

BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 OCTOBER 2021

ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR RESOURCES

Report from: Councillor Adrian Gulvin, Portfolio Holder for Resources

Summary

This report provides an overview of activities and progress made on work areas within the Resources Portfolio, which fall within the remit of this Committee. This information is provided in relation to the Portfolio Holder for Resources being held to account.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1 The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Resources are:

- Transformation and Digital Services
- Council Plan and Service Improvement
- Business and Administration Support Service
- Complaints Policy and Management
- HR
- ICT
- Legal
- Category Management/Procurement
- Travellers

2. Transformation and Digital Services

a) Business Change

2.1 Smart Parking

2.1.1 The Business Change Team have implemented a range of Smart Parking solutions to improve the customer experience and reduce costs for the Council.

2.2 Medway Park

- 2.2.1 The Business Change Team worked at pace to enable the configuration of the RingGo Touch Screen system at Medway Park so that it was in place in time for the facility to re-open on 12 April 2021 when the lockdown restrictions were lifted.
- 2.2.2 The previous pay & display system required customers to park their car, walk to a machine to pay for a ticket, walk back to their car, and then queue at reception.
- 2.2.3 The new system has installed touch screen kiosks behind the reception barriers, which allows centre users to simply park, walk directly into the centre and then enter their car registration number into the touchscreen. This automatically updates the Civil Enforcement Officer's handheld devices to show that the vehicle is legally parked at the centre.
- 2.2.4 Phase 2 of this project was implemented on 7 June 2021 when the car park transitioned to the Council's first completely cashless car park. Centre users continue to use the new streamlined RingGo kiosk system and people parking at Medway Park to visit the high street, or local area, can pay by credit/debit card, contactless, use the RingGo online via a smartphone or still pay by cash via the local shops that offer the PayPoint system.
- 2.2.5 There have been no complaints or negative comments about this change, which is a good indicator for a potential wider rollout of cashless parking in our other public car parks.

2.3 ANPR – Rochester Multi-Storey Car Park

- 2.3.1 Following a successful tender process, Sagoss Limited were awarded the contract in July 2021 to install a ticketless Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) solution at Rochester Multi Storey Car Park. This is the same solution that is used in Canterbury's Council car parks.
- 2.3.2 The Smart Cities Project Officer (SCPO) is leading on this project and will have the ANPR solution installed and operational by October 2021. Following the "go live" date responsibility will be transferred to the Parking Service. The Transformation & Innovation capital budget has covered all civil works (including the removal of existing P&D machines), cost of all hardware, all back-office integration costs and a year's worth of maintenance (including parts and labour) through to October 2022.
- 2.3.3 The Business Change Team will co-ordinate with Comms and Parking to ensure a smooth "customer journey" transition.

2.3.4 This work is also being coordinated with the electric vehicle charging points that will be installed on Level 1 and Level 3 at RMSCP over the coming weeks to minimise disruption for customers and provide a seamless solution.

2.4 Smart Road Surface Monitoring Pilot

2.4.1 The Medway are working in partnership with Kent County Council and Amey on their ADEPT Smart Places Live Labs Programme to implements a road surface monitoring pilot.

2.4.2 4K Ultra high-definition cameras and sensors have been fitted to six Council vehicles: 3 within the Highways Inspection Fleet and 3 within the Medway Norse refuse collection waste fleet.

2.4.3 These devices constantly analyse the condition of the road surface and pavements, capturing information such as the size and depth of potholes. The real power of the system comes from the data analysis and artificial intelligence built into the system, which is able to identify which potholes have deteriorated over time and also predict which potholes will become problematic in the future, allowing for cheaper, proactive, repairs to be made.

2.4.4 The data captured during the pilot will be analysed to see whether the Route Reports system is picking up the same level of defects that is usually picked up by our Highway engineers.

2.5 Smart Winter Gritting

2.5.1 The Internet of Things (IoT) and associated networks provide new opportunities for the Council to explore alternative ways of delivering services and achieving improved outcomes for the residents of Medway.

2.5.2 The Business Change Team have developed a pilot using LoRaWAN (Low Power, Wide Area Network) and low-cost road surface temperature sensor probes to be used along a quarter of Medway's Primary gritting routes to:

- gather road surface temperature profile data, alongside existing weather stations in Medway
- determine whether Highways could reduce the number of gritting treatments
- better understand the benefits (and limitations) of LoRaWAN in order to determine the most appropriate future service uses it could be applied to.

2.5.3 Providing Highways with real time, accurate, weather data from within the road surface, will only serve to optimise the winter service and reduce the need for salt to be deployed.

2.5.4 All 10 sensors have now been installed and the data collected will be integrated within the RoadMaster system, which Highways use to assess whether to send the gritting fleet out. An analysis will be carried out at the end

of the winter season (around March/April 2022) to calculate the reduction in gritter call outs over that period by utilising data-driving decision-making and potential savings to the Highways Service.

