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Middlesbrough
moving forward

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL
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Self-serve for Revenue and Benefits

1. As part of the Customer Strategy, the Council is increasingly encouraging self-service across a range of services, including Revenue and Benefits.

2. For those who are unable to use this facility, or need more help, alternative means such as telephone or face-to-face contact are still available.

3. Extending self-service access to services is intended to improve the customer experience, free up telephone and face to face contact for those who do need it and to reduce the cost of service delivery.

4. Self-service for the areas covered below may be accessed using the customers own computer or mobile device, through computers at libraries and community hubs and in the Self-Service Area at Midddlesbrough House where staff are also available to assist where needed.

5. This initiative has already reduced average waiting and interview times at Middlesbrough House.

6. The following are now covered by self-service:

Council Tax
- View a Council Tax or Business Rates account; including balance and payment history
- Update contact details
- Make a payment
- Set up a direct debit
- Check the Council Tax band
- Report a change in circumstances, such as change of address
- Apply for discounts

Benefits
- Making a new claim
- Report a change in circumstances
- Check payment history

7. 80% of new benefit claims are now completed on-line and 20% of changes of circumstances are reported online.

8. Self-service means the service is available to the customer 24 hours a day 7 days a week and in the same way that many people already choose to access most other services.

9. Having previously looked at this service as part of scrutiny of Customer Contact a few months ago, when we visited the self-service area of Middlesbrough House and spoke to service users, I am currently undertaking some further 'mystery shopping'. I also would be grateful if any Members who may have received any feedback from their constituents would let me have any comments via email.

Teesside Pension Board

10. The Public Service Pensions Act 2013 included several provisions relating to better governance and improved accountability of all the various public sector pension schemes. Certain provisions also applied to Local Government Pension Schemes such as Teesside Pension Fund with effect from April 2015.

11. One of the requirements of legislation is to establish a local Pension Board for each Local Government Pension Scheme Fund, with responsibility to assist the administering authority (also known as, the Scheme Manager-in the case of Teesside Pension Fund this is Middlesbrough Council):

   a) to secure compliance with relevant legislation relating to the governance and administration of the Local Government Pension Scheme, and; the requirements imposed by the Pension Regulator; and

   b) to ensure the effective and efficient governance and administration of the scheme.

12. Teesside Pension Board held its first meeting on 28.07.15 and the key operating functions were identified as:

   - *Policies and Procedures*,
     The Board will need to ensure the Scheme Manager is complying with Scheme Regulations, any other legislation relating to the governance and administration of the Scheme, and any requirements imposed by the Pension Regulator

   - *Performance*,
     The Board will undertake a review of performance of the Fund and comparison to similar funds in Local Government. It will also review the administrators' performance against the Service Level Agreement and investigate any failures. Findings will be made available to the Scheme Manager.

   - *Governance*,
     Ensuring that:

     i.   the right decisions and actions are taken at the right time

    ii.   the right people make those decisions and take those actions

   iii.   the right information and advice is available to feed into the process, and

   iv.   that all of the above is focused on getting the right results in line with the long-term objective (e.g. paying the correct benefits to members), and.

- *Risk*
  The Board will undertake a risk assessment to identify potential internal and external risks to the Fund and members. Once identified, all risks will be recorded on a risk register which will be reviewed regularly. It will also review all Pensions Regulator communications and ensure that the Teesside Pension Fund has suitable policies in place to mitigate any key risks raised.

Staff Survey

13. The staff survey seeks the staff's views on areas such as change within the Council, employee engagement, learning and development, customer services, health and safety and equality and diversity. The survey also includes questions relating to the Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards. These are used as a workplace stress risk assessment and provide a useful tool in measuring the impact on staff of the Change Programme. From 2015 onwards it is planned to carry out the survey on an annual basis.

14. The survey includes a measure of staff satisfaction and the results from this measure will be included in the Balance Scorecard for the three levels of management. The Staff Survey will be distributed in October via electronic or paper payslips. Online completion of the survey is actively encouraged where possible.

Returning Services - HR & ICT

15. From 1st October 41 ICT staff and 20 HR staff (including HR advice, Health & Safety and HR Admin) will TUPE into the Council as part of the return of this service from Kier group (who recently acquired Mouchel).

16. Three presentations have been given to the staff which gave an overview of the where the service sits, reporting and governance procedures and plans for both the service and workload.   During the first week of return, a general induction will be provided to these staff. Further meetings are scheduled in October for overview sessions on Middlesbrough Manager and recent updates around savings targets.

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