

GROWTH, INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

SCRUTINY PANEL

12 April 2018

BUSINESS SUPPORT REVIEW

Report of the Director for Resources

Strategic Aim:	Sound Financial and Workforce Planning	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Mr O Hemsley, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Rutland One Public Estate & Growth, Tourism & Economic Development, Resources (other than Finance and Communications)	
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Ward Councillors	N/A	

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Panel notes the report and provides feedback to the Portfolio Holder and Director.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update members on the Business Support Review which was completed in February 2018 and give members the opportunity to comment on its ongoing progress.

2 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 In July 2016, it was agreed that a review should be undertaken into the administrative support provided throughout the Council.
- 2.2 It was identified that:

- administrative tasks were being completed disparately by teams throughout the Council and did not enable efficient service delivery;
- there was no resilience if officers were absent;
- officers were not enhancing their skills;
- there was thought to be duplication of processes, procedures and work streams which could be reduced if a centralised service was created; and
- the existing model did not offer clear career progression and encourage staff retention.

2.3 There was also a need to review the Corporate Support Team as a result of high levels of staff turnover and difficulty recruiting to vacant posts. This included reviewing the support that was needed in light of the changing needs of the business and a need to provide the Senior Management Team with a different type of support to traditional clerical support which would enable them to deliver more effectively, particularly in the light of more major projects. It was also identified that support for statutory meetings, constitutional issues and member support required specific technical expertise which would be best achieved through the creation of a specialist team.

2.4 A Project Board was established in January 2017 consisting of senior representatives from all Directorates and consultants appointed to support the review. The Project Board met regularly and was sponsored by the Director for Resources.

2.5 In March 2017, an Assurance Board was set up so that the project could benefit from member oversight at key milestones. Both Cllr Hemsley and Cllr Lammie were appointed to the Board; Cllr Hemsley as Portfolio Holder and Cllr Lammie as the (then) Resources Scrutiny Panel representative.

2.6 The role of the Assurance Board was to provide assurance that proper process was being followed throughout the Review. As such, the Assurance Board reviewed and commented upon the key processes and supporting documentation. They also endorsed the subsequent organisation changes, including management of staff affected by outcomes.

2.7 The objectives of the review were to create a business support service that was:

- Consistent across the council;
- Efficient and robust;
- Resilient to change and differing working practices; and
- Offered a well-defined career path; and
- Offered greater job depth and variation.

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Consultation took place in early 2017 with all staff considered to be in administrative

posts. Workshops were held with the staff to gather information on the nature of the work they undertook, and the time spent on various tasks. This work found that the equivalent of 72.4 FTE posts were delivering administrative support across the council.

3.2 The main areas of activity were:

- Handling enquiries;
- Finance activities;
- Document production; and
- Statistics and Information.

3.3 The workshops also collected information about the challenges staff faced in delivering their roles, and ideas on how improvements could be made. The key issues and actions to address these are shown below.

<p>IT issues such as age of equipment, different versions of Microsoft Office in operation, issues with wifi connectivity across the building</p>	<p>As part of the final stages of Liquidlogic roll out, a significant proportion of the People Directorate received upgraded equipment to enable more remote working. There has also been targeted upgrade of equipment across other teams.</p> <p>We are in the process of migrating to Office 365 which will mean we are using the latest technology and will enable us to get all staff onto the same version of Office software such as Word and Excel.</p> <p>The wifi has been improved within the Catmose building to address the issues people were experiencing.</p>
<p>Use of Agresso – lack of knowledge</p>	<p>An Agresso optimisation project has been undertaken to increase knowledge and understanding of the system across the teams. This was done through a combination of training, and workshops with teams to address their specific queries.</p>
<p>Channel shift and the need to enable more service delivery via the website</p> <p>The potential for CST to deal with more enquiries, rather than them go directly to the back office</p>	<p>A Customer Access Strategy is being developed that will review the services delivered by CST, continue the improvement of the website and increase the number of transactional services that can be accessed online.</p>

3.4 The findings from the workshops were then discussed with senior managers from each directorate to gain their perspective and to identify options for future service delivery. Three delivery options were identified:

- Administrative support remaining within existing teams;
- Full centralisation; and
- Centralisation of some activities.