2.6 Smart CCTV Monitoring at The Strand

- 2.6.1 On the evening of 11 June 2021 trespassers climbed over the walls surrounding the Strand swimming pool and smashed glass in the pool. The damage was not discovered until the following day, so the morning swimming session had to be cancelled at short notice until the glass had been cleared by staff. During the gradual lifting of lockdown restrictions, the pool was running at a reduced capacity, but the session was fully booked in advance by 62 adults, 34 children, 1 senior swim and 3 disabled swimmers. There would have also been retail sales of rubber rings, goggles, arm bands etc. during the session.
- 2.6.2 The lost revenue for this swimming session has been estimated to be £635. However, if the same incident were to happen when the pool returns to normal capacity the lost income would have been over £2k for this morning session alone.
- 2.6.3 The Business Change Team investigated Smart solutions and, in discussion with Kyndi, identified a standalone CCTV system that would detect motion within pre-defined areas & times, and then automatically send an alert to Medway Norse to immediately investigate. Appropriate, and timely, action can then be taken.
- 2.6.4 The cost of the system was £4k and the Smart City budget has been used to install the new system and cameras as an additional measure to prevent further loss of income, improve customer satisfaction and maintain service delivery over the peak summer period at this popular attraction. Since the installation of the system there have been no unauthorised trespassing incidents at the Strand pool.

2.7 Smart Energy – Heat Mapping & Energy Masterplanning

With the Government introducing the New Homes Standard in 2025, gas boilers will be banned in new build domestic properties, with a greater emphasis on heat district networks. With a requirement of nearly 30,000 new homes in Medway by 2037, it is important that the Council support the local development industry with this transition.

- 2.7.1 In late 2019, and into 2020, Council officers sought the support from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) – via the Heat Delivery Network Unit (or HNDU) - to explore opportunities in Medway and to work strategically with key stakeholders (energy providers, landowners, and relevant Council teams) to highlight potentially viable heat district networks in our area.

2.7.2 The Business Change Team are working with partners to complete a techno-economic feasibility study to assess the suitability of a heat district network in Medway and evaluate the return-on-investment opportunities.

2.8 Electric Vehicles

2.8.1 The Business Change Team is working alongside the Sustainable Transport Manager to deliver all EV workstreams in Medway. The main workstreams are noted below:

2.9 Electric Vehicle Strategy for Medway 2021 - 2026

2.9.1 CENEX were appointed as the lead consultants, with analytics provided by Field Dynamics, to deliver the first Electric Vehicle Strategy for Medway.

2.10 Council EVCP “Quick Wins” Project – Rochester Multi Storey Car Park, Station Road, Rainham and Commercial Road, Strood

2.10.1 Following our successful Office of Zero Emission Vehicle (OZEV) Bid, the Council have procured Connected Kerb to install our first batch of public electric vehicle charging points (34 sockets/bays in total) in three Council car parks.

2.10.2 The installs at Commercial Road, Strood and Station Road, Rainham and Rochester Multi Storey Car Park are now complete.

2.11 Kent & Medway EVCP Network Deployment – Kent 600

2.11.1 Connected Kerb (partnering with Osprey) won the tender for the Kent & Medway EVCP Network - now known as “Kent 600”. The supplier has carried out a feasibility assessment of all of our 34 car parks that were put forward as part of the procurement (and have included both Capstone and Riverside County Parks as optional extras). 30 suitable sites were selected in consultation with the service and property. We anticipate that Medway will have around 125 chargers available within public car parks by November 2023 as part of a 2-year programme.

2.11.2 All parties have now agreed to take the whole package (charging point numbers, locations and financial projections for Council revenue share) to Procurement Board in October 2021, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for FLS.

2.12 EV Pool Car Pilot

2.12.1 The Business Change Team led on the delivery of the Council’s first EV pool car pilot out of Broadside for Children’s Social Care.

2.12.2 The EVs were delivered to the Children’s Service on 10 November 2020. The

intention was for our International Social Workers to make use of them. Unfortunately, due to COVID and poor uptake from social worker staff, the demand for EVs was not as high as anticipated, with only three vehicles being regularly used for social worker visits.

2.12.3 The Business Change Team have acted swiftly to gain better value from this pilot project. After constructive dialogue between the Business Change Team, the Children's Service and EVision, it was agreed to retain 3 x EVs for Children's Social Workers, but switch out the remaining three vehicles for 2 x Renault Kangoo ZE vans and 1 x Corsa-e – to be used by the Environmental Services Team: and importantly, at no additional cost to the project.

2.12.4 The handover took place on 14th September and both services will have use of the vehicles until the end of the 12-month pilot (10 November 2021). This will be the first pilot for a fully electric van for the Council and will allow colleagues to gain valuable experience driving these vehicles over the remaining months of the pilot before a review of the fleet is undertaken.

