| 25 July 2018 | ITEM: 1 1 |
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| **Council** | |
| **Report of the Cabinet Member for Central Services** | |
| **Report of:** Councillor Gary Collins, Cabinet Member for Central Services | |
| **This report is** Public | |

**Introduction by Cabinet Member**

I am delighted to present to Council this report which details some of the many achievements and areas of work within my portfolio over the last 12 months, which I took over in May this year.

Officers have embedded three strategies which are key to the council transforming the way it works. The Digital Strategy, Customer Services Strategy and People Strategy complement one another to develop the capacity, confidence and culture within the workforce; modernise the council and the borough and deliver for our customers.

One of the primary areas of continued transformation is the digital interaction with residents via our web portal (also known as Channel Shift). By Mid-2018, 43% of households were managing their council tax online and 52% of claimants were managing their benefits online (100% of new benefit claims are made online).

To complement the externally accessed web portal you will have all seen some of the physical changes as you walked through our newly refurbished customer services face to face and reception area. These changes reflect key principles in the Customer Services and Digital Strategies to help residents self-serve online while continuing to provide support for the most vulnerable.

To promote the changes and ensure our residents are kept informed digital communication channels continue to grow - we now have 11,400 followers on Twitter, over 4,000 follows on Facebook and almost 13,000 subscribers to our e-newsletter, Thurrock News.

Within 2017/18, Member enquiries performance remained strong, despite timeframes reducing from 10 working days to 7 working days from the 1 September 2017. However the number of enquiries are increasing year-on-year and there are other alternative and more efficient ways that residents can resolve many of their issues. With this in mind, Members should be encouraging and/or assisting residents to report various concerns on-line. In-doing so we will support the council with its digital agenda.

# IMPROVEMENT SERVICE

▸ **SERVICE OVERVIEW**

The Improvement Service incorporates the business improvement and recruitment teams. The primary focus of this service is to resource the organisation and to drive process improvements and cost efficiencies across the HR, OD & Transformation directorate and the council.

▸ **REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS**

The business improvement element of the Improvement Service has developed well in the past year. Key achievements in this area include:

**Improvement**
- Our core management objectives were reviewed with a revised set put into place which align with the key strategic objectives of the Council, focusing on the key areas for people managers of sickness, staff engagement and effective management.

**Resourcing**
- The successful execution of year 1 of the apprentice strategy following the introduction of the apprentice levy with 40 new apprentice starts in the year.
- The council's managed service provider for agency staff (Matrix SCM) contract has been extended (with the new contract end date of December 2019) and continued to be robustly managed to drive compliance in ensuring agency staffing needs are monitored and managed with a continuous focus on driving down cost, usage and spend where possible. We are compliant with the Eastern Region Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) relating to children's qualified social work agency staff.
- Reduction in spend on agency staff of over £600k in 2017/18 compared to previous financial year.
- The recruitment team has built on the successful improvements made in the previous 12 months including the development of the online applicant tracking systems and system for electronic references helping to speed up onboarding processes for new starters. The approach being taken by the recruitment team is now one of 'direct sourcing', actively seeking the right talent for the organisation and reducing costs.
- The team have successfully on-boarded a number of long term agency workers, and work in Children's Services in relation to qualified social care recruitment has been particularly successful, with a corresponding reduction in agency staff in this area.

**Wellbeing**
- Occupational Health are critical to ensuring staff can remain at work and are supported to return to work. The team are triaging referrals received to ensure the process is timely and utilising occupational health placement students to strengthen resource and capacity.

- Managers continue to engage with HR and their staff to effectively manage staff wellness and enable them to access the right support which is in place. The development of the wellbeing programme across the last year has seen an increase in staff engagement with the initiatives put into place, a key success being the staff Choir. It has been well received by employees to date and has the support of Trade Union representatives too. This is part of the wider comprehensive programme to promote health and wellbeing in employees across the council.

▸ **PERFORMANCE**

| KPI Title | 2017/18 Outturn | Performance | Direction of Travel |
|---|---|---|---|
| No of new apprenticeships started (incl. current staff undertaking new apprentice standards) | 40 | FAILED | BETTER |

Despite missing the nationally set target of 2.3% of the workforce, performance over the first year of the levy was strong with 40 apprentice starts confirmed, of which 13 new starts were in the final quarter. We have seen an expansion in the types of apprenticeships, away from the traditional business administration apprentices into specialisms such as CIPFA and ACCA Accountancy, digital marketing and housing certificates. We expect to continue to see this trend grow. Work is ongoing with Children's Services to promote apprentices to local young people in care.

▸ **FUTURE: IMPROVEMENT SERVICE**

**Improvement**
- The business improvement team will lead the People Board savings project over this year to further reduce absence, overtime costs and agency staff levels and achieve the savings allocated to the Board.

