

Briefing note to Council – 11th April 2016

Shared services and procurement

Shared services and procurement covers a range of services, both public facing and support. It consists of Money Home Job, ICT Programme Delivery and Governance and Procurement. All of these services have one thing in common: an approach to service delivery that puts the people that need help and support at the heart of what they do.

Money, Home, Job achievements in 2015/16

2015/16 has been a challenging year for the Money, Home, Job service. The costs of running the service have been reduced but performance has continued to improve. This is due to the commitment and motivation of staff.

The major challenges for in the year have included:

- The roll-out of Universal Credit
- The transfer of fraud investigation employees to the DWP's Single Fraud Investigation Service
- The introduction of Real Time Information – which generated almost 10,000 new benefit enquiries many of which were very complex and time consuming.
- The introduction of the 'The Assured Shorthold Tenancy Notices and Prescribed Requirements (England) Regulations 2015'

Universal Credit went live last year for single claimants of working age who meet specific requirements. At the 31/1/2016 there were 975 Universal Credit claimants in Walsall.

From the 4th May 2015 all housing and council tax benefit fraud investigation work was transferred to the new Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) part of the DWP. Benefit Investigation Staff transferred to the SFIS 1st June 2015. Investigation of potential fraud involving the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme remains the responsibility of Walsall Council.

Real Time Information (RTI) is Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' (HMRC) new system for collecting Pay as You Earn (PAYE) information from employers and pension providers who are now required to provide HMRC with income details immediately after each payment they make. This data is now cross-referenced with housing benefit records and mismatches reported. As at 9th February 2016 RTI had generated almost 10,000 new benefit enquiries since 1st April 2015, many of which were very complex and time consuming. No additional resource has been recruited to take on this additional workload. Changes in our work flow have removed waste and duplication and have permitted this additional work to be absorbed by existing staff.

The Assured Shorthold Tenancy Notices and Prescribed Requirements (England) Regulations 2015 came into force from 1st October 2015 relating to assured shorthold

tenancies (ASTs). The regulations make new requirements on landlords wishing to evict tenants and give further protection to tenants.

The above is only a small part of the change that the service area has experienced. Despite these changes the service area has improved its service to residents. We now process claims faster than the national average of 23 days, processing on average in 21 days. We also perform better than the national average of 10 days for processing changes of circumstances, our average is six days.

We have prevented 2,914 households from becoming homeless by either supporting them to remain in their own homes or moving into alternative accommodation.

Our welfare rights team continues to support some of the most vulnerable people in the borough. We have helped people to gain £8,718,270.35 in welfare rights gains in 10 months.

The fuel switch campaign in 2015/16 has led to over 1700 households benefitting from the reduced cost of energy. Total savings for the year are estimated at over £400,000.00.

There are many other elements to our work and Money Home Job deals with residents who are in need of help. Money Home Job will continue to work in difficult financial circumstances to help our residents in an effective and efficient way.

Procurement

Throughout 2015/16 the Procurement Service has assisted Directorates in the delivery of in excess of 100 procurement projects which have enhanced the value for money obtained by the council across the full breadth of the council's operations. Work has commenced on developing a methodology to further support local businesses in supplying the council. We are looking at developing a system where Walsall-based firms are given the first opportunity to quote for contracts up to £25,000. Also the Procurement service has run or supported a number of events where local firms have been encouraged to supply the council.

Work has started on reviewing and improving the council's suite of procurement documents to ensure that they are appropriate for the value of contract being procured and don't hinder local firms from bidding for council contracts.

A staffing restructure is in progress to ensure that the skills and experience of the staff is more aligned to the needs of the organisation and the types of contract that the council will be procuring in the future.

The service will continue to respond to the needs of the Directorates ensuring that procurement is considered to be an enabler helping them achieve improved outcomes whilst ensuring that legislation is complied with and risks appropriately managed.

ICT, Programme Delivery and Governance

With effect from August 2015 responsibility for ICT services, together with Programme Delivery & Governance were transferred to the Chief Finance Officer and the service is now being led by Carol Williams as Head of Information, Communications and Technologies.

Council Web Site Development

The council's digital presence is undergoing a major revamp to meet the demands in the way our residents can access council information. Statistics show that more than 50% of visits to the site are from mobile or tablet devices and the planned new web site has a responsive design to meet this change. This will be enhanced by a new Content Management System which will underpin the website. We will shortly have a new website which our residents will find easier to use and will more effectively support services within the council.

Harnessing the Cloud (Hosting of Our Applications Systems by Third Party Storage Providers)

ICT continue to review cloud hosting options for new IT systems or existing systems when at a point of refresh. Decisions are made via suitable assessment process taking into account functionality, non-functional opportunities (e.g. high availability), information governance and cost (cloud is not always the cheapest). ICT will be exploring a proof of concept for Microsoft Office 365 during this calendar year.

Mobile Telephony Contract

The council will be migrating its mobile airtime connections from T-Mobile/EE to Vodafone. When fully migrated the new contract will save the council in the region of £260k per annum.

New Technologies

New technologies are available at a faster and faster rate. Whilst it is understood that being the first to use these technologies is not the best answer, ensuring that we are aware of these technologies and how they might help us is a key activity going forward.

Assurance Team (Policy/Performance)

The Corporate Plan for 2016/17 was approved at Full Council as part of the budget process and is currently being produced for wider cascade. The team will be focused on ensuring information on performance is available in a timely manner.

New Technologies

As part of budget saving options proposed changes to service structure and posts are to be implemented from 1 April. All is on track to deliver the new structure on time and continue the transition of activity across the first quarter of 2016/17. Given changes across a number of council services we are currently assessing the impact on demand for the assurance team from a business continuity perspective whilst we reshape our service offer. This will involve ongoing engagement with services regarding how we develop and deliver new working arrangements whilst focusing on supporting external customers.

Programme Governance

Following Phase 2 implementation of Mosaic, the team are now concentrating on scoping the requirements for delivery of Phase 3.

“Mosaic Phase 3” will focus on enabling financial transactions (mainly Adult Services) to be handled directly within Mosaic and link to Oracle (as well as other interfaces to external systems). This will reduce many duplicate and unsupported methods of current operations that the council employs and will provide ample opportunities to re-design and change the way the council processes finance relating to Social Care practice and administration. The team are also investigating use of Mobile Devices and the recently developed “Mosaic Portal” which will eventually provide greater levels of self-serve.

Information Governance

The Information Governance team continues to respond to requests made under the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations received in relation to services across the council. Money, Home, Job, and Children’s Services are now dealing with low-level FOI requests directly with more complex requests still being handled at centre. The requests continue to be growing in length and complexity. Performance remains good at an average of 90% within timescale across the council. The team also receives regular reports of data breaches which require investigation and technical advice from the team relating to containment and recovery of personal data. There has been a small decrease in the number of breaches being reported.

Requests for advice and guidance on information sharing and how to transmit and store information securely are also dealt with on a daily basis, as well as advice about the appropriate use of mobile devices and cloud storage solutions.

The services has recently re-launched the mandatory training module for staff (Protecting Information V3) which seeks to ensure staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in regard to protecting information and complying with the Data Protection Act.

Councillor Mohammed Arif

Portfolio Holder for Shared Services and Procurement

1st April 2016