2.13 Adult Social Care Transformation and Improvement Programme

2.13.1 From April 2021 a new Transformation and Improvement Programme has been introduced within Adult Social Care. This Programme is being managed using the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) framework and principles. The Programme is implementing systems to routinely analyse demand coming into the service and redesign processes to improve prevention, safeguarding and resilience.

2.13.2 The Business Change Team are overseeing the programme, with the role of Programme Manager being undertaken by a Business Change Manager. The Business Change Team engaged with Adult Social Care staff, via workshops and collaboration on TEAMS, to obtain their thoughts and ideas on improvements and projects to include within the programme. Engagement from the service has been excellent, with some staff commenting that they are pleased to see this review being conducted by the service leadership team and Business Change Team, rather than external consultants.

2.13.3 The key strands for this programme are:

- Improvements to the front door
- Targeted reviews
- Managing demand
- Assistive technologies
- Transitions
- Double handed care

2.13.4 It is anticipated that this programme will save £3m from Adult Social Care in 2022/23 by reducing demand on the service and introducing more efficient and effective processes to improve the client journey through the service.

2.14 Gun Wharf Office Footprint Reduction

- 2.14.1 The Business Change Team have been leading the project to reduce the office footprint at Gun Wharf, by utilising hybrid/flexible working, to create space on Level 2, which will be leased to the Ministry of Justice.
- 2.14.2 This is a complex project with different workstreams such as relocating services, linking with the Re:Fit programme, addressing storage issues, reviewing HR policies, ensuring cover is in place for First Aid and Evacuation chairs, identifying ICT equipment to support a hybrid working model and consider the change of culture required to embed and sustain the changes.
- 2.14.3 Following extensive engagement with services, a plan has been developed to relocate services and vacate the areas identified for the Ministry of Justice by December 2021.

2.15 Reduction of MFDs AT Gun Wharf

- 2.15.1 The Business Change Team have reviewed the number of Multifunctional Devices (MFDs) within Gun Wharf (i.e., the printers, scanners and copiers) and implemented a project to reduce the number of machines from 38 to 13.
- 2.15.2 This is due to a dramatic reduction in printing as a result of previous transformation projects, which was accelerated by Covid. In 2016 almost 10million black and white A4 pages were printed. Since the Transformation Programme has introduced mobile devices, agile working, digital channel shift and Microsoft TEAMS, the Council has seen a steady decline in printing since 2016 with around 4million black and white prints being made in 2019, with further reductions achieved during Covid.
- 2.15.3 This is a reduction of 6million prints per year. If this many A4 sheets were laid out end-to-end they would reach from Gun Wharf, through France and Spain, to Gibraltar (1,782km).
- 2.15.4 The new MFDs have now been installed and are all colour printers to maximise the utilisation of the remaining assets. Work has also commenced with suppliers to investigate the option of implementing controls to reduce the cost of large print jobs by automatically routing them to the print room where larger, more efficient, machines can be used.

2.16 Delivering a full fibre (gigabit) network in Medway

- 2.16.1 CityFibre is making significant progress on its £40m investment to transform Medway into one of the world's best digitally connected regions, with construction ramping up in areas including Rainham South, Rainham Central and Watling. Construction is being delivered by the infrastructure service provider Lanes-i on behalf of CityFibre. The team is using a range of construction methods while working in close partnership with Medway Council

and local communities to deliver a fast rollout and minimise potential disruption.

2.16.2 The build project is also supporting jobs in Medway, with local residents making up 65 per cent of the 80-strong Lanes-i team. The project is regularly monitored by the Head of Highways and the Smart Cities Project Officer (SCPO) within the Business Change Team.

2.17 Children's safeguarding and QA

2.17.1 The Business Change team is supporting the Safeguarding and QA service with a review of the service following the implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model and a significant reduction in the number of Child Protection (CP) conferences.

2.17.2 Following a workshop with the Meeting Support Officers (MSOs) and management team, the Business Change team undertook interviews, observations and analysis of support needs with MSOs, CP Chairs and the IRO manager. This informed a recommendation to review the MSO structure to increase resilience and flexibility within the team (as suggested by the MSOs themselves). The re-organisation delivered savings of approximately £68k via a reduction of FTE through the streamlining of processes, adopting better practice with corporate systems, and embedding a more collaborative way of working through behavioural change and hybrid meetings.

2.17.3 This project called on the resources of the diverse elements of the Business Change team: Organisational Change, Finance, Business Analysis, Change Management, Smart solutions, and Behavioural Change. This particular project is a great example of how one part of the Business Change Team entered a service to carry out the discovery phase and then pulled in the various expertise from within the team to implement a holistic review of the service.

2.18 Assessment Unit: Old Vicarage / Eden House

2.18.1 The Business Change Team has assisted Children's Partnership Commissioning with the project management of this initiative to establish a short-term children's residential Assessment Unit at the Old Vicarage. £1.65m was added to the Council's Capital Programme to deliver the project, which will address high-risk, high-cost, bespoke placements to deliver better outcomes for children, deliver savings and avoid future costs.

