

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	Wednesday, 31 May 2017
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors W. Johnson (Chair), P. Birkinshaw, G. Carr, Charlesworth, Clarke, Clements, Ennis, Franklin, Daniel Griffin, Hampson, Hayward, Lofts, Sheard and Wilson together with co-opted members Ms P. Gould and Mr J. Winter

1 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

Apologies for absence were received from Ms K. Morritt in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

2 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillor Lofts declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 7 in his capacity as a Member of the Adoption Panel insofar as this item referred to this matter.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd May, 2017 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4 Future Council Strategy Progress

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:-

- Andrew Frosdick, Executive Director Core Services
- Michael Potter, Service Director Business Improvement and Communications
- Amanda Glew, Head of Organisation and Workforce Improvement
- Councillor Robin Franklin, Core Services Cabinet Support Member.

The meeting received a presentation giving an overview of the Organisation Improvement Strategy 2017–20, which had been developed to ensure that the Council continued to drive forward changes in improvements to meet the demands required of a modern council. The presentation identified key achievements in relation to organisational change and transformation for the period 2014-17, and identifying the key themes and areas focused in taking forward the Strategy to 2020, as contained within the high level delivery plan.

Members asked questions in response to the report submitted and presentation and the following matters were highlighted:-

- Work was being undertaken to ensure the transfer of skills and knowledge as part of a succession planning toolkit, and to develop clear career pathways in known shortage areas. The need to engage with managers to raise their awareness of these issues and develop flexible work pathways was acknowledged, particularly as implementation of savings proposals resulted in reduced staff numbers.
- The meeting noted that it had been hoped to have made more progress on workforce and succession planning than was currently the case, with the need for this approach to be more fully embedded across the Council. Similarly, coaching and mentoring were taking place informally, but more needed to be done to embed the relevant processes and procedures.
- Whilst the Organisation Improvement Strategy had been developed in the context of the Council's reducing resource base, the improvements proposed within it were considered necessary in any event to respond to the wider environment and expectations of service users. In general, employees recognised the need to work more flexibly within a changing culture, particularly where this removed unnecessary process. The need to invest in training and development infrastructure to support this change was also acknowledged.
- The likely impact on staff morale during this period of change was recognised. Staff morale was monitored as part of the Talkabout process, which also went some way to building staff morale, and in the bi-annual staff survey. The evidence from the Investors in People Accreditation process also provided a good evidence base of strong staff morale, but the need for Service Directors and managers to consider this issue in day to day operations so that the organisation did not become complacent was acknowledged. Managers were aware that stress and other mental health issues were now the main causes of absence due to ill health, but there were good levels of resource within the Occupational Health Service to address this.
- Greater emphasis was being placed on employees seeking out training opportunities, for example through research, mentoring or job shadowing, rather than traditional courses so they took more responsibility for their own personal development. Although there was a good rate of return for completed Performance and Development Reviews, there was a concern that the focus was on completing the process rather than the quality of the outcomes, which this change in emphasis was hoped to address. The Performance and Development Review process itself was also under review and staff will be engaged in this work.
- The importance of achieving the right balance in the Member Development Programme was acknowledged, between respecting the Members' role as accountable to the electorate whilst at the same time providing development opportunities for those Members who wish to take them up. The need for Members to be provided with suitable services and equipment to do this was important, and work continued to deal with issues associated with Members ICT.

- It was important that obstacles were not placed in the way of achieving good engagement with the public, for example by moving towards “on-line” only when older people were less likely to use electronic means of communication. Customer satisfaction with Council services was kept under review, and the latest annual report contained positive messages about this, although a pilot project in relation to housing benefits and council tax was considering how to improve accessibility for people who cannot use on-line systems. In terms of Member enquiries, there was a need to evaluate the Highways Pilot project which had considered concerns about the ability of Members to make representations. However, Members were encouraged to contact the relevant Service Director where they had particular concerns.
- SMT were aware of the likely impact on staff morale resulting from the erosion of salary levels over the period from 2008, although these were paid in accordance with national pay agreements. Changes to the National Living Wage would require some re-alignment of salary levels which was not provided for within the Medium Term Financial Strategy so likely impacts were being modelled. However, the most recent Employee Survey suggested that pay was not one of the top five issues of concern for staff, with involvement in decision making, for example, considered more significant.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contributions;
- (ii) that Members be provided with information on the Member Enquiries Highways Pilot and updated staff contact details; and
- (iii) that Members be provided with further information on levels of Performance and Development Reviews that have been completed across the Council.

