

Council Meeting – 20 March 2019

Report of Councillor Andrew Sully – Corporate Resources

1. Corporate Performance

- 1.1 I would like to welcome Amy Tregellas, who was appointed on the 11 March 2019 as our New Governance Manager. Amy will also take on the responsibility for Data Protection, so our arrangements with South Somerset District Council will come to an end at the end of March 2019.
- 1.2 Our Current Audit Plan for 2018/2019 is showing good progress. The Corporate Governance Officers Group are now working on the 2018/2019 Annual Governance Statement.

2. Customer Services

- 2.1 The integration of Taunton Police Station into the Customer Hub on 10 December 2018 has gone well. There were no issues with staff from Avon and Somerset Police or Taunton Deane, and everyone is working well together. To date there have been no concerns from our customers regarding operating in a shared space.
- 2.2 Internal recruitment of Leads and Champions has been very successful with a further phase of internal recruitment being undertaken now to complete the team. I would also like to welcome Gilly Allgood, Steven Clarke, Alex Lumby and Alice Mercer who have joined Richard Burge to lead the Customer Services Team.
- 2.3 Cross training across various areas of expertise is underway to prepare our Customer Champions for 1 April 2019 and our telephone system is being used to route calls to the right person with the right skills to deal with as many customer enquiries as possible first time.
- 2.4 The team are very involved with the development and implementation of Firmstep and training has begun to allow our team members to capitalise on the efficiencies it will bring as it begins to be rolled out to the organisation.
- 2.5 The recruitment of a Case Manager – Members has begun. This role will continue to provide direct support to our Members until the Members Portal is in place and operating efficiently. The role is a fixed term contract for six months.
- 2.6 Calls continue to be shared and managed across West Somerset and Taunton Deane to minimise any dips in service during busy times. This has been very effective and has allowed our team to be truly agile in how they are deployed to serve the customer.
- 2.7 Garden Waste calls have begun. Call volumes have increased as expected and are being managed effectively. Further seasonal events such as rent increase letters are scheduled and close co-ordination between our Case Management and Customer Champion Teams ensures we are prepared for short term spikes in call

volumes. This has been very effective.

3. ICT/Technology

3.1 The ICT Team continues to support the delivery of critical 'business as usual' and "transformation" projects.

3.2 Key Projects:-

- Preparing for go-live of Firmstep, the new Somerset West and Taunton website, E5 finance system for the new Council, new single payment hub, gov.uk pay for on-line payments. This includes supporting user acceptance testing and staff training.
- The new single security domain project is currently on track to hit its go-live date of the 23-24 March 2019.

3.3 Business as usual priorities:-

- Making improvements to our data backup infrastructure, implementing improvements to Wi-Fi following a post implementation health check, review of equipment in the two Council's data centres and starting work to build a plan for consolidation of infrastructure, support activities – as well as continuing to provide a responsive "helpdesk" service.
- Supporting year end activities for Finance, Revenues and Rents.

4. Members Case Management

4.1 Members Case Management continues to be providing support for elected Councillors getting their queries resolved and keeping them updated on issues Raised during this period of change. Whilst also collecting data around issues raised which will help in the development of services for Members in the future.

5. HR (Human Resources)

5.1 Our priorities at this busy time are:-

- Internal recruitment - Providing support to internal recruitment of Case Management Leads, Case Managers and Locality Champions.
- External recruitment - Recruitment of all Specialist posts and Case Manager posts not yet filled.
- TUPE transfer of staff to new Council - Notification to stakeholders/ suppliers of new Council from 1 April 2019 and amendments to HR policies and internal templates to reflect changes.
- Continuing support to employees on long term sick - Successfully supported two employees and one ex-employee through the ill-health retirement process.

- Support for leavers process – return of equipment, pensions options, annual leave calculations etc.
- Payroll - Build of new structure in payroll system. Issuing of new statements of particulars to all staff taking up their new roles. Transfer of West Somerset Councillors onto Taunton Deane payroll. Processing all voluntary redundancy leaver's forms and checking all calculations for redundancy figures.

