

Cabinet Member for Support Services and the Working Environment Annual Report to Scrutiny May 2020

Human Resources

Workforce and Establishment Data

A good amount of work and progress has been made in relation to reporting on workforce data and establishment performance. Data that is reported on includes sickness absence, turnover, agency expenditure, number of dismissals, number of grievances (and reasons), recruitment and appraisal timescales. This has allowed discussions to take place with our Finance colleagues to better inform our establishment and manage our vacancies, leavers and posts in need of re-evaluation. More closely aligning our HR and Finance services can really help enhance the quality of our performance management.

Policy and Intervention

Good line manager intervention which effectively addresses the issue in hand and sets the right precedent is vital to gaining employee confidence in leadership. A new Sickness Absence Policy has been introduced to tighten the reporting of sickness and set a new six day guideline for managing sickness more effectively and robustly. A number of policy reviews have commenced into key subject areas which include Change Management, Conduct and Leave.

A coaching and training plan to upskill line managers on how to deliver effective intervention is under consideration and will look to enable the demonstration of leadership qualities and behaviours that underpin good performance management. We will also educate line managers further on how to understand and own risk that arises in situations, then address it.

Employee Engagement and Wellbeing

An all staff consultative group called 'Impact' has been established which allows employees to give feedback and input on both Council work programmes and new initiatives. In addition to encouraging greater ownership and collaboration in the organisation, the group encourages the exchange of views and ideas so there is an open and transparent culture on employment and workplace issues. We also intend to carry out a comprehensive staff survey in the Autumn.

The Council has arranged a series of wellbeing and mental health first aid training sessions for staff to raise awareness around these important issues. We are also emphasising the employment practice that can help underpin effective intervention on mental health including supervision.

Payroll

In this financial year we have extended the outward facing MyView (that you can access from home) to include expenses claims. This means that we now have no need for employees or councillors to complete paper forms.

The payscales were changed this year from numerical to alphabetical, the rates follow the guidelines and the lowest hourly rate is now £9.00 per hour so no need for an adjustment to incorporate the new National Minimum Wage.

Learning and Development

The Evolve project (a series of initiatives around supporting our workforce and allowing training needs and skill development to be co-ordinated effectively) has made good progress this year with the finalising of a new competency framework which will allow all Council employees to identify the qualities that are pertinent to their professional responsibilities but also their professional development. There will be a series of workshops in this year which will outline how the competency framework should be used in the forthcoming Appraisal/PDR process.

Appraisal 20/21 will be co-ordinated and stored by the Learning nexus online system. As well as allowing us to capture which Appraisals have been completed, the strengths, development areas and talent opportunities that are identified from using the competency framework will be stored to give us a skills analysis of the organisation.

Group Managers were allocated their required portion of the Corporate Training Budget to remain responsible for their individual employee's specific training and development for 2019. The remainder of the L&D budget was held centrally and used for the South West Coaching Pool, Dementia Awareness Training, Suicide Awareness Training and Disclosure Training. Investigation Training, Mental Health Awareness sessions and First Aid Courses across the Council have been held along with sessions on raising awareness of Domestic Abuse throughout the 2019/2020 financial year.

L&D has also worked with South Devon College and provided employees with training on Effective Communication, Project Management and Train the Trainer using the funding they acquired. PRINCE2 training via The Knowledge Academy for Group Managers, and other staff involved in project work, is in the process of being rolled out with 9 employees completing both the foundation and practitioner course in February with another 12 booked in to complete in April.

We have secured the training provider CRISP to deliver a catalogue of courses throughout 2020 focusing on management training, customer service and employee wellbeing based on trends within the service training plans together with team requests.

7 members of staff across the services have been signed up to Post Entry Training to enable them to get a specialised formal qualification including an Urban Planning Degree, Certificate in Housing Practice, Facilities Management Certificate, Diploma in Paralegal Practice and the NEBOSH general certificate, however it is the Apprenticeship Levy which really has created opportunities for new and existing staff to obtain on the job learning and formal qualifications at no extra cost (the cost is deducted from the levy). The Levy has been used to its full potential with us working closely with Petroc, Exeter College, Exeter University, Plymouth University, Lifetime Training and Bridgwater and Taunton College to ensure the 22 Apprenticeships are delivered to the highest standard. 18 members of staff completed their Apprenticeships in 2019 and 15 are due to complete this year ranging from Level 2 up to MBA.