3.5 The consensus from the consultation on these options was that a centralised service was the best option to meet the objectives of the review. As such a detailed implementation and change management plan was developed to implement the following changes:

- Corporate Support would be expanded as a Business Support Team to support the general administrative functions identified through the review. A Business Support Manager would be appointed to manage this team and take forward the service improvement work.
- That the democratic functions of Corporate Support would be separated into a Governance Team where there would be a stronger emphasis on support to the scrutiny process, member support and stronger clerk support/advice to committees. A Governance Manager would be appointed to manage this team and fulfil the Statutory Scrutiny Officer role.
- Executive Officer posts would be created to meet the changing needs of SMT and the Council.

3.6 From the original pool of staff in scope of the review, it was determined that 33 FTEs would become part of the Business Support Team. These were posts that were predominantly administrative roles. Some roles were excluded that had specialised knowledge, were technical roles or were more service delivery roles such as HR, CST or roles within satellite centres (Visions/Jules House).

4 IMPLEMENTING OUTCOMES FROM THE REVIEW

4.1 Overview

4.2 The new arrangements began on 1 February 2018 and progress can be separated into two parts i) establishing and setting up the new structure, and ii) current working practices and improvements.

4.3 Work on each element began prior to the 1 February and still continues. Significant progress has been achieved and the new arrangements, which have already begun to deliver benefits to the Council, staff and customers, are outlined below.

4.4 Establishing and setting up the new structure

4.4.1 New teams established and recruitment largely complete

4.4.2 On 1 February a new support function was established comprising three sub teams:

- An Executive Support team - comprising three Executive Officers supporting SMT
- A Governance Team - four staff delivering democratic and member support to the Council

- A Business Support Hub - providing administrative support to Council directorates.

4.4.3 The Council has undertaken various recruitment exercises to get staff in place. A new Business Support Manager (BSM) - responsible for Business Support and Executive Support - started in February 2018. The Executive Support team and Governance teams are now fully staffed with officers with the right skills relevant to their new roles.

4.4.4 On 1 February Directorate administrative staff in scope transferred into two Business Support hubs; Places and Resources and the Peoples hub. There are still some vacancies in this team which are being recruited to.

4.5 The structure for the Business Support Hub includes four roles (of different grades) from business support apprentice to team leader. This gives the opportunity for career progression and gives opportunities to new apprentices in line with the Councils commitment to the training and development of young people.

Benefits

- ✓ New structure and teams in place
- ✓ Recruitment has been successful bringing an injection of new skills into teams
- ✓ Investment in apprentices and career progression opportunities

4.5.1 *Management and supervision*

4.5.2 Improving management of teams to drive efficiencies and deliver a higher quality service is a key priority. Within the overall budget, there has been investment in management which will facilitate this:

- The new BSM has a remit to focus on improving working practices, delivering efficiencies and high quality support.
- The BSM has appointed two team leaders for the Business Support Hubs to strengthen and increase capacity.
- A Governance Manager post with an enhanced remit was created and appointed to.

4.5.3 The BSM is spending time talking to internal customers, understanding current support requirements and future needs.

4.5.4 The new arrangements have allowed the Director for Resources and Head of Legal and Governance to work with managers on tackling performance issues, action planning and identifying training needs.

4.5.5 The management of the Support Hub by the BSM and two Team Leaders has also allowed service managers in Directorates to focus attention on service delivery.

Benefits

- ✓ A focus on improving the quality of existing support and the needs of customers
- ✓ Increasing capacity of front line service managers through removing management of support

4.6 Current working practices and improvements

4.6.1 Delivery of support

4.6.2 The Places and Resources Hub are located together and managed centrally by a Team Leader. The Peoples' Hub remains, for now, in smaller teams in order to preserve the confidential nature of the information they handle. Whilst the Adults team are located within an office together, space is yet to be identified for the Children's business support team, and this will remain a high priority in the coming months.

