

STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2013 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Fleming (Chairman)

Cllr. Dickins (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs. George, Mrs. Parkin, Piper, Mrs. Purves and Miss. Thornton

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Abraham, Neal and Miss. Stack

Cllrs. Eyre and Fittock were also present.

19. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Strategy and Performance Advisory Committee meeting held on 8 October 2013 be approved and signed as a correct record.

20. Declarations of Interest

There were no additional declarations of interest.

21. Presentation on the Residents Survey Results

The Chairman had agreed to take the following presentation as an urgent item. The urgent matter was taken as Agenda item 2(a).

In accordance with Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman advised the Committee he had agreed to accept an urgent matter – ‘Presentation on the Residents Survey Results’.

The matter was urgent because the results of the resident survey needed to be considered by the Advisory Committee to ensure that they can inform the work of the Committee’s working group. The results were not available until after the publication of the agenda.

The Head of Transformation and Strategy and the Communications and Consultation Manager gave a presentation of the results from the Residents’ Survey. The survey was carried out over the telephone, by an independent company and received 201 responses.

In response to questions, the Communications and Consultation Manager confirmed that there had been a positive change in attitudes to public services and the Council’s reputation had improved since the last survey in 2010. A question in the survey asked how helpful residents found the Council the last time they contacted it. The

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Communications and Consultation Manager was unsure how many respondents had answered this question, but would be able to provide the information to Members after the meeting. He also confirmed that there were service specific questions which ensured the responses were in relation to the District Council.

Action 1: That the Communications and Consultation Manager inform Members how many responses were received to the survey question relating to helpfulness the last time they contacted the Council.

In response to further questions, the Communications and Consultation Manager explained that residents were informed of the cost to produce InShape, which was less than the cost of a second class stamp at 21p. Concerns were raised whether residents knew how the Council's services provided value for money and whether it was something that could be quantified.

Members questioned how our score compared with other local authorities. The Head of Transformation and Strategy confirmed that some of the questions asked could be benchmarked though LG Inform which is being developed by the Local Government Association (LGA). As soon as it is available the information would be fed back so that it can be compared to other Councils.

Action 2: The full report to be added to the work plan for the next meeting and the full report to be shared with the Communications Strategy Working Group.

22. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Chairman, who was also the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Performance reported that he had attended the Scrutiny Committee for the second time. The Corporate plan had been finalised and the Peer Challenge Review was underway. The Peer Challenge Review was looking at savings, asset buying, supplement revenue budget, a focus on customer service and investment in businesses in the District.

Some projects in the Corporate Plan would be taken forward early next year. Some of these included the provision of long stay parking in the District and this would be taken forward to other Advisory Committees. Another project was for Swanley to be included in the Zone 6 London Travel Card boundary. This had been initially discussed with Kent County Council. The Leader reported that he would directly contact Transport for London, Michael Fallon M.P and Boris Johnson, Mayor of London.

23. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee (if any)

There were no referrals from the Cabinet or Audit Committee.

24. Annual Complaints Report 2012/13

The Customer Services Manager presented a report which updated Members on customer complaints and feedback monitoring for the year 2012/13, as compared to 2011/12 and provided projected figures for 2013/14.

In response to a question, she explained that customers could go straight to the Ombudsman with their complaints however, it had been their general practice to refer

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complainants back to the Council to go through the Council's own complaints procedure first. A Member questioned the meaning of the word 'settlement'. It was confirmed that it was not necessarily a financial settlement but upholding and admitting a mistake made.

Members felt that customers may not know the Council's complaint procedures and what was defined as a 'formal complaint.' The Customer Services Manager explained that there was a document on the Council's website and a leaflet available in reception which each department had a copy of. All Contact Centre staff were also trained in the complaints procedure. The definition of a 'formal complaint' was at Officer's discretion however, if correspondence was received with the words 'formal complaint' then it would be dealt with as a Stage 1 complaint. If concerns were raised in the correspondence then it would be dealt with as a Service Request which the Service Manager would respond to.

In response to questions, the Customer Services Manager explained that although the number of Stage 1 complaints received was increasing, it was something that had been anticipated with the Welfare changes coming into force earlier that year. The number of Stage 1 complaints for Local Tax was consistent. There was a decrease in Stage 2 and 3 complaints which showed that customers were satisfied with the outcomes of their Stage 1 complaints.

The Customer Services Manager explained that if a resident went to a Member with a complaint then they could be referred to the Council and it could be dealt with through the complaints procedure. She also explained that when a complaint is made to the Council the complainant was asked if they would like their local Councillor copied into correspondence, however this could only happen if they gave their permission. In response to a question from a Member regarding what assistance could Members provide to help reduce complaints, the Customer Services Manager offered to meet with the Portfolio Holder and look at potential ways that the Committee could be involved to help reduce complaints.

Action 3: That the Customer Services Manager have a meeting with the Portfolio Holder to look at potential ways that the Committee can be involved.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

25. Feedback from the Communications Strategy Working Group

A short briefing note was tabled by the Communications Strategy Working Group. The agreed focus areas were: the Council's website; marketing; and to explore Members communication needs. A comparison between alternative websites and the District Council's website had been carried out. The Working Group were producing a questionnaire for all Members to take part in which would look at which communication tools the Members were using.

26. Work Plan

The Work Plan was noted. The Committee agreed to add the Residents Survey results to the meeting in January 2014 and move the Annual Complaints report for 2013/14 to June 2014.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.05 PM

CHAIRMAN