**Resourcing**
- The recruitment team's focus is to ensure the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) is utilised to its fullest capabilities and working towards the successful implementation of the Oracle solution for recruitment. Work has continued on the council's advertising strategy to ensure that we are attracting, and retaining, staff with the skills that Thurrock needs to deliver its ambitious agenda and priorities. The recruitment service is also developing a commercial focus, selling recruitment advertising to businesses and academies in the borough with the full recruitment offer sold, and being delivered to, Brentwood Council.
- The apprentice levy commenced in April 2017 and good success was seen in year 1 with work ongoing to ensure the council makes the most of its contribution and achieves the target number of apprentices set by Government. We will also continue to ensure they have a valuable and worthwhile apprentice experience and put Thurrock Council on the map as a provider of first-class apprenticeship opportunities. There is a focus on branching outside of the traditional business administration apprenticeship, with a view to ensuring we are workforce planning

effectively for the future, looking at planning, legal and social care apprenticeships to fill the hard-to-recruit areas and address any skill gaps. The first coordinated apprentice recruitment day took place on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2018 resulting in 16 offers. The council is continuing to develop the programme of support on offer to apprentices and their managers, ensuring they have a fantastic experience as an apprentice at Thurrock Council and considering the best ways to retain this talent at the end of their apprenticeships.

**Wellbeing**

- The employee assistance programme provider will continue to be managed effectively, ensuring staff across the council are aware of the support on offer. The wellbeing offer to staff is ongoing, aligning with areas in which the council has high sickness. The team is working towards achieving Safe, Effective, Quality, Occupational Health Service (SEQOHS) accreditation for our occupational health service.

▸ **FINANCIAL INFORMATION 2018/19**

| Service Area | Full Year Budget £0 | Full Year Forecast £0 | Variance £0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Improvement Team | 802,718 | 802,718 | 0 |

# HUMAN RESOURCES & ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (HR OD)

▶ **SERVICE OVERVIEW**

The focus of the HR OD service is to ensure the council has a confident, competent, high performing and customer focused workforce.

The Service comprises a People and Organisational Development team with a focus on delivering the people strategy and supporting the organisation to manage change effectively; an HR Advisory team with a focus on ensuring compliance with expected people management standards, policies, and legislation changes; and a payroll team which delivers corporate, schools and academy payrolls.

The service, structure and work delivered have been subject to a comprehensive service review as part of the council's transformation programme - the service has restructured resources and refocused work delivered ensuring support for managers is provided efficiently; processes have been reviewed which has ensured a smarter use of resources and capacity has been built to generate income.

Over 2017 / 2018 the service has achieved national recognition for excellence in the public sector by achieving Finalist status at the Personnel Today awards. The team were also finalists in April's PPMA Excellence in People Management awards recognising the standards of our in-house training provision, and the commercial achievements of the HR team.

▶ **REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS**

The People Strategy for 2017-2020 serves as a framework for the organisation, describing the workforce we need to develop in order to meet the vision and priorities of the council and the needs of Thurrock residents over the next three years.

It is built around three strategic themes of **capacity**, **confidence** and **culture**.

**Capacity** - A customer first approach and a workforce that has the capacity to deliver what is required, multi skilled with flexible structures and agile working practices, our workforce are able to adapt to what is required

**Confidence** - A confident workforce who are free to innovate and take managed risks, clear on their value, taking new challenges in their stride, remaining resilient and able to adapt, working differently using modern tools and techniques

**Culture** - A 'one team' culture of inclusion and engagement where people are confident to challenge, resilient in the face of our transforming organisation and where high performance and the delivery of outcomes is the norm. Excellent leadership, management and trust drive a climate of continual improvement and effective use of resources

The actions to delivery these strategic themes has been closely planned and integrated with the themes within other key strategies which impact the way we need council officers to work:
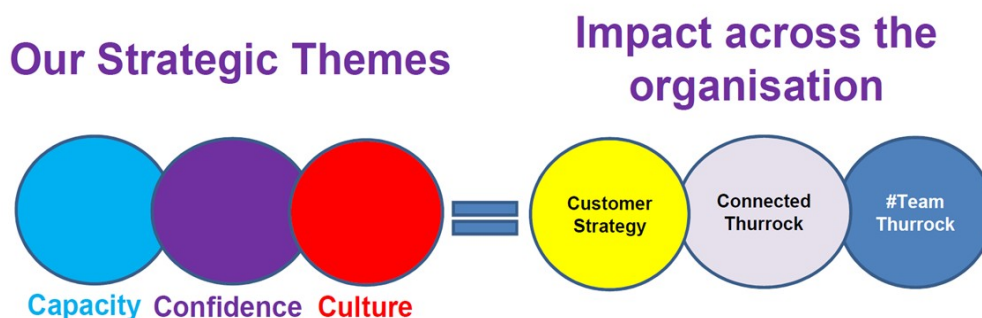


Year 1 has seen the delivery of a number of key interventions – many of which provide the foundation for our future workforce

