

CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2018

PRESENT: Councillors David Burbage (Chairman), Mohammed Ilyas, Richard Kellaway, Eileen Quick, Gerry Clark (Vice-Chairman) and Paul Brimacombe

Also in attendance: Cllr Saunders.

Officers: Rob Stubbs, Nikki Craig and David Cook.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received by Cllr L Evans and Cllr Sharma. Cllr Kellaway attended as a substitute.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

Resolved unanimously: that the Part I minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2018 were approved as a true and correct record.

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

The Head of HR and Corporate Projects introduced the annual complaints report that covered the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018. The report detailed all the compliments and complaints made by or on behalf of customers that were investigated under the formal complaints policy or statutory adults and children's complaints procedures.

In 2017/18 the Council recorded 644 complaints, a slight reduction on 665 received in 2016/17. There were also 463 compliments, a significant increase on 192 received in 2016/17.

The Panel were informed that the formal corporate complaints were covered from pages 24 to 31 of the report. Corporate Complaints was a two stage process with up to 10 days with a potential 10 day extension for stage one complaints and up to 20 days for stage two complaints.

Corporate complaints totalled 574 and corporate compliments totalled 310. This represents 89% of the total complaints received and progressed and 67% of the total compliments received for the council during 2017/18 as detailed in section 5.1 of the report.

Table 7 within the report detailed the corporate complaints received by service area. The 574 complaints received were spread out amongst 25 service areas with the highest numbers received by Highways, Waste and Customer Services.

The nature of the complaints were shown by theme in table 8 of the report. The top five themes similar to those across the council were lack of action, failed to follow timescales, attitude or behaviour of staff, services delivered below standard and not being happy with a decision.

The Panel were informed that at stage 1, the number of complaints responded to within timescale was 53%, however at stage 2 this increases to 79%.

The LGO made decisions on 32 complaints and enquiries, nine of these were within corporate services of which six were upheld. These covered Housing, Planning, Benefits and Council Tax and Highways. The Panel were informed that there was a public interest report published in 2017/18 for a complaint against the council's housing service. The LGO published a total of 42 reports nationally during 2017/18; an increase of 40% on the previous year.

The Panel were informed that it was important to learn from complaints with some examples being included in table 11 of the report.

The report also showed compliments received by 22 services in table 12. This was a significantly increased from 101 in 16/17 to 310 in 17/18. Examples of some compliments received were shown in table 13.

The Chairman commented that an increase in the number of complaints may be a result of better reporting and capturing complaints. He also asked that with regards to the LGO complaints were they included within the report and was compensation paid. The Panel were informed that the complaint details were available from the LGO website and that in some cases compensation was paid.

Cllr Brimacombe mentioned that there were four channels of communication with the Council; in person, telephone, letter and social media. He asked if all were used to capture and record complaints. It was confirmed that all the mentioned channels of communication were used and that there was an increased use of the RBWM website.

Cllr Kellaway mentioned that he was currently undertaking a task and finish group on planning and requested that details of the planning complaints be made available to the task and finish group.

Cllr Quick referred to learning from complaints and asked if this was being actioned upon especially staff attitude which should always be 100%. The Panel were informed that learning action was undertaken, for example within customer services there were weekly training. The complaints team also reported to senior management team meetings.

Cllr Brimacombe reiterated that the increased number of complaints could also be seen as better public engagement.

The Panel noted the report and thanked the teams with increased compliments.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

The Lead Member for Finance introduced the council's latest financial update report for 2018-19 that confirmed a projected overspend on service budgets of £1,426,000 with a General Fund Reserves of £8,663,000. The Panel were informed that as well as noting the current projected outturn position there were an additional three recommendations in the report.

The Lead Member for Finance informed that as per the two previous Financial Update reports to Cabinet he was confident that the NET financial outturn would remain at a £1.4 million overspend. The outturn was not expected to significantly improve or decline. The budget continued to be subject to national pressures such as high cost child placements for our vulnerable children and the ability to fully recover business rates.

The Chairman asked for confirmation that the overspend was a NET figure. The Lead Member for Finance confirmed that this was a NET figure and after continued pressures and savings he did not expect it to dramatically improve or decline.

The Chairman asked if the pressures relating to children's high cost placements was due to increased cases or increased costs from providers. The Panel were informed that it was a mixture of both.

Cllr Brimacombe mentioned that at a recent Employment Panel meeting mitigating actions were discussed and he asked if they will reduce the £1.4 million pressure. The Panel were informed that action was being taken to create a buffer against ongoing pressures but he was not expecting the NET position to grow significantly. The actions proposed at Employment Panel were to stop the NET position from growing.

The Chairman asked if the buffer in our balances would be used to mitigate pressures and was informed that mitigating actions were being taken to relieve the situation and that our reserves remained in a healthy position.

Cllr Brimacombe asked if the £2.5 million of budgeted subsidy that had not been recovered was for long term debt and not expected to be recovered. The Panel were informed that this related to housing subsidies that were paid if overpayments were due to claimants error then 100% could be recovered but if they were due to administrative errors than only 40% could be recovered.

Cllr Brimacombe also asked if the pressure on the dedicated schools grant would be recoverable or if it will fall onto the council. The Panel were informed that if schools failed to take action it could fall onto the council. The Schools Forum were responsible and were taking mitigating action.

Resolved Unanimously: that the Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the Cabinet report and unanimously endorsed the recommendations.

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES - LATE CLAIM BY COUNCILLOR DA COSTA

The Democratic Team Manager introduced the report relating to a late claim for payment of £61.65 for travel allowances from Councillor Da Costa. As the claim had been submitted in excess of six months after the date of the qualifying meetings it required a cabinet decision.

Resolved Unanimously: that the Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the Cabinet report and unanimously endorsed the recommendations.

COUNCIL TRUSTS

The Democratic Team Manager introduced the trust report and informed that this was an annual report regarding charities where the Royal Borough were trustees. There were four categories:

- A charitable trust where Cabinet acted as trustees on behalf of the Council.
- Where the council were involved with the charity and provided the lead and administrative support.
- Where the council were involved but provided no administrative support.
- Where the council were involved but the charity was not registered and did not have to provide an annual return to the charity commission.

The Panel noted the report.

WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman informed the Panel that Cllr L Evans had asked why the Annual Report on Commissioning 2017-18 Cabinet report was not being considered by this Panel.

The Clerk had informed that the report was being scrutinised by the relevant O&S Panels who covered the commissioned services. The Panel requested that the report be considered at their next meeting, it was noted that this would be after Cabinet had considered the report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Resolved unanimously: that the Part II minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2018 were approved as a true and correct record.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 7.20 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....