

Council – 23rd February 2017

Report of Councillor A Nawaz, Portfolio Holder, Personnel and Business Support

I am incredibly proud of the people who work within Personnel and Business Support who provide professional support to front-line services as well as working directly with residents. Services within my portfolio range from the provision of technology, to ensuring that children of the borough are fed at school. The services covered by this portfolio are:

- Information, Communications and Technologies (ICT)
- Procurement
- Human Resources
- Facilities Management

These services are often invisible and un-noticed, but incredibly important to us all.

Information, Communications and Technologies

My vision for the future of this service is a modern, efficient and effective service which utilises the latest digital technologies to support service delivery across the authority in a safe and secure manner.

The following services are provided by ICT:

- Customer-facing services handling public consultation activity, complaints (including Local Government Ombudsman, children's and adults statutory complaints), data protection and freedom of information requests
- IT supports staff in the delivery of their services by enabling availability of our key corporate systems, support to end users, and business improvement and change projects outlined in the ICT strategy
- Assurance, advice and guidance for information governance, policy and corporate performance management

Corporate Assurance and Information Governance

We have worked with Cabinet and Executive Directors to develop a new four-year corporate plan, which is aligned to our medium-term financial plan and other key council strategies. The team has supported public engagement and consultation activity around budget savings proposals for 2017/18.

We have worked closely with directorates to prepare for the recent Information Commissioner's audit of our data protection processes, which took place in November 2016. We recently received confirmation that the outcome of the audit is a Reasonable Assurance rating. We recognise the hard work which all directorates put into supporting preparation for the audit, and the action plan arising from the audit will be delivered during the next 6-12 months. We are also preparing for forthcoming changes to the Data Protection Act which will take place from May 2018.

Information Technology

We accelerated work required to renew our Microsoft software licence agreement for a further three years. When a price increase was announced in November, we enabled the council to complete the contract early to avoid significant price increases over the next three years and continue our use of Microsoft software products.

Two new services have been procured: broadband data and voice services to council offices will commence from April 2017 and will affect all council buildings. ICT will manage this significant project; a new contract with Vodafone was awarded last year and the completion of a successful trial will lead to our mobile phones transferring to this new service provider by June 2017. The benefits will give faster 4G connectivity, a cheaper contract and consolidation of our mobile phone devices.

A mobile tablet (remote working) trial is currently underway in children's and adults social care to trial new ways of working for social workers, enabling them to operate in an agile manner. This is due to be rolled out to over 500 users during 2017/18.

We delivered a new online service for the public to order and pay for copies of birth, death and marriage certificates. This is an enhanced service to customers available online 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Previously, a telephone service only was available during normal office hours.

We strive to ensure that our IT services are safe and secure and have a programme of investment during 2017/18 to enable enhancements to the service to support transformational work.

Procurement

My vision for the future of this service is to help deliver a robust, innovative, compliant and efficient procurement and contract management process, enabling the council to maximise financial and social value from its contracts for our residents.

Procurement Opportunities and Challenges

Procurement's role is to ensure that the council's underpinning contracts are procured in a compliant manner and that value for money is achieved across the council through the provision of procurement knowledge, expertise and support.

A significant amount of work has been done to raise the profile of the procurement service over the last year in order to better support the council to minimise risk, improve compliance and governance, reduce procurement-related waste and maximise value and enable sustainable savings.

There are many opportunities to maximise procurement-driven benefits in a challenging environment. As the value and benefit of Procurement are increasingly realised, the demand for procurement support continues to grow at a time when resources have reduced. Continued improvements to procurement systems, processes and documentation have all helped to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of procurement activity against a backdrop of shrinking resources.

Through the provision of procurement knowledge, expertise and support, the procurement service will continue to support and enable delivery of the council's strategic objectives and lead activity that seeks to reduce waste, maximise value (including social value), minimise risk, improve compliance and deliver sustainable savings.

Procurement Achievements 2016/17

During the financial year 16/17 the Procurement Service has managed a total of 103 procurement projects across all directorates of the council with an annual value of around £90m.

Highlights of some key achievements are summarised below:

- Strategic Regeneration: the Goscote Open Spaces tender provided a saving of £400,000 against budget
- Business Change: the Healthwatch contract tender provided a saving of £31,000 and an improved service operating model
- Facilities Management: the tender for gas supplies saved £47,000 against the previous contract value and provides a more effective operating model
- YPO Effective Purchasing Dividend: income generation of £22,646 was achieved by maximising purchasing power and applying efficient and effective deployment of procurement activity across a range of supplies and services
- Electronic Monitoring Implementation: Implementation of electronic monitoring systems during 2015/16 continues to generate savings of around £900k against previous expenditure by ensuring that the council only pays for services received. This also provides qualitative information to improve services to end users.

