

Item 5 - Review into the Best Value delivery of the Environmental Health Out of Hours Service for SDC and DBC

The attached report was considered by the Direct & Trading Advisory Committee on 13 March 2018. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Direct & Trading Advisory Committee (13 March 2018, Minute 24)

The Assistant Environmental Health Manager presented a report which recommended that the Out of Hours (OOH) service targeted the Environmental Health Officer resource at times of peak demand whilst simultaneously empowering the CCTV team to respond, record and provide advice to the majority of 'one off' complaints received by the service in order to make more efficient and effective use of resources and allowing serious or emergency public health matters to be dealt with all year round and provide an enhanced system during periods of highest demand. The existing OOH provision for serious or emergency public health complaints would be extended via a year round cascade call system.

The shared service Environmental Health team currently provided an Out of Hours (OOH) Service to deal with complaints from residents within the Sevenoaks (SDC) and Dartford (DBC) districts. This service currently operated everyday throughout the year between 17:00 and 22:00 Monday to Thursday, 17:00 to 00:00 Friday, 08:00 to 00:00 Saturday and 08:00 to 22:00 Sunday. Demand for the service varied significantly throughout the year and by day of the week. Many of the calls received were not urgent and did not require immediate action and could be managed the next working day during office hours in accordance with agreed performance indicators. In the past 18 months, experienced officers had left the OOH Service, and there as now a serious issue with fully staffing the Service in its existing format.

With reference to Appendix D and the analysis of calls, Members requested the breakdown figures of the times of calls made, especially on Saturdays and Sundays to help them make an informed decision.

*Action 1: Data to be made available to the committee and for the Cabinet meeting on 19 April 2018 with the day by day breakdown of the time of calls (particular with regard to out of hours and weekends). (*this is now attached as an additional appendix to the report.)*

Members took the opportunity to ask questions. In response to those questions: it was explained that shift work had been ruled out as it would be less cost efficient and all officers on the rota were multi-skilled as this made the team more resilient; and staff had indicated that they would be more willing to volunteer for out of hours if the number of hours to be available was reduced. It was also acknowledged that it was not a statutory service which more recently had only been provided by two members of

staff, which was not sustainable. The Committee expressed their appreciation to these members of staff for maintaining the service. Whilst it was not a statutory service Members felt that the value to the public needed to be assessed against value for money.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that the following recommended changes be agreed, that

- a) a targeted OOH service be implemented during the busiest service periods of Friday and Saturday night 18:00 to 00.00;
- b) during the periods in (a) above; all calls in respect of environmental health (other than first time complaints) be passed to the OOH Duty Officer for review and investigation as per the current service.
- c) at all other times OOH calls be reviewed and logged by the CCTV team;
- d) training and guidance be provided to CCTV operators to ensure they provide accurate advice and assistance to a customer at the time of their call;
- e) Environmental Health continue to provide additional advice or assistance as required via a cascade telephone system (or similar) for emergency situations or difficult/ demanding customers;
- f) it be noted that the proposed system would allow serious or emergency public health matters to be dealt with all year round and provide an enhanced system during periods of highest demand;
- g) it be noted that the proposed service would also ensure all customers calling the District Council outside of working hours receive an enhanced level of information and advice (provided by CCTV) during their initial call to the Council (rather than just in current service hours). It will also enable CCTV to contact an officer from Environmental Health in periods not currently covered by the existing service.
- h) it be noted that the provision of a secondary cascade rota would enable the OOH Duty Officer to seek a second opinion or if necessary operational support on difficult and challenging cases.
- i) it be noted that it is hoped that the recommended service could continue to be staffed using volunteers from within the EH Team.

However, there remained a high risk that contract conditions may need to be applied to adequately staff this option.