list of sites and services provided which was approximately 80 sites but this may need to be updated. The Chairman commented on knowing the appropriate contact points and how they were accessed. The Deputy Chief Executive reported that residents will contact individual officers as they may not know the normal routes of access. The Council would always ensure that this opportunity was not denied. The Leader commented on the level of direct enquiries that his office receives and deals with.

The Chairman referred to the telephone system and asked if it was fit for purpose or if it needed to be upgraded across the Council. The Interim Service Director, Transition reported that the telephone system does need to be replaced. He explained that IT together with the Business Change team will be working with services to understand business need to provide a system with longevity and capability in the context of the changing government landscape. The Customer Contact Manger reported that the switchboard was not fit for purpose due to operational changes and periodically there were occasions where calls would be stuck in the system. Officers, in response to a question, reported on the telephone usage and training within the organisation in providing access to customers. The Customer Contact Manager commented on the Customer Care Standards/Management Development Training which was being provided to frontline staff and would be rolled out across the Council. The Service Director Legal and Democratic reported on the review being undertaken by HR on customer training, dealing with customer complaints and monitoring follow up.

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The Chairman asked for clarification on the future development of DBD. The Major Programmes Director reported that the DBD team were working hard on the relaunch of the DBD process and to extend the suite of capabilities and support provided to services.

The Chairman highlighted the importance of Customer services and making sure that appropriate tools and gateways were available for access to services. He took the opportunity of congratulating the Council on achieving a satisfaction rate of 95%.

DECISION MADE:

1. That having considered and commented as above on the Officers report the Panel receive an update on the strategic direction of Customer and the relaunched Digital by Default.
2. That Members consult the Customer Contact Manager if they wish to visit the Customer Contact Centre.

30. VEXATIOUS AND UNREASONABLY PERSISTANT COMPLAINANTS

Members considered a report reviewing the operation of the policy after a 12 month period as requested by the Panel on 29 July 2015.

The Customer Contact Manager explained that the Panel at its meeting in July 2015 had considered the revised Council Complaints Policy and referred the policy to the Corporate Management Team for approval and roll out. In doing so the Panel agreed to undertake a review on the operation of the policy in a year. Members were advised that the Corporate Management Team had approved the policy and it became operational in September 2015. The Customer Contact Manager explained that following the introduction of the new Complaint Policy 2 persons had been deemed vexatious and or unreasonably persistent and neither had appealed against the decision to apply restrictions. Members were informed that in line with the policy a further two persons had their restrictions reviewed and lifted.

The Vice-Chairman referred to paragraph 6 of the Policy and asked if information had been provided on BIZ. The Customer Contact Manager reported that there was a dedicated area on BIZ including the policy and guidance together with details of contact officers on complaints.

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The Vice-Chairman highlighted the enforcement section in the policy whereby the Service Director Legal and Democratic and the Monitoring Officer were the same person and therefore could be escalating to themselves. It was suggested that if a complaint related to the Service Director Legal and Democratic the escalation would be to the Executive Director responsible for that service area. The Service Director Legal and Democratic confirmed that the above was implicit and supported the amendment to the policy.

DECISION MADE:

That following the review the Panel endorses the policy, and congratulates officers, subject to recommending to the Corporate Management Team the suggested amendment as outlined above.

31. KIER CONTRACT UPDATE

The Panel considered a report updating on the transition of services previously delivered through the Partnership Agreement by Kier which came back into Council control on 1 June 2016.

The Service Director, Transition reported that services returned to Council control as planned on 1 June 2016. Members were informed that a total of 244 staff returned but 8 Kier employees who worked in either the Partnership Management Team or held national roles did not. The Service Director explained that it was a delicate period leading up to the transfer but clear focus and detailed planning ensured the overall objective of a smooth return of service with Kier staff and Council staff fully consulted.