2.18.2 A tendering process awarded the contract to Five Rivers. Refurbishment of the Old Vicarage is now complete, and the contract is being finalised. The Assessment Unit, based at the Old Vicarage, will be named Eden House, and this will be the name of the service going forward. The provider reports that a Registered Manager has now been recruited and their application for Ofsted registration will be submitted shortly. Depending on the registration process (and Ofsted backlog), the aim is to have young people on site from

October/November 2021. As the home is unable to function as such until registration is granted, alternative options for the team are being explored, such as outreach with young people. An information session has been held for internal partners, and the next stage will be the communication of the referral process.

2.18.3 An Open Day is planned at Eden House in October for key stakeholders to view the refurbishment and understand the ethos of the new service. The second phase of the project will examine the potential for a second property, based on outcomes and learning points from the first phase. However, work is already under way to evaluate the suitability of existing Council properties.

2.19 Leadership for Change Programme

2.19.1 The Business Change Team developed the Leadership for Change programme, which supports Transformation by creating more effective and efficient managers who can lead their teams confidently. The first wave of managers from Children's Social Care and Adults' Social Care has now been completed and feedback has been collated through post-programme surveys, individual and group feedback. This feedback provided insight into how effective the programme has been in improving managers' confidence and team performance (raised as concerns in previous inspections and peer reviews).

2.19.2 In summary, participants stated that:

- They had grown in confidence as managers and leaders
- They had benefited from peer-to-peer support through Resilience Circles and were likely to continue using these platforms
- Their knowledge improved by learning with managers from other divisions (Children or Adults in this instance)
- They felt confident enough to grant more autonomy to their teams, delegating and coaching, rather than 'leaning in' to do things themselves
- They valued the strategies and tools presented in the programme and will continue to use them

2.19.3 The Leadership for Change programme will now be progressed by HR to roll it out to the rest of the organisation.

2.20 Facet5 Personality Profiling

2.20.1 Five members of the Business Change Team have successfully achieved Facet5 and TeamScope accreditation. This enables the team to conduct individual feedback sessions on Facet5 profiles, but also to map the profiles of an entire team within a TeamScope session to show collective strengths/risks and prepare action plans to address areas of risk.

2.20.2 The Business Change Team have carried out TeamScope sessions with the Corporate Management Team, Finance & Business Improvement

Management Team, and RCE Directorate Management Team, with more teams planned to be covered in the coming months. The sessions have been well received and have provided teams the opportunity to reflect on areas such as decision making, problem solving and dispute resolution – with a particular focus on addressing any potential weaknesses within the teams to improve performance.

2.21 Children's Admin Review (Broadside teams)

2.21.1 A review of Children's Administrative Support was undertaken by the Business Change team to strengthen and realign resource to support Social Workers. The consultation resulted in the proposed structure being amended and the new structure was implemented on 1 February 2021. There were no redundancies from this reorganisation and the structure provides a robust solution as roles across all grades in Business Administration have been reviewed and redesigned to focus only on administrative duties, in line with realigned job roles and teams in Children's Social Care.

2.21.2 This has provided the required resilience within the teams and supports social workers to focus on providing good outcomes for children.

2.22 Fostering Panels

2.22.1 The use of MS Teams has enabled Fostering and Adoption panels to continue meeting throughout the Covid19 pandemic. The Business Change Team has worked with ICT to develop and test secure document sharing functionality within MS Teams, whereby Panel members are able to read case documents within a secure area without downloading them to a personal device.

2.22.2 Business Change has worked extensively with the Fostering team, and individual panel members, to resolve issues and train users. The remaining difficulty in Mac users accessing pdf documents has now been resolved. Now that this final issue has been addressed, the use of hard copies for the Fostering panel (apart from for one member who has accessibility issues) can be completely removed, improving security and reducing copying, collation time and waste. The Business Change Team have monitored the reduction in print, post and collation to calculate and capture the savings from this project in the 2022/23 budget build.

2.23 Culture Service Review

2.23.1 The Business Change Team have carried out a review of the Culture Service to realign the teams into the service's four main areas of work going forward:

- Theatres & Venues
- Events & Film
- Culture Development
- Libraries, Community Hubs and Archives
(not included in the scope of the reorganisation)

2.23.2 Following a formal consultation and selection process the new structure was implemented with effect from 14 December 2020 and achieved a £40k revenue budget saving to address a budget pressure within the service.

2.24 Review of HR Services

2.24.1 The Business Change team worked closely with the Head of HR and Head of Finance Operations on a review of the HR, Payroll and Systems teams. This re-organisation has been incredibly complex due to the wide variety of roles and responsibilities across HR and Payroll.

The review has:

- Addressed the historic financial pressure in HR & Payroll of £372k
- Gathered valuable feedback from staff during the extensive consultation process
- Realigned teams to better support Council staff
- Identified key improvements required to the HR & Payroll system to support the new structure
- Highlighted the need for fixed-term posts (funded from capital) to achieve the revenue savings immediately whilst work on the systems and processes are carried out to fully transition to the new structure & ways of working

2.24.2 The final structure was confirmed to staff before Christmas 2020 and was implemented in April 2021 after an extensive recruitment and selection process.

