

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

From: Councillor Suzie Morley Cabinet Member for Organisational Delivery	Report Number: CMU32
To: Council	Date of meeting: 25 October 2018

TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ORGANISATIONAL DELIVERY

1. Overview of Portfolio

The Organisational Delivery Portfolio encompasses Customer Services, Business Improvement and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Over the past 3 months, we have continued to focus on improving core performance, and we have also worked hard on a number of key projects which build upon our business as usual activities. A summary of activity that has taken place across the themes over the last few months follows.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That Council notes the report.

3. Key activities/issues over the past 3 months

3.1 *Customer Services*

3.2 Performance in Quarter 2 continues to improve; with customers waiting on average 1 minute 30 seconds for their call to be answered which is a reduction of 12 seconds from the previous Quarter. We have also increased the number of calls we answer and reduced the number of phone calls abandoned by customers, on average we answered just over 88% for Q2. The improvements in performance have been set against a backdrop of reduced resource for a variety of reasons over the summer months, but we have still maintained good performance levels and continued with our programme of staff development.

3.3 A new online service has been introduced for customers to access their Council Tax or Business Rates account information. Customers can already provide information to us through the website including registering to pay Council Tax and applying for discounts. Improved functionality now means they can view their account online, which gives details of their account balances, payments and bills and their ability to update their contact details.

3.4 Our customer satisfaction survey is still being piloted. During Quarter 2, 50 customers who visited either of our Customer Access Points completed our satisfaction survey.

Two customers highlighted areas for improvement to services, one in respect of the website and the other in respect of our automated payment line; both of which we are now reviewing to see if we can make improvements. With respect to customers rating our staff, (as good, very good or excellent, for helpfulness, information and advice provided, and time taken to listen and to understand their query) we maintained 100%.

4. ***Business Improvement including Policy & Performance, Data Analysis and Programme Management***

- 4.1 During quarter 2 we have carried out investigations into 9 stage 2 complaints: one was upheld as per stage 1; two were partially upheld; and six were not upheld. We are still seeing an increase in stage 2 requests when compared to the same period last year. To improve the quality of responses to complainants, reduce the need for stage 2 investigations and ensure faster access to the Local Government Ombudsmen, a revised complaints policy was presented to and approved by Cabinet in August. Implementation of the Policy is subject to evidence that the number of stage 2 requests reduces as a result of a training programme which will be delivered to all officers who respond to complaints. This training will be provided by the Local Government Ombudsmen and will focus on helping us to resolve customer issues at the first opportunity.
- 4.2 We are compiling a baseline of social data which will help us better understand how we can help those who need us most. We can use this information to feed into our policies as well as business as usual activity. We are now part of a Suffolk wide group called SODA, the Suffolk Office of Data and Analysis. The group consists of staff across all Local Authorities, both CCG's and the Suffolk Constabulary; working together to make better use of data and generate new insights into public services. Suffolk is part of the 100% Business Rates retention pilot and SODA developed a business rates forecasting model which has supported funding decisions by the Suffolk Chief Officers Leadership Group (SCOLT). This is just one example of how this group will be working together to make better use of data and generate new insights, apply them to improve policy and improve service design and delivery.
- 4.3 Work has commenced on the End of Term Report for this Administration, with all Councillors being invited to provide input. The report will reflect on the commitments made in the Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) with a summary of stories, facts and a video containing short clips.
- 4.4 The first quarter of our newly revised outcome performance report was presented to Cabinet in August. The Assistant Directors and Portfolio Holders had worked together to refine the indicators and targets reflecting the priorities of the Council. This more focused report was well received; the changes welcomed, with Council Members agreeing that it provided a good reflection of the Council's performance, and transparency of the areas where improvements are underway.

4.5 The senior leadership team have continued to monitor our strategic projects progress through the provision of a high-level overview report, and have signed off a new project management framework implementation plan which is being rolled out from the 1st October through to April 2019. Alongside developing this framework we have provided specific support to a range of other projects including public realm, payment methods, and implementation of modern.gov.

5. **ICT**

5.1 We have now run four Operational ICT Programme Board meetings with Suffolk County Council IT (SCC IT). With key officers attending from both SCC IT teams as well as Babergh Mid Suffolk Corporate Managers and lead officers, we have seen improved communication across the teams and a greater visibility of progress on key projects and programmes of work. We published our first staff IT Newsletter in July which provided updates from the board meetings and our second IT Newsletter will be published in October.

