

OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

22 February 2017

Present: Councillor T Williams (Chair)
Councillor A Rindl (Vice-Chair)
Councillors S Cavinder, J Dhindsa, K Hastrick and P Kent

Also present:

Officers: Head of Human resources
Partnerships and Performance Section Head
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (AG)

27 Apologies for Absence/ Committee membership

Apologies were received from Councillor A Joynes.

28 Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

29 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2017 were submitted and signed.

30 Quarter 3 2016/17: Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Report

The panel received a report of the Partnerships and Performance Section Head. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head introduced the report explaining that the data, at this stage of the year, would help indicate whether annual targets were likely to be achieved.

In response to questions from members, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head:

- With reference to item ES4 in the report (levels of litter and environmental cleanliness), undertook to find out whether there was any higher trend of littering in Vicarage Ward. She also undertook to

establish whether there was an issue with fly tipping in Harwood's Road at the junction with Chester Road.

- With reference to item ES7 in the report (levels of fly-posting), advised that members should report instances of fly-posting to the Section Head - Waste, Recycling & Street Care in the first instance. She advised that work was being conducted with circuses to ensure that fly-posting was appropriately carried out.
- With regard to item ES8 in the report (waste, streets and parks complaints), she undertook to obtain missed bins figures from Veolia for the panel.

Members asked, in relation to items LC1 and LC3 in the report (the Woodside Leisure Centre), why if membership of the centre had increased throughput had dropped. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head explained that this was a difficult measurement but was most likely to relate to groups – where the entry of a group of people was calculated as one item regardless of the number of people entering. The Chair gave an example of the leisure centre gate opening allowing 30 children to enter but only recorded as one throughput.

In response to further questions from members, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head:

- With reference to item RD1 in the report (penalty charge notices issued), undertook to find out why penalty charge notices issued had reduced significantly compared to quarter three in 2015/16 and quarter two in 2016/17.
- With reference to item RB3 in the report (collection rates of council tax), advised that the Head of Revenue and Benefits or the Benefits Manager should be contacted in relation to any change of circumstances.

Members commented, in relation to item HR1 in the report (sickness absence days), that the figures seemed contradictory. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head clarified the period these related to and that long term sickness this year had caused a problem. The aim was to get the performance back to the 5 days target. In response to a related question from members, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head confirmed that long term sickness was recorded by the council and that those who were unwell were treated with a great deal of sensitivity. She undertook to find out how long term sickness impacted the overall figures.

Following final questions from members, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised, in relation to item RB4 of the report (collection of national none domestic rates), that the 84.92% figure was the correct percentage and, in

relation to item IT1 (ICT service missed calls), undertook to include data as to how long it took to answer telephone calls in future reports.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Panel note the Key Performance Indicator report.
2. the actions requested be undertaken.

31

Human Resources Service Presentation

The panel received a presentation from the Head of Human Resources. The Head of Human Resources introduced the presentation inviting questions from members.

The Chair asked about the payment of the apprenticeship levy. The Head of Human Resources explained that this would commence in April. The Council should be in a position to reclaim this if the current levels of apprentices were maintained. She confirmed that the Council was unable to guarantee employment at the end of an apprenticeship. Watford Borough Council Human Resources was a proactive service seeking to improve the employee experience.

In response to a question from members about whether new staff were encouraged to join a trade union, the Head of Human Resources explained that during the induction process, staff were advised that the council recognised the Unison public services trade union - and that non-union representatives were also available to assist them. Trade union and non-trade union representatives were to be invited to all future corporate induction presentations.

Members asked why the council utilised non-union representatives. The Head of Human Resources explained that it did so as only about 30% of the workforce were trade union members. As a result, there was the opportunity for all staff to have a voice. She discussed how the system had been implemented - including consultation with the trade union.

The Head of Human Resources advised that the non-union representatives worked well with the trade union representatives and a reasonable time was set aside for them to carry out their work - they had received local government training to assist in their roles. Furthermore, the representatives had an external peer network group to provide support. She stressed that all staff had the choice to join a trade union and concluded by explaining her trade union background and her support for partnership working.

Councillor Watkin commented that if the council did not have non-union

representatives; 70% of staff would potentially be unrepresented.

In response to further questions from members, the Head of Human Resources:

- Clarified that 700 core workforce staff were supported across the two councils.
- Explained that sickness absence data was calculated on days lost per head and therefore could be compared to/benchmarked against other councils. Councillor Watkin discussed how long term sickness could affect the figures having regard to the council's relatively small workforce – which he felt demonstrated that the authority was performing well. Members debated the issue expressing a variety of views.
- Outlined the First Care sickness reporting procedures and how information was immediately available to assist monitoring.
- Advised that grievance procedures followed policy and the required timeframes – although as grievance numbers were very low they were not reported on formally but were monitored.
- Confirmed that the trade union was consulted during preparation of the staff survey and issues they had raised had previously been included.
- Explained that the numbers of male and female employees in the council was approximately 50% in each category; which was a healthy balance. She undertook to forward the latest Workforce Monitoring Report (that had been discussed at the Council Functions Committee and included Black and Minority Ethnic Group data) to Councillor Dhindsa – this was also published on the council website.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head discussed her positive experience of receiving coaching under the councils coaching scheme and recommended this to members.

In response to additional questions from members, the Head of Human Resources and the Partnerships and Performance Section Head:

- Explained that as the council had an ageing workforce - a number of long serving individuals may retire at around the same time. It was the public service ethos and work life balance that predominantly attracted new recruits.
- Advised that the average age of the workforce was reported on annually in the Workforce Monitoring Report and information was also included in the staff survey.
- Confirmed that all staff had the opportunity for an exit interview when leaving the council. The take up rate for this was approximately 50% of leavers - although staff turnover was low.

Members discussed the potential publicising of information about staff who had

won the monthly staff award (as part of councils award programme) on the council's website – believing this a good idea. The Head of Human Resources considered that this approach would further demonstrate openness and transparency with the public. She advised that the monthly winners would go forward to the annual awards.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the Chair commended the Head of Human Resources for her excellent work and this was seconded by Councillor Watkin.

RESOLVED -

1. that the Panel note the presentation.
2. that the action requested be undertaken.

Chair
Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel

The meeting started at 7.00 p.m.
and finished at 8.20 p.m.