

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL Wednesday 2nd September 2020

1. DECISIONS

The following papers went to Executive on 16th June:

COVID19 Response and Recovery Arrangements

Strategic Plan 2020-23 – Progress at Year-end 2019/20

Stop the Knock

The following papers went to Executive on 14th July:

Monitoring of Implementation of Executive Decisions

2. STRATEGIC

Finance

The Council currently holds an unqualified value for money opinion from its external auditor and is currently finalising its Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20, which will address the findings of the Ofsted inspection and other key governance issues arising during the year. The final Annual Governance Statement will be presented to Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee in September 2020 and a new officer Corporate Governance Board will be established to oversee delivery the associated action plan during 2020/21.

3. PERFORMANCE

ICT - Applications

ICT Continue to provide technical support in order to deliver Ofsted Children's Improvement plan. The Head of Service/ ICT Senior Management Team are represented on the monthly Corporate Reference Group. Our LCS is also attending the Children's Corporate Reference Group. The Reference Group is a forum to ensure that all of the wider Council's resources and attention are devoted to supporting children and young people in Middlesbrough. Its purpose is to raise issues that need to be addressed through co-operation and to allow colleagues outside of Children's Services to identify support and resource to assist on the improvement journey.

ICT - COVID-19 Response

On the 23rd of March Central Government took the unprecedented step of putting the entire country into lock-down. From an ICT perspective that meant moving our entire ICT

user base, 1800 users from the corporate network to home based working via the Councils corporate VPN.

Fortunately as part of our strategic approach ICT Services offer a mature (four years now) agile working solution to a significant proportion of our users. As a result the number of users logging on from home jumped from an average of 400 users to an average of 1200 users overnight. Whilst the number of supporting actions for the Silver & Gold Recovery groups are too numerous to mention a number of key deliverables include:

- WebEx. Our Infrastructure Network team, introduced an industry leading full Video Conferencing/remote meeting management system solution. Again this software was part of our strategic roadmap and therefore its rollout was relatively easy to accelerate at the start of the pandemic. It now serves most of the Councils remote meeting requirements including CMT and Executive meetings.
- Firewall Cluster upgrade. Due to the sheer number of users now working at home. ICT took the decision to bring forward existing capital spend to replace and upgrade the Councils Firewall Cluster. ICT were able to drastically reduce the timescales of the project (from months to weeks) in order to ensure users continued to work from home. The upgrade was completed 4th of August by our Technical Architect team with no downtime or service disruption.
- WhatsApp for Social Care. Without the ability to meet face to face, Children's Services contacted ICT with a critical requirement to speak and see to service users in a virtual but flexible way – something that would be familiar to Service users. ICT recommended, tested and rolled out WhatsApp to key teams. To date over 600 staff now have access to this software which is proving vital in continuing to engage with service users.
- Mobile phones for Foster Carers. In similar request the Foster Carers team had an urgent legal need to maintain family contact (between parent and child) during the early days of lockdown. ICT rose to the challenge by providing 127 smart mobile phones again with the WhatsApp loaded onto them.
- Laptops for vulnerable Children. An impact of the decision to close schools was the ability of looked after children, to access ICT resources and school based curriculum activities at home. Working closely with Education Services, the DFE and external education partner One IT, ICT have facilitated the deployment of 960 laptops and 135 4g devices to vulnerable children across Middlesbrough.
- Additional devices. Whilst there were around 1800 staff with the ability to work from home pre-lockdown, a significant demand was placed upon ICT Services once Council offices across the town were closed. To date ICT Services have rolled out 300 additional laptops to staff across the Directorates. A core group of First line Engineers agreed to remain onsite throughout the pandemic in order to roll out these devices to users and provide physical onsite support, whilst adhering to Social Distancing guidelines.

ICT - Redcar Council Ransomware Incident

As you will likely be aware on Saturday 8th of February Redcar & Cleveland suffered a major ICT Security incident. It was recently disclosed that this incident has cost the Council 10.4m in lost revenue and untold reputational damage.

ICT Services, within Middlesbrough, continue to bolster our already strong security posture. Along with the recent upgrades to the MBC Firewall Infrastructure. ICT Services will shortly implement “Zero Day Threat Protection”. This essentially means that the Council will be protected against the latest virus and malware threats that have no known signature or identifier, simply by analysing the behaviour of network traffic attempting to pass through our Firewalls.

ICT - ICO Audit

Working closely with Data Protection and Records Management, ICT are currently working through the actions agreed as a result of the consensual onsite audit conducted by the ICO (Information Commissioner’s Office) between the 3rd and 5th of December 2019.

