

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CUSTOMERS AND CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2015 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK
PART 1

PRESENT:
Councillors

Johnson, T.B. (Chairman)
Cooper, Miss J. (Vice-Chairman)

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| Burnett, G. | Pearson, A. |
| Freeman, Miss M.A. | Snape (substitute) |
| Grice, Mrs. D. | Stretton, Mrs. P.Z. |
| Hoare, M.W.A. | Sutherland, M. |
| Kraujalis, J.T. | |

Also in attendance –
Councillor Mrs M.A. Davis (Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Leader, Observer)

6. Apologies

Apologies were received for Councillor C.H. Anslow (substituted by Councillor P.A. Snape).

Belated apologies were also submitted by Councillor Mrs. A.F. Bernard following the meeting.

7. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations

No declarations of interests or party whip declarations were received.

8. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed.

9. Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 2015-16 Customers Priority Delivery Plan Update

Consideration was given to the Report of the Head of Governance (Item 4.1 to 4.9 of the Official Minutes of the Council) *(presented by the Head of Commissioning)*.

Customer Contact Data

A Member queried why the percentage of customer calls answered had dropped by 2.5% between quarters one and two. The Head of Commissioning replied that this was primarily down to long-term sickness absence in the team, thereby reducing the number of Officers available to take calls. A Member commented there needed to be better resilience in place to deal with such issues, as this had happened previously in other departments.

Members reported complaints with the use of the pre-recorded information system, which resulted in customers hanging up before their call had been answered properly. Additionally, complaints were also reported about having to phone up via the Contact Centre in instances where the direct telephone number of an Officer was not known by the caller, or the call was put through, but the Officer concerned was unavailable and the caller being asked to ring back later.

A Member suggested that if possible, Officers from other departments could be trained to work in the Contact Centre in order to provide backup for when sickness absences occurred.

A Member queried why the target rate for answering customer calls was only set at 92% rather than 100%. The Head of Commissioning replied that the baseline targets were initially set last year, but it was important to note that for both quarters performance was above target.

A Member asked for clarification on how the call data was collected and analysed (e.g. the number of customers who call but hang up before an Officer has had a chance to answer the call).

A Member suggested that Members could visit the Contact Centre to better understand how the team operated.

The Chairman commented that it was important to recognise the targets had been met and exceeded in each quarter, but more could be done to improve the figures.

Use of Online Forms

A Member queried why the targets for quarters three and four were low. The Head of Commissioning replied that the low targets were to allow the system time to bed in as the new forms had only been activated alongside the launch of the refreshed website. The new forms were however more user friendly than previously and usage was being promoted on the website.

E-Payments Transactions

A Member raised concern about the security of using e-payment facilities compared with face-to-face transactions. The Chairman responded that a range of payment options for customers was still available, but it was important to further develop the use of e-payments.

A Member commented that due to the low costs involved, a significant target should be set for customers to use online forms and e-payments instead of face-to-face and telephone transactions. The Head of Commissioning advised that a

mobile app was also being developed to provide residents with more opportunities to contact the Council electronically.

Community Engagement Review

A Member queried if the use of community forums would feature as part of the proposed review. The Chairman advised that the review was to be discussed later on in the meeting as a specific agenda item.

Social Alarms Provision

A Member queried if any residents had lost out on being supplied with a social alarm due to recent changes in funding criteria. A further Member queried whether there was likely to be any new customers and if the eligibility criteria had changed. The Head of Commissioning replied that he would check both queries and report back as necessary.

Asset Management Plan (AMP)

A Member raised concern that the Council did not have a current AMP in place, especially as the most recent version was based on information from 2010. The Head of Economic Development advised that as part of the Council's audit requirements, regular valuations of samples of the Council's housing stock and industrial units were undertaken so some recent asset data was available, but production of a full AMP had been hindered by those matters referred to on page 4.7 of the report.

A Member raised concern about how budgets could be set accurately without the Council knowing the correct monetary value of its assets. The Head of Economic Development replied that the 'book value' of assets was included in the budgets rather than individual valuations.

Direction of Travel PIs

The Head of Commissioning drew Members attention to the fact that no PIs had been set for the 'making best use of limited resources' strategic objective, and as such, the Head of Governance had suggested the following for the Committee to consider:

1. Percentage/level of service reductions actioned/required.
2. Amount of capital resources generated.
3. Percentage dependency on Government Baseline Support.