- Delivery of £700k savings – delivered through a combination of challenging our approaches to the use of overtime, how we manage sickness and supporting our people to return to work; whilst allocating agency reduction targets to Directorates, along with careful consideration of how we use agency and temporary additional support.
- Customer Services Skills Training Programme 'Right First Time'– designed and launched to an initial target group of Customer Service teams; this has been adapted to meet the needs of teams across the organisation. highlights are a focus on identifying vulnerable service users with the training underpinning an ethos of customer service excellence and 'right first time'; to date a pilot of 14 managers and 2 full sessions with 25 participants have taken place; feedback has been excellent
- Leadership and management development programme has been created to provide challenge and ensure the council has the required leadership capacity it needs. Time was spent on achieving the right combination of themes and with sponsorship from the Director chairs of the Strategic Boards the impact evaluations of the first cohorts were presented to Transformation Board in June
- Building confident people managers – time was spent to create a focused programme of sessions to build manager confidence across key areas to enhance people management practice; recruitment and their role; managing a remote workforce; managing absence. To date 26 sessions have been run with managers giving positive feedback that they feel confident and supported in their role.
- Behaviour Framework – a major piece of work was the establishment of a structured behaviour framework aligned to our ambitions for the workforce. Building upon the behavioural traits identified within the leadership and management programme, our Behaviour Framework has been structured to ensure alignment with our development programmes; it clearly sets out appropriate levels for the organisation and has been well received.
- April 2018 saw the launch of a full staff survey with analysis presented to Leadership group in June; with a 72% return rate the process of identifying issues to address and building action plans will be a key project for 2018/19 which will be supported by the whole service.

- Using the skills and expertise of the in-house team as an accredited Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) centre the broader programme of development, and a range of formal qualification are now embedded as part of the core workforce development offer. The team have also created an Aspiring Managers programme with the first cohort being oversubscribed.
- In the latter half of 2017 the team were successful in winning a three year contract to provide HR, Payroll and Training services to Brentwood Borough Council; pre implementation work began in November 2017 and the contract went live in April 2018. The Chief Executive at Brentwood was complimentary of our approach with establishing the contract and praised the team for considering the service needs, not only from a commercial viewpoint but also with a collaborative approach.

▸ **PERFORMANCE**

| KPI Title | 2017/18 Outturn | Performance | Direction of Travel |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average sickness absence per FTE employee | 9.95 | FAILED | Better |

The direction of travel for sickness is positive, however the targets of 9 days was not achieved. The project reported in the Improvement Service section will build on the positive direction of travel and is intended to drive further and faster improvements.

To support the People Strategy in tracking and measuring the impact of key work we established a People KPI Framework which was particularly helpful over 2017 / 18 in being able to align our priorities to the evidence shown within the framework – we now have a tracker that measures the following performance which is reviewed, monitored and challenged by People Board:

- Workforce Profile
- Workforce Diversity
- Workforce Health
- Workforce Development

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▸ **FUTURE: HR & ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM**

Looking ahead to respond to the plans for council and the changes needed as part of the wider transformation programme, we will focus on delivering the agreed People Strategy Year 2 priorities of:

- **Capacity** – Reward & Pay Review; Absence Management
- **Confidence** – Change Management and Agile Working (building skills and confidence)
- **Culture** – a focus on Values, Attributes and Behaviours
- **Workforce development** – building a strong Leadership group; a Customer focus of 'right first time'; a Digital skills strategy with supporting programme of development

We will ensure the agreed £500k savings identified through People Board are delivered – these are focused on the key areas of absence reduction, agency spend and overtime activity.

In line with the People Strategy priorities consideration will be given to appropriate pay and reward methods to ensure the organisation has a modern and effective pay strategy; each directorate will consider specific people related issues, talent management and career pathways including the use of apprentices and how they will need to engage with the leadership and management programmes. Manager toolkits and digital resources will be rolled out across the organisation ensuring managers can access key information and guidance when needed.

▸ **FINANCIAL INFORMATION 2018/19**

| Service Area | Full Year Budget £0 | Full Year Forecast £0 | Variance £0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| HROD | 2,104,108 | 2,104,108 | 0 |

# CORPORATE PROGRAMME TEAM

▸ **SERVICE OVERVIEW**

The Corporate Programme Team is responsible for the delivery of the council's Transformation Programme initiatives. This ambitious programme ranges from enhancing the way citizens interact digitally with the council, via Thurrock On-Line, to implementing new ways for employees to work and deliver services more efficiently through more agile working. Primarily consisting of Project and Programme Managers supported by Business Transformation Analysts and Project Officers, the team is continuously delivering corporate changes that impact the whole organisation with regards the delivery of council services.

In a changing world, any organisation or business that cannot adapt to the new norms, will not survive. This is also true of local authorities such as ours which looks after the people, economy and environment of Thurrock. To help us deliver the best possible services the Corporate Programme Team are actively engaged in the Council's cross-cutting, or targeted, Service Reviews to look at doing things differently, helping employees work smarter not harder and driving continuous efficiency improvements throughout the whole organisation.

▸ **REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS**

Over the last twelve months one of our key transformational focus areas has been the continued effort to encourage citizens of Thurrock to utilise self-service and online facilities – known as Channel Shift. We can measure our success through monitoring individual/household registrations on our online portal called MyAccount. We currently have over 71,000 individuals/households registered with MyAccounts which absolutely proves that our residents are choosing to interact with us online and we will continue to mutually embrace such changes through our Digital Programme.

