



# Minutes

## *FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SELECT COMMITTEE*

**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SELECT COMMITTEE  
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27 JUNE 2018, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL,  
AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 4.30 PM.**

This meeting was webcast. To review the detailed discussions that took place please see the webcast which can be found at: <http://www.buckscc.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>  
The webcasts are retained on this website for 6 months. Recordings of any previous meetings beyond this can be requested (contact: [democracy@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@buckscc.gov.uk))

### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mr W Bendyshe-Brown, Mr T Butcher, Mr C Clare (Vice-Chairman), Mr D Martin,  
Mr D Shakespeare OBE, Ms J Ward and Mr D Watson (Chairman)

### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Mrs K Baines, Ms F Bashir, Mr J Chilver, Mr L Jeffries and Mr A Smith

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP**

Apologies were received from Mr Martin Farrow.

### **2 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

#### **RESOLVED**

**That Mr D Watson be elected Chairman of the Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee for the ensuing year.**

### **3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

#### **RESOLVED**

**That Mr C Clare be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee for the ensuing year.**

#### **4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **5 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 08 May 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

#### **6 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions.

#### **7 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

- Preparatory work had been undertaken for an inquiry called 'Planning for Effective Leadership'. Mr Charlie Clare would chair the inquiry, and the Chairman thanked Members for their contributions to the Inquiry Scope.
- It was agreed that a number of follow up actions from the HR and OD item at the last meeting would now be incorporated into the Inquiry.

#### **8 CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS REVIEW**

The Chairman welcomed Mr John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Resources, Mr Lloyd Jeffries, the Director of Customer, and Mrs Kelly Baines, the Head of Customer Experience, to the meeting. Members received a report on the review of the Customer Service Standards and asked questions on the report. During the session and in answer to subsequent Members' questions, the following main points were noted:

- The new Head of Digital, Mr Ben Unsworth, started this week. He would be conducting a digital maturity assessment for the Council, which would help the Council to understand where existing strengths lay from a digital perspective and would highlight which capabilities would need to be developed further.
- The Digital and Customer Service teams were now located together. This enabled the business unit to review the end-to-end customer journey.
- The reviewed Customer Service Standards aimed to create a customer service that would be more digitally focused, drive forward the channel shift towards digital communication, align with customer expectations which were continually increasing, and deliver clear staff accountabilities.
- Part of the 'Brilliant at the Basics' programme was to get customer feedback and use it to improve customer services. Previously the Council was rated a 2\* by the Society for IT Practitioners in the Public Sector or Socitm, and had now moved up to a 3\*. The Directorate aimed to reach a 4\* rating by the end of the calendar year. Three fixed-term web content editors were now employed, which enabled the Directorate to drive improvements.
- Webchat had a soft launch on the Contact Us form and the HR service desk. It had received positive feedback.
- The Directorate was looking to integrate social media into the Customer Service Centre as a communication option.
- Office hours had changed as a response to customer feedback, from 0830-1730 Monday to Thursday, and 0830-1700 on Friday.
- The Customer Service Standards first launched in 2016. The review aimed to ensure that the standards had evolved in line with how customers accessed services at present. Mr Jeffries would provide an update on the Brilliant at the Basics programme and the Customer Service Standards Review to the next meeting in September.

