

CORPORATE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

10 October 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Oppler (Chair), Tandy (Vice-Chair), Bower, Brooks, Butcher (Substitute for O'Neill), English, Jones, Lawrence, Lloyd, Turner and Warr

Councillors Harty and Dr Walsh were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

262. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillor O'Neill who was substituted by Councillor Butcher.

263. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

264. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 April were approved and signed by the Chair.

265. 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 presented at the meeting.

266. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions submitted by any member of the public for the meeting.

267. COMMITTEE MEETING START TIMES

The Chair proposed that the committee meeting start time for 2024/25 should remain at 6pm, this was seconded by the Vice-Chair.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the committee meeting start times for 2024/25 remain at 6pm.

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## 268. TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL ANNUAL UPDATE

The Head of Technology and Digital was invited by the Chair to present his report to the committee. He advised members that the report before them was an annual update that provided some highlights of the activities from the service over the last 12 months. The team had focused a lot of development time on rewriting all of the councils e-forms after the current supplier pulled out of the market. The team had continued to roll out other software projects alongside this work, including the roll out of a new cleansing application. He confirmed a number of major infrastructure upgrades had also been completed, to time, quality and budget. The council's website remained the most popular customer access channel that sees over a million visitors a year, the team continuously review ways to make improvements using user feedback. The Cybersecurity landscape remains an area of concern, and the team constantly review emerging threats and new ways to improve our defences. He stated that Members would have noted from the report that the team have a number of back-office challenges to overcome over the next 12 months, particularly around a number of current key suppliers that had pulled out of the market, he reassured the committee that a plan had been put in place to address and resolve these challenges.

The Chair then invited members to ask questions of the Head of Technology and Digital or make comment on the report. Councillor Turner then advised the committee that he had asked the officer if he could expand on what work for the website was still required in advance of the meeting. The Head of Technology and Digital then provided the committee with his written response where he confirmed that work on the website would never stop, the team were continually improving the site based on user feedback, site analytics and customer journeys. The team were passionate about ensuring the council's website was usable by as many people as possible including those with:

- impaired vision
- motor difficulties
- cognitive impairments
- learning difficulties

He explained that at least 1 in 5 people in the UK with a long-term illness, impairment, or disability with many more having temporary disabilities. The Council did not want to exclude anyone from accessing its services; for some the digital world was the best way for them to do that, and for others it may be the 'only' way they could.

As new content would be produced for the website by various department across the council, the team would not only review the writing style (the language used must be understandable for all reading abilities and councils often use their own jargon that no one understands except people that work for a council) but also the structure of content to ensure it was published as accessible content (e.g. screen reader and voice recognition compatible).

When the website was built, an independent audit was carried out and that provided insight to see real people with disabilities undertake certain interactions. Which really bought home that by making changes the council could make people's lives better and

support them doing the things they need to do, that a lot of us just take for granted – so we made those changes.

As the council's e-forms were also being rewritten and as part of that work the team were ensuring they were all accessible too. He stated that if 'wanting to help all our customers' was not compelling enough it was also a legal requirement for public sector websites to meet certain accessibility standards which the council does and passed the last Government Digital Service (GDS) audit. Finally, he advised that the council's website would never be 'finished', or work stop because our passion is to continually improve what we can offer.

It was then asked if there were any concerns regarding cyber-attacks, specifically in relation to the middle east and Russia. The Head of Technology and Digital explained that the council did see these types of attacks coming in from all over however, it didn't matter where the threat or attack was from, the team and council were always mindful of them. Finally, a concern was raised regarding to the number of suppliers that had removed themselves from the market, the officer was asked, how long did the council have these contracts in place and if this was normal as it seemed concerning. The Head of Technology and Digital confirmed that the contract lengths did vary, in terms of the e-forms we had had that supplier for a long time, however the team took the approach to rewrite these using open-source technology so the council would not be reliant on an external supplier in the future. In terms of some of the other systems in place they are mostly long contracts, as it was expensive to replace these systems. He advised that it was unusual to get that many suppliers pull out at once, but the sheer scale and number was bigger issue that was being managed.

After the debate had concluded the Chair checked that there were no other comments or questions to be raised, members then noted the report.

269. Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI'S) WHICH FORM PART OF THE COUNCIL'S VISION 2022-2026.

The Chair invited the Group Head of Operational Excellence to introduce the report, where she drew members attention to 3.7 of the report where it highlights the areas that were not achieving and sets out the work being put in place to address these. She confirmed The recommendations before are asking you to recommend to P&F to remove CP6, compliance of the Health and Safety programme from reporting for this committee as this is considered as an operational matter and did not fit with the committee's purpose to focus on the strategic direction.

The Chair requested that the committee review each indicator individually, there were no questions raised for CP1, CP2, CP3 or CP4. Councillor Turner confirmed that he asked relating to CP5 if now the target had been met, would a new one be set, ahead of the meeting. The Group Head of Organisational Excellence advised that while turnover rates could be seen as a concern, having a moderate level of attrition was healthy for an organisation as it brings in fresh perspectives and new skills. The Councils current target of 14% is believed to be around the national average for similar Local Authorities, although care did need to be taken when looking at data – figures for

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social care roles for example showed a turnover of 28% which made direct comparisons with all local government staff turnover difficult. Turnover allows the council to balance the retention of experienced and knowledgeable employees with the need for new talent. Any efforts to reduce the council's turnover rates further had to be considered in a wider context of organisation wide initiatives such as staff engagement, career development and progression, pay and reward etc. The Corporate Leadership Team would consider whether a new target would be set when the performance indicators for the forthcoming year were to be reviewed. She also confirmed that data for reporting of basic reasons of staff turnover for the council were that voluntary resignations were 56%, end of full-term contracts were 19% and age retirements were 7% and 13% were made up of more complex and individual reasons.

The Chair then continued to run through each indicator, there were no questions for CP6, a member commented on CP7 saying she felt that the officers were being a bit hard on themselves with the critique of this measure, there were no questions raised for CP8 or CP9.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Butcher and seconded by Councillor Bower.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

2.1 it noted the contents of this report and provides any questions or comments on the indicators relevant to this Committee to the Policy and Finance Committee on 24 October 2024 and,

2.2 **Recommended to the Policy and Finance Committee** that it approves the removal of CP6, Compliance with the Health and Safety Programme from the KPI list for Corporate Support Committee (para 4.8)

## 270. CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

The Chair introduced the councils new Corporate Complaints Manager and invited her to present the report, where she advised that the report covered from June 2024 to September 2024 and as the committee had been receiving these updates previously, she was happy to take any questions on the report content.

The Chair invited Councillor Turner to address the committee where he advised that he had asked the Corporate Complaints Manager what the nature of the complaints were for the 4 received from the July 2024 election. The Corporate Complaints Manager confirmed that these were 1 x poll card not received, 1 x postal vote package not received in time, 1 x postal vote not received, and proxy vote refused, 1x racist incident and all of these were dealt with at Stage 1 by the Elections Team.

As there were no other questions to be asked, members agreed to note the report.

271. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY REVIEW - REPORT TO APPROVE WORKING PARTY TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

The Chair explained to members that their focus was to agree the Terms of Reference (ToRs), the Monitoring Officer and Group Head of LA and Governance confirmed that the ToRs could be found on page 91 of the agenda and explained that members had agreed previously to set up a Working Party (WP), officers had now highlighted dates for these meetings and the report was focused on the membership and the ToRs for this WP, he advised that a membership of 7 would allow for a geographical spread and the membership would be politically balanced, meaning it would have representatives from the largest political groups within the council. He suggested that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the WP be the Chair and Vice-Chair of Corporate Support Committee with the remaining 5 members being selected from the wider membership of the council, confirming that members could draw on the wider membership of the council, not just members from the Corporate Support Committee membership. He highlighted the importance of a quorum for the WP, which would be one third of the membership with the Chair also having a casting vote provision. He confirmed that the ToRs detailed an overview of the WP's functions and responsibilities that had been taken from the council resolution made in November 2022. The Chair then confirmed that he endorsed a membership of the WP to be 7 members and that the remaining 5 members of the committee should be taken from the wider membership of the council. He then queried with the Monitoring Officer if wording needed to be added to the resolution to state the appointments were to be made by the relevant Group Leaders. The officer confirmed that the committee could agree that the membership based on political proportionality could be agreed based on nominations from Group Leaders.

