

Bromsgrove District Council

Report of the Leader of the Council without Portfolio Holder (Retaining Overarching Governance/Policy and Performance/HR)

I am pleased to present my report to councillors for the areas covered by my portfolio specifically governance, policy and performance and HR). In so doing I would like to look back over recent events and forward to emerging issues affecting our council and our residents.

LEGAL, EQUALITIES & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The Legal, Equalities and Democratic Service provide support to both BDC and RBC. They are mainly an enabling service supporting all of the Councils Strategic Purposes but there are also front line activities that interface directly with our customers.

The service has three key operational purposes:

- **‘Provide corporate legal advice to the council, to members and officers, to ensure the probity and legality of the council’s decisions and actions, and represent the council as necessary in civil and criminal proceedings.’**
- **‘Administer the democratic and governance processes of the Council’**
- **‘Manage the electoral registration and election processes to ensure that local people are fully able to exercise their right to vote and influence decisions that affect themselves and their communities.’**

The service has been a shared one since 2011 and also provides an external legal service to Worcester City, Worcester County Council and BDHT. They are also the host support service for Worcester Regulatory Services.

Budgets

In 2017/18 the department restructured achieving in year savings of £214k (including transfer from reserves of £51k). The in year savings relate to vacancy savings following the restructure. The ongoing annual reduction on budget is £19k

Income from external agencies from legal support

- Income achieved in 2016/17 = £48k
- Income achieved in 2017/18 = £42k (to March 2018)
- Income budgeted in 2018/19 = £30k

Commercialism agenda and delivery against the Efficiency Plan

1. The department restructure enabled a resource to be established for the enabling of specialist commercial advice. To date this has been used on a case by case basis. In addition we have strengthened the internal legal capacity in line with the Councils emerging agenda.
2. The Commercialism Group was established to focus activity on four main areas:
 - Fees and Charges
 - Assets
 - Contracts
 - Income generation

Within the department we have focussed on driving improvements and more value from our procurement and our management of contracts.

3. Governance Changes

It was identified fairly early on in the commercialism group that the governance arrangements of the Council – in particular the speed of decision making needed to be reviewed.

As a result the constitution review working group was re-formed and has been working throughout the year to determine changes that would enable this. It isn't an easy task and it has been clear throughout the process to date that there are still a great number of local issues that need to be resolved before all group leaders can work together to achieve these changes.

As things currently stand there are proposals being considered to enable a more delegated environment for the purposes of decision making on business cases that sit within the agreed investment and acquisition strategy and service changes that may be necessary departmentally.

It is fair to say that the Finance and Budget Working Group has been identified as a key driver in the decision making process and as a result it has been proposed that the group be constitutionally formalised in a way that would enable early scrutiny of major decisions.

It is anticipated that the group will be involved in early discussions on fees and charges and that these would be looked at in the context of strategic purposes and the extent to which services that sit within them deliver against purpose. This will enable us to develop a holistic view of the charges that we make for these services with a rationale as to why. This will then feed into the budget setting process in a logical and timely manner. In order for this to happen the work needs to commence in the spring.

4. Contracts/Procurement

As part of the restructure another area of focus was the creation of a commercial/contracts team. This resulted in the transfer of the procurement officer into the team. As a result the procurement savings identified in the efficiency plan for 2017/18 (£50k) have been exceeded and there is a clear plan for delivery against the 2018/19, 2019/20 figures.

It has enabled the council to reorganise the contract management process and training and delivery is being given to all staff to ensure tighter contract management and a sharper focus on contract delivery and value for money.

HR and OD

As an enabling service, the role of HR is to enable services deliver against strategic purposes. HR & OD makes a key contribution to the Strategic direction of the Council by providing professional support and leadership in terms of the use of employee resources both now and in the future.

We build and maintain good employee relations through collaborative working with the Trade Unions at both a local and regional level.

Budgets – Savings

- Saved £7,000 from the salary budget (this is BDC's share of the savings) – by trialling different ways of working in the service which will be made permanent later this year.

HR&OD work over the past 12 months:

- Reviewed the contract for the provision of temporary staff – Matrix contract as a 2+1
- Produced and implementing the HR&OD strategy
- Implementation of the HR self-serve system HR21 across the authority enabling managers and employees to record / apply for
 - expenses
 - annual leave
 - sickness (in Return To Work Interviews)
 - recording status meetings
 - appraisals
 - booking of training courses

- trialling reporting for managers – this has included reviewing the establishment for the authority and reporting lines to enable the relationships in the self-serve system and the ability to talk to other systems
- Reviewed a number of HR policies, including JE policy
- Implemented a policy review programme
- Devised and commenced the implementation of a skills matrix to identify skills gaps and potential within our workforce and the ability to record the data on the self-serve system
- Implemented a new approach to the Staff Survey
- Supported on the implementation and roll out of the System Performance Framework and Appraisal process
- Devised and launched the Dignity at Work policy and currently rolling out training for all staff
- Implemented e-forms on the Intranet for managers
- Co-ordinated corporate and service based training
- Supported service reviews eg: Benefits, Planning etc
- Supporting managers on Disciplinary / Grievance cases
- Reviewed the corporate approach to the use of agency staff
- Reviewed the Gender Pay Gap identifying ways to reduce the gap even more. The gender pay gap for the UK is currently 18.1% (Institute of Fiscal Studies 2016), which is much higher than BDC's figure of 4.33%
- Produced the Statutory Inspection Policy and a number of other H&S Policies
- Implemented IOSH (Institution of Occupational Safety and Health) training for all employees
- Negotiated a package of staff benefits including: buying annual leave, discounts off certain purchases e.g. holidays, car lease schemes, etc. Whilst these offers are beneficial to employees, there is also an opportunity for the organisation to make some savings, particularly in relation to annual leave, if take up is high. This item is being reported to CMT on the 24th April 2018.

April 2018