With such a high proportion of registrations we know we will have now started to reach areas of the population who are unable, unwilling, or unsure how to get online. To help support the conversion of remaining households to online we offer assisted self-service within the Civic Offices in conjunction with offering support at Libraries and Community Hubs to ensure we minimise online/digital exclusion.

Further, real-time, online assistance is also available now through a web-chat facility that has been introduced to key pages on MyAccount.

We already know that technology has transformed everything from social interaction and connecting with friends, family and businesses (social media platforms), banking (mobile applications) to parcel deliveries (online tracking systems) and will continue to do so. It is just as clear that online interaction with the Council is also choice that is highly preferred by our residents.

By Mid-2018, 43% of households were managing their council tax online and 52% of claimants were managing their benefits online (100% of benefit claims are made online).

▸ **DIGITAL PROGRAMME: Completed elements**

The Digital Council Programme focusses on exploiting new/existing digital technologies and combines them with new ways of working to enable the transformation of strategic operational areas of the council. This programme is designed to use technology to achieve optimum efficiency gains resulting in a more modern, effective and sustainable business that satisfies internal end-user and external customer needs by ultimately providing 24/7 access to key services where appropriate.

**Thurrock On Line:**
- Registrar appointments Single Sign On – improved user experience, allows user to use My Account log in details to access booking forms without the need to log in separately
- Registrars copy certificate ordering – order and pay for a copy certificates online
- Environmental reporting LIVE maps – improvements to product which lets user see existing reports on a LIVE map, reduces duplicate reports and allows transparency
- Bulky Waste booking product redesign- improved accessibility when used on mobile devices
- Web-chat support on key MyAccount pages went live in November 2017.
- In October 2017 Thurrock Council won a SOCITM award for Citizen Engagement based on the success of resident subscriptions to the on-line portal
    - Over 11,000 issue reports were made online in 2017 using www.thurrock.gov.uk/report
    - We now receive more reports via on-line channels than by phone contact.
    - Our online services are now the first choice for most of our customers

**Business Improvement – Oracle EBS/Oracle Cloud:**
- Further enhancements to the existing Oracle EBS system were completed that delivered:
    - Improved bulk uploading of data
    - Improved on-boarding processes for new employees
- Further protection of our investment in Oracle EBS has been maintained through a successful Oracle Cloud readiness assessment that ensured we are able to transition to a more modern Cloud based solution.

**Data Modelling - phase 2:**
- Early intervention alerts were made available directly into the Multi Agency Service Hub (MASH) to identify children/families that would benefit from early intervention assistance

**Common Data Portal:**
- In June 2017 a web page went live that contains a section reflecting useful Thurrock Facts and Statistics to (https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/thurrock-facts-and-statistics/overview)

▸ **SERVICE REVIEWS:**

In January 2018 the Service Review programme changed from a cyclic Service by Service programme to a focused targeted or cross-cutting review process. This ensures that Services meeting specific criteria such as overspending, under-performing or having high staff attrition/sickness/agency costs are given priority. Recommendations and supporting evidence from Operational Boards regarding Services that meeting such criteria are evaluated at Service Review Board and decisions to progress are reported through Transformation Board.

As previously, each service review is still coordinated by a Senior Project Manager from the Corporate Programme Team and aligned with a Senior HR Advisor in conjunction with a Business Transformation Analyst and, of course, involves key stakeholders from the Service itself.

In 2017/18 the Service Review programme achieved efficiency savings across various services equating to £577k. The 2018/19 targeted and cross-cutting Service Review programme carries a target of £930k and reviews are initially being carried out in the following service areas:

- Children's Services
- Business Resource
- ICT / Technology
- Transport
- Single View of Debt

It is anticipated that additional cross cutting or targeted reviews will be identified as we progress throughout the year.

▸ **PERFORMANCE**

| KPI Title | 2017/18 Outturn | Latest Data | End of Year Target | Performance | Direction of Travel |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No of people registered for MyAccount | 67,978 | 71,344 | 60,000 | ACHIEVED | Better |

▸ **FUTURE AND IN-FLIGHT PROJECTS:**

Innovation and new ways of working are constantly on our radar in order to deliver the best possible services to the residents and businesses of Thurrock. Through the very active Service Review programme we will continue to strive for more operational efficiencies and increased productivity. Ground breaking projects such as using data modelling to predict, not only early help opportunities for our younger generation, but also giving valuable insight to Anti-Social Behavior triggers, potential homelessness and identifying optimal engagement with our most vulnerable residents will continue to dominate our appetite to transform the council and manage demand more effectively.

Other key initiatives that are currently under consideration, development or in early stages of project commencement are:

**Business Improvement – Oracle Cloud**
- Building on our investment with the current Oracle EBS system a plan to migrate to the next generation of feature-rich Oracle Cloud is already in progress.

