

CUSTOMER SERVICES AND BUSINESS SUPPORT POLICY ADVISORY GROUP

Meeting - 17 September 2018

Present: D Smith (Chairman)
D Saunders

Apologies for absence: M Bezzant, T Egleton and R Reed

19. MINUTES

The minutes of the Customer Services and Business Support PAG held on 18 June 2018 were approved.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

21. VERBAL UPDATE ON THE JOINT ICT STRATEGY

The Head of Business Support provided an update on the Joint ICT Strategy. Approval was given by the Joint Committee on 28 June 2018 for the proposed Shared ICT Strategy.

At the same meeting, although not part of the ICT Strategy, approval was given to move Officers to using a shared email address of @chilternandsouthbucks.gov.uk. Approval to use the domain name was given by the Government Digital Service on 22 August 2018. The ICT Infrastructure Team completed work on configuring the email server by 7 September 2018 and the shared email address was now ready to use. Work had been undertaken with the Communications Team to ensure that residents were aware of the shared email address and for changes to be made to webpages and letter templates.

In response to this update Members were informed that staff would cease using the single email address on a service by service basis. Redirection of emails would be in place for a reasonable length of time.

In relation to the Shared ICT Strategy the Head of Business Support reported that a budget of £30,000 was authorised to cover the cost of employing external expertise to help develop the financial and technical business case for a move to a cloud delivery model. Technical workshops were planned for early October. The logical approach for a move to the cloud was to build on the existing in-house knowledge of Microsoft. Councils were not yet ready to move to a pilot for Windows 10 as not all core IT systems were Windows 10 compatible.

Members were also informed of the 'Delete the Data' project in line with the Information Governance Group programme. Files would be deleted if they were

between 7-10 years old or 5 years old if they had not been looked at for a long period of time. Under the General Data Protection Regulations it was important to get rid of information after it had been held for a period of time, particularly personal data. Staff would be asked to manage their email inbox to only keep recent emails. A Member commented that some departments deleted their data quickly whilst others held onto it for a longer period of time. Planning documents were held in perpetuity whereas other information such as licensing had a shorter shelf life.

Members asked whether a small specialist company would be used to hold cloud files and were informed that the Council was looking at Azure Cloud Services because of their experience. A question was asked about the possibility of a Unitary Council and was informed that this would be a long project. Wycombe were using the same provider but Aylesbury Vale District Council was working on different options.

The Head of Business Support reported that the following transformational projects were being supported:-

- Insourcing of the SBDC Rev\Bens IT systems
- The digitisation of the planning archive
- IT aspects of set up for the Customer Experience Programme
- Flexible and mobile working in Environment and Rev/Bens Services

Goss were providing the software for the Customer Experience Programme. There would be an overlap between the current and new supplier. The Head of Customer Services reported that the new system would be released shortly and they would be working closely with Service areas.

The Head of Business Support reported that with the insourcing of the SBDC Rev\Bens Team some staff would be working remotely as they did not live in the local area. They would be supported in mobile working arrangements. The system used by Northgate called Academy would be brought in-house. The system at Chiltern District Council was Civica. In the longer term one system would be investigated.

A Member asked about mobile working and what equipment would be made available in the future. The Head of Business Support reported that rather than have ipads they would look at Notebook/Surface Pro computers with touch screen. Reference was made to the shorter battery life and the need for wireless chargers to avoid the need of charging cables. Another question was asked about staff using their own devices, but this would be difficult because of the level of security required. However, with new Microsoft technology any mobile device would be secure.

22. **UPDATE ON REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE TRANSITION**

The Head of Customer Services reported that the contract would finish at the end of October 2018 and work was being carried out building up the IT systems in house.

They would be testing the Academy System on 18 September 2018 and further testing would be undertaken by Capita.

Staff would be subject to TUPE and a letter has been issued to staff affected on their terms and conditions. Individual issues would be taken up with staff separately. Staff would also be subject to some changes such as change in pay date. As mentioned in the previous item some staff who lived outside the local area would have mobile working arrangements and the same contact details would apply to them. Managers would see remote workers a day a month for one to one meetings and training etc. Performance would be monitored through the IT system with reports on transactional information. From the end of October there would be a few days where transition arrangements would be in place and no processing would be undertaken. The new system should be up and running by 5 November 2018.

A decision was taken for cash receipting to be undertaken through the Civica system used by Chiltern District Council. This would take effect from 1 November 2018.

A Member asked about their new terms and conditions and was informed that the staff subject to TUPE would remain on their current terms and conditions until such a time as the Council considered whether to move them onto harmonised terms and conditions and if so staff would be consulted. A question was then asked about the two different systems being used in Chiltern and South Bucks District Council and the Head of Customer Services reported that they would look at procuring a single system but were waiting to see if any decision was made on modernising local government. It would be likely that the Council would look at considering procurement options in the New Year.

In terms of savings the Head of Customer Services reported that it was difficult to ascertain the cost of the service at this early stage.

23. **EXEMPT INFORMATION**

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the following item(s) of business were not for publication to the press or public on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

24. **APPLICATION FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF (1)**

Members were asked to consider an application for Discretionary Rate Relief. The Council had been previously supporting this organisation by providing Discretionary Rate Relief over a number of years at the rate of 80%. The organisation was encouraged to review their internal arrangements in order to set themselves up as a registered charity whereby they would automatically qualify for 80% Mandatory Rate Relief removing the need for regular applications for Discretionary Rate Relief.

Charitable status had been not been achieved by September 2017 and Members agreed that Discretionary Rate Relief would be granted at the existing rate of 80% to 31 March 2018. On 1 February 2018 charitable status was confirmed and the 80% Discretionary Rate Relief was replaced with 80% Mandatory Rate Relief. This organisation has submitted an application for the 20% Discretionary Rate Relief top up.

Members noted the Council's Guidelines and Advice including that the majority of the funds go to local or national charities and that local residents could support those charities direct. Having considered the application, Members considered that it was not appropriate for the Council to exercise its discretion in granting the application for the 20% Discretionary Rate Relief and that it would not be in the interests of the taxpayers and prudent use of the Council's resources.

Having considered the advice of the PAG, the Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that the Discretionary Rate Relief be refused.

25. **APPLICATION FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF (2)**

Members were asked to consider an application for Discretionary Rate Relief. This organisation had made payments in full for 2015 – 17 but then made an application for Discretionary Rate Relief for 2017 – 2019 as local users would not be able to afford the increase in costs, which was due to a recent assessment by the Valuation Office of their bigger premises.

Members noted the Council's Guidelines and Advice and the factors which had and had not been met. There was a clear link to the priorities of the Council detailed in the Joint Business Plan however there were a number of access restrictions to residents who could not benefit from the organisation. Members commented that this restricted the community value provided by the organisation.

Members considered that because the activities of the organisation met some of the Council's objectives in the Joint Business Plan on balance it was considered appropriate for the Council to exercise its discretion in this case and award 25% for one year. However, when the organisation applied for Discretionary Rate Relief next year further evidence should be provided by the organisation to show how they would provide added value to the community.

Having considered the advice of the PAG, the Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that an award of 25% Discretionary Rate Relief be awarded for one year.

The meeting terminated at 6.45 pm