2.25 Corporate Performance & Intelligence Hub Review

2.25.1 Given the changes to the responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer in early 2020 there was an opportunity to rationalise the staffing structure for the Corporate Performance Hub and RCE Business Intelligence Team.

2.25.2 The Business Change Team worked with the Head of Performance & Intelligence and the Head of Finance Strategy on a re-organisation that aligns the work of these teams. The net effect of this review was cost neutral within the BSD directorate, but the new structure provides a more robust and focussed team. The new structure was successfully implemented in January 2021.

b) Digital update

2.26 In the past year, [Medway.gov.uk](https://www.medway.gov.uk) has continued to see a huge increase in the number of visitors to the site, particularly compared with the same time last year.

2.26.1 For example, between 28 September 2020 to 27 September 2021, there were 21,456,122 page views, compared with 15,698,611 in the same period the year before. That's an increase in site traffic of more than 36%.

2.26.2 The top 5 most popular pages on the site (28 September 2020 to 27 September 2021) were:

| Page | Total page views |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Medway.gov homepage | 725,730 |
| Coronavirus (COVID-19) homepage | 469,789 |
| Book a vehicle into a household waste and recycling centre | 450,859 |
| Waste and recycling homepage | 187,217 |
| How to get a symptom free test | 184,681 |

2.27 Covid recovery and Customer Ready cell

2.27.1 The Digital team was part of the council's Covid Tactical Command Group and worked with colleagues to keep Medway.gov.uk up to date and accurate.

2.27.2 The Digital team led a 'Customer Ready' cell with CABs colleagues as part of the Recovery phase, responsible for coordinating timely information from colleagues to be made available online/phone lines as part of the government's roadmap out of lockdown.

2.27.3 Feedback from customers about the website has been very positive:
"Always up to date! Thanks"

"I found this page so easy to use and I wouldn't alter it at all. THANK YOU to Medway Council for the way they have handled this dreadful covid pandemic. Well done"

"Excellent page, excellent services. Many thanks"

"It is so simple to use so it needs no improvement"

The top 5 most popular coronavirus pages (28 September 2020 to 27 September 2021) were

| Page | Total page views |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Coronavirus homepage | 469,789 |
| Coronavirus symptom free testing | 148,440 |
| How to get a symptom-free test | 140,681 |
| Coronavirus symptom-free testing | 114,886 |
| Coronavirus business support | 67,794 |

2.28 New online services

2.28.1 During the past year, the Digital team has continued to build a range of new online services (transactions such as apply/report/request) to support customers to transact with the council online.

2.28.2 Recent new online services include:

2.28.3 Apply for a business support grant, including Additional Restrictions Grants (ARG).

Following a number of government grants implemented last year, the Digital team has continued to support businesses by developing two new grant schemes - [Additional Restriction Support Grants \(ARG\) for skills and employability](#), and [ARG for tourism, creative and wedding sectors](#).

2. 28.4 Payments online (removing ICON)

To support the decommissioning of an older system and move to the council's payment system, the Digital team and ICT team have now built and made live more than 105 staff payments and 10 public facing payments.

2.28.5 A new payment viewer also enables staff to more easily check and track payments.

2. 28.6 Request information online (FOIs and SARs)

The Digital Team has been working with Information Governance colleagues to improve the process of Freedom of Information and Subject Access requests.

2. 28.7 The teams have updated the [Publication Scheme](#), to help customers find council information without needing to submit an FOI.

2. 28.8 For those who still want to, the team has made live a new online form for [requesting information from the council](#). This provides colleagues with structured information on which to act, which has improved the quality of data received. It replaces the emails previously received which generated a lot of customer interaction.

2.28.9 Next, the teams are designing a back-office workflow to handle requests in a more automated and streamlined way, and replacing the existing case management system.

2.29 Apply/renew/replace and pay for a Medway Youth Pass

2.29.1 Customers can now [apply for, renew or replace a Medway Youth Pass online](#), adding to the suite of online bus pass applications already available. Previously, applications were paper based, and customers had to call the council to pay.

2.29.2 Customers can also get help to apply online via the phone or at a community hub if necessary. Applications are collated and reviewed within the system, reducing the need for rekeying information, handling paper applications and scanning.

2.29.3 In the first 10 weeks, 97% of applications were made online.

2.30 Pay for your interpreter booking

2.30.1 Since 19 April, the Community Interpreting Service now takes payments upfront for interpreting bookings made by customers such as solicitors.

2.30.2 Previously, customers were invoiced after they had booked a service. Now, everyone must pay up front or risk having their appointment cancelled.

2.30.3 In the first 10 weeks, 88% of payments were made online. The other 12% were cancelled appointments.

2.30.4 Interpreting colleagues have given great feedback about the new online service and the removal of the need to chase outstanding debt.