Building Control Service

The Head of Economic Development reported that the service was performing reasonably well, but its future was increasingly vulnerable to competition from private companies. The existing shared service arrangements were useful, but further options to strengthen the service needed to be explored (e.g. expanding the shared service to include other neighbouring councils or establishing an Arms Length Management Organisation to manage and run the service).

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) The performance information relating to the Customers Priority Delivery Plan, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.
- (B) The actions and indicators which were rated, yellow, orange or red and the associated commentary/remedial action proposed by the Leader Officer be noted.
- (C) The following be approved as Direction of Travel PIs for the 'making best use of limited resources' strategic objective:
 - (i) Percentage/level of service reductions actioned/required.
 - (ii) Amount of capital resources generated.
 - (iii) Percentage dependency on Government Baseline Support.

10. Universal Credit Update

Consideration was given to the Briefing Note of the Deputy Managing Director (*presented by the Benefits Services Manager*).

The Benefits Services Manager reported that since publication of the Briefing Note, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had confirmed the following:

- 927 claims for Universal Credit (UC) were expected to be made locally between December 2015 and March 2017;
- 46 of those claimants will require online access support;
- A further 46 claimants will require help with budgeting;
- 303 claimants will require support from the Housing Benefits team to complete UC calculations;
- £35,176 to be provided to the Council to help support the rollout of UC.

Members were also advised that the Partnership Agreement had not yet been signed by the Council due to not having yet received all required information from the DWP.

A Member raised concerns about how payment of UC would be made to persons with drug and/or alcohol addictions and that the 'direct support' payments would only be in place on a short term basis. The Benefits Services Manager replied that vulnerability of claimants would be assessed as part of the application process, and it was hoped that direct support payments would be matched to individuals' needs, but limits on how long the payments could be made would have to be set.

A Member raised concerns about how those with learning disabilities would be supported, and the capacity of the local Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) to help UC claimants as they were already struggling with their existing workload, some of which was being transferred to the Cannock Advice Centre (CAC). The Benefits Services Manager replied that the onus would be on the Council and DWP to help those claimants with learning disabilities who were not resident in 'supported exempt accommodation'. In respect of the CAB, whilst claimant numbers for UC were at a low level it was the ideal time to agree a process for how claimants

would be supported and assessed.

A Member queried whether any links had been made with the building resilient families programme. The Benefits Services Manager advised that links with partners were not fully in place as yet but would be developed as the UC project expands.

A Member queried how the DWP had determined the project support fund figure of £35,176. The Benefits Services Manager replied that the various costs aspects of the project were calculated and then an individual cost figure was set for each claimant. Additionally, the DWP had specified they wanted to pay the support fund on an outcomes basis (rather than up front), therefore the Council had requested more accurate costings from the DWP to ensure that all relevant costs would be fully covered.

A Member sought assurances that overpayments of benefits by the Council would be reduced as a result of the introduction of UC. The Benefits Services Manager replied that reductions would happen due to how UC was paid to claimants. More generally, the level of overpayments made was at its lowest level ever and a number of initiatives were in place to try and reduce this further.

Councillor Mrs. Grice left the meeting at the end of this item and did not return.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) The Universal Credit update be noted.
- (B) A further update on the introduction of the Universal Credit project be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.
- (C) Representatives of the Cannock Citizens Advice Bureau be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee to provide information on what support and help they will have provided to Universal Credit claimants since its introduction.

11. Community Engagement Review

The Chairman advised that due to the unfortunate absence of both the Head of Governance and Policy & Performance Manager, it was proposed that a Task & Finish Group be established to take this review forward.

RESOLVED:

That Councillors Burnett, Hoare, T. Johnson, Pearson and 1 UKIP Group Member form the Community Engagement Review Task & Finish Group.

12. Asset Management Plan

Further to the earlier discussion on this matter, the Head of Economic

Development sought Members' views on what information they wanted to know about the AMP.

Members requested that all income generating assets be covered; property/land which was owned/rented out by the Council and all usable assets, and any assets which were a cost to the Council rather than income generating.

The meeting closed at 5:40pm

CHAIRMAN