

# Briefing Note



Subject: **Corporate Services and Governance Directorate – 2016/17 review of performance exceptions**

Submitted to: **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **15 June 2017**

Prepared by: **Jane Hartnell, Director of Corporate Services and Governance**

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## Introduction

### Summary of Performance

1. 2016/17 has been another successful year across the Directorate. There have been significant challenges and additional unplanned work and this has been compounded in some teams by absences of key team members either as a result of long term sickness or hard to fill vacancies. Colleagues have overcome these challenges by effective team and collaborative working, patience and commitment. Staff have continued to take on new opportunities for development, identify service delivery improvements and be fabulous ambassadors for the council.
2. Full details of performance against targets are set out in the supporting documentation. I have set out below issues I wish to draw to Members attention as either: examples of performance that should be celebrated or areas where further action is necessary to achieve the position we had targeted.

### Targets identified as Amber

3. **Sickness absence** – Qtr 4 covered the period January – March and reflects the high incidents of coughs, colds, flu, vomiting and viral infections which were prevalent at the time.
4. Sickness days per person across the Council is slightly down from the previous year: 7.55 days per person in 16/17 compared to 7.74 per person in 15/16
5. This represents a small drop in long-term and short-term illness but is still some way off the target of 6.25 days per person. The HR sickness management

team continue to review sickness monthly with managers and undertake case management to address individual cases, to analyse emerging patterns and reasons for sickness and to identify trends and effective interventions.

6. HR resources are focused on areas where sickness absence is highest or where trend analysis highlights a need for review or intervention. A small number of staff have been on long term sickness and these cases are distorting the figures.
7. Proposals will be implemented during 2017/18 to achieve further reductions in sickness absence. These include the consistent application of the attendance management policy, enhanced monitoring/reporting to Assistant Directors and earlier intervention. In order to give focus to this work it is not recommended that the PI target for 2017/18 is reduced, but is maintained at 6.25 days.
8. **Internal Audit** – The team were unable to fully achieve the audit plan owing to a number of challenges mainly unexpected long term serious illness in quarter 4. Virtually all of the field work was completed the main exception being the Cash and Bank audit. This is being addressed as priority and the core audits have been planned for earlier completion in 17/18.
9. **Freedom of Information Requests** – The Council has received 813 FOI requests in the year, an increase of 118 from 15/16. Of the requests received 50 were outstanding by year-end. A number of the FOIs received are extremely detailed and require a range of council staff to complete aspects of requests.

In addition, the complexity, frequency and volume of FOIs (and some complaints\*) are increasingly taking dedicated and senior officer time to meet deadlines, respond to requests for increasing number of internal reviews and respond to any subsequent investigations by the Information Commissioner or Ombudsman's Office. Members can view responses to FOIs published at: [http://www.hastings.gov.uk/my\\_council/freedom\\_of\\_information/archive/request\\_responses\\_2016/](http://www.hastings.gov.uk/my_council/freedom_of_information/archive/request_responses_2016/)

Records of time spent is now being captured on the Firmstep platform, (these processes were transferred online in qtr 3) and this data will be available to inform future reporting on issues, trends and levels of persistent requesters. Overview and Scrutiny may be interested in receiving an update on this at a future meeting.

\*411 complaints were received (increase of 35 from 15/16) and 18 were outstanding at year-end.

## Service Highlights

10. **Revenues & Benefits** – 2016/17 was a good year for the service with all targets achieved. The year brought with it some significant changes, the impact of which have yet to be fully realised, for example:
  - a. The revised Benefit Cap from November 2016 saw some households lose up to £200 per week in benefits. In response the service sought funding from the Department for Work and Pensions, and created a temporary Benefit

Cap Coordinator post (for 12 months) and is this post holder is providing essential support to those most in need.

- b. Another major development in the Benefits area, was the implementation of Universal Credit Full Service in mid-December. Whilst the caseload of claimants has fallen, the actual work load is increasing due to the complexities of UC and the ongoing changes which are difficult for both staff and customers. With further changes proposed, UC is likely to have a continued impact for the near future.
- c. Finally, the Revenues Team played their part in the new Business Improvement District scheme by ensuring that the new system for additional billing of relevant businesses was installed, accounts created and bills despatched on time.

11. **Building Surveyors** – The team successfully managed the minor works contract, renewal and repair programme and statutory inspection and testing regimes for 2016/17. Larger works included the external redecoration and addition of a lightning protection system at the Town Hall; stonework repairs to Johns Place Museum; improvements to Hastings Castle; replacement of water storage tanks and pool filters at Summerfields Leisure Centre; concrete repair and improvement works to the promenade along with the initial phase of the cliff erosion management works. Additional support was given to colleagues on landlord and tenant matters, sustainability, energy efficiency and buildings insurance issues.
12. **Estates** - The team played a crucial role in purchasing, leasing, constructing or managing the council's portfolio of properties – all of which contributes to the new income generated in 16/17. Successes included the construction of the new factory for BD Foods; acquisition of new commercial property (Hastings Retail Park) as well as land at Churchfields; purchase of Muriel Matters House; leasing of office space in MMH and the Town Hall, and achieving 100% occupancy in both Business Centres enabling the council to rely on the circa £3m of income from factory rents.
13. **Elections** – The small elections team had a significant turnover of staff, leading to need to recruit 3 out of the 4 posts. Over the year the team successfully completed the annual canvass, undertook a polling station review (following the Boundary Review) and prepared for the County Elections and snap General Election.

Colleagues in development control, continuous improvement and legal services all contributed the detailed work needed for the 16/17 Boundary Review.

