

CORPORATE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

15 September 2022 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Dendle (Chair), Clayden, Cooper (Substitute for Madeley), Mrs Cooper, Gunner (Substitute for Roberts), Haywood (Substitute for Huntley), Oppler and Warr.

Apologies: Councillors Bennett

262. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

263. MINUTES

The minutes of the Corporate Support Committee meeting held on 19 July 2022 were approved by the committee and signed by the Chair.

264. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions submitted for this meeting.

265. CUSTOMER SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

The Customer Services Manager provided members with an introduction to the report. She explained that the report highlighted the areas where the customer service teams helped and assisted the district's customers. She confirmed that they handled approximately 3000 webchats annually. She drew members' attention to appendix 3 in the agenda pack as it highlighted all the different contact channels available to customers. She also advised that call volumes had seen a decrease in numbers and that this was due to the number of available trained resources as well as other contact channels being chosen and used instead of just the telephone option. Turning to appendix 5 she explained that showed the decrease in the 'come in' figures, the number of people coming into the Civic Centre and or Bognor Regis Town Hall, she also confirmed that the zero figures highlighted the pandemic timeframe. She also explained that recently an appointment system had been put in place at both the civic and town hall locations. Confirming that the customer services teams were covering both receptions and assisting customers with the best route to have their query resolved, which may involve a variety of options from a video call with a specialist advisor or an in person appointment where needed. In summing up she also confirmed that any individuals presenting as homeless would also be assisted by the staff on the receptions.

In turning to the debate, members were invited by the Chair to ask any questions if they had any, a summary of which is below.

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It was queried how many employees there were in the team. It was confirmed that the team was made up of 23 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) when fully staffed. However, the team were currently 4 FTE short as well as 1 member of the management team short. It was confirmed that all Customer Service team members were trained, and all took calls, especially during high peak times.

Clarity was sought regarding staffing at Bognor Regis Town Hall after several press reports had been seen over the last few months that stated the Town Hall reception had been closed and this differed from the presentation members had just received. It was confirmed by the Customer Service Manager that reception at Bognor Regis Town Hall was open and was now benefitting from the recently introduced appointment system. It was confirmed that no complaints had been received since the appointment system had been introduced and that the only staff that had been relocated from Bognor Regis Town Hall were some parts of the Revenue and Benefit Teams.

There was further discussion in relation to how working remotely had impacted the Customer Services Team, what were its advantages and disadvantages. This then led to discussion on how the team approached referring customers to the website to self-serve in the future. Where it was confirmed that the team would always encourage customers to take the self-serve option, inclusive of talking the customer through the step-by-step process over the phone or inviting the customer in to use the computers available in the reception areas and showing them how to navigate the website in person.

The final question asked was, was there anything that the Customer Services Manager thought that the council could improve on. Where she confirmed that the team were doing everything they could to promote all the different contact channels available to all customers, but, feedback was that customers did not yet trust the self-serve option and therefore it was important for the council to ensure that when a customer did choose a self-serve option, the actions required were completed and completed well, in order for customers to see the process working.

Members then noted the report.

## 266. CORPORATE SUPPORT PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR QUARTER 1

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced the report to members, as there were no questions raised, this was noted by the Committee.

267. BUDGET PROCESS REPORT 2023/24

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced the report to the Committee. The Chair confirmed that previously there had been confusion as to the right place to ask questions related specifically to the Budget and confirmed that this would be at the budget meeting early next year. This report was to note the process that would be followed as highlighted in appendix B.

As there were no questions, the Committee noted the report.

268. SUNDRY DEBTS WRITE OFFS 2021-2022

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced the report to Members.

The Chair queried the process followed for chasing bad debts and asked if the council considered selling those debts to an external debt collection company to try and recover some of the monies. The Group Head of Finance & Section 151 Officer explained that external debt collection agencies were used by some areas in the council. However, should this be something that was of interest to Members for Sundry Debt, then this would require a policy change and Members would be consulted prior to any changes being implemented. It was then commented by one Member that he would not encourage this approach and he would advise against it.

As there were no further questions, the Committee noted the debts written off in 2021/22 under delegated powers of £67,250.77 as detailed in the report.

269. WORK PROGRAMME

It was queried if the Chair had received any contact from the Committee with suggestions of items to add to its work programme as previously requested. The Chair confirmed that no contact had been received.

The Committee therefore noted the work programme.

(The meeting concluded at 6.23 pm)