

CORPORATE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

12 October 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Oppler (Chair), Bower, Brooks, J English, Jones, Turner, Lury (Substitute for Warr), McDougall (Substitute for Tandy), Nash (Substitute for O'Neill), Mrs Stainton (Substitute for Lloyd) and Wallsgrove (Substitute for Lawrence)

290. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Lawrence, Lloyd, O'Neill, Tandy and Warr.

291. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

292. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous Corporate Support Committee meeting held on 27 June 2023 were approved by the committee and signed by the Chair.

293. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

There were no urgent items for the meeting.

294. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received for the meeting.

295. TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL ANNUAL UPDATE

The ICT Operations Manager advised members that the report before them provided an update on the activities and progress of Technology & Digital over the last 12 months. He confirmed that the team had maintained a high level of service and progressed a number of key projects.

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The Chair invited questions from members where it was asked what the timetable was for the removal of analogue telephone lines, and it was commented that the donation of 350 computers to local schools was great to see. The ICT Operations Manager confirmed that the work being completed to remove analogue telephone lines was being done by BT, and the council could help in providing reports on the district but that was all. He also said that the council was proud to be able to deliver 350 laptops and provide local schools with support. Additionally, it was asked for information on the council's cyber security defences where it was explained that it would not be possible for that to be discussed in public. Members then raised questions on Data Protection training that could be provided for members where the Group Head of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer confirmed that all staff had recently completed Data Protection refresher training and that relevant Data Protection training would be delivered to members as a priority. It was also stated that the ICT support that had been provided to members during their recent induction programme following the May 2023 election had been exceptional.

Members then noted the report.

296. HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

The Environmental Health Team Manager explained to members that report concerned the council's Health and Safety Policy in particular part 2 of that policy which detail the council's health and safety organisation and responsibilities. Part 2 sets out who does what in relation to management of Health and Safety, he confirmed that this was previously adopted by the Committee in January 2022 with some minor amendments made in September 2022. The updates included in the report before members were, the council's structure and service area activities, the activities are the risk areas identified within service area and ensures that the necessary help and support can be provided to help management of these risks. Additionally, the terms of reference for the Staff and Safety Panel which was approved by the Panel in May 2023. Driving Licence checks content had been updated to show that these would now be completed on a risk-based frequency rather than annually as previously resolved by the committee, this was due to the recent checks completed in 2022 that resulted in no issues being found. He also addressed some minor inaccuracies that had been documented in the council's structure that had been provided with the report and advised that these would be corrected under delegation to make minor amendments should the committee approve the recommendation to allow the Group Head to make minor amendments Policy.

Members were then invited to ask any question or make comments by the Chair. The following points were raised including, how its confirmed that staff have read and understood the policy, what mental health support measures were in place for staff and where was this documented within this policy. It was confirmed that all Policies were publicised through the councils' communications team and Managers were required to ensure that their teams understand the policy and their relevant responsibilities. Regarding Mental Health support, this was provided through Human Resources. A

question regarding the councils' asbestos register in relation to the amount of asbestos found at the Windmill Entertainment Centre after the recent fire and had the council been aware of these levels prior to the fire, it was confirmed that the asbestos arrangements varied however they were robust, specifically regarding the Windmill that detail would need to be provided by the Property and Estates team. Clarification was sought regarding the driving licence checks on how the risk-based approach would work in practice. As the debate drew to a close one member raised their concern regarding the current state of the Bognor Regis Arcade specifically the health hazard that had been created by the amount of pigeon activity, whilst it was explained that this concern wasn't specific to the policy before members the Environmental Health Team Manager stated he would follow this up with the Property and Estates team as this would be a potential public health concern for the council to address.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Nash and seconded by Councillor McDougall.

The Committee

RESOLVED

- 2.1. that the Health and Safety Policy: Organisation and Responsibilities be adopted; and
- 2.2. that authority be given to the Group head of Technical Services to make minor and administrative amendments to the Policy

297. DATA PROTECTION POLICY UPDATE

The Information Governance Manager advised members that the purpose of the report was for them to review and agree to adopt the update Data Protection Policy. It was explained that the last updated in August 2020 and was intended for annual update, however the requirement for the update was highlighted by the Information Governance audit in December 2022. The main updates were relevant to Council employees, roles and responsibilities, and recognising the impact of UK GDPR as well as linking in more closely with the council's ICT Policy.

As there were no questions the recommendation was proposed by Councillor Nash and seconded by Councillor Wallsgrove.

The Committee

RESOLVED

- 2.1 that the revised Data Protection Policy as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be adopted.

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298. BUDGET PROCESS REPORT

The Group Head Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced the report to members, where he explained that the report outlined the budget process for 2024/25 that would be followed, members were being asked to note its content which was a high-level outline of the process and had already been approved by Policy and Finance Committee at its meeting on 11 July 2023. The detailed committee budget was due to be presented to Corporate Support Committee at its meeting scheduled to be held on 31 January 2024 and a medium-term financial report which would contain more information ahead of the next committee report would be presented to Policy and Finance Committee at its meeting on 26 October 2023, finally he reminded members that the budget challenges previously documented still remained.

The Chair then invited questions, where clarity was sought regarding the uncertainty over the long-term government funding, it was confirmed that the medium-term financial report and a follow-up report would be presented to the Policy and Finance Committee meeting scheduled for 6 December 2023 and this would be when the details might be provided to the council from Government. It was explained that certain assumptions would be made within the forecast, however these come with uncertainty.

Members noted the report.

299. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 1

The Group Head Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced his report to members, where he explained the report outlined the committees budget forecast out turn against the 2023/24 budget. He explained that the virements that members were being asked to approve were not additional spend, it was presentational. He outlined the importance of members receiving this new report in order to keep them informed of performance against the approved committee budget. He then highlighted some of the underspends and overspends highlighted within the report, he confirmed that the finance team were actively working with Group Head and budget holders to drive down and mitigate overspending where possible and reminded members to read the Financial Prospects report being delivered to the Policy and Finance Committee at its meeting on 26 October 2023.

The Chair then invited questions from members where the following was raised, comments regarding the level of agency staff was asked, in particular how many agency staff were currently employed, what was the total cost of this to the council alongside what would the cost be should these positions be filled by permanent council employees. It was confirmed that the detail requested would be provided in writing to Committee members, however the Group Head of Finance also highlighted the difficulties with recruitment that were being faced since the pandemic. The Group Head of Law and Governance also confirmed that he was seeing the same difficulties, however specifically addressing comments made regarding paragraph 4.7, he stated that last year the spend had been over £420,000 and this year it was forecast to see a

reduction of £100,000, confirming that the focus to drive down spending was effective as well as highlighting that the flexible working that has arisen from the pandemic was something that the council could take advantage of. The Group Head of Organisational Excellence confirmed that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) were reviewing the use of agency staffing very closely and regularly and there would be an improvement seen in this area over time.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Wallsgrove and seconded by Councillor Lury.

The Committee

RESOLVED

2.2. Noted the report.

RECOMMEND TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

2.3. that it approves virements of £190,900 from the Corporate Support Committee to the Economy Committee and £34,423 from the Policy and Finance Committee to the Corporate Support Committee

300. SUNDRY DEBTS WRITE OFFS 2022/23

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer advised members that the retrospective report asked them to note that £39,521.56 of sundry debt had been written off in respect of 81 cases as shown in appendix 1. He explained that members were now also being asked to approve this write in line with Part 7, Management Structure, Delegations and Authorisations, Section 2, Officer Scheme of Management, Group Heads, paragraph 1.1.9. In summing up he confirmed for members that, all debts were reviewed and challenged thoroughly.

The Chair then invited questions from members, where clarification was sought on what specifically made up the debts classed as 'miscellaneous' and 'uneconomic', it was confirmed that the detail of each of these would be provided in writing to members. The Group Head of Finance did confirm that for those that sit in the 'uneconomic' column these were debts that had exhausted the recovery process and further work to attempt to recover these debts would prove most costly than the level of debt itself. Further questions on the recovery process were asked where it was confirmed that the process varied from case to case in terms of length of time pursued and that additional detail would be provided outside of the meeting. Members were keen to understand if the council's level of write offs for sundry debt was in line with other local authorities. Final comments made were to ask the Group Head of Finance if he was seeing the levels of debt increase given the current economic situation. He confirmed that the area he expected to see collection rates fall was in council tax and business rate collection,

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however these were seen to be currently holding well, overall, the councils' collections rates have remained steady.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Nash and seconded by Councillor Brooks.

The Committee

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee note that £39,521.38 of sundry debt has been written off in respect of 81 debts under delegated authority during 2022/23 shown in appendix 1.

301. CUSTOMER SERVICES – ANNUAL UPDATE

Before inviting the report to be presented the Chair thanked the Customer Services Manager and her team for the tour that had been provided for some members today it had been gratefully received. The Customer Services Manager confirmed that the report provided members with an overview of the customer services performance in 2022/23 and it identified merging operational trends compared to the previous 3 – 5 years. She confirmed that since October 2022 a security team had been implemented at both the Civic Centre and Bognor Regis Town Hall for the safety of staff and customers, as well as providing security services they also provide our customers with a triage service. When surveyed customers had fed back that they were happy to speak and interact with the security staff and understood why they were in place. Since April 2023 to August 2023, they have handled a total of 3137 customer interactions. She confirmed that over 6500 webchats had been handled this year almost double what had been handled for the last period. As documented in the report, reporting on data was easily managed in house and allowed for better internal management. One trend highlighted from the data was a decrease in telephone calls received, she explained that this was due to a change in contact pattern from customers and further detail was provided at paragraph 4.3. She also highlighted that appendix 5 showed a decrease in customers who visited the council's reception areas, this was believed to be due to customers using the councils' online services.

The Chair then invited comments from members where further comments regarding the customer services tour were heard, it was commented by one member that they were amazed at the fantastic job completed by the team, it was acknowledged that this role was varied and not always easy and there was a concern for the mental well-being of staff given the variety of issues that they deal with. Comments regarding staffing of the team were also raised, where it was noted that the team were already 1 staff member down with 2 more retiring in the new year and should recruitment for these positions not be well underway by now. This was also echoed by other members who had been in attendance on the tour where it was stated that as the team who were front facing, they should be afforded the highest priority for recruitment. It was also

recommended that future tours for members be organised, and all members should attend. Further discussion was had regarding the need for the security team to be in place and the Chair stated that he had previously raised concerns about the need for the team, however he confirmed that after attending the tour he now understood fully why the team was needed and in place. Discussion then turned to the cost of employing an external company to provide this service and would it be more cost effective for the council to recruit its own security team. A query was raised regarding the level of social media content that was currently provided and could this be increased to improve key messages from the council. It was confirmed that the Communications Team were responsible for the corporate social media posts. There was discussion regarding the opportunity for individual teams to take control of their own social media messaging, how members did have differing opinions on if this would be possible. One member commented that the current set up for council communications was entirely right and proper and should remain with the Communications team managing it. The Group Head of Finance addressed the comments regarding exploring the opportunity to recruit the council's own security team and confirmed that he would investigate the costings for this suggestion for members.

The Committee noted the report.

302. Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Chair confirmed that the report would be taken as read and as there were no questions, members noted the report.

303. WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted the Work Programme for the remaining municipal year.

(The meeting concluded at 7.06 pm)