

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - VALUE FOR
MONEY & CUSTOMER SERVICE - 19 FEBRUARY 2018

(To be read in conjunction with the Agenda for the Meeting)

Present

Cllr Mike Band (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Nicholas Holder
Cllr Stephen Mulliner

Cllr Nabeel Nasir
Cllr David Round

Apologies

Cllr John Williamson, Cllr Brian Adams and Cllr Libby Piper

45. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 1.)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs John Williamson, Brian Adams and Libby Piper.

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 2.)

There were no declarations of interests in connection with items on the agenda.

47. SERVICE PLANS 2018/19 (Agenda item 3.)

The Committee considered the Service Plans falling within the remit of Value for Money and Customer Service. Officers advised that the template had been updated slightly, to focus more on outcomes. Members were pleased to have the opportunity to properly scrutinise the Service Plans in detail.

The Committee made an overall recommendation that, in future years, where Service Plans referred to a budget implication, that this be cross-referenced to the appropriate line of the budget report. This would enable Members to clearly see where a Capital or Revenue resource had been agreed. The Committee then made the following observations on the individual Service Plans.

Customer and Corporate Services

David Allum explained that the first section of the Service Plan related to customer service; this work involved building on the report and action plan that had been agreed by O&S and the Executive in 2017. The Committee discussed the Channel Shift programme which would involve encouraging residents to use automated, online methods for more transactional services, such as checking rent accounts or booking sports facilities. Capital resources of £40k had been secured in 2017/18 and would be carried forward; this would be used to fund the purchase of software to link up existing Council systems. Members were pleased to note the anticipated savings that would be delivered following the implementation of the programme.

The second section related to investment and commercial activity which would see the Service achieve a £300k budget contribution each year. The Committee queried

whether there team had sufficient resources to support these outcomes. Officers responded that ultimately more staff would enable the team to generate more income, and that a plan was in place to recruit two new members of staff to the team. This would also potentially enable the management of property acquisitions to be done in house rather than by an external company. The Committee emphasised the importance of ensuring that the team was adequately resourced and requested to see a plan of how this would be taken forward.

The third section related to IT investment; a key project within this would be the development of a new core IT system for Planning. David Allum advised the Committee that the Council would be the pilot for a new system that was being developed by an existing supplier and so there would therefore be no upfront cost. Members had some concerns over the risks involved with this approach and recommended that progress be closely monitored.

The fourth section related to income generation and efficiencies including providing external cleaning services in order to generate income. The Community Meals service was working well and generating an income, David Allum added that there was also capacity to take on more clients. There was also a target to reduce post and printing costs by 5%. The Committee was very keen that reducing paper usage be promoted as much as possible. Robin Taylor added the promotion of paperless agendas was also included within the Policy and Governance Service Plan and Cllr Band emphasised the need for an ongoing dialogue with councillors to encourage them to be more paperless. Cllr Round added that it would be useful if concise summaries of longer documents could be provided to councillors.

Economic Development

The Committee noted that Economic Development Strategy would be developed in light of the Council's new Corporate Strategy and therefore felt that the timescales for adoption set out in the Service Plan were slightly optimistic.

Finance

Peter Vickers explained that the objectives set out in the Service Plan tied in to the Medium Term Financial Plan. The Finance Service aimed to deliver savings by supporting other services with their efficiency projects, such as the Channel Shift programme already discussed.

The Benefits team had just completed a 'Systems Thinking' pilot, which had already resulted in savings of around £70k. This involved redesigning the service around the customer and cutting out any unnecessary work. The team would also be dealing with the impact of Universal Credit when it goes live for Waverley in July 2018. The Committee noted that the impact of Universal Credit was already on its work programme, and that updates would be provided at meetings as necessary.

Peter Vickers informed the Committee that over the coming year the Revenues team would be undertaking a similar 'Systems Thinking' review to take a fresh look at how the service is delivered, with a shift towards more self-service options. Additionally, a Corporate Debt Policy would be developed which would help to more effectively manage debts to services across the whole council.

Additionally, the Finance team would be utilising a new module in Agresso, making budget management more interactive, with the ability to deliver more efficient and effective financial information to budget managers.

Policy and Governance

Robin Taylor explained that the Service Plan reflected the current time of change at Waverley and included aspects such as the O&S change programme and the amendments to the Constitution and Scheme of Delegation to reduce bureaucracy. The Service Plan defined Policy and Governance as a hub for organisational change and increased consultation. It included some revenue growth bids and one capital bid for a more extensive roll-out of the mobile canvasser project.

The Committee noted that there was a £50k growth bid to ensure compliance with GDPR and asked if there was a plan in place for this. Officers assured Members that the Council was clear about what was required of it, and had an action plan in place to achieve this. Following the introduction of GDPR in May, it would be an ongoing process to ensure that the Council continued to effectively and efficiently manage data. Cllr Band queried how GDPR would affect councillors; officers responded that this was included within the project plan and separate briefing sessions would be arranged. The Committee also suggested that, where possible, support also be offered to Town and Parish Councils, who had fewer resources than Waverley. Robin Taylor responded that the Council was actively sharing information with Town and Parish Councils, which enabled them to benefit from Waverley's investment in consultants.

Members were generally supportive of the proposals to increase community engagement through more consultations rather than passively disseminating information. The Committee felt, however, that this could be difficult to achieve. Robin Taylor acknowledged that this could be challenging, but cited the good work that had recently been done with the Citizens' Panel.

Strategic HR

Wendy Gane explained that a key aspect of the Service Plan would be developing a new People Strategy (formerly the HR Strategy) which would sit alongside the new Corporate Strategy. The senior management team would be supported to develop the skills required to deliver the aspirations of the new Corporate Strategy. A Pay and Reward scheme would also be developed which would enable the council to attract and retain high quality staff. This work would be on top of the day-to-day Strategic HR role of monitoring service resilience and carrying out employment law work.

The Committee commented that, due to the nature of the profession and competition with the private sector, the Planning Service had a higher staff turnover than other areas of the organisation. Members therefore suggested that it might be appropriate to develop a separate People Strategy dedicated to the Planning Service. Officers responded that there was a specific salary structure in place and that the Council was working on its offer in terms of development and career progression. A consultant would be working with officers on the development of the People Strategy, and would investigate the best ways to retain staff. Ultimately, members acknowledged that good quality Planners would often be head-hunted

and therefore suggested that the Council just needed to have different expectations in terms of this area.

The Committee thanked Heads of Service for their presentations and endorsed the Service Plans to the Executive for approval.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 5.29 pm

Chairman