

**COMMUNITY, CUSTOMER AND ORGANISATIONAL SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, 24th January, 2017

Present:-

Councillor P Innes (Chair)

Councillors Dyke
L Collins

Councillors Flood
Niblock

Councillor Caulfield +++++

Councillor Simmons +++++

Andy Bond, Town Centre Operations Manager +++

Damon Bruce, Head of Customer Centric Services +

Martin Elliott, Committee and Scrutiny Coordinator +++++

Anita Cunningham, Policy and Scrutiny Officer

Kate Harley, HR Manager ++

Brian Offiler, Committee and Scrutiny Coordinator

Paul Radcliffe, Benefits Manager +

+ Attended for Minute No. 31

++ Attended for Minute No. 32

+++ Attended for Minute No. 33

++++ Attended for Minute No. 34

**29 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' AND OFFICERS' INTERESTS
RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA.**

No declarations of interest were received.

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Borrell and Sarvent.

31 **CABINET MEMBER FOR CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES -
IMPACTS OF WELFARE REFORM (UNIVERSAL CREDIT)**

The Head of Customer Centric Services and the Benefits Manager gave a presentation to the Committee on the main changes to the benefits system and the impacts on claimant households, arvato services and the Council.

Implementation of Universal Credit (UC) had commenced for new claims from single young people in March 2015 and was due to be rolled out for all new claims and changes in circumstances in November 2017, with migration of all other claims due between 2018 and 2021. Arvato staff were working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Council's housing staff to manage the increased workloads and to mitigate the impacts on households as far as possible.

It was noted that the introduction of UC was having a significant impact on the level of rent arrears, as there was usually a six week wait for the first payment of UC, the housing element of this was paid to the claimant rather than the landlord and some claimants were having their payments sanctioned. Currently average rent arrears for Council tenants was much higher for those tenants on UC (£828 average arrears) than for those on Housing Benefit (£228), with 79% of UC claimants having arrears compared to 38% of Housing Benefit claimants.

It was confirmed that the Council could request managed payments of the housing element of UC be made to it by DWP as landlord where there was the potential for tenants to fall in to arrears.

The reduction in the benefit cap in autumn 2016 was currently affecting 81 households in the borough, with an average reduction in Housing Benefit paid of £49 per week. Benefits advisers were working with families to assist them to claim the benefits to which they were entitled and to minimise the impact of the cap. It was hoped that funding of the two benefits advisers would be extended.

The budget for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to assist those who were most vulnerable had been increased in 2016/17, and it was confirmed that it was expected that this would be fully utilised. The budget for 2017/18 had not yet been decided.

Further welfare reform changes in the future included:

- From April 2017 removal of housing support for UC claimants aged 21 and under;
- From April 2019 capping Housing Benefit for tenants in social housing to Local Housing Authority rates.

The implications of these changes for rent collection and housing allocation policies would need to be worked out.

A new project was currently being developed using voicemail and text messages to make it easier for tenants to keep up payments and to access advice and to enable better management and control of payments. It was confirmed that written reminders would still be issued where necessary.

It was noted that the Department for Work and Pensions Select Committee had met recently to take evidence on progress in introducing UC nationally and its impact.

Members indicated that they may have further questions on this issue, and it was suggested that such questions be sent to the Chair for him to raise with the officers and that a progress report be provided to the Committee in July, subject to the outcome from the annual scrutiny work programming process.

The Chair thanked the Head of Customer Centric Services and the Benefits Manager for their input to the meeting.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That members submit any further questions to the Chair to be forwarded to the officers for a response.
- (3) That, subject to the outcome of the annual scrutiny work programming process, a progress report be submitted to the Committee in July 2017.

32 **CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION -
PROGRESS REPORT ON WORKFORCE FIT FOR THE FUTURE**

The Human Resources Manager reported progress to the Committee on three main elements of developing the Council's workforce as part of the Workforce Strategy.

An online learning platform was being launched in February, initially for managers and then for all staff from early March. This would eventually include 150 learning modules and would provide greater flexibility for staff to undertake mandatory training and enable managers to monitor progress. Consideration was being given to including a streamlined EPD process within this, which would support greater consistency between personal and corporate objectives.

The Member Development Working Group was keen to engage Members in the implementation of the elements of the learning platform for Members, which would be launched in the next few months.

The Council's Investor in People (IiP) accreditation had been due for re-assessment in June 2017. As this would have been against the revised 6th generation standard, it had been agreed, on the basis of an assessor's review earlier in January, to extend the existing accreditation until January 2018. An action plan would be developed in the next three months to determine how the new standard could be achieved in January 2018, to enable the Council to decide whether to seek such accreditation. The Workforce Strategy would be revised to more closely match the requirements of the new IiP standard.

It had now been confirmed by central government that the Council's target for apprenticeships would be 23 new apprenticeships each year with effect from April 2017. The Corporate Management Team was currently considering possible options for such apprenticeships, either new apprentices or upskilling opportunities for the existing workforce.

The Chair asked whether consideration had been given to the Committee's previous request for a Scrutiny Committee Member to be included on the Workforce Strategy Steering Group. The Human Resources Manager agreed to investigate this. In the event of this being agreed Councillor Flood agreed to be nominated as the Committee's representative.

