

SCRUTINY PANEL

23 AUGUST 2016

Present:- Councillor Davies (Chairman), Councillor Fox, Councillor Hogg, Councillor Scordis, Councillor Wood

Substitutions:- Councillor Barlow for Councillor Coleman
Councillor Chapman for Councillor Arnold

Also in Attendance:- Councillor Cory, Councillor Lilley

81. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2016 were confirmed as a correct record.

82. Work Programme 2016/17

Councillor Davies introduced the Work Programme for 2016/17. Councillor Davies informed Panel members that questions for the Crime and Disorder Committee review of the Safer Colchester Partnership would be required by 9 September to ensure that a full answer can be provided at the meeting. Information will be circulated to members in advance of the meeting to provide a basis for questions.

Councillor Davies highlighted that an additional Scrutiny Panel meeting had been scheduled for 21 September.

The Panel agreed to receive the Homelessness Strategy Progress Report and Delivery Plan 2015-2019 at the November Scrutiny Panel meeting.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme 2016/2017 be noted.

83. Staff Survey

Councillor Mark Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources introduced the Staff Survey report. The report requests that the Panel consider and comment on the 2016 staff survey its findings and the next steps.

Councillor Cory stated that the results from the Staff Survey were at a time when the Council has been changing significantly, with pressure on teams within the Council to manage budgets and to look at opportunities to develop further income.

Councillor Cory stated that the good results in the Staff Survey highlight that members of staff are buying in to the changes at the Council. The response rate for the survey reached 75% of staff with 86% of the respondents stated that they were aware of the three corporate

goals, Customer, Business and Culture. Councillor Cory also commented that members of staff felt that Colchester Borough Council is a good place to work, and that staff feel that they can make improvements in their service areas. Councillor Cory also stated that there has been a 3% reduction in work based stress this year; these results show that the Council is continuing to go in the right direction.

Matthew Sterling, Assistant Chief Executive, stated that the survey had been running each year for a number of years and has now been reduced to nine topics, which has helped to increase the number of respondents. The 2016 survey was conducted during January and lasted a period of three weeks. Members of staff who completed the survey are entered into a prize draw; the prize for the draw was donated by the Senior Management Team.

Jess Douglas, Strategic People and Performance Manager, provided the Panel with a presentation which included further analysis of the results as well as selection of comments made both positive, neutral and negative. Jess Douglas highlighted the responses and comments around the relationships within the organisation, job control, line manager reviews as well as personal development and training. With regard to work related stress, Jess Douglas stated that this has reduced from 35% in 2013 to 26% in 2016. The Council has continued to focus on reducing this amount and recently commissioned, as part of a joint project across Essex, training for managers from Rethink to help them identify signs of stress and how to help members of staff. Jess Douglas also highlighted the increase in satisfaction in resources, tools and information, which follows the investment in ICT at the Council.

Matthew Sterling stated that the survey provided a good set of results for the Council. In terms of the next steps for the organisation, the Council will continue with its whole organisation improvements, but also to focus on specific improvements in the different service areas. Each service department has now devised its own action plan to improve the response rates and positive responses in each service area. With regard to Corporate and Financial Management two areas have been identified for improvement; stress and communication with other services. Following the identification of these issues a more detailed survey for this service will be taking place with an action plan following shortly after.

The following issues were raised by Councillors;

- Councillor Davies – Questioned why the number of staff who believe that they have adequate opportunities for professional growth is so low; highlighted the need to retain staff and identify different skills. Also questioned how the staff survey can assist in informing management of those staff who do not feel they have opportunities for professional growth.
- Councillor Barlow – Asked whether there had been any in-depth analysis on the causes of stress in the work place, and whether the scores in the survey have been compared with other local authorities.
- Councillor Fox – Questioned how Councillors can assist in developing the relationship between themselves and members of staff.

- Councillor Davies – Suggested that back bench Councillors could be invited along to team meetings to be introduced to the staff.
- Councillor Chapman – Highlighted that under the previous committees system more members of staff involved with Councillors due to the range of items discussed. Queried how it would be possible for Councillors to attend team meetings without impeding on the progress of the meeting or issues discussed.
- Councillor Wood – Highlighted a correction within the report regarding to the percentage of staff who made comments on the survey; which should have totalled 21% of 697.
- Councillor Scordis – Asked for further information on staff suggesting improvements for services and staff speaking highly of the organisation.