5.2 The performance of the SCC IT support desk has continued to improve from Quarter 1 through Quarter 2. During June, SCC IT took on average 1 minute 55 seconds to respond to support calls, but this has reduced to 1 minute 28 seconds in July, and to less than 42 seconds in August (traditionally a quieter month). In total (all SCC IT customers) the IT service desk answered over 8739 calls during the quarter. 626 incidents (issues/problems) and 659 additional service requests were raised from Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils during this period. During Quarter 2 SCC IT resolved 81% of incidents within 7 working days, moving towards their target of 90%, and 71% of their service requests.

5.3 As recommended by the National Cyber Security Centre and in line with SCC IT we will be changing our network password policy; such that the length increases from 8 to 10 characters and you only have to change your password once a year. Experts are advocating not to force customers to change their passwords at regular short intervals as this behaviour can lead to weak passwords being chosen e.g. a dictionary word with sequenced incremented numbers or a date type password.

5.4 A project group has been working to understand why users are having differing ICT experiences when working from home. Most staff and Councillors are able to work freely from home; however we have experienced some issues with older legacy applications. We have identified some solutions which include where possible moving users across to Windows 10 and also providing information to users explaining what can cause some of the issues, for example moving large files and bulk uploads with the associated work arounds.

5.5 The Democratic team have recently switched to using tablet devices to conduct the canvassing exercise – this means the Electoral system is updated immediately as we complete the information on the doorstep, avoiding us having to rekey information.

5.6 After listening to customer feedback, SCC IT have increased the opening hours of the IT Platform; which now opens at 8:30 and closes at 4.30pm. This has been greatly welcomed by those staff who like to start work early in the morning.

6. **Communications**

6.1 End of Term Report – the communications team has been working with the business improvement team to deliver an end of term report covering the councils' key achievements and challenges over the previous term. This includes work on content, design and distribution to ensure residents can access the information as easily as possible. Members have been invited to suggest material for inclusion in the report, which is now being drafted. The report will be published in the coming months.

6.2 Town and parish council briefings – a new members briefing note has been introduced to provide monthly updates to all members that can be included in their reports to their town and parish councils. Distributed by email, this briefing covers the key messages that the council has been promoting over the previous month, as well as key activities that have taken place. In addition, this provides another channel to communicate upcoming council meetings and engagement opportunities for town and parish councils.

6.3 Shop fronts funding – working in support of the open for business team, the communications team has promoted the new shop front grant and accessibility fund grant. This has seen media coverage in the EADT as well as the design, print and distribution of leaflets targeted directly at shop owners.

6.4 Communications team - The councils have taken action to increase capacity within the Communications Team, including recruiting into vacant business partner posts and sharing Suffolk County Council's head of communications.

6.5 Stars of Babergh and Mid Suffolk – content promoting the awards has more than doubled in last couple of months and will continue until the event itself. Some small sums of money have been put behind social media (posts about award categories receiving fewer nominations) which has resulted in an increase in nominations. We are currently in discussion with videographers (incl. the event organiser) to look at options for the evening. A press release with Flagship was sent out to re-encourage nominations and received good coverage.

6.6 Key stories in the last quarter included:

Gateway 14 purchased – The purchase of the Gateway 14 site in Stowmarket, securing 100 acres of land in a position ideally situated to provide vital links to the Port of Felixstowe in the East, to the Midlands and the UK motorway network beyond.

Nautilus appointed to look at Tech Hub options – the commissioning of Nautilus Associates to carry out a feasibility study on the possibility of a new technology hub in Stowmarket

£156,000 funding approved – the allocation of CIL funds to six bids in Mid Suffolk, in Stowmarket, Botesdale, Laxfield and Stowupland, totalling £156,000 towards infrastructure improvements

Mid Suffolk acquire former Aldi building in Stowmarket – the purchase of the now empty property, former occupied by Aldi, in Stowmarket, including the car park and the introduction of managed parking. The acquisition also aims to bring the site back into use after being vacant for over a year.

The Foyer opens in Stowmarket – the renovated Foyer in Stowmarket has opened to provide accommodation for those under threat of homelessness, doubling the provision of such accommodation in Mid Suffolk.

7. **Conclusion**

We continue to make progress and improve performance across all of our teams. Over the next few months we will continue to focus on maintaining performance whilst looking to deliver our services in the most efficient way possible. We will continue to develop our Customer Strategy action plan in line with our aspirations to provide excellent customer services across the whole organisation. Two new graduates have joined Babergh Mid Suffolk Councils for their next 6 month placement, and they will also be working alongside us on a number of projects supporting our day to day work, including the partnership initiatives with Suffolk Libraries and further enhancements to our performance framework.