

RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

VIRTUAL MEETING

12 OCTOBER 2020

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: K Wild (Chairman), T Diccico (Vice Chairman), W Qais, M Gough, M Parker, M Allen, B Groom, J Fairburn and M Brain

Officers: Paul Johnson, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive
Sam Gilbert, Assistant Director (Finance and Property Services)
Paul Langham, Assistant Director (Business Systems)
Sarah Barnes, Head of Business Intelligence and Improvement
Frank McSheffrey, Director (Children, Young People and Families)
Alison McGrory, Assistant Director (Communities and Partnerships)
Lizzie Edwards, Assistant Director (Adult Social Care)
Alan Brown, Assistant Director (Environment and Highways)
Mohinder Johal, Service Support Lead, Solihull Connect
Karen Millard, Customer Relations Manager
Paul Rogers, Democratic Services

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were received.

4. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORTS – 2019/20

The Head of Business Intelligence and Improvement introduced the report to the Scrutiny Board.

Members were informed that the Annual Complaints report was inclusive to 31st March 2020 and covered a range of Council services. Report headlines included the following:

A small increase in complaints had been recorded relating to Children's social work, from 120 to March 2019, compared to 135 to March 2020. Appropriate management action was taken to address all complaints. Only 1 complaint had progressed to Stage 2 and none had progressed to the Local Government Ombudsman. Learning forms were also in place for Children's Services to support improved processes going forward.

Adults Social Services had received 58 complaints to March 2020, which equated to the same number received for 2019. The Council had received 7 contacts from the Local Government Ombudsman for this service area.

RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

VIRTUAL MEETING

With regard to Corporate Complaints and Compliments received to 31 March 2020, Members were informed that a total of 709 complaints had been received for 2019/20, which represented a decrease of 14.6% compared to 2018/19 when a total of 830 complaints had been received. The issue of the Council's brown bins supply to residents had been identified as a significant contributor towards the number of complaints received during 2018/19. A total of 1,273 compliments had been received in 2019/20 compared to 1,137 received during 2018/19.

The corporate timescales for response to complaints received was 20 working days, although the criteria for this timescale was under review via a pilot scheme with the intention of reducing this timescale.

Having received the presentation, Members raised a series of related questions, which in summary included the following:

Councillor Qais queried how in cases of complaints spanning more than one Council Directorate were they recorded and entered into the complaints system. Members were advised that such complaints were distributed to the relevant Directorates for attention with one, co-ordinated response being issued to the complainant. In the event that a complaint was re-opened and progressed to Stage 2 status, it would be progressed as an existing complaint.

Members referenced the detail for complaints received relating to staff attitude and behaviours and questioned whether such complaints pertained to Council employees or commissioners / third parties. It was confirmed that the complaints referred to employees employed directly by the Council.

Further to staff attitude and behaviours detailed in the report, Members raised the Council's use of complaint Learning Forms and noted that 76% of Learning Forms had been completed by Managers. Members questioned what had happened to the remainder of the Learning Forms and in the case of any unwanted reoccurring behaviours what disciplinary and follow up measures were in place. The Scrutiny Board was advised that the 76% figure related to Learning Forms completed by 31 March 2020. All Learning Forms would be completed and on completion follow up took place with the responsible Manager/s as to what changes had been put in place to address the behaviours at the source of the complaint. Managers were also expected to confirm what impact the learning had had within the service area.

The Director (Children, Young People and Families) informed Members that the majority of complaints had centred on Child Protection Services Team, which in turn generated a number of complaints from involved families relating to Court proceedings. However, the service had seen a decrease in the number of upheld complaints to 31st March 2020.

It was noted that the majority of complaints related to areas within Social Services and Members questioned why this was the case. Members were advised that the majority of the complaints received related to front facing social work teams, which often led to working with families not wishing to work or engage with the Council. The concerns expressed in the complaints largely related to communications and response times from the Council. The Council did, however, always contact families to attempt to resolve the matters raised before moving the status to formal complaint.

Officers were questioned as to whether it had been established if any correlation existed between the number of complaints received and the Covid-19 lockdown and

RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

VIRTUAL MEETING

related restrictions. It was confirmed that Officers had reviewed the data and that it had been established that complaints had actually reduced in the first 2 Quarters of reporting in 2020 across the Social Care service.

The Scrutiny Board noted that the majority of complaints received in Adult Social Care were attributable to human error, employee attitudes and breakdown in communications, all of which should be easily rectified. Members were advised that the three aforementioned issues were the 3 most common issues leading to a complaint being made. However, the number of complaints received in Adult Social Care had actually decreased compared to 2018/19. All complaints were nevertheless reviewed by the Adult Social Care Leadership Team on a quarterly basis. In turn, all Learning Forms were used to form case studies to support improvement in practice across the service, as were case file audits. It had been found that the review of both sources had a positive impact in the service.