Health & Safety

Work carried out during 2019-20

- 15 x Health and Safety, safety reviews
- Phoenix House, Carlu Close Depot, Old Road Depot, Pannier and Market Walk, and the Leisure sites, have had Fire Risk Assessments review carried out with recommendations made to Managers were required.
- Phoenix House, Carlu Close Depot, Old Road Depot, Pannier Market and the Leisure sites have had Legionella risk assessments created with Property Services carrying out work were required.
- The Learning Management system is now being used to deliver fire and legionella awareness a courses.
- The following in-house training courses where completed:
 - 8 First Aid courses
 - 2 Accident investigation
 - 3 First aid for mental health
 - 7 Service specific H&S courses

Accident Reporting 2019-20

To date a total of 36 accident reports have been received of with 3 requiring reporting to RIDDOR. All 3 RIDDOR accidents were due to employees being off work for longer than 7 days following a work related accident. All incidents have been investigated and improvements made or training given where appropriate.

Health and Safety Policies

All health and safety policies are up to date

Planned Work for 2020-21

Due to the retirement of the existing Health and Safety Officer the work plan for 2020-21 will be created when the new Health and Safety Officer starts on the 4th May 2020.

The work plan will continue to focus on the high risk services of Street Scene, Leisure, Building Maintenance, Housing and Property Services. However, the role will be changed with the training aspect delivered by the Learning Management system supported by in-house or external face to face training where required. This will allow the new H&S Officer to develop and support the Wellbeing project.

Electoral Services

Electoral Registration 2019-20

- Met 100% of Electoral Commission Performance Standards for Electoral Registration
- Achieved a response from 99% of Mid Devon households for annual canvass of electors, as was the case last year
- 30% of the returned household electoral registration forms were electronic (internet, phone and text), compared to 24% last year
- Will end the year on budget

Elections 2019-20

- Met 100% of Electoral Commission Performance Standards for the Returning Officer
- Ran the following major elections:
 - District and Town/Parish elections - 85 elections with a total of 482 candidates
 - European Parliamentary Election at short notice
 - Snap UK Parliamentary General Election during annual canvass of electors
- Administered 3 uncontested parish by-elections
- Planning for May 2020 Police and Crime Commissioner Election – now postponed until 2021 due to Coronavirus pandemic
- Planning for Neighbourhood Planning Referenda
- Planning for District by-election (Taw ward) – now postponed until 2021 due to Coronavirus pandemic
- Only MDDC election budget is for district elections (all other elections recharged to the relevant authority). Within budget.

Our Electoral Services Manager, Jackie Stoneman, received a national award in February 2020 in recognition for her support to the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), South West Branch, and contribution to electoral services.

Member Services

Provide support, advice and assistance to elected Members and Council Officers both informally and through the formal decision-making structure of the Council and maintaining and improving the quality of decision making throughout the Council.

- Meetings support – support services to the Council, Cabinet, Committees, Policy Development Groups, working groups etc. Providing advice on meeting procedures and

legislation. Ongoing work continues on a day to day basis in this regard with the monitoring of decisions to be made via the Forward Plan, the publication of agendas for all meetings (formal and informal) and the preparation of minutes and actions from these minutes.

- Member support – supporting the Council’s elected Members including training and development: A comprehensive raft of training and member briefings took place as part of the 2019 induction programme, and following on from that a wide range of learning opportunities has since been delivered. The majority of these are group sessions that take place as part of the “briefing programme”, with some committee/group specific training which has been requested. Individuals have also requested specific training that is appropriate to them either in their Ward Member role or specific Council duties and these are paid for out of the Member Development budget.

The Council works with other local authorities in Devon and Somerset providing a shared service for Member Development. The shared service consists of 7 partners which widens our opportunities to provide learning and development with other local authorities in a cost effective manner, offering networking opportunities and the benchmarking of good practice across the field. The programme for the current year has included:

- An introduction to Scrutiny – this unfortunately clashed with our members away day
- Chairing Skills – with 11 of our own members attending alongside those from other authorities
- Questioning Skills – 4 of our own members attended from this authority alongside those from other local authorities
- Time Management and Managing Casework – 8 of our own members attended alongside those from other local authorities

The Shared Services Officer (DCC) has also visited us and undertaken some personal development discussions with members, the outcomes of these conversations will feed into the development programme for the coming year.

Further training sessions have continued throughout the year on relevant subjects.

- Keeping the Chairman of the Council’s diary and responding to invitations on his/her behalf. Civic events – arranging civic and ceremonial events

A member of the team is also the Civic Officer and carries out the above functions on a daily basis when required. She is also the officer leading on Operation London Bridge.