14. **Finance and Accountancy** – The team continued to provide extensive financial support to all areas of the council. During the year they paid 13,743 invoices, payroll and refunds to the value of £30.6m and processed £141m of receipts, grants and investment income into the authority

Most fundamentally, our Accountants worked closely with budget managers, supporting them to achieve a lower revised budget, and a balanced budget for

2017/18 enabling the council to meet its goals, whilst delivering core services in a difficult economic climate. In addition the 2015/16 financial statements were produced two months earlier than usual (by 30 June) and were approved in September with an unqualified audit opinion.

15. **Community Contact Centre** – Our Customer Support Officers dealt with 120,487 telephone calls and 35,275 face to face customers throughout 2016/17. The CCC took on a new responsibility for triaging customers in housing need. This is a significantly improved service for service users and ensures Housing Options officer's time is more effectively allocated.

Contact Centre also staff work with customers to promote and encourage the use of Myhastings – in 16/17 over 16,000 cases were reported by customers through self-service. Customer data from these contacts is also now being used to more effectively plan and review service areas.

One of the biggest pressure points in the year is annual billing – the reduced number of CCC staff means this is a high risk period for service delivery. Significant work was undertaken to ensure customers can get FAQs answered without the need to call and to simplify our communications. Colleagues in other departments were also 'seconded' to the CCC to assist and this one team approach was certainly successful.

16. **Legal Services** – Full details of the legal work supporting delivery of council objectives is set out in the supplementary document. Highlights include planning legal work (S106 agreements, deed of variation, TPOs etc); property work (purchases, lease agreements/surrenders); contract and procurement works (e.g. ERP system, Bid Operating Agreement, Building Control Partnership Agreement with Rother etc); drafting of Public Space Protection Notices - securing evidence and producing maps, and supporting our regulatory processes for good decision making in terms of Licensing, Planning and Environment & Safety.

The litigation work undertaken by the team is probably the most high profile and highlights this year included protecting the Council in claims e.g. Pier Arbitration this took 9 full days in London and a significant amount of pre and post work – we are still awaiting a decision. Colleagues achieved prosecutions and/or costs for contraventions of regulations around dogs, HMO licences, grotbusters, and Rogue Landlords, including over £25,000 of Housing Benefit overpayment debt fully paid or agreed to be paid and £20,000 secured for council tax by way of charge on property.

17. **Transformation Programme** – the second year of the Programme has seen significant progress across a range of inter-related work packages:
  - a. The Council's **Customer First Strategy** has been adopted and clear standards for customer contact have been established and along with the communications toolkit are improving the customer experience. All staff are being trained in relevant customer service skills and many colleagues have taken up the offer for shadowing in the CCC which is proving invaluable.

- b. The introduction of **My Hastings** as the prime method of customer contact has encouraged channel-shift and is the most efficient route for high volume interactions. Customer self-reporting of a problem is now c. 60% and on average reduces calls to the contact centre by around 300 per month. Reporting covers such issues such as clearing litter, dog fouling, fly-tipping and graffiti.

In addition the number of self-accounts has risen from 624 in August 2015, to 11,500 by the end March 2017 without any major marketing campaign. This has resulted in the unique My Area feature being available to those customers with a self-account - enabling them to be aware of planning applications in their neighbourhood; detailed information about their waste and recycling collections; allowing them to check their Council Tax and or Benefits information; and the availability of facilities and services in their area such as GP's, pharmacies, schools etc.

The real achievement of My Hastings is the way that it has and continues to maximise the potential of the Firmstep platform by minimising back-office handling and routing requests directly to the service area or contractor to carry out the required task.

- c. **DASH** is the unsung hero of the Firmstep platform but is fast becoming the Councils internal work-flow management tool. All members of staff have access to Dash and it is used to assign and signpost tasks: joining up front and back offices; automating processes; minimising unnecessary manual interventions; and routing transactions by the most efficient pathway to the service deliverer.
- d. No matter how good our technology is the way a service operates to maximise productivity and create efficiencies is essential. The extensive **Business Process Mapping** work carried out thus far has had a major impact on how we deliver services by moving them from the 'as is' to the 'ideal'. There has been a two-fold success in that it engages and empowers staff to be able to effect change and creates a more effective customer focused approach to delivery.
- e. The transformation of the Council's **website site** has been a major success. The site has been completely overhauled and now provides relevant information in a customer friendly way; is intuitive and easy to use on all devices - tablets, PC and Mobile Phones; and it links directly to the My Hastings platform for a near seamless customer experience.
- f. An essential Programme work stream has been to embed a refreshed corporate project planning framework and to provide the tools to support decision-making, identify and deploy resources efficiently and effectively. The new framework and tools are being increasingly used and valued by colleagues.

- 18. **Continuous Improvement** – The team supports core democratic functions and ensured that the committee meetings and scrutiny programme were delivered to

time, cost and quality, that . Successive forward plans were produced and the meetings schedule, diaries and business cycle were successfully delivered.

Other successes included – further development and embedding of ModGov as a key organisational tool; members training programme delivered; total re-design of the corporate plan and supporting performance arrangements developed; driving use of new SharePoint through corporate plan area; partnerships, external funding and income generation ambitions developed and supported.

19. **Human Resources, Payroll and Business Support** - During the past year all three teams have been involved in the transformation project delivering on work packages supporting cultural change. This includes:

- Introducing a new 'mentoring' style Management Development programme
- Expanded online training resources
- People Plan developed - with a focus on commercial skills development
- Introduction of behavioural trait analysis as part of the recruitment process
- Gender pay gap report included in workforce profile statistics
- Work with Sussex Coast College developing our approach to apprenticeship
- Increased income generation from letting and long-term rental of rooms within MMH to external bodies
- Management of the archive, cleaning contract and facilities management responsibilities of MMH and the Town Hall
- Throughout the year the teams have gone the extra mile to support colleagues in other service areas whilst still maintaining day to day operational service.

Jane Hartnell,  
May 2017