6. Finance

- 6.1 The team has finalised the budgets for the new Council and these were presented to Shadow Full Council for approval on 21 February 2019. Alongside the budget proposals, the Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy for the new Council were also presented and approved.
- 6.2 The Quarter 3 budget monitoring reports have also recently been presented to Members and both Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils are forecasting under spends for the current financial year.
- 6.3 Preparation for the year-end close down for both Councils has also recently begun with guidance sent out to all relevant budget holders and business support staff. In addition, a report setting out the transitional arrangements in respect of the production and approval of the financial statements of both predecessor authorities was presented to the Corporate Governance Committee (Taunton Deane) and Audit Committee (West Somerset) on 19 March 2019. This report set out the statutory responsibilities of the Shadow Authority including the key milestones to ensure that both sets of accounts are approved within the required deadlines.
- 6.4 Work also continues to ensure that all the key financial actions are completed for the new Council to start business safely and legally from 1 April 2019. There is a great deal of work involved to make sure this is achieved including, for example, the setting up a new bank accounts, informing suppliers and making changes to the current finance system etc. We are currently on track to achieve this.

7. Revenues and Benefits

Revenues

- 7.1 Council Tax bills for Somerset West and Taunton will be issued mid-March.
- 7.2 The team focus is now on outstanding work and aiming to clear backlogs.
- 7.3 There will be a renewed push on collection to try and recover from the "down time" needed to deliver annual billing.
- 7.4 Continuing with the preparation for the new Council, updating letters and forms and involvement in testing for the new website and Firmstep.

Benefits

- 7.5 The team are experiencing backlogs currently as the service settles down post the

changes in staff roles. We are mitigating this where possible by using agency resource, extending the finish date for some staff and are looking to use an off-site processing company to support too.

- 7.6 In early April the priority will be to support newly appointed Customer Champions to be trained up to deal with front end benefit calls and counter queries. Some of the Benefits Officers in their Case Manager roles will support this training to support a better front end service.
- 7.7 The impact of the backlog and shortages in staff will impact on our performance and, as always, we are in regular liaison with the Department of Work and Pensions.

8. 'Democratic Services' and The Mayoralty

- 8.1 The new Governance and Performance function is now responsible for servicing the Council's meetings meaning that the former 'Democratic Services' unit has been consigned to history!
- 8.2 Although given a different name, there have been many meetings in recent months that have had to be serviced by staff in the new structure involving Committees at both Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils and those set up as part of the Shadow Authority.
- 8.3 Hopefully, once the new Council is elected in early May, the number of meetings will decline in number making it far more manageable for the members of staff who, I am sure, will continue to provide the efficient service which Councillors have become used to.
- 8.4 Later in the agenda, formal thanks will be offered to the last Mayor of Taunton Deane, Councillor Catherine Herbert, for the way in which she has carried out her duties during 2018/2019.
- 8.5 From a position six months ago where it looked like the Mayoralty was going to disappear, an approach to the Government has led to a Statutory Instrument being drafted which, if approved by Parliament on 1 April 2019, would allow Charter Trustees to be established in what currently is the Unparished Area of Taunton.
- 8.6 In effect, this means that the 16 Councillors elected on 2 May 2019 to represent the Wards of Blackbrook and Holway, Halcon and Lane, Manor and Tangier, North Town, Priorswood, Victoria, Vivary, Wellsprings and Rowbarton and Wilton and Sherford will automatically become Charter Trustees in addition to being Members of Somerset West and Taunton Council.
- 8.7 Their main duty as trustees will be to continue to operate the terms of the Royal Charter granted in March 1975, which afforded 'Borough' status on Taunton Deane District Council.
- 8.8 Therefore, rather than losing the Mayoralty on the formation of the new Council, the Charter Trustees will be able to meet during May/June 2019 to elect a Mayor of Taunton and a Deputy perpetuating this long established office. Good news indeed!

9. Portfolio Holder

I would like to add my personal thanks to all departments and staff that have helped me in the past two years in bringing such valuable information on the workings of their departments and reporting it to Full Council.

Councillor Andrew Sully