

# Full Council Meeting – 5 July 2022

## Report of Councillor Benet Allen – Corporate Resources and Communications

Please find below the relevant updated relating to each of the Corporate Teams providing the main support functions to the council.

### HR Team Update

#### Recruitment

During the last quarter, SWT budget was for 660 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. The actual average for the period was 592.67 FTE with 67.33 FTE vacancies.

Of those vacancies many are covered by agency or contract staff in anticipation of LGR.

| Month    | Starters | Leavers | Turnover |
|----------|----------|---------|----------|
| January  | 8        | 4       | 0.67%    |
| February | 2        | 5       | 0.84%    |
| March    | 3        | 4       | 0.68%    |

#### 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 up to date and the process agreed for future appointments
- An updated OH process has been agreed and implemented
- A new recruitment approval process and induction process has been agreed
- All relevant policies and guidance have been reviewed

#### Priorities for 2022/3

- Delivering Recruitment within the constraints related to LGR
- Providing consistent high-quality service and advice
- Addressing all anomalies prior to LGR

- Supporting revisions to work practices for key employment groups at the Depot
- Enabling and Empowering Managers to effectively manage their team's performance
- Supporting Wellbeing

## **Organisational Development & Learning Update**

### **Current Projects**

- Key priority for L&D Team is compliance and mandatory training with particular focus on our trade and open spaces teams. This work is well underway and progressing well. We are also doing a significant push on our mandatory corporate e-learning modules.
- On-going training requests are being processed on a monthly basis. The apprenticeship levy is being utilised wherever possible and we are promoting any low-cost or free training that we are aware of through our partner organisations.
- The Leadership Development Programme is progressing well, with sessions 4 of 6 now completed. The feedback has been positive. We are now planning the second cohort for the autumn.
- Our Digital Eagles are continuing to support colleagues, customers, friends and family to increase digital awareness and confidence. They are now beginning to support the Digital and Change team on various upcoming projects.
- Corporate Team Awards have now been expanded to the whole organisation and are being coordinated by the People Business Partners.

### **New Projects**

- Interview training for all recruiting managers has been designed and will be delivered in late June. We are already fully booked and will have to organise further sessions.
- In the Corporate Area we are trialling some a new template for managing performance to increase the focus on wellbeing and development. Initial feedback is positive.
- We are building and launching new e-learning modules for Health & Safety Policy and Project Management.
- All members of the team are involved in various People LGR workstreams. Key areas of focus coming up are the Hybrid Working Strategy, cultural workshops and culture navigators, LMS system, and manager and employee change support.

### **Key Achievements**

- Training Needs Analysis activity has given us a clear picture of organisational training requirements, and these are now being actioned.
- Significantly improved data report for learning and development.
- Significant improvement in percentage completion of mandatory corporate e-learning modules.

- One of our apprentices is about to finish a Digital Infrastructure qualification. and last month we were involved in facilitating the National Apprenticeship of the Year event.

## **ICT Team Update**

### **Infrastructure Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements**

Work has started on the deployment of a major windows 10 update to all laptops to ensure compliance and security is maintained.

A review of current printing arrangements is being undertaken to ensure they are still appropriate and provide value for money.

### **Service Desk Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements**

Introduction of a new starters/leavers process.

### **Applications Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements**

Projects

- Sergio WS Land charges moves to Acolaid completed (04/22)
- EPRF interface created for Firmstep form, form now live.
- Mod.gov Upgrade & SQL Move completed.
- Heavily involved in Energy rebate scheme works.
- Interfaces for Ukrainian home payments.

## **Governance Team Update**

- Administered the May 2022 elections for the 15 divisional ward areas sitting under the SWT area, plus 12 contested Parish Council/Parish Council ward areas.
- Worked with colleagues at SCC on Member Inductions.
- Continuing to balance delivering business as usual in terms of our committee timetable with the work of the Governance LGR workstream.

In terms of the Community Governance Review for Taunton:

- An extraordinary SWT Full Council meeting took place on 3rd March 2022 which considered, took into account and publicised the results of the first stage of consultation, and then sought approval for the Working Group's preferred option for Taunton and the area under review to be subject to a second round of consultation.
- The second stage of consultation will be held for six weeks over 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022 – 26<sup>th</sup> July 2022.
- For updates, please follow <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/cgr/>

## **Change & Digital Team Update**

Current projects and achievements

## Power Platform

- The project has been successfully completed and the 3 solutions have been deployed and are being used.
- The main benefits have been identified including automation, ownership, traceability, speed of development.
- Work has begun on socialising the benefits and the opportunities in order to identify potential projects and grow skills.