- Directorate recommendations included developing a Customer Experience Strategy; working with the Communications team during Customer Service Week to promote the new standards and ensure customers were engaged; to create an e-learning module on customer service; to build a network of customer service champions to encourage collaborative working in the best interests of the customer; and building customer focus groups so that residents had a voice. The recommendations had not been through governance channels yet.
- Multiple channels of communication would equate greater cost. The Chairman asked whether there would be more or less communication channels in the future or the same number. Mr Jeffries responded that according to the vision of the Customer Experience Strategy, telephony would certainly drop, leaving a smaller customer service centre dealing with complex queries and hopefully doing more for frontline services by delivering deeper integrations. The aim was to expand communication channels to include social media as a customer point and potentially artificial intelligence, but first there was a need to identify key issues, go through discovery stages in terms what was trying to be improved, and then put the right channel in place to provide that service.
- An average call costs £7 per transaction. The same transaction through the BCC website costs 8 pence.
- If there were more communication channels in the future, how would savings be made? The Directorate had delivered just over £630k of efficiency savings, mainly through channel shift. If the Directorate was able to deliver further improvements by investing in technology, channel shift and customer experience, then calculated risks should be taken rather than banking the initial saving, which would be a short-sighted benefit in terms of what the long-term aim would be delivering the Customer Experience Strategy.
- Alongside cashable savings, time and resource savings were important considerations, so that officers could be released to do better at their day jobs.
- If customers had questions that were not answered elsewhere, the Director of Customer assured the Committee that they would still be able to speak to an adviser directly.
- Call drop-out rates were monitored on a monthly basis to push performance.
- A Member recommended that the Directorate provide a service for customers so that if they have an emergency, they could be put straight through to an adviser. Mr Jeffries and Ms Baines agreed to take this recommendation away.
- Face-to-face customer contact would be maintained through: increased reception hours, and plans for local government reform for the 19 community hubs where there would be the opportunity for face-to-face communication. Mr Chilver highlighted that Members were often the frontline in receiving customer/resident experience feedback, and played an important role. Mr Chilver urged Members to pass any feedback to the Customer Directorate.
- A Member questioned how far the team had gone in ascertaining what local communities wanted from the service, eg, the blind, hard of hearing, and those with learning difficulties. Mr Jeffries affirmed that the Directorate was not shying away from working in collaboration with residents as, if engaging with them made the facilities easier to use, and if everyone could get online and stay online, it would make the jobs of officers a lot easier and capacity could be freed up. The Directorate would be reviewing all webpages to look at disability access, and speaking to adult social care colleagues and residents regarding usability. They would make sure that they involved residents in the design process going forward.
- A project was being undertaken to analyse 17,000 customer feedback forms, to gain business intelligence on the variety of customers using the service and their different customer needs. It was agreed that the findings of the project would be shared with the Committee.

#### **ACTION: Head of Customer Experience**

- Conversations with Customer Service Advisers were recorded and measurable, but conversations between customers and officers were not recorded and therefore difficult to

measure. The review aimed to create customer service standards that were measurable, and that applied to all Council employees so that they were all accountable.

- Advisers could potentially answer multiple webchats at one time, but could only be on the telephone to one person at one time. This was why priority was given to those contacting the Council online or through webchat for general enquiries.
- Embedding the standards effectively would be about obtaining the buy-in and ownership of Council employees. The biggest challenge would be to measure the standards and find out user experiences. The Directorate would need to be proactive, look at who has made contact, and contact them to obtain feedback to inform service improvements. Further areas to explore would be to evaluate how outsourced service providers were performing in their customer service.
- The Directorate was working very closely with the Complaints team, having monthly management meetings where they looked at complaints data, insight and performance, and analysed this so that feedback could be provided to service areas to further drive improvements.
- Fix My Street was being run by a third party provider.
- A Member commented that the Council was getting really good at communication, but not quite so good at frontline delivery and quality and monitoring of delivery. An improved and better interface was needed.
- Improvement suggestions from Members included developing more webchat for Fix My Street with an FAQ and link to Communities on the same webpage; and developing Twitter usage for communicating updates.
- Mr Chilver detailed how the Council was assisting the less digitally enabled through libraries, particularly with Learn My Way training.
- If the Council was driving towards more digital communications, there would need to be equality in internet access across the County, and robustness, resilience and reliance in the Council's own systems. Both these were highlighted as key elements of the Technology Strategy.
- A Member recommended that the web pages were constantly refreshed, up-to-date and exciting. The Directorate responded that they were creating prototypes for a new webpage template, and aimed to trial the prototypes during National Customer Service Week in October to get public feedback.
- Broken web links had reduced from 800 to 130. The Directorate aimed to have all links fixed by September 2018 or earlier, and would report progress back to the Committee.

**ACTION: Head of Customer Experience**

## **9 INQUIRY SCOPE PROPOSAL**

### **RESOLVED**

**Members will consider the inquiry proposal/draft scope and agree it as their next inquiry topic.**

## **10 PROPERTY AND ASSETS UPDATE**

The Vice Chairman welcomed Mr John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Resources and Mr Adam Smith, the Director of Property, to the meeting. Members received a report on the review of the Customer Service Standards and asked questions on the report. During the session and in answer to subsequent Members' questions, the following main points were noted:

- The Property Department was composed of four specialist teams - asset management, major projects, strategic programmes, property services.