- Provision of support and assistance to the Independent Remuneration Panel on their annual review of Members Allowances. Administration support is provided to the IRP throughout the year.
- Parish Liaison support to the Town and Parish Councils

A member of the team is also provides specific support as the single point of contact for the town and parish councils, election year is extremely busy for the officer as she had to deal with over 600 register of interest forms and also provide support to new parish

clerks. She also provides a monthly town and parish newsletter and organises the annual clerks meeting.

- Support to the Monitoring Officer (Deputy Monitoring Officer role) – the Member Services Manager is also one of the Deputy Monitoring Officers and supports the Monitoring Officer with regard to meeting procedures and work on the Constitution.
- Scrutiny/Policy Research – providing support to the Scrutiny Committee and Policy Development Groups with regard to research, providing information and report writing – our new officer took up her post in September 2019 and has undertaken research and policy analysis to further the work of the council's scrutiny function as well as shaping thoughts around the future policy direction in servicing the councils policy development groups. Specific work has taken place with the Customer Engagement Working Group and the Net Zero Working Group. The officer is also working with the Cabinet Member for Climate Change with regard to progressing work following the Climate Change Declaration and working with Devon County Council's Scrutiny Officers with regard to the 5G project.

Health Services

Mid Devon Leisure supports and leads on health initiatives across the district via variety of Referral schemes. These schemes are either funded through the health sector, or subsidised and included in the pay and play activities across the Mid Devon Leisure portfolio. Access to the facilities is also available for 3rd party organisations to deliver health and wellbeing sessions to their own clients.

Funded Referrals. In order to deliver the quality and expertise required when dealing with clients with complex medical needs, Mid Devon Leisure staff require professional qualifications and training. In some circumstances this training is funded by; Public Health, the NHS or more specialist organisations such the British Heart Foundation. Other funding streams take the form of payments directly to MDDC based on per client activity.

- a. **Cancer Rehabilitation (NHS).** Activity is based on individual needs rather than group exercise. Clients can attend the set GP session which is instructor supervised and benefit from social support with group peers. Qualifications are funded
- b. **Escape Pain. (NHS)** Physiotherapy pilot specifically for Osteoarthritis. 2 sessions of group exercise per week, for 6 weeks. This pilot has ended (March 2020) with a proposal of MDL continuing a 6 week scheme currently pending. Funding payments to MDDC after completion.
- c. **Strength & Balance Pilot (NHS).** Targeting '*Falls and fear of falling*'. Clients participate through self-referrals or referred by specialist and undertake a 12 week course. **Active Devon** have now taken over the initiative, may reduce to 6 weeks and funding is to be identified. Mid Devon Leisure is in discussion regarding how to continue the scheme

- d. **Walking Football (Active Devon/Public Health)** Funding paid for the launch of the activity for participants and pitch hire. This is no longer funded, and the groups are self-managed paying a reduced rate for pitch hire.

Subsidised Referrals. These schemes support recovery for clients with health related needs and require the direct supervision of Mid Devon Leisure staff. Funding for activities is not currently supported although Mid Devon Leisure pricing subsidises the session costs to the clients from the equivalent full paying fee. Clients pay either per session or where appropriate with a monthly fee through the membership scheme.

- a. **Cardiac Rehabilitation.** Following a Cardiac event clients complete Phase 1 and 2 recovery within the hospital.
- **Phase 3** is hosted at a Mid Devon Leisure site with sessions led by; NHS Cardiac Nurse and Leisure staff. This activity is group exercise and based in the class studio.
 - **Phase 4** is led and supervised by Mid Devon Leisure staff and follows the structure set by the Cardiac Rehabilitation framework for group exercise in the gym. Support is available from the NHS cardiac teams should any concerns for client welfare arise .
- b. **GP Referrals.** A scheme where GP's can refer clients to exercise rather than medication for a 12 week programme specifically designed by the team to improve the clients individual health circumstances. Examples of these circumstances are; weight loss, mobility, joint and muscular pain, high blood pressure and more. This scheme is hosted and led by Mid Devon Leisure and was established over the past 20 years with local GP surgeries. For a short period this scheme expanded into a Devon wide initiative where set criteria and qualifications were met in order to meet the agreed NHS standard. The Devon wide initiative has since been disbanded and Mid Devon Leisure continues to provide the service in conjunction with the local surgeries to maintain the quality of offering.

3rd Party Organisations. Hire of facilities (courts, pitches and rooms) is in place for local providers such as physiotherapists, sheltered accommodations, and local support charities to provide their offering to their customers. This includes, although is not limited to groups such as; Age Concern, Inclusive Crediton, Involve, Active Devon, Crediton Hospital, Grapevine Church Charity, Creedy Court and The Woodmill Disability Trust.

