

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 November 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Shane Hebb (Chair), Graham Snell (Vice-Chair), Russell Cherry, Martin Kerin and Deborah Stewart

Apologies: Councillor Steve Liddiard

In attendance: Les Billingham, Head of Adult Services
Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care
Sean Clark, Head of Corporate Finance
Matthew Essex, Head of Regeneration
Jackie Hinchliffe, Head of HR, OD & Transformation
Wendy Allen, People and Organisational Development Manager
Stephanie Cox, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

17. Minutes

Councillor Hebb requested that an action list be compiled for future meetings so that Members could monitor actions, such as which other accreditations the authority could undertake in order to demonstrate performance.

Councillor Stewart advised that at the previous meeting she had requested a list of statutory and discretionary services and that as of yet she had not received this information.

In response the Head of Corporate Finance advised that he could send information on the statutory and discretionary budget services as the slide packs had been used as part of the Budget Review Panel Process. He informed Members that more detailed work on other services areas was currently underway and once finalised could be circulated to Members.

The Minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 17 September 2015, were approved as a correct record.

18. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

19. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Cherry declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item 5, 'Serco Transition Update', as his wife had once been subject to TUPE, the

Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations to Serco and back again to Thurrock as a Council Employee.

20. Serco Transition Update

The Head of Regeneration introduced the report which outlined the broad background to the transition programme, the work completed to date and the proposals for the hosting and management of the returning services.

At 7.08 pm Councillor Kerin arrived at the meeting.

Councillor Snell requested an update with regards to the transition of the ICT Call Centre, to which the Head of Regeneration advised that the interim system had been integrated and tested and there were no anticipated issues at this stage.

Councillor Kerin asked for further information on the review of terms and conditions and associated rates on contracts in order to determine whether the Council was receiving best value.

Members were advised many of the contracts were annual contracts which were currently being brought across as they were, however the Commercial Services team would be scoping all contracts as they come back to the authority, and four had already been examined already in order to make savings.

Councillor Hebb recognised that this was one of the largest TUPE, Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, exercises since the Thames Gateway Development Corporation and asked whether as part of the transition staff were receiving regular one-to-one meetings and contact with their line manager.

The Committee were advised that a Consultation and Engagement Process was underway, where in addition to a formal consultation that had taken place, there had been conversations with the cohort of staff affected through staff briefings, welcome sessions, management training packages and regular one-to-one staff meetings.

Councillor Snell asked how the test payroll runs were going, to which it was reported that one payroll run had been undertaken which had not demonstrated any problems that had not been expected and a second test off live payroll data would be conducted before the transition date.

Officers assured Members that it was critical that staff were getting paid the right amount of money, especially in light of Christmas approaching. The Head of Corporate Finance further reported that a treasury system would also be set-up on standby to ensure that if there was an issue staff salary could still be paid.

Councillor Hebb felt that it was important to keep everyone well informed of the key milestones during the transition and asked whether a weekly briefing could be provided to identify whether the transition was on/off track.

The Head of Regeneration explained that a weekly progress tracker was prepared and circulated, which he could also share with Members.

RESOLVED:

Members are asked to acknowledge the work completed to date and the progress achieved in transferring services back to the Council.

21. Training and Development - Officers

The Head of HR, OD & Transformation introduced the report which focused on the training for officers from both adults and children's social care, which included mandatory training, certification requirements, how the Council ensured staff remained competent and demonstrated the balance between personal/council accountability.

Councillor Hebb remarked that the Committee asked for the report in order to ensure that standards were of the highest quality.

Councillor Kerin questioned whether there were any measures in place if an employee did not book on mandatory training courses, to which it was explained that training and development fell within the management framework and all employees were required to discuss and agree their development plan through ongoing discussions with their line manager.

The Committee were advised that all employees were subject to a six month probation period during which the skills and development required to undertake the role would be agreed within a set timetable and according to agreed objectives. The employee would then receive a full review after six months and the appraisal system was linked to the financial year, with a detailed appraisal being conducted for all employees at the end of March.

The Head of HR, OD and Transformation advised that the setting of objectives and development plans were undertaken simultaneously.

Councillor Kerin asked how often local policies and procedures were reviewed in relation to Female Genital Mutilation and Child Sexual Exploitation and whether other organisations were involved in this process.

In response, the Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes explained that the range of training was set by both the Council and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and informed by the Multi-Agency Child Sexual Exploitation (MACE) group, who also worked in partnership with the People and Organisational development team. Members were assured that cross-checks were undertaken to flag up anyone who may have missed a course in order for them to be re-booked.

The Committee were informed of the comprehensive training programme for Social Workers, for whom records had to be signed off by line managers and a random dip sample taken each year by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) in order to ensure that all employees met the professional standard.

Councillor Stewart asked for clarification around the audit process for care homes that looked after young people under the age of 16 years, which she understood did not have to be registered with the local authority.

The Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes explained that semi-independent care homes for those under 16 years were not statutorily bound to register with the local authority but that evidence of training around the prevent strategy and child sexual exploitation were monitored through commissioning arrangements.

Councillor Stewart commended the Corporate Parenting training she had received and asked whether providers were rigorously monitored to ensure that they were appropriate for the Looked After Child, to which the Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes advised that all providers were subject to a high level of scrutiny that included an initial social worker visit, weekly visit for the first 4 weeks of the placement and regular contact with the Reviewing Officer thereafter in the case of young people under the age of 18 years.

Councillor Snell commended the report which he felt was thorough and asked for clarification around the process if an employee was not meeting the standard expected despite training and assistance. In response the Head of Adult Services informed Members that training was constantly being undertaken in the day-to-day working environment and he felt the workforce was a valuable asset to be proud of. In circumstances when the expected standard was not met a capability process was followed where support was provided to the employee to enable them to improve or deal with any issues and in circumstances where it was not possible to resolve the issue a contract would be terminated.

