

Appendix B – Director Report: Corporate Services and Governance

Subject: **2015/16 Performance Review Director’s Report**

Submitted to: **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

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Introduction – Overview of 2015/16

1. 2015/16 has been an incredibly busy year for the whole Council, and our staff have all worked extremely hard to deliver effective services for local people and to deliver the Council’s ambitions. We have delivered against our planned targets in very trying circumstances when our main operational building was completely refurbished around us. We have also made very good progress in delivering on the many projects within the council’s organisational change programme – The Transformation Programme and these have touched all parts of our organisation.
2. In addition to the planned activity undertaken in 2015/16, colleagues also delivered a number of other projects as opportunities/circumstances arose during the year. These include the lease and refurbishment of space in the Town Hall to ESCC Registration Service and the related transfer of democratic and civic functions to Aquila House. Opportunities were explored to facilitate new income generating and economic development resources e.g. building a brand new factory.
3. We have experienced a number of challenges in managing within reduced resource levels. Although colleagues are working hard to find more efficient ways of working, we are experiencing the ongoing impact of managing with less, particularly when skills, experience and/or organisational history/knowledge are lost. These tighter staffing levels also mean we have less resilience, this has been a particular problem for a number of our services when colleagues experience personal issues e.g. bereavements, illness or need for recovery time after operations.
4. I am very proud of the way colleagues continue to work extremely hard, take on new responsibilities and challenges, deliver above expectations and support each other to achieve the best outcome for local people. I hope that Members of Overview and Scrutiny will share this view.

Year-end performance summary

a) Legal and Electoral Services

5. During 15/16 the team’s resilience was challenged to cover the absence for medical reasons of a senior member of staff. The team worked well together to

reallocate work, take on additional responsibilities and cover this work without the need to bring in expensive external support.

6. During the year the team's work included:

- Providing a proactive and positive role in delivering council projects and protecting the council's interests and probity. Some projects have required significant legal input to ensure schemes, associated policies; procedures and agreements are properly planned and operated e.g. Selective Licensing Scheme. In addition new Seashore and Promenade Byelaws were made, completed a Parking Order for most of the council's Car Parks.
- Legal work for large number of leases including The Source (White Rock Baths), and individual leases for the Social Lettings Agency.
- Completion of in-house legal work for property sales e.g. property sold after CPO, purchase of Aquila House
- Supporting the Licensing Committee to consider applications in the public interest and securing prosecutions and fines for enforcement activity (e.g. dog fouling, noise nuisance, planning and debt collection e.g. council tax debt
- Contributing significant time to providing legal advice for contentious planning issues e.g. Queensway Gateway, Rocklands, Holmhurst St Mary
- Achieving a positive outcome from the inspection by the office of Surveillance Commissioners to check we are compliant with the legislative demands of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.
- The Elections team had a very significant workload in 2015/16. They facilitated the biggest change to electoral registration in a century - Individual Electoral Registration (IER). Following the transition years, the new 'business as usual' arrangements have been implemented since the end of Q3. The team have also successfully delivered a General Election, 3 By-elections, a new style annual canvass and preparation for the Borough, Police and Crime Commissioner and By-elections in May 2016. These elections were only made possible by the continued support of colleagues from across HBC and is a brilliant example of our One Team working.
- In addition the Boundary Review was supported by senior policy, legal, planning and elections staff. These changes will now be implemented and will necessitate a polling station review, all out HBC elections in 2018, use new boundaries for ESCC elections in 2017

b) People and Business Support

7. The small Business Support team have played a greater than anticipated role in Aquila House refurbishment project, implementation of new working arrangements and associated technology e.g. Condeco room and desk bookings. During this time they also maintained parallel support for Council activities that continued in the Town Hall, and assisted with the transfer to Aquila. The junior level staff extended

their working days considerably to ensure the impact on day to day operations was minimised. Their role is now being refocussed to undertake facilities management now that HBC own the building.