Members questioned whether Commissioners provided feedback as part of the complaints process and were advised that Commissioners were as involved throughout the complaints process as the Council. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) Commissioning Officer was informed of every complaint received by the Council, who in turn provided feedback to the Council.

Members sought clarification as to the level of complaints being received regarding the Council's brown recycling bins and were advised that there had been a significant decrease in the number of related complaints received.

Members of the Scrutiny Board noted that the level of service delivered by Environmental Services, including waste and recycling services, during the Covid-19 pandemic had remained extremely high and robust and unanimously agreed to have their thanks to officers and partners delivering those services noted for the record.

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the Annual Complaints Report 2019/20.

5. SMARTER WAYS OF WORKING STRATEGY

Having received an introduction to the report from the Assistant Director (Finance and Property Services), Members of the Scrutiny Board raised a series of related questions, which in summary included the following:

Councillor Diccio queried what system was scheduled to replace Citrix and how would the subsequent anticipated savings be made. The Scrutiny Board was advised that Citrix was currently used to deliver office based desktop functions and remote working solutions and was scheduled to be replaced by the Microsoft 365 package. Savings would be released through no longer paying the Citrix license costs, with the license arrangements ending in 2023. Citrix licensing costs currently stood at £240,000 per annum, which post 2023 end through the introduction of Microsoft 365 corporately.

With regard to Council meeting arrangements, Members questioned whether any thought had been given to future arrangements and how such meetings would be delivered and what potential existed for fiscal savings to be made in this area. The

RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

VIRTUAL MEETING

Scrutiny Board was advised by the Assistant Director (Business Systems) that support arrangements for future meetings was being considered, but that no decision had been made as yet specific to Council Meetings.

Members were advised that technology existed to support formal meetings in a number of ways remotely and that future planned technology upgrades would improve such arrangements still further. The future solution in the shape of Microsoft Office 365 will provide a number of options going forward to support meetings and will be a matter for future discussions with Members.

Councillor Groom noted of the 3 options outlined in the report supporting Smarter Ways of Working, one option appeared to already have a framework in place and the means to deliver the proposals quickly, namely the preferred Strategic Option 2 *Blended Working Arrangements (combined home and collaborative workspaces model)*.

Councillor Groom stated, however, that he would have liked to have seen included within the report examples of different office occupancy models (beyond the 40% occupancy rate figure) included in the options under consideration. Councillor Groom expressed concern at the 40% occupancy rate, referencing Best Practice to allow for sufficient occupancy at peak times, which would equate to approximately 60% occupancy. Councillor Groom queried how the 40% figure was arrived at and whether scope existed for the figure to be adjusted as the Council moved forward to a more agile working environment. Councillor Groom expressed concern that taking forward the 40% model may be implementing a model that did not work for employees going forward.

The Assistant Director (Finance & Property Services) advised Members that of the options put forward, the 'blended' option could be seen as falling somewhere in the middle between the extremes of the other two Strategic Options detailed in the report. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council was already working towards delivering a 7/10 ratio occupancy. The evidence available suggested that many organisations were going far more extreme in their occupancy levels i.e. less than 40% occupancy. 40% was seen to be a reasonable balance given the Council's experiences to date and an achievable milestone in the first instance. Although 40% equated to employees being office based twice per week, it was acknowledged that some staff would enter the office more frequently, whilst other less so.

The Assistant Director (Business Systems) reiterated that 70% occupancy was the Council's current occupancy and moving towards a 40% occupancy rate was felt to be a reasonable figure to achieve based on the findings of the recent employee survey addressing flexible working arrangements.

With reference within the report to conducting a home working assessment before providing equipment for home working (e.g. DSE compliant chair, table, display screen equipment), Councillor Groom sought clarification that any such assessments would not be used to rule out employees from receiving equipment required to facilitate home working.

The Assistant Director (Finance & Property Services) advised the Scrutiny Board that home assessments would be in place to ensure that all employees were safe when working from home. The checklist had been developed by the Council's Health and

RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

VIRTUAL MEETING

Safety Team in order to ensure that all Council employees were working in a safe environment when at home.

Councillor Parker raised a series of questions, including:

- With regard to staff recruitment, had any applicants not had the means to access virtual interviews and , in instances where applicants did not have access to technology to access virtual interview arrangements, how did the Council support those applicants through to the interview process;
- Had Human Resources advised employees that they could claim back from Government office expenses / tax rebate whilst working from home;
- How was the Council managing to train staff whilst they are working from home;
- Could further information be provided regarding the rationalisation of assets (paragraph 4.3.3) and reduction of the estate footprint in support of the Council's carbon reduction targets?

The Assistant Director (Business Systems) advised that:

- All job applicants within the Business Systems service had the means to apply digitally and undertake remote interviews;
- Employees had been notified of the right to reclaim expenses/VAT and that this message would continue to be conveyed to Council employees;
- The Council was already using some online and video platforms to provide staff training. However, in support of the blended / flexible ways of working, it had been ensured that the current refurbishment of the Council House also included sufficient space for staff training and development purposes for smarter ways of working moving forward.

