

Council – 6th September 2022

Portfolio Holders Report for Internal Operations – Cllr Benet Allen

1 INTRODUCTION FROM

1.1 I am pleased to present a report which shows council operations continuing, and even improving, in the face of pressure from many directions. Administration of government grants such as the fuel rebate on council tax, external factors such as the cost of living crisis, and overall pressures such as the huge increase in fuel prices have made life more difficult for the council.

Our staff have risen to the challenge.

2 CORPORATE SERVICES

Please find below the relevant updates relating to each of the Corporate Teams providing the main support functions to the council.

2.1 HR TEAM UPDATE

2.1.1 Recruitment

During the last quarter, SWT's budget was for 637.42 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. The actual average for the period was 562.17 FTE with 75.24 FTE vacancies. Of those vacancies many are covered by agency or contract staff in anticipation of LGR.

Month	Starters	Leavers	Turnover
April	4	7	1.16%
May	10	9	1.49%
June	4	4	0.66%

2.1.2 Sickness Absence

The level of reported sickness absence during the quarter was 3.24% compared to 3.89% in the previous quarter:

Personal and work-related stress continues to account for the largest amount of absence, making up 15.21% of all sickness (a 30% reduction from the previous quarter) closely followed by Covid at 13.95%.

Following sessions with MIND, Wellness action plans have been rolled out and we have re-engaged MIND for further support.

2.1.3 Service Development - People, Projects & Key Achievements

- A new Job matching process has been implemented to resolve legacy JE queries and a market factor review is under way.

- A new DBS process has been implemented and embedded as BAU
- IR35 status determinations are up to date and the process agreed for future appointments
- An updated OH process has been agreed and implemented
- A new recruitment approval process and induction process has been agreed
- All relevant policies and guidance have been reviewed

2.1.4 **Priorities for 2022/3**

- Participating in the People work steam
- Delivering Recruitment within the constraints related to LGR
- Providing consistent high-quality service and advice
- Addressing all anomalies prior to LGR
- Supporting revisions to work practices for key employment groups at the Depot
- Enabling and Empowering Managers to effectively manage their team's performance
- Supporting Wellbeing

2.2 **ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & LEARNING UPDATE**

2.2.1 **Current Focus**

- Training requests are being processed on a weekly basis to speed up applications and we have introduced an Assistant Director Panel to support decision-making, the apprenticeship levy is being utilised wherever possible and we are promoting any low-cost or free training that we are aware of through our partner organisations
- The Leadership Development Programme is progressing well, the Second round is now booked, and attendees have been sent their invites. A brief evaluation of round 1 is available.
- Interview training for all recruiting managers has been designed and will be delivered in late June. We are already fully booked and will have to organise further sessions. Update - Delivery almost complete, high attendance and good feedback.

2.2.2 **New Projects**

- In the Corporate Area we are trialling some a new template for managing performance to increase the focus on wellbeing and development. Initial feedback is positive. We are now planning to take this new template to SMT for a wider organisational roll-out.
- We are working on agreed plans and messaging for the autumn to support our people and the organisation to navigate through increases in COVID cases and the cost-of-living crisis.
- We are designing a series of in-house training packages to support our employees to be in the best possible position for LRG.
- All members of the team are involved in various People LGR workstreams. Key areas of focus coming up are the Dynamic Working Strategy, cultural workshops and culture navigators, LMS system, and manager and employee change support.

2.2.3 **Key Achievements**

- Significantly improved data report for learning and development. Now closer working with Health & Safety Team to continue to improve this data and ensure it is utilised effectively.

- Significant improvement in percentage completion of mandatory corporate e-learning modules.

2.3 ICT TEAM UPDATE

2.3.1 Infrastructure Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements

All corporate devices will need to be upgraded to Windows 11, checks are currently being taken to identify any compatibility issues with corporate systems.

A review of current printing arrangements is being undertaken to ensure they are still appropriate and provide value for money (on-going).