Arising from questions from Members and discussion the following points were raised:

- Experience of supporting existing apprentices within some areas of the Council would form a good basis for how this could be done more widely;
- The apprenticeships would be established posts leading to regular employment;
- Managers were taking account of succession planning when determining possible apprenticeship opportunities;
- Whilst there was concern at the cost of the new liP standard accreditation, it was recognised that revising the Workforce Strategy to more closely match the requirements of this standard would provide a good self-assessment and challenge for the Council if it decided not to seek accreditation under the new standard.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources Manager for her input to the meeting.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be noted and the direction of the work on the Workforce Strategy be supported.
- (2) That a response be provided to the Committee's previous request for the Workforce Strategy Steering Group to consider whether a Scrutiny Committee Member could be included in the Group and that Councillor Flood be nominated to attend in the event of this being agreed.

33 CABINET MEMBER FOR TOWN CENTRE AND VISITOR ECONOMY - OUTDOOR MARKETS PROGRESS REPORT

The Town Centre Operations Manager reported progress in respect of the outside market since the previous report to the Committee in March 2016.

It had not been possible at that time to pursue the options which had been identified for reconfiguration of the main market square due to financial constraints and the Council's VAT position.

Some small improvements had been implemented over the last 12 months, although market traders remained supportive of a more comprehensive reconfiguration project, rather than separate minor works.

The town had been accepted on to the Healthy High Streets project, which provided support through external corporate partners to help guide and mentor the retail offer in the town centre over a three year period. This had involved a collaborative approach with some of the major retailers, bringing together all sections of the town, including Vicar Lane, the Pavements Shopping Centre, independent businesses and both the markets and High Street along with help from Destination Chesterfield, resulting in added value to town centre events, including delivery of the grotto in the Market Hall at Christmas, which attracted nearly 1,000 children.

The Healthy High Streets group had produced an action plan for the year ahead, focussing on two key deliverables, communication and events, with the aim of delivering well publicised, good quality events in order to drive footfall through the town.

Attempts to identify funding opportunities, working with the Economic Development Team as part of the Town Centre masterplan, to deliver the reconfiguration project were continuing, and once funding could be identified the stakeholder consultation on the options previously identified could be revisited. It was hoped that some progress could be achieved over the next 12 months.

Arising from questions from Members and discussion the following points were made:

- The scheduling and timing of the Christmas Lights switch on event (4.45 pm on a Sunday) was based on consultation with retailers;
- Whilst it was hoped to include a dedicated entertainment area as part of any future reconfiguration, it was noted that funding would need to be identified for regular good quality entertainment. It was hoped to build on the recent collaborative working with traders and retailers to explore possible options. In the meantime good quality buskers were being encouraged, in line with a code of conduct;

- It was noted that there had not been a continental market for the last three years, as there had not been sufficient interest from the organisers. Alternatives for this were being considered through the Markets Consultative Committee and in consultation with the organiser of the artisan market;
- It was noted that Staveley Town Council had obtained grant funding for a portable ice rink at Christmas, which had been very popular. The Town Centre Operations Manager agreed that options for this would be considered for next Christmas.

The Chair thanked the Town Centre Operations Manager for his input to the meeting.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted and Members' comments be taken into consideration.

34 SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUP REPORT ON FRIENDS GROUPS

Councillor Caulfield, Scrutiny Project Group Lead Member, presented the Scrutiny Project Group's report on Friends Groups to the Committee.

The project group had been set up to look at how friends groups worked with the Council to improve local parks and open spaces. The report detailed the objectives of the review, its findings and analysis, including a survey of all the friends groups and research of related documents used by other authorities, and its recommendations.

The Chair thanked Councillor Caulfield and the members of the project group for the group's work and report.

RESOLVED –

That the recommendations of the Scrutiny Project Group's review of friends groups as detailed below be approved to be recommended to Cabinet, including any corporate considerations:

- (1) That an up-to-date data base of Friends of Groups is maintained by officers and that all Friends of Groups are given a single point of contact at the council to facilitate streamlined , effective and

accountable channels of communication between groups and the council.

- (2) That an annual survey with Friends Groups be carried out to collect information on their activities and achievements to enable the council to see how their work is contributing to the delivery of the councils objectives, as set out in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.
- (3) That all Friends Groups should have an agreed Management or Master Plan which has been developed in consultation with both the Council and the local community which clearly sets out both the group's and the council's role with regards to the development of the park or open space.
- (4) That Friends Groups be provided with information and guidance, as required, from the Communications and Marketing Team on how to publicise their activities to, and engage effectively with, their local communities.
- (5) That the documentation made available to new Friends Groups by the council is reviewed and refreshed, and that a knowledge bank of templates and guidance documents are made available to assist groups to put key documents and policies, including a strong constitution, in place.
- (6) That to facilitate effective communication channels between the council and friends groups, and between friends groups in Chesterfield, that a Friends Group Committee be established, also that a bi-annual Friends Group newsletter be published which will also enable the work of Friends Groups to be shared and celebrated with a wider audience.
- (7) That officers work closely with, and provide advice and guidance to Friends Groups who are bidding for external funding in order to reduce duplication, increase coordination and ensure better outcomes from the bids.

35 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 February – 31 May 2017.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

36 WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE COMMUNITY, CUSTOMER AND ORGANISATIONAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the list of items included on its Work Programme for 2016/17.

It was noted that the first scrutiny work programme action planning day would be on 1 February, 2017, and following the work programming process new work programmes would be developed for each of the Scrutiny Committees for 2017/18.

RESOLVED –

That the work programme be approved.

37 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee held on 13 September, 2016 were presented.

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.