A number of technical and policy based improvements are being tested and agreed. The latest of which (the removal of auto complete within the Exchange Email) system is now complete. Disabling this function reduces the likelihood of ICT users sending emails to the wrong recipient and in turn reducing the potential of significant fines by the ICO due to the incorrect ending of sensitive or confidential data.

ICT - Community Safety Data Recording System – CDPSoft

ICT Services are now providing full project management and technical work stream support in the implementation of a new innovative case management system that effectively manages victims, perpetrators and locations involved in crime and antisocial behaviour. This system is due to go live March 2021.

Middlesbrough's Community Safety Team currently uses Flare as a case management system. This has been the case since 2003. When Flare was acquired it was a time when Community Safety was under the same umbrella as Public Protections/Environment and it was beneficial to use the same system. In 2017 the team is more closely aligned to Youth Offending Service, Early Help and Troubled Families, and works with the same individuals. We require a system which can be utilised by Middlesbrough council and our partner agencies. (Police, Cleveland Fire Brigade, Probation Service etc.) We have recently completed the requirements capture and the preferred solution is called CDPSoft.

CDPSoft allows us to better extract data we can deploy our own and partner resources more effectively which will support us to reduce crime and ASB, in accordance with our statutory duty and support the Mayors '2025 vision' to create safer communities and further reduce the impact of crime and ASB.

Revenues and Benefits – Business Grants

Over a period of 4.5 months, our Revenues and Benefits Service have paid over 2000 business grants totalling around £24m. These grants have been critical and necessary to support both our businesses and local economy. The service have responded positively throughout the process and have spent over 6000 hours administering the scheme. As we near the end of the process I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the service and thank the Service for all their hard work.

Revenues and Benefits – Changes to the way we collect Council Tax

Over recent months you may have noticed that we are making changes in the way we collect council tax. Collection will always been challenging especially here in Middlesbrough, however that shouldn't stop us trying. Following a complete redesign of the service, our residents now have a single point of contact with their very own caseworker. Our caseworkers will provide advice and support, pay benefits and resolve payment problems all in one go using a ward based tailored solution. If our residents need short term financial assistance then our team can do that as well.

Covid 19 has significantly impacted our residents, a number of residents have lost their jobs and are struggling to make ends meet. Following the announcement of some much needed funding, our Revenues and Benefits Service are reaching out to our residents and providing them with some short term financial support- helping residents get back on their feet.

Over recent weeks, the service have also managed to engage with customers who have not made contact with the service for some time. Being in debt for some means burying their heads, for our Revenues and Benefits Service, this means finding ways to free up disposable income to help our residents meet their payment obligations our teams work closely to establish the root cause of non-payment and remove as many barriers as possible. I have to say this I am really impressed with the feedback so far.

Human Resources - Disability Confident Leader Status

The Disability Confident Scheme is managed by the Department for Works and Pensions, it is scheme that supports employers to demonstrate a commitment to equality in the workplace. The scheme purpose is to challenge attitudes towards disability, increase understanding and support employers to removes barriers to disabled people and those with long-term health conditions. The ultimate aim is to ensure that disabled people have equality of opportunity, to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations.

Our employee led Disability and Wellbeing Network (DAWN) have worked as a team over 12 months to pull together our latest assessment documents and evidence for our 2020 assessment and bid for Disability Confident Leader status.

We have been awarded the highest level, this level is for employers who act as a champion for disability in local and business communities. We were awarded on 16th March and this lasts for 3 years.

Human Resources - Supporting employees through Covid

There has been a lot to do for HR in this period including;

- Keyworker Letters - Provided for over 1,000 people allowing them to travel for work during lockdown and for their children to be able to attend school.
- Casual Worker Payments - Facilitating average 80% payments to over 150 staff and engaging them in other work until they have been able to return.
- Physical Health Support - Helping with home set ups, delivering chairs to be people working from home. Providing advice on the importance of taking a break and doing some physical activity. Working with Craig Postgate in Public Health to provide weekly short stretchwell videos that people can access and do at home

- Mental Health Support - Introduction of an Employee Assistance Programme from 1st April providing support 24/7 365 days a year. Regular reminders of our Network of Mental Health First Aiders and other support available such as MIND, recovery College and Mental Health Foundation.
- Working From Home Newsletters - We have provided 3 specific newsletters targeted at those WFH and cover topics like looking after themselves, keeping in touch with other, ICT tips as well as energy saving ideas.
- Shielding – we have been working with managers to facilitate the return to work of those employees who were previously shielding and came to an end on 1st August
- Reoccupation – we will be working to ensure concerns and anxieties about returning to work are dealt with.