2.30.5 Some other online services created this year:

- Report an adult safeguarding concern
- Apply for heritage action zone funding
- Apply and pay for various parking services (and supporting the roll out of ANPR)
- Apply and pay for a passport to leisure
- Request some breathing space (debt respite)

2.31 Improvements to Medway.gov.uk

2.31.1 Below are two examples of ways in which the Digital team has worked with subject matter experts to improve Medway.gov.uk.

2.31.2 Adult social care front door programme

The Digital team has been supporting the Adult social care front door programme to:

- reduce calls
- free up professionals' time
- offer customers the right tools and information to help themselves
- help customers find what they're searching for online

2.31.3 Working with subject matter experts in Adult Social Care, the Digital team has completed a review of all content on the adult social care pages on Medway.gov.uk and implemented improvements. Information is more up-to-date and plain English with more cross links to relevant tools (e.g., Ask Sara) and information.

2.31.4 The search results have been improved and a new online directory built, enabling customers to find details of products and services they can source privately.

2.31.5 The team has also built a new online form for reporting an adult safeguarding concern. This has received positive feedback from both colleagues and partner organisations as it is a much simpler process to follow.

2.31.6 The changes were presented to the programme board on 26 August and were well received.

2.32 Fostering web presence

2.32.1 The Digital team is working with Fostering team colleagues to deliver an improved online offer.

2.32.2 Following a very informative discovery phase with existing foster carers and social workers, the Fostering and Digital teams are designing new templates to reflect the fostering brand, with improved customer-focussed content to meet the service's priority objectives.

2.32.3 This presence will support recent changes to pay and benefits, in a bid to recruit more foster carers to work for Medway.

2.32.4 The section will be live by November.

2.33 New websites

2.33.1 The remit of the Digital team remains to provide a great customer experience online, while supporting colleagues with their online ambitions and making best use of existing digital solutions.

2.33.2 To that end, the team has worked with colleagues to produce several new websites this year, within the corporate website system.

2.34 The Rochester Corn Exchange

2.34.1 The Digital team was commissioned to create a new online presence for the newly refurbished [Rochester Corn Exchange](#).

2.34.2 With a different audience to Medway.gov.uk, the team created a new website but in the corporate website system.

2.34.3 The new site promotes Rochester, the local history and the Corn Exchange as a venue for weddings, parties and business events, with a simple contact form for people to get in touch.

2.35 Medway Adult Education

2.35.1 The Digital team was commissioned by Medway Adult Education colleagues to build a new online presence for the service.

2.35.2 The aims were to create a more visually appealing site to promote courses and increase take up.

2.35.3 [The new site](#) includes more useful information about the courses on offer, on a mobile-responsive platform, with a design which ties into the service's branding.

2.35.4 The site went live in the last week of September and its performance is currently being monitored.

2.36 Other Digital projects

2.36.1 Accessibility

2.36.2 In September 2020, new accessibility regulations came into force which mean public sector organisations have a legal duty to make sure their websites and mobile applications are accessible to all.

2.36.3 Colleagues who run websites on behalf of the council are aware of the regulations and their obligations.

2.36.4 The Digital team, responsible for Medway.gov.uk, continues to work hard to ensure the council's primary customer contact channel remains as accessible as possible.

2.36.5 Medway.gov.uk was ranked in the top quarter of council websites for its compliance to legal obligations including accessibility. In Q1 Medway Council climbed 22 places to 101 in the UK Local Government Digital Compliance INDEX.

2.36.6 The Digital team is organising training for the whole council to ensure everyone understands their responsibilities on accessibility.

2.36.7 An internal audit on accessibility in Q3 will also highlight how the organisation might further respond to the regulations.

2.37 Digital Service Standards and Digital Showcase

- 2.37.1 To support the growing digital culture at the council and maintain high standards, the Digital team has updated [the Digital Service Standards](#).
- 2.37.2 These standards apply to all colleagues looking to create an online presence for their service. They are available to colleagues and partner agencies we've commissioned.
- 2.37.3 The standards cover any digital solution (e.g. website, app, chat or system) and apply to written online content, design, forms and functionality.
- 2.37.4 These standards follow best practice and have been approved by CMT.

3. Council Plan and Service Improvement

- 3.1 The Council Plan forms part of the Council's Policy Framework and approval of the Council Plan is therefore a matter for Full Council, following consideration by the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.
- 3.2 A new overarching Council Strategy was introduced in 20/21, following a review of the corporate reporting timetable involving the Council's key strategies and plans. The overarching Council Strategy sets out the Council's vision and is more outcomes focused document than the Council Plan, without all the detailed performance measures and delivery plans explaining how the strategic objectives are to be met. The overarching Council Strategy is supported by detailed performance measures and delivery plans which continue to be included in the Council Plan.
- 3.3 At Full Council on 18 February 2021, it was agreed to produce a short-term Council Strategy and Council Plan for 21/22, to focus on the recovery from Covid-19. The Council Strategy and Plan for 22/23 will be considered by Cabinet and Full Council in February 2022. A more fundamental review of the Council's Strategy and Plan is to take place for 23/27.
- 3.4 Presenting performance, finance and risk monitoring together is intended to support informed decision making. In June 2019, the Cabinet agreed that the Strategic Risk Register will be reviewed on a quarterly basis and presented alongside the Council Plan Performance Monitoring and that each Overview and Scrutiny committee will be presented with performance and risk monitoring pertaining to the committee's areas of responsibility.