- Asset Management handled the County's assets and investment portfolio and investment decisions.
- Major Projects delivered LASR (Local Asset Strategy Review) and the OPE project (One Public Estate).
- Strategic Programmes ran for 2-5 years and involved more change management and transformation than a major project. Two programmes were running - the Aylesbury Town Centre Programme and Schools Capital Programme.
- Property Services included facilities, soft services (such as reception and post room), hard services (planned preventative maintenance or PPM), and health and safety. Projects were worth up to £1 million.
- To help manage the Property and Assets portfolio, a revised governance structure was being developed. The Asset Strategy Board would continue to take an overall corporate view in terms of capital slippage- setting overall asset budget, balancing different business unit priorities, and monitoring capital slippage throughout the year. The Property Board was a senior Member and officer advisory board dealing with the Property Strategy and making recommendations about investment to the Cabinet and Full Council; and the Portfolio Progress Group monitored whether anticipated benefits from the projects were actually being delivered – 'doing things right' and 'doing the right things'.
- Every three months the Property Board updated the corporate management team (CMT), every 12 months the Property Board and Asset Strategy Board agreed the capital expenditure split, and every 6 months the two Boards joined to exchange information.
- Strategies were divided into 5 areas - Finance, Benefits realisation, Risk management, Resource management (Property) and Stakeholder management.
- Challenges included retention of qualified staff, modernising local government and not knowing what the future would look like, and failure of tenants in the retail sector.
- Opportunities included Aylesbury town centre regeneration, efficient use of existing staff through matrix management approach, and a focus on return on investment. All work was aligned to Council objectives.
- Department aimed to establish the right culture within Property and the Council, as well as having the supply chain on board. This was linked to procurement strategies and how the Council sold itself to the marketplace.
- For the Resources portfolio, the revenue budget was 2.2 million and capital budget was circa 11-12 million.
- None of the departmental budget was outsourced, but contractors were managed efficiently through procurement protocols.
- The value of investment in property assets was just under £75 million.
- Revenue capital this year was targeting £8.4 million.
- Weighted yield on the investment portfolio was 6.48%?
- Top 20 corporate properties with descending current net book value taking land and buildings together included a number of schools. Carter Jonas had conducted the asset valuation. Members requested further detailed information as to how this information was arrived at, particularly how the values were calculated. The Director of Property agreed to provide this information.

**ACTION: Director of Property and Assets**

- The Council had a broad aim of £250 million investment portfolio that could be reviewed. The Department had already secured £80 million. A proportion of this was funded by borrowing. A yield of less than 6% would not be considered viable (this was a target for the

whole portfolio and not individual investments). The Council attempted to have a diversified portfolio and geographically located in different places. It relied on the advice of Carter Jonas.

- There was no depreciation on the capital value of the two retail parks owned by the Council, The Vale Park in Aylesbury and Knaves Beech in High Wycombe. However, the Council would be prudent about acquiring new properties in the retail sector given the downturn in the retail sector.
- Members questioned why there were not two separate boards – one for the investment portfolio and one for existing properties. An Investment Group Board was being set up to handle the new investment property portfolio as a sub-group to the Property Board.
- Members requested further clarity around the Boards and governance structure.

**ACTION: Director of Property and Assets**

- Permanent members of the Property Board included the Cabinet Member for Resources (Mr John Chilver), Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment (Mr Bill Chapple), Director of Property (Mr Adam Smith), Director of Resources (Ms Sarah Ashmead), and the Head of Property Portfolio who was responsible for the management of the portfolio. The Asset Strategy Board had three elected members.
- The Chairman questioned whether there was an overreliance on Carter Jonas (CJ). CJ attended monthly progress meetings with the Director of Property and Assets and his team and had KPIs to meet. The Director of Property met with the senior partner of CJ every three months for a one-to-one to discuss broader property issues. The Council attended retail forums independently of CJ. Every 6 months a full review was conducted with CJ, in addition to the meetings that the Cabinet Member would have. Carter Jonas pursued active asset management which meant that they were in regular contact with commercial and retail tenants, monitored tenant intentions and flagged issues early on. Mr Chilver was quite confident that the Council was taking the measures that it could to mitigate risks but acknowledged that risks remained.
- The Director of Property and Assets had implemented an interim structure change rather than a re-structure. This meant that there were a number of acting Heads of Service, but posts would be filled permanently when the outcome of unitary was known. Acting Heads of Service were full-time employed people.
- Property Asset Management Plan had six principles. The Chairman requested that the Director of Property provide the current principles to the Committee.

**ACTION: Director of Property and Assets**

## **11 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Members requested that:

- the draft new Technology Strategy was added to the work programme
- budget scrutiny dates were added to their diaries
- pre-meeting invites were added to Member diaries as standard.

**ACTION: Committee & Governance Adviser**

## **12 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2018, 10am in Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall.

**CHAIRMAN**