

CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL

CONFIDENTIAL NOTES of the Meeting of the CUSTOMER SERVICES POLICY ADVISORY GROUP held on 13 APRIL 2016

PRESENT: Councillor L M Smith - Chairman

Councillors: J Cook
E A Culverhouse
M Harker
M J Harrold
F S Wilson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Councillor N I Varley.

37 NOTES

The Chairman raised that, regarding the discussion of information provided to the public explaining how council tax is spent, another point which needed to be made clear was where the specific dividing lines lay between the services provided by County, District and Town & Parish councils.

The notes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

38 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

39 UPDATE ON CURRENT ISSUES FROM CABINET MEMBER AND HEAD OF SERVICE / SENIOR OFFICER

The 'Update on Shared Services' was delivered under this item.

The shared service had launched in September; due to recruitment to a number of posts, a number of staff being in training, and a high level of sickness the service had not been operating at full capacity. Jacquie Smith, the Customer Services Manager, had also given in her notice for personal reasons. The PAG Members asked the Head of Customer Services to formally give her their thanks for all her work at the Council.

The role was being advertised and would close on the 24 April; it was hoped that a candidate could be found who would be suited to moving forward the agenda which had come out of the shared services business case. Recent work had been done to stabilise the department, such as getting the call software working well across both councils. The service had also recently been through its busiest period of the year, when it carried out its annual billing process, which had gone well and all bills had been sent out on time. Feedback had mostly focussed on the adult social care precept and the fact that the Chiltern precept had increased by more than 1.99%.

The call volume regarding waste matters had begun to settle at a lower number. Over the Easter period when rounds change there was often a couple of weeks with more contact but following this calls were expected to drop down again. It was noted that the reason for this increased contact was a combination of people not reading the information provided about the changes and mistakes made in collection due to the new rounds.

40 UPDATE FROM MEMBERS ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no updates from Outside Bodies, however, Councillor Harker raised a related matter that an Amersham Revitalisation Group volunteer had paid what seemed a unnecessarily high charge for photocopying papers for the Local Plan Consultation. It was advised that copies cost 10p per page to meet the costs involved and the reason it had cost so much was the large amount of material available related to the Local Plan. It was noted that in the annual budget setting process for fees and charges and option could be included for discretion to be used in certain case to allow the charge to be waived, or that in future people could be advised to use a print shop for bulk orders where the costs would be lower.

41 UPDATE ON SHARED SERVICES

This item is covered under minute 39.

42 CUSTOMER SERVICES SERVICE PLAN 16/17

The Head of Customer Services introduced the report, which was intended to share the contents of the Customer Service Plan for 2016/17 with the members of the PAG and to invite any questions on its content. The Plan was focussed on the agenda created by the shared service business case. On the Customer Services side this would include encouraging partnership working with other authorities, dealing with more enquiries at the first point of contact, establishing service level agreements with all services and continuing the roll out of Universal Support. For Revenues & Benefits it would entail a training programme for those new to their roles, the recovery project at South Bucks, the development of strategies to deliver the Business Case items, the review of Council Tax discounts and of the arrangements of bailiff services.

During discussion of the Plan it was noted that there was now a Transformation Officer post in Revenues and Benefits, whose role would be to review and seek to improve the processes being used in the department. Regarding the section for Key Achievements 2015/16 it was noted that the most aims had been met and considering the service review process and staff shortages a very strong level of collection rates had been achieved. Concern regarding hacking was also raised, given the personal details stored by Revenues & Benefits, and it was advised that although this was always a risk it was managed by IT. On the key performance indicators of speed of processing new claims it was asked whether a downward trend could be expected and it was advised that due to the introduction of Universal Credit the current level of 18 days could increase. This would be because of an increase in how long it takes to request information, although that impact could be lessened by a decrease in the amount of information required.

43 REVIEW OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORTING INFORMATION

At the last meeting of the PAG it had been requested that a report on the information available to the public on how council tax is spent be brought to a future meeting to be reviewed. The Head of Communications and the Head of Finance were in attendance to assist wherever their departments were affected. The report outlined the information currently provided, which was significantly governed by legislation, and members were asked for their views on how it could be improved.

It was felt that providing a hard copy leaflet was no longer appropriate given the cost involved. The possibility of council tax billing by email and including the leaflet with the bill was raised and it was advised that the Council planned to move in this direction, although take up in other authorities had been quite low so it may not reach many people at first. Members also raised concern that what information was available on how Council Tax was spent could be clearer and phrased in language more easily understood by the public. It was agreed that a new document would be drawn up to clearly set out the spending of CDC's portion of council tax, to be available online and in hard copy upon request. A draft of this would be circulated to the PAG Members in advance of the next meeting.

Due to its closeness to the EU Referendum it was agreed to cancel the next meeting on the 06 June. It was also agreed that the meeting on Monday 18 July would be moved to a more convenient date to be confirmed following the meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.35pm.