4.6.3 The pooling of resources into Hubs means:

- when staff members have been absent (and duties would not have been undertaken) they are now covered by another member of their designated Hub;
- reliance to undertake tasks/support is no longer on specific individuals but the Hubs themselves giving greater flexibility;
- knowledge gained from working with service teams and Directorates has not been 'lost' but is now spreading across the Hubs; and
- there is continuity of support to teams and Directorates.

4.7 Cross training is already taking place to facilitate resilience, and to give staff a greater depth of role and variety, with a view to also retaining staff and improving job satisfaction.

Benefits

- ✓ Increased resilience for the delivery of support
- ✓ Continuity of support to Directorate teams
- ✓ Greater variety of role for team members

4.7.1 Identifying areas for improvement and enhancing skills and knowledge

4.7.2 This is a big area of focus for the BSM. Service reviews have been taking place with both service managers and the staff which has built on the data gathered in the earlier stages of the project. This has identified what work is being carried out within teams or by individuals, and also the processes and procedures and issues that the service may encounter moving forward.

4.7.3 The outcomes of these reviews have fed into a programme of work which includes:

Improving use of Agresso	<p>Finance related tasks (e.g. raising orders) consume a significant proportion of officer time. If the system is used optimally (e.g. orders 'copied' rather than recreated) then time spent can be reduced, thereby substantially removing the need for manual spreadsheets and other paperwork.</p> <p>Existing competency levels are 'adequate' but can be improved.</p> <p>Finance training has already taken place, with future training sessions planned to develop staff further.</p>
Improving Microsoft Office skills	<p>The Council is migrating to Office 365 which means that all staff will use the same version of Office software such as Word and Excel. Improving 'IT' skills from 'adequate' to 'very good' is again a key priority. Corporate training is being organised.</p>
Process efficiency	<p>Work has just begun on reviewing process efficiency to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can be stopped - tasks that do not add value or duplicate other processes • What can be changed - to ensure processes are 'lean' and make best use of systems • What might better sit elsewhere – to ensure tasks are done in the right place or by the right method e.g. accessed online
Channel shift	<p>This links with process efficiency review.</p>

4.7.4 Although the service is in a transitional stage and focus to date, inevitably, has been on recruitment, the work of the BSM has identified opportunities where improvements can be made and where staff skills can be improved.

4.8 In relation to the Governance team, the Governance Officers will shortly embark on professional qualifications, through the Association of Democratic Services Officers, to enhance their existing experience and skills. The objective is to offer an improved service to members, internal and external customers.

4.8.1 Alongside this work, a performance framework is being developed. This will allow the team to show the impact of changes made. The framework will include:

- Existing KPIs used to measure aspects of performance e.g. completion of FOIs, administration of complaints;
- New KPIs – as agreed with Directorates; and
- Customer satisfaction measures.

Benefits

- ✓ Training needs identified and action already undertaken
- ✓ Work programme underway to deliver improvements
- ✓ Performance framework being developed

5 NEXT STEPS – LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

5.1 As indicated above, a lot has been achieved but there is still work to do on:

- recruiting new staff;
- improving skills and knowledge;
- reviewing processes
- developing the performance framework.

5.2 This work will continue over the next 12 months and allow the Director to assess the extent of savings that can be made in the medium term. Whilst there is confidence that efficiencies can be delivered, the ability to turn these into savings will depend on the demand for services. If efficiencies are absorbed by increased demand then the Council will 'avoid' cost rather than reduce its cost base. In the last few years, the requirements placed on local government through FOI, the transparency code, GDPR etc have served to increase the level of support needed.

5.3 It is suggested that the Director reports back on progress in 12 months' time.

6 BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1 There are no additional background papers to the report.

7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix A

A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.

Appendix A. Draft Structure – Business Support