4. Customer and Business Support (CABS)

- 4.1 Customer and Business Support (CABS), launched in October 2018, replaces the two services previously known as Business and Administration Support Service (BASS) and Customer Contact. This report refers only to activities

aligned to the former BASS, as previously defined. CABS provides a professional customer and administration support function across the council, serving approximately three quarters of council services. CABS incorporates the Customer Relations Team (CRT) which coordinates responses to complaints and champions the learning that can be distilled from complaints, across every council service. Although Blue Badges are mentioned as part of the administration portfolio, CABS owns this service end to end.

- 4.2 Administration is operated as a shared service, where staff resource is flexed to match the peaks and troughs of the council's business needs. This agile approach is facilitated by cross-training and has the benefit of increasing overall resilience across the council. Staff are also able to provide generic business support functions and use the council's CRM (customer relationship management system) 'Lagan' and a broad range of other back-office council systems.
- 4.3 The majority of officers in the CABS service have continued to work at home, to effectively maintain service delivery through, and beyond, Covid-19 restrictions. This service has been valued by both internal and external customers. For example, the service has provided digital assistance to customers to complete online forms and used Microsoft (MS) Teams for conducting panel hearings for Social Care complaints, and for meeting minute-taking generally. Some administration tasks, such as scanning and printing, still require an office presence, and CABS continues to support this, adapting to help keep the council open for business. Good management contact has been maintained and these working arrangements have not adversely impacted on performance.
- 4.4 The CABS ethos continues to be one of continuous process improvement, transformation and support for the digital agenda, to give customers more modern and streamlined ways of doing business. Online forms are used wherever possible, alongside traditional service request methods; as an example, close to 60% of customer complaints are submitted through the digital channel. Mindful that some residents may not have access to digital media, CABS offers a 'digital assist' service, supporting customers applying for a Blue Badge or Bus Pass where they are unable to use online forms themselves. The service has recently assimilated a new phone system, which will assist call management, and open potential opportunities for multi-channel customer interaction and the launch of a new or improved CRM.
- 4.5 CABS owns and manages the authority's Blue Badge service, receiving around 550 applications per month. The online application process in the Jadu system is popular with customers, as they are automatically kept up to date as their application moves through the various stages of assessment. For those who feel unable use the online facility, CABS officers can complete an application over the telephone with the customer.
- 4.6 CABS is responsible for assessing and processing Blue Badge applications promptly and efficiently, but completion time will vary according to the volume

and complexity of applications. Existing Blue Badge holders can apply up to 14 weeks before the expiry date of their current badge. This lead-in offers sufficient time for customers to gather and supply documentary evidence. Identity and eligibility checks are undertaken by CABS officers and applications from customers with complex conditions are subject to further assessment by CABS Expert Assessors. Eligibility can sometimes be established by the Expert Assessors using “desk-based” assessment methods, while others require a face-to-face assessment with the customer to correctly establish eligibility.

- 4.7 Both the council and government websites advise that it can take around 12 weeks to decide eligibility. During the first six months of 2021-2022 CABS received 3,359 Blue Badge applications, and 61% of them were assessed and processed end to end within 30 working days (six calendar weeks) of the application being received.
- 4.8 CABS has continued to support the council’s apprenticeship programme; promoting three apprentices to permanent officer posts in Spring 2021 and recruiting a new cohort of four apprentices over the summer of 2021. CABS has adopted the best practice of working with the Apprenticeship Academy to support apprentices

5. Complaints Policy and Management

- 5.1 The Customer Relations Team (CRT) provides a professional complaints management and reporting service, and supports complaint handlers across the authority, placing an important focus on learning from complaints in order to improve service delivery. The CRT acts as the interface with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and as guardian of complaint response thoroughness and timeliness.
- 5.2 The full impact of Covid-19 on complaint handling is not yet fully understood, and the LGSCO has committed to release a report later this year clarify this. In Medway, complaint investigations and responses continued uninterrupted, as colleagues adapted quickly to working from home and working in different ways, for example, by using technology such as MS Teams for independent complaint investigations and statutory social care complaint panels. Despite such challenges, complaints performance remained positive in all areas.
- 5.3 The Customer Relations Manager adapted the delivery of Customer Complaint training, which ran successfully via MS Teams, and continues to do so. Similarly, this applied to the well-attended Complaint Handlers Groups, where there is an opportunity to review complaints performance and trends, share learning and develop complaint handling skills.
- 5.4 In consultation with the Complaint Handlers Group and Service Managers, the council’s website was updated so that pages which offer information and access to the complaints process also now helpfully direct customers to a range of options, for example, to raise a service request.

