

REPORT OF CHAIRMAN OF STRATEGIC (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

Councillors, Strachan (Chairman) Norman (Vice-Chairman), Pullen (Vice-Chairman) Mrs Arnold, Mrs Barnett, Derrick, Leytham, Mynott, Thomas, Wilson, and Mrs Woodward.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors Spruce, and Wilcox attended the meeting)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Apologies were received from Councillors Constable and Powell.

At the meeting of the Strategic (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee held on 17th June 2014 the following matters were considered:

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 1.1 As it was the first meeting of the municipal year, the Members received the Terms of Reference for the Committee.

2 COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS – 2013/14

- 2.1 The Committee received a report on the compliments and complaints received corporately during the last financial year along with more detailed analysis of those of specific relevance to the Committee. It was reported that although a report was submitted annually to the Standards Committee, it was agreed at a full Council meeting that it would be appropriate for each Overview & Scrutiny Committee to consider the number and nature of complaints received.
- 2.2 It was reported that the District Council had a Corporate Complaints Procedure and had published a revised Complaints Charter in early 2014. It was then reported that during the 2013/14 year, 101 complaints had been received with 91 dealt with at Stage 1, three at Stage 2 and six at Stage 3. It was noted that if a complainant was still not satisfied once all of the three stage process had been carried out, they could contact the Local Government Ombudsman to consider the complaint. Members noted that there had not been any complaints passed to the Ombudsman in the reported year.
- 2.3 It was reported that although there had been an increase in complaints, this was due to a tighter reporting process and the inclusion of all leisure complaints received which had been recorded separately in the past.
- 2.4 It was then reported that in 2013/14, there had been one complaint received in relation to Democratic and Legal Services relating to a non Council employee working as an electoral register canvasser. There had been 34 complaints relating to Finance, Revenues and Benefits and it was noted that they were mostly only because the Council had been compelled to take recovery action. It was noted that there had been complaints about the introduction of credit card surcharges which was outside of the Council's control.
- 2.5 Members felt that more should be done to highlight the compliments received and it was agreed that focus on both compliments and complaints could be more balanced.

- 2.6 Members asked how independent another Director could truly be at Stage 3 of a complaint and if there was a risk of bias. It was reported that all Directors, if asked to independently review, do so objectively and if the complainant is not satisfied, had the opportunity to pass the complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman who were fully independent.
- 2.7 Members asked if the majority of complaints were due to systems enforced onto Local Government or the District Council's own processes and it was reported that especially with Revenues and Benefits, it was due to the system including recovery and overpayments.
- 2.8 Members felt that 46% of the complaints rated as 'justified' was high and asked if lessons were being learnt. It was reported that it may be a small element of a complaint, like the failure to acknowledge in time, that would be justified yet the complaint as a whole not justified. It was agreed that more detail of the complaints and findings after their investigation would be advantageous for the Committee in the future. Members also felt that the term 'unjustified' was too subjective, as a complaint may not be relevant to the District Council but could still be a justified one affecting the complainant.
- 2.9 Members asked if complaints received by Councillors were included in the figures and it was reported that they were if the Councillor wrote or emailed in but not if verbal. The Committee felt that some clarification was needed on how to get complaints from Members on behalf of residents recorded. The Committee did recognise that it would need to be distinguished that it was a true complaint and not a comment about a service.
- 2.10 It was noted that MP enquires were dealt with separately and were mainly requests for information rather than complaints.
- 2.11 The report was noted.

3 END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT 2013/14

- 3.1 The Committee received a report on progress against the activities and projects set out in the District Council's One Year Action Plan for 13/14. It was reported that performance was mostly on target and within budget and that there was an underspend which would be put back in reserves.
- 3.2 Members asked why there had been a small slip in performance for processing new Housing Benefit/Local Council Tax Support claims and it was reported that the nationally set target for processing claims was a much longer timescale so in reality, the District Council was performing far better than it may appear. It was reported that it was preferred to be accurate and prevent overpayments. When asked if the increase of days to process claims was due to more claims or a reduction in resources, it was noted that claims had risen in 13/14 and also that there was a part time vacant post but that that would remain ready for the introduction of Universal Credit.
- 3.3 Members asked why there had been an increase in payments via the website and self-service telephone and it was noted that Officers were encouraging channel shift. When asked, it was reported that although the number and value of staff assisted payments had also increased, postal cash payments had greatly reduced.
- 3.4 The Committee were pleased to note the underspend although it was noted that this was a verbal update and would formally reported to Committee in September) but recognised that it was not time to get complacent.
- 3.5 The report was noted.

4 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

- 4.1 Consideration was given to the Work Programme and Forward Plan. It was reported that there would be a Briefing Paper to Members updating them further on Individual Electoral Registration when the system being used by the District Council goes live for testing.
- 4.2 Members were also briefed that there had been 687 responses so far to the Fit for the Future survey and Councillors were encouraged to push for more especially outside the City Centre areas. It was noted that a report on the responses to the survey would be submitted at the September meeting.
- 4.3 Members asked for a report on the Communications service area as it now came under the remit of the Committee.
- 4.4 It was resolved that the Forward Plan and Work Programme be noted and amended as agreed.

R. Strachan
Chairman
Strategic (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee