

CUSTOMER SERVICES AND BUSINESS SUPPORT POLICY ADVISORY GROUP

Meeting - 4 March 2019

Present: D Smith (Chairman)
R Reed and D Saunders

Also Present: R Bagge

Apologies for absence: M Bezzant and T Eggleton

31. MINUTES

The minutes of the Customer Services and Business Support PAG held on 19 November 2018 were approved.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

33. PROGRESS ON IT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

The Head of Business Support updated Members on the ICT Strategy. She informed Members that a full report had been submitted to the Joint Committee on 13 February 2019 which sought agreement to approve the initiation of the projects to move the Council's ICT desktop services and infrastructure estate to Microsoft's Azure Cloud and to use PowerOn, through the CCS G-Cloud framework to provide professional services to deliver these cloud migration projects. In her update, Members noted that contracts were being drafted with PowerOn and they were liaising with Microsoft regarding licenses.

Following a question from a Member it was agreed that a written report would be submitted to the next meeting of the PAG providing an update on the IT Strategy and the Head of Business Support confirmed that there was no additional funding on the ICT Strategy. The Head of Business Support reported that they had to move forward with these projects as the Council would be out of compliance in January 2020 if these changes were not implemented.

A Member queried the IT Strategy and the Customer Experience Strategy in relation to the transition to a new Unitary District Council. Both Customer Services and IT were working with their colleagues at the County and District Councils on a number of work streams and looking at different options. Any proposals would be considered by a joint meeting of the Chief Executives and would be discussed by the Shadow Executive once it had formed, if required. The Head of Customer Services clarified that no solution had been agreed yet for customers but confirmed that South Bucks

District Council was not spending any additional funding on the Customer Experience Strategy.

In relation to the IT Strategy the Head of Business Support reported that Wycombe District Council were taking the same approach to their IT Strategy as Chiltern and South Bucks and that the approach at Bucks County Council was also very similar. Aylesbury Vale District Council have had a Cloud Strategy for several years. She was having weekly meetings with the other Buckinghamshire Authorities Heads of IT on work streams for the Unitary District Council.

34. EXEMPT INFORMATION

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

35. BAD DEBT WRITE-OFFS

The PAG received a report on the write-off of debts, which were non recoverable due to insolvency action. Members noted that some businesses faced problems following a revised valuation being received from the Valuation Office. The Council would put recovery action in place with a Liability Order being granted by the court. Following this if liquidators were appointed, the account would be apportioned and a Proof of Debt submitted. With individual debt, attempts would also be made to recover debt and Enforcement Agents would be used. Debt was not recoverable once an Individual Voluntary Arrangement had been entered into. Since the service had come back in-house from November 2018, new arrangements had been put in place to monitor debt.

Having considered the advice of the PAG the Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that the position regarding the debts listed be noted and for Cabinet to authorise these to be written off on the Council's books.

36. APPLICATION FOR HARDSHIP RELIEF FROM BUSINESS RATES

The PAG considered an application for rate relief on hardship grounds. Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 gave the Council power to reduce or remit the payment of non-domestic rates by granting hardship relief to provide assistance to businesses that were suffering unexpected hardship arising from circumstances beyond the businesses control. When granting rate relief on the grounds of hardship consideration was given to whether the ratepayer would sustain hardship if the Council failed to grant relief and whether it was reasonable to grant relief having regard to the interests of persons subject to the Council Tax.

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Members considered the application and commented that all businesses needed to make provision for their first year of operation and therefore considered that it was not reasonable to grant hardship relief in this instance, particularly as it was a commercial venture which did not significantly benefit the community. Reference was made to considering if the business could obtain any other reliefs.

Having considered the advice of the PAG the Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that relief should not be awarded for this organisation in this instance.

The meeting terminated at 6.25 pm

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