Officers clarified the definition of the Victorian Risk Management Framework which was a model for describing the minimum risk management requirements agencies were required to meet to demonstrate that they are managing risk effectively.

The Committee were informed that training was increasingly offered online through e-learning packages as it was available to a wide range of people at any given time and cost-effective; however for high level issues more appropriate class room methods, or a blend of methods, were used.

Councillor Cherry asked whether there were sufficient ICT and desks available in light of the transfer of staff from Serco and the hot-desking policy, to which officers advised that the 7/10 hot-desking ratio was working well and

staff could access training from a variety of locations, which included home working.

Councillor Hebb questioned how training was quality analysed, to which the People and Organisational Development Manager explained that:

- Following all training courses attendees were sent 'Happy' sheets to formally request feedback on the session provided.
- Feedback was also undertaken through the PDR process and three months after attending the course, managers were contacted to identify any improvement in performance.
- That extensive work was undertaken in partnership with Thurrock Coalition, who observed training and independently provided feedback.

Councillor Hebb further questioned how much was spent on training and development and requested that a benchmarking exercise be undertaken to determine how Thurrock's investment compared with other similar sized unitary authorities.

The Head of Adult Services cautioned against drawing a direct correlation between the quality of training with the amount of money spent as he felt it would provide a false picture of the support offered internally by colleagues, but acknowledged that it was reasonable to undertake a benchmarking exercise.

Councillor Hebb asked for clarification on a number of the training courses listed, including what was Extremist Ideology Training and why only one person was documented having attended. Officers felt that this was an error and reported that they would check the records to identify the discrepancy, as it was believed this referred to 'Prevent' training which had actually been undertaken by a significant number of employees.

In light of the discrepancy Members questioned how officers checked the integrity of training records to which it was explained:

- All staff applied for training through Oracle, which could in turn produce reports.
- Training was monitored through staff supervision and line managers
- The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) annually sampled training records.
- Officers provided feedback that training was fit for purpose.

There was a detailed debate on how training and development was audited in Thurrock in order to assess the integrity of training records and evaluate the success of the programme. Members explained that they did not doubt that training was robust but wanted to ensure that all records were accurate and that any gaps could be identified and rectified quickly, which was particularly important in relation to employees in the Children's Social Care service.

Members were advised that training records were not currently subject to an internal audit by the audit team but the Head of HR, OD and Transformation confirmed that she would investigate to see if it was possible to include the audit of training records on the annual work programme. The Committee were advised that other services, such as statutory finance, would be prioritised but that this would be taken away as an action point.

Following the debate the Committee agreed to add two additional recommendations which included:

- 1.4 *That the Committee request the internal audit team conduct an audit of training records as a due diligence exercise and make recommendations as they feel appropriate.*
- 1.5 *That officers undertake a benchmarking exercise to determine how Thurrock's investment in training compares with other similar sized unitary authorities.*

RESOLVED:

- 1. Members to comment on the rigour and range of training.**
- 2. Members to review the information for comment.**
- 3. Members to be reassured that the rigour and range of training meets both national and local requirements, including legal requirements.**

22. Members Training and Development

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which set out the current Members Training and Development programme offered to all Elected Members in order to assist them in their work.

Councillor Snell felt that all Members should attend courses offered through the Members training programme, and although he appreciated some Councillors may struggle with some daytime courses due to work commitments, all courses should be mandatory and a known requirement before Councillors stood for election.

The Committee felt that the Members Training Programme would benefit if there was a form of accreditation Members could achieve through the completion of courses.

The Committee highlighted that resilience was required from all Group Leaders to ensure that Members bought into compulsory courses.

Members felt that it was only right that when they expected officers to be of excellent quality that Councillors should also be of excellent standard and training courses would assist with performance.

Councillor Stewart felt that training should be mandatory for all new Members and suggested that training courses should be split between those for new members and those for existing members so that the content was targeted appropriately.

Councillor Stewart further observed that Members had a duty of care and as a result suggested that the performance of Councillors should be reviewed every 6 or 12 months.

Councillor Kerin highlighted the fact that he sometimes found it difficult to attend daytime courses due to work commitments, and felt that online training should be further developed to enable Members to complete the required training at home in the evenings or weekends.

The Committee agreed that it was important to improve the accessibility of training and that Members should be held accountable. It was suggested this could be improved through the introduction of webinars, recommended reading lists, Group Meetings and videos.

The Committee agreed to establish a Working Group in order to further identify ways that the Members Training and Development Programme could be improved. The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised that Group Leaders would be approached to seek nominations to the Working Group.

As a result Members agreed to amend the wording of recommendation 1.2 to read as follows:

“That officers to form a working group with Members to identify innovative and accessible ways to enhance the Member Development and Training Programme in Thurrock, such as through the development of a regional Member Development Programme, an Online Training Portal and to identify a list of mandatory training courses for Members.”

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Committee comment upon the quality and breadth of the current Members Training and Development Programme.**
- 2. That officers to form a working group with Members to identify innovative and accessible ways to enhance the Member Development and Training Programme in Thurrock, such as through the development of a regional Member Development Programme, an Online Training Portal and to identify a list of mandatory training courses for Members.**
- 3. That each Political Group nominate a “Training Advocate” to act as a lead liaison between Elected Members and Democratic Services in order to help identify which skills Members wish to develop and promote the training courses on offer.**

23. Work Programme

The Chair requested that an action log be created for future meetings in order for the Committee to establish whether actions previously raised were on track.

The Head of HR, OD & Transformation reported that website users could now provide feedback online regarding the functionality of the Corporate website.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting finished at 8.45 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**