

CUSTOMER SERVICES AND BUSINESS SUPPORT POLICY ADVISORY GROUP

Meeting - 20 November 2017

Present: D Smith (Chairman)
M Bezzant, R Reed and D Saunders

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. REPORTS FROM MEMBERS ON OUTSIDE BODIES (IF ANY)

None received.

3. PORTFOLIO BUDGET 2018/19

The PAG considered a report seeking Members' comments on the draft Revenue Budget and the Fees and Charges schedule for 2018/19 for the Customer Services and Business Support Portfolio, prior to consolidation of all portfolio budgets for consideration by the Cabinet. The report also outlined the context of the overall financial position facing the Council for the coming year and confirmed that Local Authority funding is subject to continuing significant reductions.

In considering the report, the PAG particularly noted:

- The Medium Term Financial Strategy in the Autumn of 2016 identified a potential funding gap in the coming years. There were known issues such as homelessness and potential changes to the New Homes Bonus grant that would increase this figure unless further cost reduction/income generation measures were taken. The Council was currently tackling the issue by embarking on a number of key projects and programmes set out in the report.
- All services were now provided by joint teams with Chiltern District Council. The Chiltern & South Bucks Joint Committee on 24th July 2017 agreed that from 2018/19 the standard cost split should be amended to CDC 58% / SBDC 42%, and this should be used for all joint services apart from Revenues & Benefits and Waste. This change has an impact on individual areas, in that the cost shares would be different between 2017/18 and 2018/19, however the effect on the budgets overall would be minimal.
- The draft budgets presented to Members at this stage represent the net direct running costs of services. They do not contain the apportionment of support services such as accommodation, IT, finance etc. These would be included in the final approved budgets, once the budgets for these support services have been set.
- The increase from the current year's approved budget to the 2018/19 draft budget is £141k (13.0%). The reason for this change was set out in the table in section 4.4 of the report.
- The key risks were set out in section 5.3 of the report.

In the discussion which followed, the reasons for the 13% increase from the current year's approved budget were explained. It was noted that whilst there had been an increase, these were costs taken from other portfolios so the council budget overall would be not subject to such an increase.

In response to a question regarding how the actual savings made from the service reviews were monitored against the projected savings, Members were advised that this information had been reported to the Joint Committee and that an internal audit had also been carried out which looked at the savings which had been made. A request was made that this report be circulated to Members of the PAG for their information.

Having considered the advice of the PAG, the Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** for the onward submission to Cabinet;

- The 2018/19 revenue budget
- The 2018/19 fees and charges.

4. **CASH AND CHEQUES**

The PAG received a report which discussed the Council's approach to accepting cash and cheque payments.

The PAG were advised that in order to reduce processing costs it was being suggested that the Council should aim to phase out cash and cheque payments over time. Although the Council could refuse to accept cash / cheque payments this would have a negative impact on customer choice and could negatively impact on collection rates as a significant number of customers still choose to pay by cash and cheque. It was therefore being proposed to work with the Council's customers to help them move to other payment channels, and to target some service areas initially to reduce cash/cheques. The removal of information about the ability to pay by cash / cheque from the back of bills, where it would be appropriate to do so, was also being proposed.

In the discussion which followed, Members were advised that other local authorities in the surrounding area had stopped accepting cash.

The PAG whilst in support of the proposal to discourage the use of cash payments, were not in support of the proposal to discourage the use of cheques as this would have a negative impact on customer choice and could negatively impact collection rates.

It was noted that whilst the use of cash would be discouraged and gradually phased out, if there was a customer who brought cash in to pay for something and didn't have another method to pay, the Council would still take the payment.

With regards to the removal of information about the ability to pay by cash from the back of bills, where it would be appropriate to do so, the PAG felt that Members should be consulted with over what information this would be appropriate to do so on.

Members were advised that the new Customer Experience Strategy would be looking at ways to encourage customers to go online to pay bills etc. It was noted that consideration would need to be given to the fact that some customers were unable to access a computer.

Having considered the advice of the PAG, the Portfolio Holder **AGREED** that the Council should aim to phase out cash payments over time, taking account of customer needs.

5. **WEBSITE CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

The PAG received a report which set out the process for website change management.

The report covered the following:

- How minor and major change requests are carried out
- How content is managed and maintained by service areas through the use of web editors.
- The mobile friendly websites and keeping content up to date
- The use of google analytics
- The use of Siteimprove
- The future impact of the Customer Experience Strategy.

The PAG noted the Dynamic Theme Design Specification which was attached to the report.

As the contract with the Council's current provider expires in September 2018, the PAG were advised of the Council's procurement process and some of the specifications which would be required of any provider.

Having noted the fact that the quality assurance score (generated by siteimprove) was lower for South Bucks District Council than Chiltern District Council, a request was made that the most recent scores for both councils be circulated to Members of the PAG.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

6. BRIEFING NOTE FOR CHANGES TO IT SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS

The PAG received a briefing note on changes to IT support for Members.

For security reasons, as set out in the report, the Council was proposing to remove the forwarding rule on all Members' mailboxes and to replace it with MobileIron on all iPads giving a direct connection to the Council mailboxes.

In the discussion which followed, the need for Members to be able to access their council emails on their mobile phone was raised. Members were advised that this could be done via Outlook Web App (OWA).

In response to a question, the Head of Business Support explained that for security reasons it would not be possible for anyone not employed by the Council to have access to a Member's calendar.

Following a concern raised regarding the fact that Members who were also Buckinghamshire County Councillors were having to use two different ipad devices, Members were advised that talks had been taking place with Buckinghamshire Country Council over the last couple of years to see if one ipad device could be used for both councils but that no solution had been found as of yet.

It was agreed that it was important to ensure that all Members were made aware of what the Council was proposing to do prior to roll out.

RESOLVED that the briefing note be noted.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS - CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY JOINT MEMBERS WORKING GROUP

The Portfolio Holder advised Members of the PAG that a Customer Experience Strategy Members Joint Working Group had been set up and invited nominations from two Members of the PAG to join the working group.

Councillor Saunders and Councillor Bezzant agreed to be part of the working group.

The meeting terminated at 7.24 pm