8. The Personnel team have completed a high number of recruitment exercises during the year – the 52 recruitment campaigns led to the employment of 78 staff. Difficulties with recruiting specialist roles e.g. planners, finance officers meant some of these exercises had to be repeated two or three times.
9. In addition, the team continue to:
 - i. Play a lead role in delivering the organisational development aspects of the Transformation Programme – see presentation.
 - ii. Support managers to:
 - (1) release savings or increase efficiencies through restructuring, redeployment and redundancy as well as offering opportunities for professional development e.g. growing our own.
 - (2) undertake their staff management roles effectively e.g. introduced an e-appraisal system, give 1:1 support and support training needs.
 - (3) robustly manage sickness absence – there has been an increase in short term absences over the year and serious longer term sickness absences have affected the resilience in a number of service areas

c) Community Contact Centre

10. Customer experience at CCC continues to improve, a cohort of six new Customer Service Officers were recruited and trained to deliver the full range of CCC services over the year.
11. The reception process has been reviewed and following an earlier Housing Options Service Review a new triage process has been put in place and the CCC staff now undertake the role previously done by Housing Options officers. Whilst this has led to better customer service and more effective use of housing resources, there is obviously an impact on CCC resources which is why channel shift from Digital by Design is crucial to achieve.
12. The CCC staffing resources have been impacted by the secondment of two of the Team Leaders to the Firmstep Project. The Team Leaders have worked with IT and service departments to develop the new customer journey maps and associated process 'forms' which the software systems use to deliver customer transactions. Whilst this investment of customer service skills into the project is vital and is viewed as an 'invest to improve' for the service, there have been opportunity costs.

d) Revenues Service

13. The benefit claimant numbers have reduced by some 5% in 2015/16. The Council has continued to receive year on year reductions in funding and as a consequence of losing the equivalent of two members of staff each year there will inevitably be

an impact on the service. However the service itself is performing very highly given all the challenges it faces.

14. The Council consulted on the Council Tax reduction scheme and unlike other East Sussex authorities resolved to leave the scheme untouched for 2016/17 – thus supporting the most vulnerable in the community. Universal Credit will start impacting more heavily from December 2016 when all new working age claimants will be applying for it – rather than housing benefit.
15. In terms of performance indicators:
 - a. The overall Council Tax collection rate for the year will exceed the 96.5% target within the next few months. A number of the revenues targets were missed mainly due to the absence of a key officer to sickness and need to train a new member of staff.
 - b. Additional pressures were placed on the service this quarter as a result of the installation of two new servers; business rate appeals continue to cause concern both for work associated with backdated payments and the impact on future income streams; additional time is being spent on supported/exempt accommodation cases which are becoming contentious and creating additional work.

e) Audit and Procurement Service

16. Staffing issues impacted on this small team of three. A new Group Auditor was appointed to fill the vacancy following the retirement of a senior colleague. The Housing Benefit Subsidy Grant Audit claim was far more resource intensive than usual. The council's procurement processes continue to be well supported by the East Sussex Procurement Hub.

f) Finance and Accountancy

17. The preparation of the Council's Budget for 2016/17 was made more challenging as a result of significant changes and delayed Government announcements of funding streams. The team has also welcomed four new colleagues this year all of whom needed to experience budget setting and year-end reporting here.
18. In addition the team piloted an earlier close down of accounts as part of their preparation for the mandatory requirement for all Councils to close down their 2017/18 accounts by end of June 2018 (as opposed to September). This 'practice run' is added to workload pressures.

g) Estates

19. 2015/176 was an excellent year for enhanced occupancy rates and higher income from revised rental and lease agreements. The new factory unit for BD Foods will be built in 2016/17 following renegotiation of existing leases.
20. There was additional unscheduled property-related work associated with the income generation opportunities for leasing out parts of the Town Hall to ESCC and SEAP, space in Aquila House to Learning Direct and the purchase of Aquila House.

h) Surveyors

21. The small surveyors team have made a valuable contribution to the Aquila House accommodation project, maintenance of the Town Hall and have absorbed responsibility for the major cliffs maintenance and protection project.

i) Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services

22. The team have implemented a project fundamentally changing the way members and officers prepare and access decision making reports and processes. The implementation of Mod Gov is facilitating efficiencies all the way through the decision making process.

23. The increasing level of Freedom of Information requests will be managed more effectively and efficiently in future, following work to develop of an on-line process using Firmstep. This process is also being adapted for our new Corporate Complaints process.

24. Senior policy officers continue to support projects and work packages across the council including FLAG, external funding bids, the Local Strategic Partnership's Mind the Gap project and the Transformation Programme.

j) Transformation Programme – Year 1

25. Over the past year we have been working together to transform the way we work. At the core of this transformation has been the fundamental principles of: Customer First, One Team, Smarter Working and Digital by Design.

26. The breadth of the Programme makes summarising complex therefore a presentation setting out achievements and next steps will be given at the meeting.

Jane Hartnell, June 2016