

ITEM 4

Commenced: 6.00pm
Concluded: 8.23pm

RESOURCES AND GOVERNANCE BOARD 15 OCTOBER 2012

Present Councillor L Winter (Chair)
 Councillors Ashburner, Davis, Radford, Roberts, Stanton and Tittley

Councillor Roberts was absent for consideration minute number 25/12 and part of minute number 24/12. Councillors Tittley and L Winter were absent for part of minute number 25/12.

17/12 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Carr and Sandhu.

18/12 Late items introduced by the Chair

There were no late items.

19/12 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

20/12 Minutes of the meeting held on 20 August 2012

The minutes were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21/12 Call-in

There were no items.

22/12 Forward Plan

The board considered the Forward Plan published on 9 October 2012 and noted that there were two relevant items, namely reference numbers 18/12 and 34/12.

Resolved to note the Forward Plan.

23/12 Customer Management and Benefits and Exchequer Services

A presentation was received from the Director of Customer Management. The

Director highlighted the services provided by their department, including:

- Benefit;
- Welfare Reform, Subsidy and Financial Control;
- Derby Direct;
- Local Taxation; and
- the Transactional Service Centre.

The Director outlined the composition, caseload and performance attributes of each service area. Following substantial statutory changes to welfare, the board was informed that the directorate was expecting a transition in caseload. It was reported that the work undertaken by the directorate was largely transactional in nature. In response to the need to deliver greater efficiencies, more was being invested in providing self service opportunities. It was common for this initiative to be met with reservation but teams were working to ensure a seamless transition and the maintenance of customer satisfaction.

The board noted that the forthcoming priorities for the directorate were:

- reoccupation of the Council House – ensuring a smooth transfer, continuity of service and embracing new ways of working;
- welfare reform – responding to mandatory statutory requirements; and
- finance – ensuring that the directorate remained responsive and resilient within the marketplace, offering value for money and generating income, despite budget reductions.

In light of the challenging caseload dealt with by the Benefits team, the board questioned why there was difficulty recruiting to vacant posts within the team. The Director explained that a specific skill set was required; training was administered across a thirteen week period and support was provided for six months thereafter as the housing benefit scheme was considered to be complex in nature. In addition, the Director asserted that agencies within the private sector were offering a competitive salary package.

The board asked why overpayments occurred during the administration of housing benefit entitlements. The Director observed that there were various reasons including, for example, lack of notification of change in circumstances. The board understood that the service conducted data matching using information held by the Job Centre Plus, National Benefit Fraud Hotline and the Department for Work and Pensions. This joint working incurred the possibility of a delay in processing. The Director clarified that in the event of an error being the responsibility of the local authority, the imposition of a repayment would be at the discretion of officers. The officers would assess whether the recipient would have reasonably known that they had received an overpayment.

The board discussed the pressures experienced by the directorate as a result of the budget reductions and increasing case load. It was reported that the Benefits service was expected to transfer to the Department for Work and Pensions in 2017.

Resolved to note the report and presentation on services that fall within the remit of the board.

24/12 Corporate Complaints

A presentation was received from the Performance Manager, together with the Head of Customer Service. The presentation summarised the council's performance in responding to complaints and provided information regarding changes to the way in which complaints were processed. The operation of the Lagan Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) was also referred to. The board was advised of proposed changes to the way in which feedback would be captured.

An updated action plan, which was considered at a Leader of the Council Performance Surgery on 18 January 2012, was circulated to members.

The board was informed that performance in this area was affected by:

- customer standards/expectations, service delivery and policy changes;
- the number of complaints received;
- the complexity of complaints received; and
- the responsible department's local arrangements for managing complaints.

The board queried the extent to which the quality of responses was monitored. The Head of Customer Service explained that summary reports were produced for each service area to provide an insight to the number, location and type of complaints being responded to. This was of significant assistance to, for example, frontline services such as Streetpride. Performance reports were issued on a quarterly basis.

In response to a question regarding the reason for pronounced variations evident in graphical results, the Performance Manager recommended analysis of results using a dip sampling method. This method would indicate both the quality and timescale of the response.