The Chair then took questions from members where a comment was made that membership of the Corporate Support Committee had been agreed with this review in mind and therefore this should not be overlooked, it was also commented that nominations from Group Leaders for the final 5 members of the WP, was agreeable. The Monitoring Officer explained that the Corporate Support Committee would remain the parent committee and the decision maker within the process when making recommendations to Full Council. A suggestion was then made that an amendment to the wording in the ToRs regarding 1e, where it was requested to read 'at least one third'.

The Chair then confirmed that a WP of 7 members with the Chair and Vice-Chair being automatically appointed with the remaining 5 members being appointed by Group Leaders.

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## The Committee

### RESOLVED

2.1 considered the draft Terms of Reference set out at Appendix 1 and agreed the Terms of Reference and membership of 7 to the Working Party with the Chair and Vice-Chair and the remaining 5 places being appointed by Group Leaders.

## 272. CUSTOMER SERVICES - ANNUAL UPDATE

The Customer Services Team Leader provided members with an overview of the report, where she highlighted the outreach work the team had been completing since February 2024, the team had been visiting community hubs, Libraries and veteran breakfast clubs to assist people with navigating the website. She then drew members attention to Appendix 4 where it detailed the types of enquiries received, the largest number comes from Housing, WSCC and the councils' cleansing services. The outreach team have built a bridge with those who previously may not have been able to contact us, not have wanted to engage with the council previously. She confirmed that customer front facing services continued to be delivered at the Civic Centre, Littlehampton and Bognor Regis Town Hall (BRTH), where the most common enquiry was related to Council Tax queries.

The Chair invited members to ask any questions, where a concern was raised relating to the set up in place at BRTH, relating to those visiting being provided with an area to discuss their queries that allowed for more privacy. An additional concern of safety was also raised relating to the stairs at the entrance of BRTH. Following further conversation on the concerns it was agreed that the concerns raised would be followed up with the councils Property and Estates Team for review. Councillor Turner was then invited to speak where he advised members that he commended the team for all their hard work on behalf of the council and its residents over the last year and asked officers in advance of the meeting that another ADC Member Briefing Visit to the Team be organised to emphasise our support for their hard work and to discuss relevant issues (improvements and difficulties) face to face with them. He also requested that the briefing be open to Parish Councillors and Clerks. The Customer Services Team Leader Thanked him for his kind words and recognition of the team's effort and confirmed that the team would be pleased to host another briefing session, to include Parish Councillors and Clerks. She confirmed that officers would review potential dates for this and confirm with members outside of the meeting.

The Vice-Chair addressed the Committee referring to paragraph 4.6 in the report confirming that the Council App had recently been launched and was a brilliant tool for everyone to use particularly for waste collections and recycling information. He stated that everyone should be signposting people to the app as it was a great way for people to 'self-serve'.

The Chair then invited the Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer to address the committee where he wanted to pick up on a comment made earlier in the meeting regarding the Key Performance Indicator CP7, he explained that although the results for this year showed that the team were slightly under target, the target had been met every quarter during 23/24 and performance of the team had been and remained exceptional.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and then checked the committee had no other questions or points they wanted to raise.

#### 273. DEBT MANAGEMENT WRITE OFF POLICY REPORT UPDATE

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer explained that the report was requested their approval for the update to the Debt Management Policy at appendix 1, he confirmed that the policy was not only good practice but a requirement of the council's constitution. He advised that the policy was usually reviewed and updated every 2 to 3 years, unless there was a specific change that was required sooner, in which case it would be updated and brought before the committee sooner. He confirmed that as Section 151 Officer he had authority to write off debt up to £10,000 and anything above that figure is reported to the committee for their approval. He confirmed that appendix 1 detailed the specifics of the policy including the variety of debt write off reasons. He drew members attention to paragraph 4 of the report, confirming that everything that was considered for write off was individually reviewed by him and he hoped that this put members minds at ease. He then provided members with examples of previous debt write offs he had signed off on and confirmed that there was not a high number of write offs due to every effort being made to collect outstanding balances where they could be collected.