**Thurrock On-Line:**
- Upgrade to v6.5 offering multiple feature rich enhancements to residents
- Single sign-on for resident requiring parking permits.
- Benefit claim evidence upload

**Electronic Document and Records Management - phase 2:**
- Continued integration with Line of Business Applications
- Continued bulk document scanning and archiving
- Enabling secure external partner access to selective electronic documents held internally

**Agile working**
A modern approach to agile working is already underway and this project is intrinsically linked to a property related project looking at the optimization of the Civic Offices workspace. Pivotal to the success of building an agile workforce are the technologies and culture within an organization. Pilot groups are being formulated to reflect changes in technology, the workforce and working regimes since the original New Ways Of Working project completed back in 2015. The output from these pilot groups will be used to shape a wider project that will commence in late 2018.

▸ **FINANCIAL INFORMATION 2018/19**

| Service Area | Full Year Budget £0 | Full Year Forecast £0 | Variance £0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Transformation | 766,453 | 766,453 | 0 |

# INFORMATION TEAM

▸ **SERVICE OVERVIEW**

This team is responsible for ensuring compliance with information governance regulations and protection of the council's reputation, including information security (policies and procedures), data protection, Freedom of Information (FOI), Records Management, Complaints and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) including Local Land & Property Gazetteer (LLPG) / Local Street Gazetteer (LSG).

▸ **REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS**

During 2017/18, the council processed 96% of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests within the legal timeframe. This is based on 1056 FOI requests that were processed. 2017/18 has seen a slight increase in FOI requests received compared with 2016/17 (1046 received).

The council challenge and/or refuse requests when it is believed that the requestor has used a false name, where we have reasonable grounds to believe the applicant is acting as part of a campaign or in consort with others, or where their questions do not meet the other validity requirements for FOI. The council refuse requests where it is estimated that the time taken to process the request exceeds 18 hours.

During 2017/18 the council received 29 Subject Access Requests under the Data Protection legislation. 83% of these requests were processed within the timeframe.

The Information Governance Team is continuing to ensure an increased amount of data is identified for routine publication online. This work forms part of the Transparency Agenda and aims to increase openness and accountability; whilst reducing unnecessary processing of FOI requests.

A review of the complaints procedure took place during 2017/18, which resulted in the timeframe for responding to member enquiries reducing from 10 working days to 7 working days. This took effect from 1 September 2017.

The number of complaints received for 2017/18 is 1714. For the same period last year the combined figure for concerns and complaints was 2890, therefore the reporting period represents a significant reduction which is positive.

There is an increase in the percentage of complaints upheld at 41%. Last year this figure was 38%. The corporate indicator is set at 35%. Detailed analysis on upheld complaints will be shown in the annual complaints report for Standards and Audit Committee.

The corporate indicator for responding to complaints within timeframe is set at 95%. A total of 83% of complaints were responded to within timeframe. This is below target however there was an improvement from October onwards.

A total of 3764 member enquiries were received, with 94% responded to within timeframe. The average time taken to respond to members enquiries across all Directorates was 5 days.

Prior to submitting any Members Enquiries into the council for consideration and action, Members should be encouraging and/or assisting Thurrock Residents to report various concerns on-line.

In doing so, will support the council with its digital agenda and channel shift work. If Residents are able to log it on-line, then they will receive notification of progress directly and they should also receive a quicker response from the council, as their issue is submitted into the service area (from the resident) and not passed between Members and Officers.

We know that many of our Residents are happy to communicate with the council online, it's quicker and more convenient.

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) came into effect on the 25 May 2018 and the team ensured the Council was compliant with the revised legislation ahead of this date.

▸ **PERFORMANCE**

| KPI Title | 2017/18 Outturn | 2018/19 Target |
|---|---|---|
| % timeliness of response to all complaints | 83% | 95% |
| % of all complaints upheld (based on closed complaints) | 40% | 35% |

▸ **FUTURE**

The focus for the team in 2018/19 will be on the following:
- To continue to drive forward a learning from complaints culture with robust learning action plans across council services
- To implement changes required as part of the General Data Protection Regulation

▸ **FINANCIAL INFORMATION 2018/19**

| Service Area | Full Year Budget £0 | Full Year Forecast £0 | Variance £0 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Information Management | 407,742 | 407,742 | 0 |

# CUSTOMER SERVICES

## ▸ SERVICE OVERVIEW

This part of the portfolio includes all front line customer contact including contact centre, Careline, out-of-hours and the face to face on the ground floor of the Civic Offices.

## ▸ REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

A major project within this part of my portfolio in 2017/18 was the commencement of delivery of the customer services strategy action plan following approval at Cabinet in April 2017.

The Customer Services Strategy action plan delivery is going very well with some key highlights such as a new contact centre telephony platform implementation in October 2017 and the commencement of the ground floor face to face customer services changes which will be finalised in July. Feedback has been excellent so far, even with the interim solution during work completion and customers are reacting extremely well to the new approach of utilising self-service wherever possible. This is enabling more time and dedicated resource to support our most vulnerable residents.

Our customer excellence right first time training is in progress with many service areas scheduled to attend over the next few months including housing and environment. This has been developed to include service specific scenarios and the flexibility to meet the needs of all services.

Our quality performance has again been recognised externally with the reaccreditation of the CCA (Customer Contact Association) Version 6 status in June 2018 where no non-conformances were reported and an excellent audit report from the British Standards Institute. This is an independent audit of our customer services operation against industry developed and approved requirements.