5 Mrs Joan Whitaker

The Chair advised the committee that Mrs Joan Whitaker who has served as a Co-optee for a number of years had resigned due to being busy with other commitments. The Chair proposed that a letter of thanks was sent to Mrs Whitaker for her service on behalf of the committee.

RESOLVED that a letter of thanks be sent to Mrs Joan Whitaker for her service as a Co-optee on the committee.

6 Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) Work Programme 2017-18

The meeting received a report on the proposed Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2017-18, setting out the proposed topics for consideration at each meeting. The report also noted the need to agree a topic for the third Task and Finish Group, with fly-tipping and Community Engagement Strategy already identified. The report also identified a number of other topics, drawn from the Forward Plan of Key Decisions or in relation to issues or services not considered for some time.

Members identified the following as possible priorities for consideration by the third Task and Finish Group and/or inclusion within the main Work Programme:-

- Council's Asset Management
- Culture/Visitor Offer
- Social Prescribing
- Highways Infrastructure
- Sheffield City Region Devolution
- Healthy/Active Lifestyles.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that, subject to (ii) below, the Work Programme set out at Section 3.4 of the report be approved; and
- (ii) that the topics identified by Members for inclusion in the Work Programme be noted and all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked for their views so that the Work Programme can be finalised at the next meeting.

7 Exclusion of the Public and Press

RESOLVED that the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the specific paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended identified:-

<u>Item No</u>	<u>Paragraph</u>
7	2

8 Children's Social Care reports

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:-

- Mel John-Ross, Service Director Children's Social Care and Safeguarding
- Councillor Margaret Bruff, Cabinet Spokesperson People (Safeguarding).

Mel John-Ross introduced the Children's Social Care monthly report for March 2017, containing a summary of performance and the major performance indicators for children's safeguarding and social care. Members were also provided with a summary report, together with supporting documentation, which outlined and explained the terminology used in the report and advised how to interpret the information given.

Members asked questions in response to the report submitted and the following matters were highlighted:-

- Work continued to address the levels of social work caseloads, although these were not as high as some statistical neighbours. Within this, it was important to recognise that there were a range of other issues to be taken into account, such as how complex the needs were of service users, rather than simply the numbers.

- It was noted that the time taken to match children with prospective adopters was above the Government target of 120 days, but had seen a significant improvement from levels recorded in November 2015. Emphasis continued to be placed on achieving the right placement for the child in question, even if this went beyond the Government target, and the Council had a good track record in placing older children and keeping family groups together as part of this approach.
- Members noted the requirements and regulations to record looked after children as “missing”, even though it was likely that their whereabouts were known to the service. The importance of undertaking systematic reviews of every “missing” incident was noted so that appropriate action could be taken. In particular, it was known that placing children as close as possible to their local area went some way to reducing the number of “missing” incidents. The Corporate Parenting Panel had requested a detailed investigation into this matter, which would be shared with the meeting in due course.
- To an extent, it was unlikely that re-referrals and additional child protection plans would ever be avoided, even if this was regrettable. It was important to make efforts to deal with issues in the family home, through a child protection plan, rather than moving prematurely to care proceedings. If it came to a Court hearing, the evidence trail of any child protection plan arrangements would be critical to the case.
- The position on dental checks for looked after children was noted, with the record in respect of younger children welcomed. The meeting noted the challenge in achieving compliance with dental check requests for older children.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the witnesses were thanked for their attendance and contribution;
- (ii) that the report on “missing” incidents commissioned by the Corporate Parenting Panel be shared with the committee in due course; and
- (iii) that a report giving further information on dental checks for looked after children be requested.