

# CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY AND REVIEW PANEL

Meeting held on Thursday, 12 November 2015 at the Concorde Room, Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

## **Voting Members**

Cllr Jacqui Vosper (Chairman)  
Cllr D.S. Gladstone (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr D.M.T. Bell  
Cllr D.E. Clifford  
Cllr B. Jones  
Cllr G.B. Lyon  
Cllr P.F. Rust  
Cllr D.M. Welch

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Barbara Hurst.

## **7. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th June, 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

## **8. COUNCIL'S WEBSITE**

The Panel had invited the Corporate Communications Manager, Ms. Gill Chisnall, and the Website Manager, Mr. Paul Cowell, to the meeting to discuss the progress of the Council's new website since it had been launched in 2012. It was explained that while the website had only been live for three years, work had begun on the development of the improved website in 2010.

Prior to the launch of the new website, customers had found it difficult to understand the old site and often experienced technical issues. There had been a reduction in the number of pages and the developed site had also allowed staff to update their service pages. As well as improving the design and management, staff had started to ensure that the content of the website was more customer focused.

Members heard that regular improvements had been made and were shown a number of the developed pages. Customers had been given the ability to look up more information, including their bin collection dates and polling stations. The main improvements had included software updates and the ability to view the website easily on mobile devices. The introduction of feedback forms had been important in the development process as it enabled customer views to be collected. The improvements had resulted in a 50% increase in users.

The Panel had been provided with data that showed how the customers used and accessed the Council's website. It was noted that 57% of the website traffic

came out of hours, when the offices were closed. It was also heard that in 2012, 87% of website visits had been made on a desktop computer, whereas 2015 statistics showed this had reduced to 46%, while the remaining percentage of visits had been made on tablets or mobile devices. The common popular pages included rubbish and recycling, council tax, job opportunities and parking, however, there had been seasonal popular pages where the number of visits had spiked at different times throughout the year, for example, fireworks, elections and the Lido.

It was explained that there had been a focus on the development of the elections pages during 2015, there had been a live update feed during the count and there had also been an increase in the promotion of the elections pages through social media. Social media had also been used to promote other Council news and events.

A facility had been developed that enabled staff to see what customers did when they visited the website, although, it had also been felt necessary to find out the reason the customers had visited. Feedback had been received from the Society of IT Management (SOCITM), customers, staff and councillors. SOCITM had completed a number of tasks and scenarios during their review and assessed mobile and desktop use. As a result, Rushmoor's website had been rated three out of four stars. The Council had been offered some suggestions on how the website would be improved, for example, the removal of outdated phrases, 'do it online' or 'report it', and think 'mobile first' on all pages.

Members were informed that, during the second quarter of 2015/16, customers of the website had completed 736 'did you find what you were looking for?' forms. It had been shown that 81% of those customers had found what they were looking for, 6% had not and 13% had made a specific request for a service.

Ms. Chisnall then made reference to Channel Shift and the intention to increase online transactions. However, it was noted that most customers had visited the website for information. Members heard that there was a need for a new 'platform' to progress with Channel Shift, that would allow customers to have their own council account; 'my account'. It was intended that this feature would enable customers to self-serve and track their requests. It was explained that there had been work to embed this into the current website, although the current website design had made this a challenging task.

The Panel was provided with examples of current website trends in local government that were similar to the national "gov.uk" website, although it was stated that there was an intention to find out what customers wanted from the website before any changes were made.

The Panel made the following recommendations for consideration in the development of the Council's website:

- Re-introduce the ability to submit petitions online;
- Enable customers to 'CC' their local councillor(s) when completing online forms or making service requests.

The Panel **NOTED** the presentation and requested the officers to assess the issues raised by the Panel.

## 9. **FINANCIAL UPDATE / TREASURY MANAGEMENT**

The Head of Financial Services, Ms. Amanda Fahey, had been invited to the meeting to provide the Panel with an update on treasury management. The presentation outlined the current economic background and the UK's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data. Members were updated on the Council's current financial position and were informed of some key financial issues, these included the Autumn Statement and the predicted financial cuts, the possible devolution deal and the financial implications of this, the uncertainty around the new homes bonus and future changes to the business rates scheme.

The Panel was reminded that treasury management was underpinned by the adoption of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's code of practice. It was noted that three treasury management updates were provided to the Licensing and General Purposes Committee each year. Members heard that while Arlingclose Limited had provided advice to Rushmoor, all investment decisions had been made by the Council's Treasury Team. It was noted that the Team also made the decisions regarding the Council's pooled funds that were managed by external fund managers. The Panel was then briefed on the current situation of the Council's pooled funds and provided with a summary of deposit and investment activity during the six month period to 30th September, 2015.

Members noted the internal investment credit score, of which the aim had been A- or higher for average credit rating and an average credit score of 7 or lower. It was explained that the credit score had been good and explained that this had been due to solid counterparties.

Ms. Fahey concluded that, whilst 2015/16 had been challenging for the Council, the estimated interest receipts were £849,000 which was an increase on previous estimates for the year. The Panel was informed that the Council had started to look ahead and was considering the possibility of becoming a 'borrowing' authority. However, this would be dependent on the level of investment and the ability to attract external funding.

The Panel **NOTED** the update.

## 10. **PERFORMANCE REPORTING**

The Panel welcomed the Strategy, Performance and Partnerships Manager, Mr. Jon Rundle, to the meeting who had been asked to provide a presentation on the Council's approach to performance reporting. A copy of the Strategic and Performance Management Updates from the second quarter of 2015/16 had been distributed prior to the meeting. An overview of the approach allowed the Panel to assess whether any issues should be scrutinised in more depth at a future meeting of the Panel.

Members were reminded of the Council's purpose, 'working with others to improve the quality of people's lives', and heard how the 8-Point Plan and Organisational Development Programme was influencing the sustainability of the organisation.

The Strategic Planning Process 2015-2018 was explained to the Panel through a diagram. It was noted that this process was a continuous loop and had begun with horizon scanning, followed by a number of tasks including budget projections, finalising business plans, finalising the budget, agreeing the Corporate Strategy and finishing with performance monitoring and public feedback.

Following discussions with the Cabinet and other Members, the Panel was advised that improvements to the corporate planning process had been pursued. For example, it was suggested that there would be an increase in the work with Members, a focus on priorities and allocating resources where they had been needed most and an introduction of more opportunities to feed in resident and customer consultation. Improvements had also been made to the monitoring documents, which had started to include an overview of the budget.

The Panel were informed of the key elements for the Corporate Plan and quarterly monitoring reports that had been presented to Cabinet during 2015/16. It was explained that broader issues relating to the local community had continued to be included, such as population, crime, education, economy and health. The document had started to include more emphasis on the 8-Point Plan and Organisational Development. There was also a focus on key priorities under the five themes; people and communities, prosperity, place, leadership, good value services.

It was heard that feedback on the monitoring documents had been positive and Members agreed that it was a sophisticated report.

The Panel **NOTED** the presentation and **ENDORSED** the approach to performance monitoring.

#### 11. **CUSTOMER SERVICES MEMBER REVIEW GROUP**

Members received a copy of the minutes from the Customer Services Member Review Group meeting that had taken place on 17th June, 2015.

The Panel **NOTED** the minutes of the meeting.

#### 12. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel **NOTED** the current work programme.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.

CLLR JACQUI VOSPER (CHAIRMAN)

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