## ▸ FUTURE

The team is continuing throughout 2018/19 to deliver the customer services strategy action plan with a year of focused activities.

This includes the launch of the newly refurbished customer services face to face area and new delivery model and launching a new Customer Charter. We will also be launching a Right First Time internal campaign with a calendar of activities to ensure we maintain a high focus and momentum on providing good customer service and staff being an ambassador for the council.

Work is also underway to support our most vulnerable residents to ensure that all services can be aware of when people are facing particular challenges so that they can be supported in the most appropriate way with early intervention wherever possible. This work will involve exploring a single view of the customer and more efficient use of our systems and processes.

▸ **FINANCIAL INFORMATION 2018/19**

| Service Area | Full Year Budget £0 | Full Year Forecast £0 | Variance £0 |
|---|---:|---:|---|
| Customer Services | 829,888 | 829,888 | 0 |

# EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Thurrock Council values the positive contribution that diversity brings to our borough. As a community leader, service provider and employer, we continue to work together with our partners to ensure that residents and employees have equal opportunity to fulfil their potential, and that our neighbourhoods are places where integration is supported. We will aim to eliminate intolerance and discrimination and to promote good relations between different groups of employees and citizens – this practice underpins the Council's priorities, strategies and practice.

Our Single Equality Scheme is currently being refreshed. This will set out our equality objectives, as well as our framework for ensuring that council meets its Public Sector Equality Duty set out in the Equality Act 2010. This requires us to demonstrate 'due regard' when assessing the equality impact of its proposed or current policies and functions. Community Equality Impact Assessments (CEqIA) are used as a systematic process to consider each protected group covered by the Act in turn.

The Council is committed to a range of existing external validation assessments that measure our commitment to equality. All managers are aware of the specific requirements of these standards and how they relate to their areas through regular internal communications and additional briefings where relevant. Staff networks exist to support engagement relating to Multi-cultural, Disability, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual + (LGBT+), Mental Health, Women and Men. As well as supporting staff engagement, networks help to ensure the council is considering issues relating to best practice as well as linking with wider community networks where possible. This supports increased profile for equality in the Borough with recent events including International Women's Day and Raising the Rainbow Flag to celebrate Essex Pride.

# COMMUNICATIONS

▸ **SERVICE OVERVIEW**

This portfolio covers the council's communications functions including media liaison (proactive and reactive), social media, marketing campaigns, design and the council's website.

▸ **REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS**

The communications team has been restructured to meet the demands of a modern local government communications environment and have recruited a multi-discipline team with experience across behaviour change campaigns, digital communications, regeneration projects, branding and marketing, media relations and internal communications.

Since the new team came into place in March, they have dealt with more than 200 media enquiries on a wide and diverse range of topics. In the last year we've run campaigns for the hugely successful Give a Gift campaign, and we've launched our new Discover Thurrock campaign this month, which aims to encourage those who live in Thurrock to make the most of the huge range of events and activities on offer in our borough during the summer months and beyond.

The council's fostering campaign generated 69% more enquiries than in the same time period in 2017, and has helped to recruit 10 new foster carers with eight more applications currently in progress. People may have noticed that all of our bin lorries are now carrying clear information and messages about what to recycle and how important it is to do so, as part of our work to support an increase in recycling rates.

Our digital channels continue to grow, with our posts on topics such as highways and waste and recycling, as well as human interest stories, regularly reaching thousands of people. For example, a recent post about the closure of the A13 for emergency repair works reached close to a quarter of a million people and was shared 2,677 times. We now have 11,400 followers on Twitter, 4,289 likes and 4,410 follows on Facebook and are hoping to rapidly grow the audience of our new Instagram account. Our main monthly e-newsletter, Thurrock News, currently has almost 13,000 subscribers and is one of a range of e-newsletters which includes Business Buzz and Thurrock Careers. We have started to revitalise our internal communications channels as well, with a new weekly staff e-newsletter which in its first few weeks has reached three times as many staff than previously.

We encourage all councillors and residents who use social media to follow or like our pages for up to the minute news about what Thurrock Council is doing.

▸ **FUTURE**

We'll be continuing with the delivery of the communications strategy, increasing the reach of our digital channels and working to make sure that our residents are kept well informed of all council services and new initiatives, as well as having a chance to have their say on major projects through our consultations.

▸ **FINANCIAL INFORMATION – 2018/19**

| Service Area | Full Year Budget £ | Full Year Forecast £ | Variance £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Communications | 457,396 | 457,396 | 0 |

# LEGAL SERVICES

## ▶ SERVICE OVERVIEW

The Legal Services directorate includes the legal services team, democratic services, Members' services and electoral services.

## ▶ REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

### LEGAL SERVICES

Following a joint review and a detailed consideration of available options the former shared legal service with the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham (known as **BDT Legal**) was consensually discontinued at the end March 2018. This was to allow each Authority to address their legal needs with greater individual focus. The discontinuance is being managed in a controlled manner over a period of transition and, where continued or interim collaborations are necessary or beneficial these will be maintained in the interim subject to exploring wider cost-efficient collaboration opportunities with South Essex Authorities and others as appropriate.