2.3.2 Service Desk Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements

Introduction of a new starters/leavers process.

2.3.3 Applications Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements

Projects

- Open Housing project – Successfully gone live.
- Data cleanse on image storage system
- LGR workstreams

3.0 GOVERNANCE TEAM UPDATE

3.1 Work continues to balance the pressures of staff retention (against LGR and SCC opportunities), continued commitment to supporting the committee cycle, LGR workstreams and working towards the implementation phase of the CGR project. The team are also working on member safety initiatives alongside the Health and Safety team.

4 CHANGE & DIGITAL TEAM UPDATE

Current projects and achievements

4.1 Academy Replacement Project

4.2 A new Housing Management solution has been successfully implemented, replacing Academy. Seamlessly supporting the business across different Directorates with training and migration over to the new system.

4.2.1 Bringing Open Housing, Open Contractor and Open Assets all under one platform

4.2.2 Supporting improvement to service delivery, improving processes and introducing new ways of working.

4.2.3 Further modules to be implemented over the coming months include a Tenant Portal, SMS and new TotalMobile modules.

4.2 Assure Health & Safety System

4.2.1 SWT has procured a new Health & Safety system and the project is to deliver 3 modules - Incident, Risk and Contractor - started mid-July with a target end date of Christmas 2022. Relevant managers have been invited to a system demo and project update on 19th August.

5.0 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TEAM UPDATE

5.1 Information Management Polices training to be rolled out to members in September 2022.

- 5.2 Paper Records Project – resource has been recruited and working well alongside SCC to futureproof the work.
- 5.3 Retention and Disposal Schedule – will be expanded to encompass all lines of business systems, currently SharePoint and Paper.
- 5.4 Work continuing under LGR Information Governance sub workstream and LGR Records Management sub workstream.

6.0 BUSINESS ANALYST TEAM UPDATE

- 6.1 Throughout the last 3 months the Business Analysis team have taken the lead and supported the delivery of the following solutions:
 - 6.1.1 Power Platform’ – case study pack for 4 pilots + presentation for the Project Board
 - 6.1.2 Additional reporting fields in 4 highest volume processes to collect data about reasons our customers choose to not self-serve online
 - 6.1.3 Full review of PDFs on SWT website identifying and prioritising the highest volume forms ready to create Firmstep
 - 6.1.4 Implemented SharePoint Business-to-Business Site Request process and form
 - 6.1.5 Negotiated PTX contract band uplift
 - 6.1.6 Full review and re-design of Road Sweeping process with Idverde
 - 6.1.7 Upgraded the Change of Address or Circumstances Firmstep form to incorporate new functionality
 - 6.1.8 Implemented a new Click & Collect process for Nursery, Garden plant sales

7.0 HEALTH & SAFETY TEAM UPDATE

- 7.1 Risk Assessment work for all areas is nearing completion with the review of all RA and additions to be completed by August 31st.
- 7.2 Risk Assessment work for all areas is nearing completion with the review of all RA and additions to be completed by August 31st.
- 7.3 The Assure H&S system project has kicked off with the first module aimed at improving the ease with which we can report incidents, accidents and hazards due to be deliver in September.
- 7.4 We continue to work with SWAP to inform the H&S internal audit and eagerly await the results which we expect to reflect the vast amount of work that has gone into the H&S improvement Programme.

8.0 BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE TEAM UPDATE

- 8.1 Recent achievements:
 - 8.1.1 Extensive suite of reports developed to enable data from the new Housing system to be extracted and analysed.
 - 8.1.2 Outturn performance report taken to Executive and Scrutiny, and Q1 performance report written.
 - 8.1.3 Business Intelligence strategy for new Somerset Council written and agreed by workstream board.
 - 8.1.4 End of year reporting and statutory returns completed.
- 8.2 Priorities for coming period:
 - 8.2.1 Continue to support LGR process, especially regarding the work to produce a single gazetteer and address record (Local Land and Property Gazetteer) for the whole of Somerset.

