

## EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL 17 October 2018

### Annual Audit Report

1. I am pleased to report that at a recent meeting of the Corporate Affairs Committee auditors EY confirmed an unqualified opinion on the accounts for 2017/18. This includes both the Financial Statements reflecting the income and expenditure of the Council, (which have never been qualified) and the Value for Money opinion.
2. In their Audit Results Report for the year ending March 31, 2018 auditors Ernst & Young confirm that they have removed their previous 'qualified judgment' relating to Value for Money in relation to asset disposal governance from their report.
3. Due to false and misleading information circulated by some on this issue, I should stress again that this concern was in relation to some aspects of governance processes around asset disposal, including fully embedding of new policies and not with the actual value received for any building or piece of land.
4. Their work in relation to Value for Money included:
  - "We reviewed the Asset Disposal Policy presented to the Executive Sub Committee for Property on 7 December 2016. We then requested further information to support compliance with specific areas of the policy;
  - We selected a sample of eight active and eight pipeline disposals and tested these assets to ensure that the process undertaken so far by the Council was in line with the Asset Disposal Policy; and
  - We considered Internal Audit's findings in relation to asset disposal governance arrangements at the Council."
5. Their conclusion was:

"In all significant respects, the audited body had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people"
6. As expected there were some recommendations to further improve governance to be considered by the committee and this included a review of the Council's approach to due diligence, a review by internal audit of the Onestop members' enquiry system and work to improve relations between officers and some members.
7. A response to these recommendations, was provided to the Corporate Affairs Committee which included proposals for externally facilitated mediation sessions between some members and senior officers.

8. I would again like to thank the officers involved for their hard work and integrity which has resulted in this unqualified value for money assessment and for cooperating with auditors throughout this process.
9. I'd also like to thank members who have expressed their support and respect for officers, whilst still retaining their right to robustly challenge in an appropriate manner.

## **Onestop**

10. A recent email to all members apologised for a delay recently in processing Onestop requests caused by a recent system upgrade, together with capacity issues within the team that manages Onestop as they have addressed other pressing issues over the past few months and the sheer volume of requests submitted by members, the majority of which could be submitted directly via the website.
11. As mentioned in previous reports, I have been meeting with officers regarding work that has been ongoing for some time to provide an improved system for councillors to use for managing their casework. This includes submitting initial service requests, escalating requests previously submitted where further action or clarification is required on them as well as submitting information requests. The aim is also to reduce the amount of officer intervention needed to process these requests in line with cuts to staffing levels.
12. Due to technical issues experienced I have not been satisfied to date that the new system was working satisfactorily and so ready to roll out to members, but work is ongoing by officers on this and further communication will be sent out to members in due course.
13. Over 80% of contacts with OSS (likely to be more than 2,500 this year) are first-time service requests, such as fly tipping, street lighting, potholes etc. We would like to encourage you to use the Council's website to log these requests directly
14. However in the interim, I would urge members to use the systems available to them in a way that gets the best outcomes for their residents in the fastest manner.

## **Service requests**

15. Over 80% of contacts with OSS (likely to be more than 2,500 this year) are first-time service requests, such as fly tipping, street lighting, potholes etc.
16. I would like to encourage you to use the Council's website to log these requests directly. This provides the fastest and most direct route to get things done for your ward and can be used either by you or local residents
17. In addition you can report such issues using a mobile device such as your smartphone when out and about in your ward, allow the system to pick up your location and you can also take photographs and input them there and then into the system if you wish. This not only speeds things up but can mean less work for the member concerned. I have certainly found it useful for reporting things when out and about in my ward.
18. Unlike with reporting via telephone through the Contact Centre, you can also receive a reply when the service request is completed, again more quickly than through Onestop

19. When members choose to email the Onestop Shop account they are increasing the amount of time it will take to respond to an issue as it takes several days for requests to be logged that come through this way. Also by removing the over 80% of emails to the one stop shop account which are service requests that would be responded to faster if they were logged through the website, it does free up the reduced officer resource to deal with other matters .

20. If you continue to choose to use Onestop to log service requests please note that:

- It will take longer to action those requests than if you use the website
- It may take several days to log your request
- Because of the above urgent requests should never be logged using Onestop e.g. needles on the street, highway emergencies, offensive graffiti etc.