As there were no questions the recommendations were proposed by Councillor Bower and seconded by Councillor Jones.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the Debt Management and Write-Off Policy for 2024/25 to 2024/27 be approved.

#### 274. DRAFT FINAL OUT-TURN - 2023/24 - CORPORATE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer provided members with an overview of the report, he highlighted that the report was in draft status as it was yet to be externally audited and whilst it was still subject to change that was unlikely. He confirmed that the main headline of the report was that there had been a £124,000 overspend, which was an improvement of £97,000 on the quarter 3 overspend update. He confirmed that the main variances were outlined in paragraphs 4.3 – 4.5 of the

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report. He confirmed that the spending on agency staff for the Finance department saw an overspend of £163,000 he explained that the Finance team were currently implanting a new structure that would result in permanent staff being recruited to fill the roles currently being undertaken by consultants and this would reduce the agency costs associated with the overspend. He confirmed there had been under achievement of costs recovered from third parties in other areas of the council such as recharges to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), IT Software and maintenance and equipment purchases of approximately £144,000. The Capital Programme there was a slippage item relating to the document management system which was not an underspend and would be carried forward into next year's budget and spent then.

As there were no questions the Chair thanked the officer for his report.

#### 275. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT TO 30 JUNE 2024

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced the report and advised members that the forecast showed a £326,000 overspend against the committee budget, he confirmed that £303,000 of the overspend was due to the continued and required use of interim agency staff, he advised that officers were dedicated to driving this spend down over the coming months.

The Chair then invited members to ask questions and make any comments, he first invited Councillor Turner who asked had asked The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer ahead of the meeting linking with his previous comments on agenda item 11 could the background to the Customer Service Staff Vacancies that had yet to be filled be explained. The officer explained that since publication of the agenda the team had now recruited 3 new members of staff, he advised that the team provide an excellent front face for the council, he was full of admiration for the team and the role was not the easiest of roles to undertake. The Monitoring Officer and Group Head of Law and Governance then referred to the Committee Services vacancies detailed in the report, he confirmed that these were not due to any members of the team leaving, these posts had been created for growth to build the team and the team's future stability and resilience, the Committee Services Team Manager was working to fulfil these vacancies as a priority.

The Chair then invited questions and comments from members where it was asked what agencies were used to acquire the agency staff, it was confirmed by the Group Head of Finance that there were a variety of agencies used, a couple who were recognised for being able to provide for the financial market. It was then asked if exit interviews were held for those staff members who had chosen to leave the council and did the council have analysis of this information. The Group Head of Organisational Excellence confirmed that exit interviews were offered and held with those who took up that opportunity, she confirmed that the Human Resources (HR) team had completed a recent review of the exit interview process and now offered online interviews as well as face-to-face interviews. However, it was occasionally seen that once people have made the decision to leave an organisation, they tended not to engage with the exit interview process. Finally it was asked if officers had had a chance to review the new changes on



employee rights that had been announced by the Government, it was confirmed that whilst the council was aware of these changes it was too early to comment and officers were waiting for more detail to be provided.

Once the debate concluded the Chair thanked officers and members for their comments.

276. BUDGET 2025/26 PROCESS

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer advised members that the report outlined the process to be followed for the upcoming Budget 2025/26 and that members were being asked to note the report and provide any comment.

The Committee noted the report.

277. OUTSIDE BODIES UPDATE

The Chair confirmed that there were no written updates for the meeting.

278. WORK PROGRAMME

It was confirmed that members were required to approve the Work Programme for the committee.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Tandy and seconded by Councillor Lloyd.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme 2025/26 be approved.

279. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Tandy and seconded by Councillor Turner.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That under Section 100a (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and accredited representatives of newspapers be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve

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the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.

280. COUNCIL TAX, BUSINESS RATES AND SUNDRY DEBT WRITE OFFS TO BE APPROVED BY COMMITTEE – 2024/25 QUARTER 1

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced the report and provided members with a detailed overview of the report.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Lawrence and seconded by Councillor Tandy.

The Committee

RESOLVED that it

Approved the write-off of £14,770 that remained due from the Littlehampton Traders Partnership Ltd.

(The meeting concluded at 7.00 pm)