

Full Council Meeting – 8 February 2022

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Corporate Resources

Customer

The services in customer are currently heavily engaged with preparations for the move to the new unitary council and for implementing the year-end processes for Council Tax, Business Rates, Benefits and Rents. In addition, we have been developing processes for the new Omicron Hospitality & Leisure Grant scheme announced by Government just before Christmas. This scheme went live on 18 January 2022.

Day-to-day service delivery continues to largely be delivered within our performance targets. We have, however, experienced high volumes of calls since the start of the calendar year. This combined with vacancies and a loss of skilled staff within our Customer Services team is meaning that we are not hitting our performance targets in that area at times. The vacancies have been recruited to and new staff will be starting in February.

Finance and Procurement

Staff from both finance and procurement teams are directly engaged in the LGR Finance Workstream to progress the work of the Programme with transition to the unitary Council. A significant proportion of this service's time and capacity will be prioritised towards the LGR programme activity in the year ahead whilst maintaining good financial controls within SWT operations.

In December the Audit and Governance Committee received the external Auditor's Annual Report. This reports on their extensive work reviewing our arrangements for governance, financial sustainability, and improving economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. The report includes one key recommendation around managing commercial investment risk plus five more minor improvement recommendations, which have been considered and will be addressed in the months ahead (no urgent recommendations were included).

We have made excellent progress with the Budget for 2022/23, presenting balanced budgets for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. This is despite an overall reduction in funding of £2m compared to the current year for the General Fund, and significant cost pressures in Housing.

The Draft Budget for the General Fund went to Corporate Scrutiny on 26 January before seeking approval by the Executive Committee on 9 February and Full Council on 24 February 2022. The HRA Draft Budget is presented for approval at Full Council on 8 February 2022, following consultation and review through the Tenants Strategic Group and then Community Scrutiny on 6 January, and recommendations supported by the Executive on 19 January.

Corporate

People Team Update

Recruitment

During the last quarter, SWT budget was for 660 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. The actual average for the period was 581 FTE with 76 FTE vacancies.

	Starters	Leavers	Turnover
August	3	6	1.04%
September	9	3	0.52%
October	7	2	0.34%

Sickness Absence

The level of reported sickness absence during the quarter was 3.89% compared to 3.34% in the previous quarter:

Personal and work-related stress continues to account for the largest amount of absence, making up 30% of all sickness, an increase from 25.43% last quarter. Following sessions with MIND, Wellness action plans have been rolled out and we have re-engaged MIND for further support.

Service Development - People, Projects & Key Achievements

- A new Job matching process has been implemented to resolve legacy JE queries and a market factor review is under way.
- A new DBS process has been implemented and embedded as BAU
- IR35 status determinations are underway and the process agreed
- An updated OH process has been agreed and implemented
- A new recruitment approval process and induction process has been agreed
- All policies and guidance have been reviewed to go live on the new intranet by the end of November

ICT Services

Infrastructure Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements

Reviewing Disaster Recovery Planning

Implemented automated security vulnerability scanning.

Service Desk Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements

Upgraded iTop IT Service Desk system now in place, supporting Service Level Agreements, with initial data now flowing through.

Performance indicators now reported monthly to Internal Operations Performance board.

Applications Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements

Projects

- Open Housing project ongoing
- Digital Modernisation project onboarded.
- Intranet project involvement

Upgrades

- NDL Robotics
- PTC
- Multiple Open Revenue upgrades

Governance Team

The Community Governance Review for Taunton is continuing to progress well and has completed public consultation on the first stage, which ran until 12th January 2022.

Officers and Members of the Working Group were pleased to be able to support discussions at many of the Parish Council's/ Charter Trustees within the scope of the review in December. Thank you to everyone who sent in their comments and feedback which will be fully analysed and presented to the Community Governance Review Working Group in the first instance for them to consider and have regard to when deciding on a preferred option to go forward for Stage 2 of the Consultation. The responses and analyses will also be available for the public to consider as part of the Council report on a preferred option, which will now be in March 2022. Due to the pre-election period now confirmed to be commencing on 21st March 2022 which would have had a slight overlap, following legal advice the timetable for the review has been agreed to be amended and the second stage of consultation will now commence in May 2022. The review is still however well on track to complete by the twelve month deadline of November 2022. Please keep an eye on our webpage on the CGR for the latest information and updates regarding this key corporate priority.