The Performance Manager advised the board that the CRM system would capture enhanced feedback from November onwards. This would be reflected in the performance data. It was anticipated that capturing such detailed information would provide more accurate and robust statistical data.

The board referred to the operation of the members' casework management system (in addition to the Lagan CRM system) and expressed disappointment that there was not a useful method of exchange between both systems. The Performance Manager agreed to investigate the possibility of an interchange between the systems.

The board endorsed the proposal to record complaints responded to by members on the Lagan CRM system, in order to create an accurate record. The board welcomed the suggestion to undertake analysis of performance data

through dip sampling and felt that this would prove to be an insightful exercise which would benefit the work of all scrutiny boards.

Resolved to:

- **request that the Overview and Scrutiny Manager reminds all overview and scrutiny boards of their responsibility, under article 6 of the constitution, to receive and scrutinise performance information relating to complaints received in areas under their remit. The board understands that performance reports are made available to members on a quarterly basis and encourages the use of exercises such as dip sampling to appraise the data collected. The board requests an acknowledgement of this request from fellow scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs, together with an indication of how they propose to respond to the data following analysis;**
- **note the implementation of changes to how the Lagan Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is used to capture and manage feedback;**
- **recommend to the Head of Customer Service that complaints dealt with by members are also recorded on the Lagan CRM system and request that the Head of Performance and Improvement ensures that this data is reflected in performance statistics; and**
- **request an update report is presented at a future meeting.**

25/12 Procurement Policy and Practice

A presentation was received from the Head of Procurement. The presentation demonstrated how procurement policy and practice contributed to council objectives by:

- delivering value for money, efficiency and savings;
- driving social and economic benefits;
- addressing the importance of local supply within the regulatory framework; and
- developing innovative, sustainable procurement practices.

The Head of Procurement advised the board that initiatives had been designed to increase awareness amongst potential suppliers and guide them to bid effectively. Working within the European legislative framework and contract procedure rules, the Head of Procurement had strengthened links with bodies, such as the Chamber of Commerce and implemented training arrangements. It was hoped that provision of dedicated training on bidding would improve awareness among local suppliers.

Promoting availability of the tenders through the Source Derbyshire website was also an important aspect of raising awareness. Tender documentation was tailored to reflect these initiatives. Contracts under the value of thirty thousand pounds, for example, required a 'light touch' approach. For higher value or high risk contracts, however, a greater level of detail was required.

The board noted the utilisation of corporate procurement cards to address low value purchases. The Head of Procurement confirmed that the inclusion of at least one quote from a local supplier was required, prior to authorisation of purchases where the threshold requiring the provision of three quotes applied.

The Head of Procurement informed the board that the initiatives were focused on businesses in Derby and Derbyshire. Officers remained mindful of the distinction between local manufactures and local distributors, who merely operated as outlets for national businesses.

The board recognised the importance of adhering to procurement regulations and ensuring that the initiatives did not operate to specify a preferred supplier. The board understood that officers were obliged to comply with the council's overarching mandate to act in the interests of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In response to a question regarding transparency, the Head of Procurement informed the board that formalisation of lower value agreements through contracts was encouraged. Furthermore, all contracts equating to thirty thousand pounds or above were listed on the council's website.

The board requested an update at a future meeting to review the progress of the procurement initiatives. The board expressed an interest in achieving a greater understanding of the tender process, especially regarding the process of evaluating a bid. The board were keen to explore how officers ensured that the council's values and expectations were maintained through its business partners and suppliers.

Resolved to request that the Head of Procurement presents:

- **a profile of the forthcoming protective clothing tender at a future meeting, to assist the board to understand the council's process of evaluating tenders. The board is particularly keen to explore the requirements on respondents to conduct their business in an ethical and fair manner. The measures in place to safeguard against practices which would be considered as contrary to the council's values and expectations are also of interest to the board; and**
- **an update on the progress of current initiatives under the procurement strategy at a future meeting.**

MINUTES END