The Panel was informed that since the transfer on 1 June there have been no problems of significance. The Service Director reported that the Council was now in the stabilisation phase of the project which would last until the end of July where the key objectives were to ensure there was no significant degradation of delivered service and that plans were in place to review and improve the services from 1 August.

Members were advised that to ensure there was appropriate comparisons the Council decided to maintain the same 33 KPIs for each service area that were in place prior to the transfer. The Service Director reported that there were only 2 KPIs in the FM Service with an amber status, as they were prior to the transfer, and plans were in place with the relevant officers to address these KPIs and improve the status to green. Members were informed that the KPIs provided an early indication that the services continue to be well managed and were stable.

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The Service Director reported that the 3rd phase commences on 1 August. He outlined some examples of improvements being worked on which included:

- Indexing of HR Records to make searching for documents easier.
- A small team which has been created to examine process improvement regarding employee starters, movers and leavers.
- New service desk system to be implemented on 25 July which has resulted in avoiding costs of £20k a month.
- Approval for the replacement of the FM Asset & Property Management systems.

Members were informed that budgets have been allocated to each service area and would be reviewed in November following the completion of the Improvement phase of the project. The Service Director reported that the savings targets for the current year and next year had been secured.

The Panel was advised that the Contracts & Commercial Team, especially Sarah Good and Linda Krywald had completed the 3rd party contract register and almost finalised the position for 300 pre payments claimed by Kier. Members noted that work would now continue on establishing the priority 3rd party contracts for re-tendering.

The Service Director advised the Panel that the Council had already suggested a process of 'expert determination' to Kier to reach a common interpretation of the contract position regarding exits costs. He reported that the Council had received a 'final settlement account' from Kier which was currently being analysed in detail by the Councils Contacts and Commercial Team and a response to this account would be submitted to Kier before the end of July. Members were advised that the Council remained highly confident about its position regarding exit costs.

A Member referred to historic data relating to creditor payments and asked what was the current situation. The Service Director reported that creditors had moved into the procurement team and this issue was being reviewed during the stabilisation phase. The Service Director clarified the position on the 10 work streams and the 5 service areas.

The Service Director reported that every team had been visited following the transition of services and staff morale was high. He explained that officers understood the final phase and were looking to improve services. Members were informed that grading profiles were currently being assessed and HR and IT were keen to reskill staff. The Deputy Chief Executive referred to a recent visit she had made to the HR team with Councillor Anne Filer. She felt that staff were pleased to be back with the Council and there was a coherence between HR Partners and payroll and better support for staff.

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The Service Director, Transition commented on the next phase which would involve the review of the organisation structure and the roles required to deliver services including considering service standards. Officers confirmed that the expected level of savings had been secured. The Service Director, Transition commented on the ongoing work to look at the opportunity of reducing the number of suppliers which would be investigated by IT as part of the overall strategy.

Members were updated on the rollout of Office 365 for officers and Members.

The Leader commented on the project and the team approach in achieving objectives. He referred to the Partnership Steering Group and the role fulfilled by Members and officers. The Leader paid tribute to many officers who were part of the team. He also commented on the Leadership of Jane Portman and Tom Rennie and the pleasure of being part of the team.

The Chairman congratulated the Council on the decision and praised and thanked the officer team.

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that the Audit and Governance Committee would review the risks at its meeting on 27 July 2016.

DECISION MADE:

That a further report by way of update and assurance be received by the Panel in October 2016.

32. WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

The Panel considered its work programme for 2016/17.

Members were advised of the proposed Special meeting for the item on the proposed new Unitary Authority.

Members acknowledged the potential need to look at the date of the next meeting of the Panel and to consider the start time.

The following items were also highlighted for consideration and potential inclusion on the Work Programme.

- Work of Dorset County Pension Fund - project Brunel
- Bournemouth Group Companies
- BH Live financial elements

DECISION MADE:

That the work programme be agreed subject the above action.

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Councillor Gill Seymour arrived at 6.15 pm

Councillor Pat Oakley arrived at 6.35 pm

The meeting closed at 8.05 pm

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