Change Projects

Current projects and achievements:

Information Management

- 14 new training videos published to support users of SWT's new document management system, the 'Corporate FilePlan'
- Preparations are gearing up for shutting down shared network drives from 31st January 2022, replaced by the Corporate FilePlan
- New Information and Records Management Policy reviewed by the Director of Internal Operations

New Intranet for staff

- System is being managed by the Internal Communications Team (business as usual). Project Board meets 11th and 14th January 2022 to discuss closing the project down.

Power Platform

- The second outcome from this project is now live, allowing the easy reporting and management of Safeguarding cases utilising the tools available through our Microsoft 365 platform.
- The analysis work has started to understand the benefits that these solutions bring.

Business Analysis and Firmstep development

Since December 2021 through to January 2022 the Business Analysis team have taken the lead and supported the delivery of the following solutions:

- HMO (Houses in Multiple Occupation) Licensing form
- Hospitality Grant form

- Deane Helpline Referral form
- Trade staff scheduling AS-IS process defined and mapped
- Freedom of Information AS-IS process mapped
- Repairs online - final stages of testing and issue resolution throughout January. Making the solution available to the public in early February

Health & Safety

H & S Strategy

During December the H & S Improvement Programme was successfully presented and approved by the Audit & Governance Committee. The programme encompasses all aspects of the internal and external audits completed during 2021 and all necessary workstreams have been allocated a lead officer. All recommendations and actions are now tracked within a newly implemented 'Consolidated H & S Action Plan, to improve progress reporting, appoint ownership and accountability and to allow transparency and visibility. The H & S Improvement Plan is now included in the PMO schedule and will be tracked and reported accordingly.

H & S Committee

A key recommendation from the SWAP Audit (Aug 2021) was to improve the mechanisms of the existing H & S Committee; subsequently a three tier structure has now been implemented and incorporates involvement and reporting mechanisms through all management levels: -

- Tier 1 – Members and SMT
- Tier 2 – Corporate Management Group (steering)
- Tier 2 – Consultative and Reporting (required under Safety Representative and Safety Committee Regulations and includes UNISON representation)
- Tier 3 – H & S Directorate Groups (x4)

During December and January, Tier 2 and 3 meetings have commenced and attendees are gaining good pace and momentum within the new committee structure rhythm. Tier 1 Committee will fall in line with the Governance Programme moving forward.

Dashboard Reporting

Significant development of H & S dashboards has delivered new Directorate Scorecard that are presented at the monthly Tier 3 groups. The scorecards provide useful H & S data for the groups to identify trends, discuss observations and make recommendations/raise improvement actions.

Risk Management

Following the Risk Management Scoping Exercise, each Directorate has a development action plan and an accessible centralised Risk Management area within the Corporate File Plan. Tier 3 Groups are responsible for monitoring progress and significant H & S support time has been programmed in to support Task Managers to achieve the improvement targets.

Communication

Work is underway to develop the H & S communication plan; this will involve a series of H & S campaigns, regular intranet news updates and a schedule of employee

questionnaires, to establish the impact of the H & S Improvement Plan against exist H & S culture.

Organisational Development & Learning

Current Projects

- Leadership Development Programme – this project has now been officially launched and we are taking bookings for the first round of training to begin in March. Further sessions will run in the autumn.
- Digital Eagles training is now complete, and we are moving to the next phase of the programme, including monthly forums to look at organisational digital improvement ideas and the Eagles logging their 'Digital Helps'. December saw 18 Digital Helps logged, with Paula Kirby being our Eagles of the month.
- Corporate Team Awards have now been expanded to the whole of Internal Operations, and the first round is now open.
- Onboarding and Induction. Induction package is complete, and now creating a process that enables new starters to access information prior to start date.
- Learning and Development data storage improvements and compliance and mandatory training completion reporting improvements.

New Projects

- Forming our OD&L Plan for 2022/23 ready for SMT sign off in February. This plan forms part of the wider people strategy.
- As part of wider work on LGR preparedness and our OD&L Planning for 2022, we will be doing another push on performance management.
- Organisational TNA – this will direct our learning and development support for all employees throughout 2022 and ties into wider support planning as part of LGR preparedness.
- Apprenticeship levy – review and reflect on 2021/22 and work with learning providers further to ensure the remaining levy is used effectively.
- Learning Pathways campaign
- Using LMS product to create further opportunities via L&D site.

Key Achievements

- Launching the Leadership Development Programme.
- Digital Eagles training complete.
- Launched new L&D Site which will be a central point for all development opportunities