- 8.2.2 Continue to provide spatial data and Geographical Information Systems support for the Taunton Community Governance Review.
- 8.2.3 Alongside the day-to-day work of each team, we also have one major programme sitting within the team which I also wish to update on:

9.0 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME UPDATE

- 9.1 The current projects within the programme are:
 - 9.1.1 Revenues Enforcement Project - this continues to deliver well above the initial forecast.
 - 9.1.2 Excellence Framework Project – over 30 Teams are now engaging with the tool and an increasing number of support materials are being made available via the intranet site. Individual team support is provided on demand with the goal of moving all those engaged teams from Forming to Good through this year. A review meeting was held to establish which teams were showing excellence and to build on sharing the materials and capabilities of these teams.
 - 9.1.3 Change and Improvement Capabilities Project: A team of Excellence Champions are developing their expertise by working organisation-wide on varying improvement opportunities.
 - 9.1.4 Customer Experience Improvement Project – we have identified several areas to address including, website improvements, self-service pathways, “how to” videos, enhanced data collection and member casework opportunities. Delivery of the earliest products is due through August.

10. FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT

- 10.1 The service continues to blend the ‘backward look’ review of last financial year with the annual audit of the accounts underway, ‘in-year’ ongoing management of resources to ensure financial performance and health is maintained, and ‘forward look’ aspects of forecasting the anticipated position at the end of this financial year plus the preparation of budget information and options for 2023/24 – the latter of course being the first year of the new unitary council for Somerset.
- 10.2 Our auditors are currently on track with their review and are due to report with their Opinion for the accounts and their Auditor’s Annual Report to the Audit and Governance Committee on 27 September.
- 10.3 Clearly significant current issues revolve around the economy, soaring inflation and rising interest rates. These have real impacts on households and businesses in our district, which can drive up demand on our local services. Equally these factors add to our own cost pressures. Early estimates for the year are reflected in our Quarter 1 budget monitoring reports as presented to Scrutiny and Executive committees in September, where overspends are forecast in both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. Our management team and services will focus on measures to remain within budget by year end, and we are financially resilient to withstand such pressures in the short term due to our reserves. The position for the HRA is more challenging with rising costs of inflation potentially exacerbated by increased depreciation costs, requiring careful and more targeted management to control expenditure within affordable limits. Progress will continue to be reported through budget monitoring reports on a quarterly basis.

- 10.4 Our procurement and finance staff are delivering a significant amount of work through the workstreams preparing for unitary, which is vitally important as we prepare for vesting day and beyond.

11. CUSTOMER

- 11.1 All of the services within Customer continue to be heavily engaged with the preparation to transition to the new Somerset Council and are working within all of the six Local Government Review workstreams.
- 11.2 In addition, we continue to focus on maintaining 'business as usual' service delivery including, since the last Full Council update, the following:
- 11.2.1 The completion of the Council Tax Fuel Rebates grants process scheme.
 - 11.2.2 Ongoing 'thank you' payments to Ukrainian refugee hosts, which we are also administering on behalf of Mendip District Council.
 - 11.2.3 We have continued to experience high volumes of calls throughout the summer, which result, in part, from large numbers of enquiries about Fuel Rebates and garden waste renewals. Additional resourcing in being brought into the Customer Services team to help maintain service delivery and call volumes, whilst still high, have started to reduce.
 - 11.2.4 We will shortly be recommencing recovery activity in respect of the current years Council Tax, which had to be suspended to allow us to run the Fuel Rebate processes within the Council Tax system.
 - 11.2.5 We have now reverted to 30-day payments terms for suppliers. This was suspended during the Covid crisis to allow us to pay suppliers more quickly.
 - 11.2.6 The Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF) scheme has now gone live for Business Rate payers and we are in the process of applying £2.9m to business rate payers who were not able to access other grant funding during the Covid crisis.
 - 11.2.7 Members of our Income Team have been heavily involved in the project to launch the new Open Housing system, which has now successfully gone live.