
Meeting	Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee
Date	9 July 2018
Present	Councillors Williams (Chair), N Barnes, Brooks, D'Agorne, Fenton, Gates, Looker and Reid
Apologies	Councillor Galvin

11. Declarations of Interest

Members were asked to declare any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests, any prejudicial interests or any disclosable pecuniary interests which they might have in respect of business on the agenda.

Councillor Neil Barnes declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 – Update Report on Attendance and Wellbeing Project (Sickness Absence) as his employer provided corporate healthcare.

12. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2018 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

13. Public Participation

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

14. Update Report on Attendance and Wellbeing Project (Sickness Absence)

Members considered a report which provided an update on sickness absence figures within the Council and work being undertaken to decrease them. The report also set out options in relation to strengthening support for absence management. The Director of Public and Head of HR attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

They highlighted the fact that sickness absence had increased from an average of 10.2 to 11.5 days and that 80% of this was classed as long term sickness. There was a high rate of absence related to stress and musculoskeletal problems. CYC also had an aging workforce, with the average age of staff now 45.5 years. This was higher at 48 and 49 in Economy & Place and Health, Housing and Adult Social Care. A Workplace Health Strategy Group was being created in order to focus on staff wellbeing and to put in place early interventions.

In response to member questions they stated:

- Staff could self-certify for 7 days before seeing a GP, this also applied to stress related illness;
- There would be coaching provided for line managers, by other managers, on performance management and it was important that this cascade down from the top of the organisation;
- Long term absence at CYC was anything over 28 days. Within the public sector this figure ranged from 20 – 40 days and it was possible to amend this;
- Officers did not have figures on how many members of staff left the organisation on health grounds;
- Having more effective means of recording absence, along with a central wellbeing team, would produce more data to measure the impact of new measures;
- All staff should have a back to work interview after time off sick and there were already 'trigger points' in place within the performance management system;
- Managers needed to take more responsibility, but there were currently no sanctions for managers who did not carry out return to work interviews;
- It was difficult to say for certain how many instances were not 'genuine' sickness;
- There was no available evidence to suggest people were abusing the system;
- The public sector sickness absence average was 8 days;
- The idea of having an Occupational Health Nurse within the wellbeing team was to provide early intervention and challenge, and to support staff to return to work as quickly as possible;

- Cuts to services had meant a loss of staff and this had certainly impacted on the staff who were left to cover a larger workload; and
- The target of reducing the average absence by a third was to bring the Council in line with the public sector average.

Members highlighted that there was a lack of comparative data in the report, particularly on how this Council compares to other authorities.

Resolved: That a six monthly update be brought to the committee.

Reason: To update Members on ongoing work to reduce sickness absence levels.

15. Implementation Update from Electoral Arrangements Scrutiny Review

Members considered a report which provided a first update on the implementation of the approved recommendations arising from the previously completed Electoral Arrangements Scrutiny Review. Members were asked to sign off all recommendations now considered to be fully implemented and asked to agree whether they wished to receive a further update in 6 months' time on any outstanding recommendations.

The Electoral Services Manager attended the meeting to present the report to the Committee.

In response to Member questions he stated:

- In relation to postal votes, once an application was received and logged the turnaround was very quick. The earliest these could be sent out was a week after close of nominations, which was around 11 working days. A second issue was done after the close of postal votes. If a resident informed elections they had not received their pack within 10 working days it could be reissued up to 4 working days before an election. All postal votes were recorded and logs were available to all political parties;
- Several alternative, larger venues had been considered for the count in 2019;

- Counting sheets were the fastest method for a multi seat ward, but inaccurate. Counting boards and grass skirts had recently been trialled by staff in a mock count;
- There were issues with recruiting appropriately trained count staff; but much of the concern around the speed of the count was about the size of the venue and the amount of staff that could be accommodated;
- Video training for count staff ahead of elections was being considered; and
- Undertaking the count within wards was logistically very difficult, especially when postal votes also had to be processed.

Some Members had ongoing concerns about the speed of the count, although it was recognised that using a larger venue with more counting staff would almost certainly improve this.

Resolved: That Members:

1. accept the recommendations in the report and sign these off as fully implemented; and
2. agree that no further updates were required.

Reason: To raise awareness of those recommendations which are still to be fully implemented.

16. Update Report on Delivery of ICT Strategy

Members considered a report which further updated them on the progress of the Council's ICT Strategy in terms of its Digital Services Programme, enhanced digital experience for customers and delivery of the Customer Relations Management System (CRM).

The Assistant Director – Customer & Digital Services, Head of ICT, and Income Services Manager attended the meeting to present the report and answer questions from Members.

Members raised some of the following issues in relation to the report:

- Problems reported online should not be identified as 'complete' when passed to a third party for action as this was misleading for residents. Information about further action needed to be clearer;

- Similarly, the reference numbers generated by the online system were unhelpful as they did not allow for easy identification if you had submitted more than one issue;
- Phone calls regularly took longer than 20 seconds to be connected; and
- Online forms were lengthy and not particularly easy to navigate.

In response to Member questions Officers stated:

- 70% connectivity to the Ultra Fibre Optic network was significantly higher than the UK average of 3%. This was a purely private sector investment and providers would go where the density was. There was an ambition to connect as many people as possible;
- CYC was hoping to secure £100,000 to improve speeds through the Digital Enterprise Scheme;
- Switching off some systems in March 2019 would hasten 'My Account' coming online; and
- 'My Account' would join up a number of systems and allow information management across the Council to work more efficiently.

Resolved: That Members note the information provided and thank Officers for the continuing work on the strategy.

Reason: To ensure that scrutiny members have the opportunity to monitor progress of the Council's ICT Strategy.

17. Year End Finance and Performance Monitoring Report

Members considered a report providing a year end analysis of the overall finance and performance position. As the final report of the financial year it assessed performance against budgets, including progress in delivering the Council's savings programme.

The Head of Business Intelligence attended the meeting to present the report.

In response to Member questions he stated:

- The response rate to the Talkabout survey was high, around 700-800 of the 1000 residents surveyed. The panel was regularly refreshed to ensure it was a fair cross section of the City;
- The 'direction of travel' information within the report was generated using the last 3 data points and this did sometimes allow for the occasional quirk. This would be looked at again as Members felt it could appear misleading; and
- Figures for Business Rates and Council Tax collection were as a percentage of the total amount raised to bill. 97.35% of Council Tax was collected.

Members highlighted some of the following issues:

- They rarely got responses to their complaints within 5 days, and suggested that perhaps 10 days was a more realistic target;
- The significant underspend suggested that cuts could have been avoided at the start of the year; and
- Their concern that the budget setting process for Health, Housing and Adult Social Care was not working as there was routinely a large overspend.

Resolved: That Members:

1) Note the financial risks outlined in the report and the need to continue to maintain a prudent contingency and reserves that is reflective of the risks set out in the report;

2) Note the continued effective financial management across the Council and the ongoing delivery of savings; and

3) Note the performance information.

Reason: To ensure significant financial issues can be appropriately dealt with.

18. Work Plan 2018-19

Members gave consideration to the Committee's draft work plan.

Resolved: That the Committee's work plan for 2018/19 be approved.

Reason: To ensure that the Committee has a planned programme of work in place.

Councillor D Williams, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 7.30 pm].