

**COMMUNITY, CUSTOMER AND ORGANISATIONAL SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday, 21st November, 2017**

Present:-

Councillor P Innes (Chair)

Councillors Borrell  
Dyke  
L Collins

Councillors Flood  
Sarvent  
Niblock

Councillor Bagley +  
Councillor Blank ++  
Councillor J Innes +  
Damon Bruce, Head of Customer Services +  
Clare Fowkes, Operational Benefits Manager +  
Brian Offiler, Democratic and Scrutiny Officer  
Rachel O'Neil, Customers, Commissioning and Change Manager +  
Donna Reddish, Assistant Director, Policy and Communications ++

+ Attended for Minute No. 25

++ Attended for Minute No. 26

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

No declarations of interest were received.

**23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

**24 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee held on 19 September, 2017 were presented.

**RESOLVED –**

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

**25 CABINET MEMBER FOR HOMES AND CUSTOMERS - PROGRESS REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

The Cabinet Member for Homes and Customers, the Assistant Cabinet Member, the Customer, Commissioning and Change Manager, the Head of Customer Services and the Operational Benefits Manager presented a progress report to the Committee on the implementation of full service Universal Credit (UC) following the previous report to Committee in July, 2017.

The report outlined the measures taken and the continuing work to support residents claiming or transferring on to UC and to minimise adverse impacts on them, including:

- Maximising income through reviewing that Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claimants were receiving the right amount of Employment and Support Allowance and reviewing that UC claimants have claimed Council Tax Support;
- Use of Discretionary Housing Payments where appropriate;
- Identifying errors in UC payments;
- Three officers trained to provide personal budgeting support, with a fourth officer by the end of December;
- Updated information available via the website, and rents and housing staff trained to be able to advise tenants, to enable claims to be submitted as soon as possible;
- Assisting claimants to set up e-mails and access the internet at points across the borough;
- Considering reprofiling of Council Tax payments during the waiting period for UC;

- Use of the trusted landlord portal (operational from 22 November) to speed up the award of housing costs and requests for managed payments;
- Engaging with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to raise general areas of concern;
- Analysing the impact of UC on rent and Council Tax arrears.

Arising from Members' questions it was explained that:

- For claimants on zero hours contracts their income would be assessed in each calendar month and they would need to reapply for UC following any month when their income had exceeded the amount at which UC would be payable;
- The amount of personal budgeting support and officer resource required would be kept under review as the number of UC claimants increased over the next few years, including training for those staff, such as Tenancy Sustainment Officers and Recovery Officers, who had regular contact with claimants as well as County Council Welfare Rights staff. It was noted that elected Members could signpost and encourage residents to appropriate support;
- Staveley and Brimington were not due to go on to full service UC until April 2018;
- Where advance payments were claimed by those who were transferring from other benefits these could be repaid over a 12 month period;
- Information was being provided on support available, and benefits staff could refer claimants to foodbanks. Printed information was being finalised and it was suggested that this include a QR code to facilitate downloading of up-to-date details. This information could be made available for Members via the Aspire intranet.

The Committee thanked the Head of Customer Services and the Operational Benefits Manager for the proactive work undertaken, and the Chair thanked them, the Cabinet Member, the Assistant Cabinet Member and the Customer, Commissioning and Change Manager for their contribution to the meeting.

**RESOLVED -**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That a progress report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee in January, 2018.

26

**CABINET MEMBER FOR GOVERNANCE - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The Cabinet Member for Governance and the Assistant Director of Policy and Communications presented a report on community engagement service improvements following the 2015 findings of the Queen's Park Sports Centre scrutiny project group and other related community engagement and consultation scrutiny discussions.

The Council's Community Engagement Strategy, which had been approved by full Council in October, 2014, incorporated community engagement standards and included a set of guiding principles informing how the Council carried out community engagement activities, in order to avoid legal challenges. The standards were attached as an appendix to the report.

The community engagement group, which was chaired by the Cabinet Member for Governance and included representatives from all relevant service areas, was the custodian of these standards for the Council and supported the co-ordination of community engagement activity.

The report outlined the process to be followed for each community engagement project, including:

- Stakeholder analysis to determine who could be affected and which people or organisations had an interest in or influence on the policy, proposal or service;
- Development of a community engagement methodology and communication plan, including pre-consultation dialogue with key stakeholders for large scale consultation and engagement activities, such as for the tenancy agreement changes;

- Identification of the appropriate type of community engagement - information giving, community consultation, community involvement or devolved responsibility;
- Use of tools, techniques and technology, including 'activote electronic voting system, electronic and paper surveys, focus groups and informal meetings, the mobile housing office, the Council website, online petitions, the Council's Comments, Complaints and Compliments system and social media.

It was noted that the Community Engagement and the Internal/External Communications strategies were due for renewal in 2018/19, with the aim of combining these into an overarching strategy to continue to improve the combined engagement and communication offer.

Arising from Members' questions and comments it was explained that consultation methods were tailored to be appropriate for different groups to seek to achieve responses from a representative proportion and that responses could be weighted if this was not achieved. Where necessary to encourage participation, especially by 'hard to reach' groups, appropriate prizes or incentives were offered relevant to the subject. Consultation events were arranged at the most appropriate times for the target audience, including daytime and evenings.

It was noted that reference was made to it not always being possible to fully meet expectations arising from consultation, and that information was provided within the annual consultation on setting Council Tax to show that only a minority of the bill was for the Borough Council – it was suggested that this could be shown by visual graphics.

Members were pleased to note the progress which had been achieved in respect of the recommendations from the Queen's Park Sports Centre scrutiny project group in 2015, which were included on the Scrutiny Monitoring Schedule.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and the Assistant Director of Policy and Communications for their contribution to the meeting.

## **RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the report be noted.

- (2) That the possibility of including the review of the Community Engagement and Internal/External Communications strategies scheduled for 2018/19 in the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2018/19 be considered at the annual scrutiny work programming days.

## **27 SCRUTINY MONITORING**

The Committee considered the Scrutiny recommendations monitoring schedule. It was noted that item CCO3 in respect of monitoring the implementation of the recommendations on Friends Groups had been added to the schedule following the Cabinet decision on 14 November, 2017 to commission a corporate officer working group to consider the resource implications of implementing the Committee's recommendations. It was proposed to schedule monitoring of this for May, 2018.

Following consideration of the report on Community Engagement at Minute No. 26 above, the Committee was satisfied that the recommendations in respect of item CCO2 had been satisfied and that this item be removed from the monitoring schedule.

### **RESOLVED -**

- (1) That monitoring of the Cabinet decision on the scrutiny recommendations on Friends Groups be included on the monitoring schedule for May, 2018.
- (2) That the item on monitoring the recommendations in respect of community engagement be removed from the monitoring schedule.
- (3) That the Scrutiny monitoring schedule be approved.

## **28 FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 December, 2017 – 31 March 2018.

### **RESOLVED –**

That the Forward Plan be noted.

29 **WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE COMMUNITY, CUSTOMER AND ORGANISATIONAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Committee considered the list of items included on its Work Programme for 2017/18.

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the progress report on Cultural Venues from January to March, 2018.

**RESOLVED -**

- (1) That consideration of the progress report on Cultural Venues be deferred from January to March, 2018.
- (2) That the work programme be noted and updated to include the decisions of the current meeting.