### **Escalating Service Requests**

21. Once a service has been requested and if has not been responded to satisfactorily or further information is required, please continue to use Onestop to 'escalate' this until the new system is ready for use and has been rolled out.

22. Onestop should also be continued to be used for the small number of service requests where there is not yet a relevant category on the website or where there is a request for information.

### **Emails**

23. When using Onestop it would be appreciated if members could input directly into the system rather than emailing officers to do so for them.

### **DBS Checks**

24. Members may recall that it was recently decided that all councillors would be asked to undertake a DBS check. Information supplied to me by officers indicates that so far:

- 23 Councillors have completed the check and have received their clearance certificates back
- 7 Councillors have had their information submitted and are waiting for their clearance certificates
- 2 have submitted 2 forms of ID and officers are just waiting for a third
- 15 have not submitted any information to officers (but they may have filled in the online form.)

25. If you have not yet received your certificate or submitted all required information, would you please follow this up as soon as possible?

## **ICT**

### **Agile Working Workshops**

26. These are still proving extremely popular and were held every Thursday morning throughout August and beginning of September. The workshops were all fully booked with all places being booked within 2 days of sending the email out.

### **Exchange Upgrade**

27. ICT Services are in the process of migrating all Outlook email users across to the new virtual Exchange email infrastructure. The old physical servers have now been decommissioned and replaced with new virtual servers which run across both of the ICT Data Centres, this ensures a high level of resilience for a key communication tool. Migration of user mail boxes is well underway and is expected to be completed by mid-October. The migrations are automated to complete overnight causing minimal disruption to our users.

### **PSN Update**

28. With the annual compliance submission for PSN (Public Sector Network) security due in November, ICT are hard at work providing audit evidence for the assessor. This annual audit demonstrates that the Councils ICT infrastructure has a strong security posture in place. A pre-requisite to connecting to the Cabinet Office and DWP networks.

## **HR**

### **Living Our Values Event**

29. The OD team led on the Living our Values Event which took place on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> September. Everyone was invited along to a fantastic day that included:

- An update by Chief Executive
- Q&A session to get to know the Leadership Management Team and gain insight on how they live our values
- A marketplace filled with a variety of health and wellbeing stalls
- Plenty of opportunities to get involved in initiatives
- A variety of activities, and much more!

30. The purpose of this event is to improve employee engagement by:

- Having increased awareness of our core values to support embedding
- Having increased visibility of LMT
- Improving awareness of service areas and the great work we do
- Providing access to a wide range of diversity/inclusion information
- Providing access to wellbeing initiatives and services

31. The target is to have 1000 staff attend this fantastic event.

## **Annual Equality and Inclusion Report**

32. Information is currently being collated for the Annual Equality and Inclusion Report which is published on the Council's internet. The information outlines the diversity of the Council's workforce and compares it to the town. Other HR data within the report includes, but is not limited to, the workforce composition, sickness absence figures, carer information and numbers of grievances and disciplinary investigations. There are a range of actions within the People Strategy that underpin the aim to have a workforce that more closely represents the diversity of the local population.

### **Exit Interviews**

33. HR are in the early stages of developing an Exit Interview Strategy. This process is an important part of the employee life-cycle and should be used to ensure an employee leaves the organisation, where possible, on good terms and under the best possible circumstances. An ex-employee is more likely to recommend working for Middlesbrough Council with the possibility of re-joining in the future if this process is maximised. Face-to-face interviews will be voluntary and will be offered on immediate receipt of a resignation providing an opportunity to potentially retain some employees. Further information on the new process will be submitted in due course.

### **TUPE Transfer of Staff - Revenues and Benefits; Payroll**

34. Work is underway on the detailed preparations for the TUPE transfer of Revenues and Benefits staff and Payroll staff from Kier Business Services to Middlesbrough Council. This is a significant exercise and is likely to involve the transfer of over 70 staff.

35. Kier Business Services began formal consultation with their staff on 18 September and a presentation was given by the Heads of Service of the services that will be receiving these members of staff.

36. Revenues and Benefits will move to the Financial Governance and Revenues service and Payroll will move to the HR Service.

37. The planned date for this transfer is 1 November 2018. The transfer is being managed through the Project Management Office.

**Nicky Walker**  
**Executive Member for Finance and Governance**