The consequent restructure of Thurrock Legal Services has addressed as a high priority the introduction of: client aligned team structures, improved reporting lines and a reduction in the level of spend on locum or agency lawyers to build increased legal capacity, resilience and internal expertise and achieve significant savings.

The service is on course to reversing an agency level of 85% to a permanent officer level of more than 85 % by October 2018.

### Joint Director of Law & Governance

The previous LBBD employed Joint Director of Law & Governance has been replaced with a Thurrock employed Assistant Director of Law & Governance who is also the Monitoring Officer with a consequent financial saving.

**There are now 4 legal teams a short narrative description of this restructure and direction of travel would be as follows:**

### Regeneration Legal Team
- Managed by a Deputy Head of Law & Governance (Regeneration) with 3 sub teams of Contracts, Planning & Highways and Property law – the aim of this interdisciplinary approach being to create a centre of legal excellence in regeneration matters to reflect Thurrock' challenging agenda.

- This team of lawyers addresses the in-house legal requirements of the Authority in the fields of planning, highways, contracts, procurement, and property law. Once permanently recruited to this team will be positioned to assist smaller district authorities in the immediate estuary area, if desired, under business plan based and resourced on sustainable trading and / or collaborations.

**Safeguarding Legal Team**
- Managed by a Deputy Head of Law & Governance (Safeguarding) with no sub teams
- This team of lawyers addresses children and adult safeguarding and education law for the Authority. The team needed strengthening and had become too agency based due to failed recruitment attempts at Band 7 starting at £29k which did not reflect market reality. Two highly experienced and senior safeguarding lawyers are now in place with a view to increasing resilience and robust line management

**Litigation & Housing Team**
- The Assistant Director of Law & Governance manages this team (having been previously a Principal Litigation & Employment lawyer some years back) with the assistance of a Senior Lawyer / Team Leader.

- This team addresses criminal and civil litigation, employment, licensing and housing matters for the Authority.

**Legal Practice Team**
- This team is managed by a Legal Practice Manager and has successfully obtained Lexcel Accreditation for the past 11 years. It accepted by the legal profession that robust practice management is a key factor in delivering excellence in legal services, that and the retention of good legal talent.

**Case management**
- Thurrock Legal Services operate a case management system called IKEN which was and is dependent of citrix access to another Authority's server. A working team has been established with IT to migrate this core critical data to Cloud servers as the current configuration is not supportive of agile working.

**Law Society / SRA regulation**
- Thurrock Legal Services has held Law Society Lexcel Accreditation for 11 years. The discontinuance of the shared service likewise requires a rewriting of the legal practice mandatory office manual which is well in hand.

**Governance & Office of Essex Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner.**
- The Assistant Director of Law & Governance currently covers the role of Monitoring Officer to both Thurrock Borough Council and the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner and further exploratory discussions are underway regarding the provision of Monitoring Officer and governance services to the Essex Fire & Rescue Authority as part of a more focused South Essex / Essex collaborations.

## DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The service continues to support all of the council's public committees. In the 2017-18 year there was the addition of the Joint Health and Well-Being Committee with Southend and Essex County Councils to consider the joint commissioning of hospital services, as well as the continuation of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force. The Constitution Working Group also met to discuss the specific issue of public access and engagement with committees. The 2018-19 year has seen significant change within the team with three new staff members joining.

The Service has progressed with innovations on Member training, developing a greater online resource for Members which supports their learning and development throughout their term. This portal can be found on Inform at https://inform.thurrock.gov.uk/zones/councillor/.

**ELECTORAL SERVICES**

The statutory annual canvass commenced July 2017 and the statutory revised register was published on 1 December 2018.

Planning for the scheduled May 2018 elections commenced in December and plans were revised to incorporate the Ockendon by-election held in March 2018 following the resignation of a councillor.  Both elections were implemented successfully.

The team continues to extensively 'data mine' on a monthly basis using other local authority data sources to keep the electoral register up to date and encourage residents to register to vote when they move or become eligible. This is a statutory duty of the Electoral Registration Officer.

The team has updated the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer documents in line with new GDP Regulations and continues to review processes to comply with new regulations.

Planning is underway for the statutory annual canvass for 2018/19 which will commence in July 2018 and will result in the publication of the revised register on 1 December 2018 (unless there is an election during the canvass period).

The Electoral Services Manager is now responsible for managing Member Services and is working to provide support to the team, enhance the service they offer and mutually provide additional resources across both services.

A statutory Polling District and Polling Place review is due and must commence and be completed within 16 months of 1 October 2018.  The team is currently considering the best time frame for the review period and consultation.

‣ **FUTURE**

Thurrock Legal Services will continue as an in-house team addressing principally the needs of Thurrock Council but will continue to explore potential collaborations with South Essex authorities where this would be cost efficient and build resilience without compromising the focus on Thurrock Council priorities and will in due course review the opportunities for developing sustainable traded income.