The Assistant Director (Finance & Property Services) advised Members that:

- The Council had a number of assets used for office accommodation.
- There was potential going forward to witness radical changes in the way office space was employed in future years. The current scenario provided the Council with an opportunity to revisit its use of such space. The corporate approach to developing a Corporate Asset Management Plan centred on Strategic Asset Management Plans (SAMPS), one of which was focussed on office accommodation. Although the SAMPS had commenced in 2019, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the SAMPS were having to be revisited and remodelled accordingly.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive drew attention to paragraph 5.5. in the report, which stated that *'In order to align our internal working practices and behavioural aspirations, a significant number of HR policies will need to be reviewed and revised'*. Members were advised that a thorough review of HR policies would be required to ensure that they were still relevant and timely in support of the blended

RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

VIRTUAL MEETING

approach as recommended within the report before the Scrutiny Board. Members were advised that a number of the issues raised by Councillor Parker would be addressed and dealt with via a review of the Council's policies to ensure they were compliant in the new working environment that was to be introduced.

Councillor Fairburn noted that the potential for shared office space with Council partners and other suitable organisations would be a very good use of the Council's assets.

Councillor Gough questioned the future costs detail for ICT within the report and sought clarification as to whether the annual costs of £490,000 for Capital financing of additional ICT equipment, plus costs of additional ICT to support staff working from home was an additional cost or whether some proportion of the £490,000 would have been spent regardless.

The Assistant Director (Business Systems) confirmed that the £490,000 was the figure required to provide the required additional equipment for staff to deliver flexible working. Members were advised that the Citrix desktop device cost approximately £200 each, whilst laptops were in the range of £500-600 per unit, so an off-set cost was involved. However, the £490,000 was the level of budget required to move to the Smarter Ways of Working model as outlined in the report before the Scrutiny Board.

Councillor Gough queried whether the mental health of employees had been considered as part of the evaluation of the Smarter Ways of Working model. The Assistant Director (Finance & Property Services) advised Members that the Council was using the Intranet to advise employees how to support their mental health whilst working from home and in the current conditions nationally. The other consideration for mental health is recognising for example that working from home does not suit some employees, as they may have caring responsibilities in the home environment, feel isolated from colleagues and feel that home working is too invasive on the home environment. The Council was attempting to take into consideration such factors as well as supporting individual employees facing these issues.

Councillor Qais questioned whether consideration had been given to monitoring arrangements to review the effectiveness of the Smarter Ways of Working model. The Assistant Director (Finance & Property Services) advised that the Council was recruiting new staff during the current period and was delivering induction processes for them. The Council was using on-line platforms and Learning Pool resources to do so. Mechanisms to keep staff connected to one another, undertake 1-2-1's and facilitate team meetings were still being reviewed. The Council was maintaining the PDR scheme to ensure employees continued to perform and deliver their individual and team objectives. Staff workshops, surveys and 1-2-1's continued to provide feedback and input into the Smarter Ways of Working model as it continued to be developed and delivered. The HR team would continue to review and monitor the above matters in conjunction with Council employees.

Councillor Mrs Wild noted that effective staff induction processes for new employees and effective team building arrangements were particularly important areas for the Council to consider when supporting the workforce in the current circumstances.

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

VIRTUAL MEETING

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the new Smarter Ways of Working Strategy; and,
- (ii) To provide comments arising from the Scrutiny Board's consideration of the *Smarter Ways of Working Strategy* report for Full Cabinet to take into account in considering the funding requirements for the Strategy.

6. DIGITAL INCLUSION

The Assistant Director (Business Systems) advised the Scrutiny Board that the *Digital Inclusion* report was a follow up to the Scrutiny Board meeting held on 14 September 2020.

Members were advised that digital services were being rolled out by the Council for residents and businesses as an additional service, rather than a replacement. Residents could continue to communicate and engage with the Council via the telephone and correspondence. Should any resident not have the means to access Council service online, they continued to have the option to receive assistance from Council employees via the telephone (for example, as facilitated by the Council's Bereavement Services).

Some paper based processes also remained in place, for example, for planning applications, even though 95% of applications were now received electronically.

The Council continues to produce the 'Your Solihull' publication for residents, providing details of Council services and contact details, whilst the Council's Communications Team continued to further develop the Council's social media platforms to facilitate communications and engagement with residents and businesses.

Having received the presentation, Members noted that a cohort of people would not be receiving 'Your Solihull', and therefore access to Council services telephone numbers, due to the closure / reduced operating hours of some GP's and libraries. The Assistant Director (Business Systems) informed the Scrutiny Board that through the Council's Covid-19 response, such as its Shielding operational arrangements to support the vulnerable, the Council had been providing contact details for vital services in paper format. The Council had also provided targeted support services directly to vulnerable residents throughout the pandemic period.

Having considered the report the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

To note the measures being taken to provide access to those who are unable to use the Council's digital services.