## Digital & Change Intranet Site

- A new intranet site has been built and launched which includes lots of helpful information, learning resources, information about our work and a form that enables people to submit digital ideas.

## Information Management Team Update

- Information Management Policies (x3 – Information and Records Management Policy, Digital Information Policy and Digital Information and Records Management for Councillors Policy) going through the July Executive cycle for sign off.
- Paper Records Project – advertisement for paper audit resource being drafted, met with SCC Records Manager to align process of storing records and system used.
- Retention and Disposal Schedule – will be expanded to encompass all line of business systems, currently SharePoint and Paper.
- Work continuing under LGR Information Governance sub workstream and LGR Records Management sub workstream.

## Business Analyst Team Update

Throughout the last 3 months the Business Analysis team have taken the lead and supported the delivery of the following solutions:

- Homes for Ukraine 'Thank You' payment process – The Business Analysis team took the lead in developing process which has subsequently been adopted by all districts and County. The form was developed in Firmstep allowing customers to regularly claim the government grant.
- Annual fee changes have all been completed from 01/04/2022.
- HMO licensing application form published.
- CTax Energy Rebate form developed.
- Electronic Payment Request Form (EPRF) delivered using Firmstep.
- Power Platform case study pack for 4 pilots.
- Nursery website and payments development.

## Health & Safety Team Update

- A revised H & S Policy was approved by SMT and H & S Committee; as recommended in the last SWAP audit, the policy now includes an A – Z arrangements section. Work continues to develop an e-learning function to

communicate the policy to the workforce and to gather acknowledgement declarations.

- A Power BI report was developed to summarise the progress delivered within the H & S Improvement Plan; this data continues to be reviewed at Tier 2 H & S Committee.
- Power BI Reporting has been developed further to illustrate dashboard/scorecard reporting for each Directorate, this is reviewed at Tier 2 & 3 H & S Committee meetings and summarises observations and recommendations applicable to previous months' data.
- Risk action plans for all service areas focused on the completion of generic risk assessments; completion statistics continue to be reviewed at the month H & S Committee meetings.
- Initial meetings commenced in connection to the next SWAP audit (Q2); evidence of delivered actions has been submitted for review and feedback.
- The Contractor Management exercise (part of the H & S Improvement plan) focused on CIS (Construction Industry Scheme) type contractors; these being rated as higher risk. Vetting processes include checks against standard H & S documentation and insurance criteria.

Alongside the day-to-day work of each team, we also have one major programme sitting within the team which I also wish to update on.

## **Service Improvement and Efficiency Programme Update**

The current projects within the programme are;

- Revenues Enforcement Project - this continues to deliver well, in the first 4 months it has delivered more cashable benefits than anticipated - additional collected and retained income of £203K against an initial forecast of £90K-. We have also been able to review the 22/23 benefits and reforecast accordingly.
- Excellence Framework Project – over 30 Teams are now engaging with the tool and an increasing number of support materials are being made available via the intranet site. Individual team support is provided on demand with the goal of moving all those engaged teams from forming to Good through this year.
- Change and Improvement Capabilities Project: A team of Excellence Champions is now identified, and development is ongoing with their expertise being utilised on varying improvement opportunities.

We have also launched one new project in the quarter;

- Customer Experience Improvement Project
- This will initially include a complaint analysis piece which is ongoing, with several quick wins and actions emerging.

## **Finance**

## **Finance and Procurement**

Following the approval of the 2022/23 Budget by Council in February the finance and procurement service has continued to focus on delivering effective financial control and compliance, ensuring we are in a good position for the transition to the new unitary council next year.

Many staff from both finance and procurement teams are continuing to deliver key activities through the LGR Finance Workstream as well as maintaining SWT 'business as usual' and I would like to thank all the staff for all their hard work as they navigate this important balancing act.

As is usual at this time of year a primary focus has been delivering financial year end including reporting our final position and performance against budget and preparing the annual financial accounts ready for review by the external auditor. This has progressed to plan with the Draft Statement of Accounts expected to be approved by the S151 Officer before the end of June – a great achievement.

We end the financial year in a good position financially. We have managed various financial risks well during the year and remained within budget in both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account and maintained healthy reserves that provide ongoing resilience to future financial risks such as rising inflation and interest rates. Detailed end of year financial reports will be presented to Scrutiny and Executive committees this month with the various facts and figures provided for public review. The external audit year end review will also start this month with the audited accounts and external auditor's report due to be presented to Members in September.

## **Communications**

The communications team has been key in supporting and promoting two landmark occasions in the first half of the year – the elections for the new Somerset council and celebrations to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

The district and county councils worked together to ensure voters were well-informed about the elections for Somerset with the creation of a new, unitary council in April 2023 – the first major change to the way the county is governed in almost 50 years. Regular and timely messaging was issued reminding people to register to vote, outlining key dates and deadlines, and signposting to information on the website about polling stations and persons nominated. The communications lead played a crucial role at the count, looking after national and local media at the venue and ensuring results were shared accurately and quickly.