Future Procurement Plans

Much has been achieved over the last 12 months, however in order to better support delivery of council objectives and priorities and tackle some of the existing challenges, within the constraints of current resources new procurement strategies have been developed which are in the process of being implemented. A summary of the targeted procurement improvement work is set out below:

- Maximise local supply chain opportunities – Maximise opportunities for local suppliers to do business with the council.
- Social value – Maximise and drive social value out of commissioning and procurement through implementation of revised Social Value Policy and Toolkit practice.
- Supplier and contract rationalisation – Maximise value for money and delivery of cashable and non-cashable efficiencies through the provision of procurement knowledge, expertise and support. Strategically manage supply, rationalise the supply chain and number of contracts across the council. This will reduce waste, maximise purchasing power and generate efficiencies.

- Procurement governance – Create a procurement board and ensure compliance throughout the organisation delivering improved value of money and efficiencies.
- Procurement strategy – Implement a procurement strategy that seeks to transform the council's approach to procurement, creating a modern and effective service.

Human Resources (HR)

My vision for HR is to build a team that effectively supports a fully representative workforce, continuing to build an innovative service based on foundations of trust and professionalism. It will be a service that is appropriate in size and scope for the future.

Overview

The HR function consists of a number of services which supports Walsall Council to deliver its corporate plan through developing its staff to deliver in challenging times where financial resources are shrinking.

The following are highlights of the year's activity and future development within the service.

Terms and conditions of employment: Changes to the council's terms and conditions of employment will be implemented from 1st April 2017 saving £2m towards the council's financial challenges.

Use of technology: New systems are being planned and implemented. HR will work closely with our ICT colleagues to ensure value for money and appropriateness of a system delivering a modern, effective and efficient service.

Equality of opportunity: The council continues to support the local community through its work placements scheme offered to young people across the borough and its commitment to providing placements within the council to people with disabilities, via its Recruitability scheme.

The council continues to drive the equalities agenda through the Corporate Equalities Group to ensure the council fully understands and appreciates the communities it serves.

Future HR challenges

Living wage: The council will continue to maintain its commitment to pay the living wage to its entire staff.

Apprenticeship levy: The introduction of the apprenticeship levy will be utilised to provide new opportunities in the council and the development of existing staff. Such opportunities will take account of the council's role as corporate parent where possible.

Public sector equalities duty: It is recognised that more needs to be done in this area to ensure that the profile of the workforce better reflects the communities which it serves.

Staff development: We will continue to ensure staff have the opportunity to develop their skills in line with the needs of the council.

Policies, procedures and safety management standards: The council continues to modernise its employment framework, providing legally compliant, clear and easy-to-use procedures.

Traded services: HR has continued its traded services to schools, selling payroll, recruitment, health and safety and HR consultancy support to schools, both inside and outside the borough.

Facilities Management (FM)

My vision for the service is to provide professional management of the council's facilities across the borough, delivering high standard facilities that can be utilised for the residents of Walsall.

The FM team consists of a number of services which support our people to deliver to residents of the borough. In addition, some frontline services are also delivered through the FM team. Services include:

- Property
- Cleaning and caretaking
- Catering
- School crossing patrols

Buildings

We have a varied stock of buildings that FM maintain and keep clean. They are in various states of repair and costs for keeping us dry, warm and safe have been too high. My officers are working tirelessly to ensure they deliver value for money for building works and repairs. Some key projects include:

- Oak Park and Bloxwich leisure centres
- Schools programme
- Repairs to the cenotaph
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Events

There has been a deliberate change of focus for the events team throughout the year which will continue. The events team will focus on social value projects and cohesion priorities as well as the successful commercial events. We put on a wide range of events including Comic-con, boxing, concerts, school Christmas concerts and weddings.

Cleaning and Catering

Often the lowest paid and least recognised in the organisation, this team is vital to our future success. This year has been the first year of the merged team and has been a year of transition. We have won new contracts and improved the quality of the service. We now have strong foundations and will build a stronger team for the future.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the cleaning and catering staff for the work they do that is sometimes unappreciated and unseen.

School Crossing Patrols

Supported by nothing more than a large sign, a coat and a hat, school crossing patrol wardens go out into the middle of often very busy roads and halt the traffic. We continue to provide this non-statutory, discretionary service across many sites in the borough.

Energy

We have taken some major steps forward on energy in the last 12 months. We now have solar panels on the roof of the Civic Centre and plans for more. We have an improved energy contract which will deliver reduced cost. This work will continue.

We will continue to provide a modern, efficient, effective and innovative service to manage our facilities across the borough. We will improve value for money when managing our facilities and endeavour to bring in greener and cheaper energy sources.

Councillor A Nawaz

Portfolio-holder for Personnel and Business Support