▸ **FINANCIAL INFORMATION – 2018/19**

| Service Area | Full Year Budget £ | Full Year Forecast £ | Variance £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Legal Services | 1,713,940 | 1,713,940 | 0 |
| Democratic Services | 198,886 | 198,886 | 0 |
| Electoral Services | 1,197,530 | 1,197,530 | 0 |
| **Total** | **3,110,356** | **3,110,356** | **0** |

# DIGITAL / ICT SERVICES

## ▸ SERVICE OVERVIEW

The ICT service is responsible for the delivery of digital, information and communication technologies (including telephony) for the council.
The scope of duties is aligned to the UK Government recognised Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) and currently includes: the Chief Technology Officer; Operations; Change and Implementation; and Commercial.

## ▸ REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

Over the last 12 months the ICT service has completed a number of technology projects and application upgrades that forms part of the overall Council Digital Strategy.  These include:

- Contact Centre telephony upgrade - which now provides a reliable modern solution and removes one of the key IT risks the Council had due to the age and supportability of the previous version;
- Disaster Recovery Link to Southend – a new 10GB data link has been installed between the 2 sites enabling ICT to host services from Southend and deliver DR capability for key applications;
- 2 in 1 Tablet rollout to Directors, some Members and the planning areas which enables great flexibility to officers and, in the case of planning, efficiencies in the way they work;
- Implementation of a new digital backup solution that removes the need for tape technology and will improve restoration times in the event of system failure;
- Implementation of a scanning solution for Customer Services that enables citizens to scan documents directly into the appropriate area in Objective which has greatly improved waiting times;
- Implementation of password strengthening as part of the Cyber Security Essentials to protect the Council from cyber-attacks;
- Meeting room technology upgrades – implementation of screens, projectors and conference phones in meeting rooms for 6 or more people;
- Enterprise monitoring – Upgrade to an enterprise version of Solarwinds that enable ICT to Monitor servers and applications and detect issues in real time; and
- Mobile phone and Good upgrade – Mobile phones upgraded and new Blackberry mobile software installed to improve connectivity for Officers whilst on the move.

Whilst there has been a new strategic and commercial emphasis within the team, our overriding priority is to ensure that the council's technology services are performant and fit for purpose. Our operational achievements for the year include:

- No change on the baseline of 41% in staff satisfaction in the Information Technologies provided by the council in this year's pulse survey; and
- No major IT outages between 1 August 2017 and 30 June 2018.

▸ **PERFORMANCE DATA**

There are no formal corporate performance measurements for ICT, however the service continue to track performance against a subset of the KPIs that were reported during the period of the Strategic Services Partnership.

▸ **FUTURE: CITIZEN JOURNEYS**

ICT are looking at rapid application development tools platform which will improve the way citizens interact with the Council. As part of this, and in support of the Customer Services Strategy, parking permits have been identified as the first process to be moved onto this platform and are due to go live in July 2018. Other processes that are under consideration for this platform include:

- A review of how the Council processes payments to provide a consistent user experience when interfacing with the Council;
- A central notification system to provide greater message consistency; and
- A single view of the debtor to assist in supporting those that are vulnerable.

▸ **FUTURE: HIGH AVAILABILITY**

Over the last year, officers have started to deliver some of the infrastructure that will support a digital council that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Digital Strategy sets an aspiration of achieving 99.9% availability – up from the current 99.5%. Key elements of this plan for 2018/19 include:

- **End User Computing –** Replacing the current equipment with modern "hyper-converged" technology. A contract has been awarded and work on delivering this solution starts in July 2018;
- **Datacentre Resilience** – ICT have been working with consultants to develop a fully costed business case that reviewed 4 possible options for improving data centre resiliency. The most cost effective solution is to build a new data centre on premise and a tender for this work will be issued in July 2018 with delivery of the new facility expected in Q2 2019;

- **High Availability Infrastructure** – A major shortcoming in our current set up is the limited ability to test changes before they are put live. New test environments will be created to cover the key areas of the infrastructure;

- **Cyber Security –** continuing the work started to meet the requirement for an industry standard accreditation for the council;

- **Corporate Wi-Fi –** The existing solution requires an upgrade to meet the Council's current future requirements. A project is currently underway to deliver this improvement;

- **Windows 10 Upgrade –** With Windows 7 going out of extended support in January 2020 and new equipment no longer supporting this Operating System (OS) there will be a rollout of Windows 10 on all new devices. A scoping project that will include application compatibility with the new OS is currently underway;

- **Windows Server 2016 Upgrade** – With Windows Server 2008 going out of extended support in January 2020 ICT are planning to upgrade all application servers to Windows Server 2016 10. A scoping project for this major OS upgrade is currently underway; and

- **Single Points of Failure** – A number of single points of failure within the infrastructure have been identified and a schedule works to remove these and replace with resilient solutions is ongoing.


▸ **FUTURE: SMARTER WORKING**

- ICT will be updating the service desk software they use which will enable officers to log calls through a self-service port and will remove the need to for forms as part of the efficiencies that this technology will bring;

- Choose Your Own Device – A catalogue of devices that will better support the IT needs of officers is being developed; and

- Single Sign On – A proof of concept pilot for single sign on is scheduled for July 2018. This will enable officers to have a single password to login to multiple systems.

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