Communications worked closely with teams across the council to promote initiatives and events marking the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Early collaboration with the events team ensured a steady flow of information across our media and social media channels for a host of interactive trails and activities, culminating in the Big Jubilee Lunch. The free event in Taunton's Vivary Park was officially opened by the Mayor of Taunton and was a resounding success showcasing an array of concert bands, creative groups and entertainers in our award-winning park with photos and videos on social media.

Communications were able to support the climate and open spaces teams to co-ordinate, record and publicise the planting of 190 trees across the district as part of the Queen's Green Canopy. The nationwide project was marked by dignitaries from across the county coming together as part of the National Association of Civic Officers Tree Planting Day, to plant the final trees and unveil commemorative plaques. Taunton, and its surrounding towns and villages, was subsequently recognised by the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset for planting 2,437 trees for the project - the most in the county.

There has been plenty of business as usual for the communications team with lots of Council initiatives, messages and events to publicise.

We have been keeping people up to date with the new partnership aiming to crack down on littering in the district as part of the ongoing commitment to help keep our streets and public spaces free of litter.

We have been providing clear information and updates about the energy rebate scheme to provide financial support to households to help with rising energy bills. Information ranging from eligibility, when to expect payments, how to sign up to direct debits, and warnings about scams has been issued across all our channels.

We have also been explaining the proposed changes to local governance arrangements identified by the Community Governance Review Working Group and encouraging participation in the second stage of public consultation.

The Council's commitment to working towards carbon neutrality by 2030 continues to create positive news for Somerset West and Taunton, which was ranked as the top performing district council in analysis by the campaign group Climate Emergency UK at the start of the year. We have announced the launch of a new round of grant funding to support the installation of electric vehicle charge points; details of a new Grassland Management Strategy to ensure that mowing routines support the climate and our ecology; and the new Woodland Creation Officer post funded by the Council and hosted by the Exmoor National Park Authority to support the delivery of local and national tree planting and nature recovery targets. SWT's Climate Positive Planning guidance has been shortlisted in this year's Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) South West, with the results expected in July.

There has been good news to share for our coastal communities as well with work progressing to build the first council homes in West Somerset for over 30 years progressing at Seaward Way, Minehead; parking machines being updated in the West Somerset area; and funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities going towards two new changing places toilets - one in Minehead and the other in Taunton.

The team continues to work with the other district councils and the county council to issue communications on joint initiatives and delivery of the new Somerset Council. Recently we have reported on the executive appointments following the elections and a new webpage set up to provide information and support for Somerset households who have volunteered to sponsor Ukrainian refugees.

Somerset West and Taunton and Sedgemoor District Council are working together on joint proposals outlined in an *Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan* which set out the Councils' ambitions to deliver ecological enhancement and protection through a framework of key actions and projects.

The two councils have also teamed up with the Heart of the South West Growth Hub to organise an event specifically designed for businesses in the food and drink sector.

We have also been able to show how partnership working is delivering for the people of Somerset West and Taunton.

Backed by key business leaders, the Council has launched an exciting new inward investment campaign to put the area on the map with future business investors. The SWITCH campaign is being delivered to promote the area of Somerset West and Taunton as a key business destination, rich in growth and innovation opportunities. The Council has also commissioned Visit Exmoor and Visit Somerset to develop and host an online platform, which enables event organisers and representatives from towns and villages across the district to submit information about local events via an online form.

The Civic Office has been supporting the Mayor of Taunton and the Chair of SWT to carry out a variety of engagements including the Jubilee Service of Thanksgiving and the Big Jubilee Lunch; and the Armed Forces Day flag raising ceremony both of which generated lots of positive feedback and 'thank yous' from participants and the community.

Plans are now underway to mark Emergency Services Day, Remembrance, and Trafalgar Day parade in October.

Following the Peacocks' unforgettable 2021-22 campaign, the Mayor of Taunton is also hosting a table at the Taunton Town Football Club Champions Dinner marking its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

Internal Communications has been working to make sure employees are aware of the support and resources available from Care First, and the monthly Nutrition and Wellbeing Workshops; as well as ensuring all vacancies are on the intranet and that news content is current and accessible.

Videos have been created for various teams and projects including Health and Safety, HR, Internal Operations and Housing. Internal communications has also supported several campaigns including International Women's Day, the Climate Team Travel Survey, and the Employee Awards; as well as overseeing staff engagement and accessibility with the intranet.