Mid Devon Leisure is currently engaging with NHS 'Social Prescribers' in Tiverton and Cullompton. These prescribers can signpost to multi agency providers to support their clients, this can also include activities facilitated by Mid Devon Leisure. This initiative is yet to be launched, and the social Prescribers in Crediton are yet to be established with the Mid Devon Leisure team.

Customer Services

Customer Services is a support service, providing front line customer service and admin support for other council services.

The team is the first point of contact for many of our customers and across many access channels, including phone, web, email and face-to-face. They also provide a central admin service, handling incoming and outgoing post, printing, scanning and much more.

2019 has seen a continued decrease in footfall, or face-to-face visitors, as customers choose to transact with us via phone and online.

As a result they are reviewing our service provision. Work has commenced on cross-training staff to ensure resilience of the service. Although having to carry some vacancies recently has impacted on this project and also intermittently resulted in increased wait times.

	18/19	19/20 Annualized	Comment
Visitors to our offices	23,078	14,832	36% Decrease
Number of Calls	135,809	114,662	16% Decrease
Items of post Despatched	162,625	145,382	11% Decrease
Kiosk Payments – Cash (self Service)	4980	9,809	97% Increase
Kiosk Payments – Card	4770	9,810	106% Increase
Payments Via website (including online forms)	25994	30,629	18% Increase
Phone Payments (automated)	17,070	19,342	13% Increase
Post Office	29179	31,567	8% Increase
Scanning at post opening	30975	34,388	11% Increase
Emails received via Customer Services	14,165	15,608	10% Increase

The service has been actively working with the Customer Experience Scrutiny Working Group as they examine some of the challenges and opportunities around Customer Service generally.

Customer Services will be organising a customer survey around satisfaction and barriers to digital inclusion to identify how they can better plan their services going forward with diminishing resources, whilst ensuring we continue to support residents. A campaign on advertising our online services is also planned to continue the trend towards self-service.

The last few weeks of this financial year has seen many more customers change the way they engage with the Council due to the restrictions resulting from the Coronavirus pandemic.

As many might have seen, Revenues and Benefits have implemented a Customer Access Solution for Council Tax and other services. Customer Services will be assisting with signposting and encouraging customers to register to obtain real time access to account and

balance information, saving time for them and Mid Devon and also contributing to reduction in carbon footprint by reducing printing and postage mileage.

LEGAL SERVICES

The small Legal Services team provides legal advice and support across the full range of council functions. Where, due to capacity or expertise, some work requests cannot be undertaken in-house, external advice is commissioned. However, that is kept to an absolute minimum. Court advocacy is mostly undertaken by the solicitors – unless it is a particularly complex matter, or there are no advocates available for the date set by the court.

Some high level stats by way of a snapshot of activity are:

- 24 completed Right to Buys
- 4 repurchases of Council houses under the statutory right of first refusal
- 15 completed section 106 agreements
- 3 significant (and successful) prosecutions - The Manor House, The White Hart and a Taxi Licensing case
- 5 planning enforcement or stop notices
- 6 anti-social behaviour injunctions
- 4 closure orders for council properties affected by ‘cuckooing’ with associated injunctions
- 2 bankruptcy proceedings
- Significant work involved in council land asset disposals, including working with the Charity Commission and the Land Registry on certain parcels

Members of the team have also undertaken the following work, in addition to day to day legal advice on planning, housing, licensing, property, contracts, employment and all other council functions:

- Advice on public spaces protection orders, including drafting
- Off-Street Parking Places (our car parks and increases to charges)
- Play area leases and sales of public conveniences
- Advice on assets of community value
- Tree preservation orders
- Applying to court for charging orders on properties where council tax is outstanding
- Injunction for threats against council employees
- Injunction for gas safety
- Commercial property leases, renewals and forfeiture (the Council’s retail properties primarily), with associated court proceedings
- Housing possessions and debt recovery

The team provides advice and support in and to council meetings and considers the legal implications of all reports going to them. Where policies (new and updated) are referred to members, these will also have been through Legal Services before issue.

Two team members are undertaking professional qualification training – to practise as a Chartered Legal Executive and as a Paralegal respectively. One solicitor has this year completed the Law Society

in Local Government Law and Practice to complement their existing knowledge and skills – another solicitor has already done so. And to cap it off, Maria de Leburne (Legal Services Team Leader) has been shortlisted for ‘Legal Professional of the Year’ at the national annual Lawyers in Local Government awards. The award ceremony has been postponed to later in the year, but we are keeping our fingers crossed.

Cllr Nikki Woollatt

Cabinet Member for Working Environment and Support Services

April 2020