Councillor Cory, Matthew Sterling and Jess Douglas provided responses to the issues raised by Councillors;

- Matthew Sterling stated that because of the anonymity in survey responses it's not possible to identify staff and provide professional development for that individual. Line managers hold the responsibility to help identify areas of growth for members of staff. Colchester Borough Council has a talent management scheme where managers have discussions with staff to identify areas where staff can develop; there is also a learning and development programme and the possibility of coaching and mentoring for specific projects.
- In response to Councillor Barlow, Matthew Sterling stated responses to the questions are not cross analysed with other questions; this may be something that the People and Performance team could look into in more detail. With regard to benchmarking against other local authorities, as the survey is originally based on a standard national survey comparisons would be possible, however some questions have been edited to ensure that we encourage staff to respond to the survey. The Senior Management Team do always compare year-on-year results to see changes within the Council.
- In response to Councillor Fox, Matthew Sterling stated that whilst the figure for those members of staff who feel they have good communication with Councillors is relatively low, this does not necessarily mean that there is a bad relationship, as the criteria asks staff to say if they have a good or excellent relationship. It may be that many more rated it as average. Councillor Cory stated that as a member of Cabinet there is more interaction with staff from different services, backbench Councillors in their roles regularly contact similar offices due to the nature of the issues they are dealing with. Councillor Cory also mentioned that this may be something that could be considered as part of the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working that the Governance and Audit Committee are soon to be undertaking.
- In response to Councillor Chapman, Ann Hedges stated that is a balance that needs to be sought when trying to develop better communications with members of staff. Ann Hedges stated that improved relationships will be those where it adds value to both the member of staff and the Councillor. Ann Hedges used an example of Councillors introducing themselves to frontline members of staff when using Colchester Borough Council services. Matthew Sterling also highlighted the new

Councillor Conference which was held following the elections, at which a Councillors were able to speak to different members of staff from different services.

- In response to Councillor Scordis, Matthew Sterling stated that staff provided significant input into the fundamental service reviews that took place across the Council. Staff workshops were held during this process to provide an opportunity to share ideas and input into the review process; Matthew Sterling stated that often the proposals that are implemented are those that come from members of staff. With regard to staff speaking highly of working at the Council there have been a number of initiatives which have helped this including the staff recognition scheme, which allows colleagues to nominate each other for an award. The staff that are nominated are then invited to an awards ceremony that is funded by external companies. Matthew Sterling also highlighted that Senior Management Team notes are also circulated to members of staff to keep them up to date with the latest developments.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Panel considered and commented on the Staff Survey 2016

84. Questions to Bus Companies in Colchester

In advance of the item Councillor Beverly Davies distributed an update set of questions to members of the Panel.

Have Your Say!

Nick Chilvers welcomed the report and was pleased to see that the Scrutiny Panel would be questioning bus operators in Colchester. Mr Chilvers highlighted the importance of bus users in maintaining the footfall in the town centre, particularly from concessionary fare users. Those users without concessionary fares were deterred from using the bus services due to the costs involved.

Mr Chilvers made a number of points to the Scrutiny Panel regarding buses in Colchester including acknowledging that bus fleets had been slowly improving, but there were still many occasions throughout the day where buses were too full to pick up passengers. In addition Mr Chilvers highlighted issues with bus stops in the Town Centre and the management of buses that drive across the town centre. Mr Chilvers highlighted route number two in Mile End, which used an old bus and did not provide an adequate service when individuals are paying full price; this was especially the case for those who are using buses with pushchairs.

Mr Chilvers also suggested that Colchester Borough Council should recommend to Essex County Council that all buses operating should have contact details available on board so that it is easier for members of the public to get in contact.

Mr Chilvers made wider comments on the frequent closure of the North Hill for events, which caused significant issues for the traffic and the travelling public. He recommended that if the Council wishes to close North Hill for events that more communication is required from the Council.

Councillor Lilley

Councillor Lilley, Portfolio for Safer Communities and Licensing, spoke to the Panel and highlighted issues on buses in Colchester, particularly the cost of fares. In addition, Councillor Lilley highlighted that he would be attending a new Bus Forum set up by Essex County Council on 15 September. Representatives from Essex County Council and other local authorities in Essex will be attending the meeting.

Councillor Lilley highlighted the importance of buses across the Borough, and the need for bus companies to communicate with users to ensure that residents are informed of cancellations.

Councillor Davies thanked Councillor Lilley for attending the meeting and suggested that the questions from the Panel be taken along to the Bus Forum.

The Panel discussed the questions that had been amended by Councillor Davies and requested that question two, which related to communication from bus companies, include a reference to the information and timetables displayed at bus stops. The Panel requested the inclusion of ticket interchangeability as part of question fourteen and an additional question for the bus companies to provide their contact details for the services in Colchester. A comment was also made regarding the Town Centre bus stops and the ease of navigation for visitors to the town.

The Panel also agreed that the letter include a deadline of four weeks to respond to the questions.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The Scrutiny Panel agree the amendments to the questions as suggested by the Chairman and the Panel, with a final draft to be agreed by the Chairman and Group Spokespersons.
- (b) The Scrutiny Panel set a deadline of four weeks for responses to the questions once the letter had been distributed.