- 5.5 Popularity for using the council's online form continued to grow and in 2020-21 59% of customers chose to use this fast and efficient method to raise their complaint. Options remain available for those who prefer an alternative method or who require support to make a complaint.
- 5.6 The 2020-21 annual report identified that complaint volumes fell considerably, and this is likely to have been the impact of Covid-19. At the same time compliments increased and 497 corporate compliments were recorded for the year, more than double that of the previous year. Waste Services and CABS were the areas receiving the highest volume of compliments, but there were also several compliments for council as a whole, thanking the authority for continuing to deliver services and for providing support during the pandemic.
- 5.7 Performance for stage one corporate complaints reduced by 4.3 percentage points compared to the previous year, but still achieved 88.6%, far exceeding the council's 10-day response target of 80%. Year to date performance, at the end of August 2021 is 88.0%
- 5.8 Performance for responding to the more complex stage two corporate complaints within 15 working days also reduced by 1.9 percentage points compared to the previous year, but achieved 79.8%, again exceeding the council's target of 75%. Year to date performance, at the end of August 2021, is 84.1%
- 5.9 Performance also improved in both Children's and Adult's social care complaints, with Children's Social Care achieving 91.4% and Adult Social Care achieving 83.3%, both far exceeding the council's target of 75%.
- 5.10 Performance reports are shared each month with Service Managers and Assistant Directors, and quarterly and annual analysis reports highlight issues that are raised from complaints so that services can learn and make improvements. Assistant Directors actively discuss the findings of these reports with their Service Managers to disseminate the messages and embed learning within services. The Complaint Handlers Group is also a successful channel to share learning from Ombudsman findings.
- 5.11 The CRT have continued to closely monitor the rate by which complaints escalate to stage two, and the reasons for this. These findings are included in the quarterly and annual reports, and discussed at Complaint Handlers Groups
- 5.12 The top three reasons for escalation during 2020-21 have continued to be:
- Challenging the council's decision
 - Stage one complaint did not fully address the response
 - Promised actions were not carried out at stage one
- 5.13 The CRT continue to embed the message through reporting, at Complaint Handler Groups and through internal Customer Complaint training, that positive actions at stage one may help to reduce the likelihood of complaints being referred upwards. Such recommendations include conducting thorough

investigations, including a root cause analysis, ensuring that all points are carefully considered and that responses are supported with evidence, and that complaint remedies are delivered promptly and monitored for completion.

5.14 In July 2021 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman released its annual report, and an analysis of its findings was presented to the CMT on 6 October 2021. This analysis highlighted that referrals to the Ombudsman had significantly declined, as might be expected due to the Ombudsman pausing activity for three months in the early part of 2020 due to Covid-19. The Ombudsman found fault in only seven complaints, compared to 11 in the previous year.

5.15 The Ombudsman updated their guidance on complaint handling and the children's statutory complaints process and emphasised the importance of learning from a single complaint. These areas of learning will be explored at future Complaint Handler Groups.

6. HR

6.1 The HR team are responsible for Employee Relations, Recruitment, Learning and Development, external support to schools, Teacher Partnership, Medway College of Social Care, and the Apprenticeship Academy. Since April 2021 we have also become responsible for Payroll, Leadership Academy, Employee Engagement and our people systems team, Resourcelink.

HR priorities and main programme update:

6.2 Employee engagement

6.2.1 Involving employees in decisions that affect their work and the wider organisation is paramount to keeping employees motivated and more agreeable to change. During the pandemic and now into recovery the pace of change and our ways of working (Hybrid model) it has been significant, and HR have sought to give employees a voice through a number of different mechanisms including:

- 2 all-staff surveys about new working arrangements and employee wellbeing.
- Re-launch of the Medway Maker engagement champions network; giving employees up to date information about organisation-wide change, plans and progress and providing a process to enable employees to feed back to CMT through Sam Beck-Farley, Head of HR Services;
- Supporting engagement within services – i.e. giving advice and guidance to teams and managers on keeping in touch following the pandemic (taking into account new ways of working); and assisting managers with engagement to inform their work force planning needs.

6.3 Internal communications

6.3.1 Following the HR restructure, there is now a clear link between HR Services and the Internal Communications provision situated in the Communications and Marketing Team through a shared funding arrangement. With our hybrid working becoming a normal feature of our ways of working for many, and staff working at a distance, effective communication and engagement is of the utmost importance. It is therefore essential the teams work closely together to find ways to engage that reach those who are working in the office, at home or elsewhere.

6.3.2 The link between the two teams has proven invaluable in terms of disseminating essential information to all staff, irrespective as to where they are working.

This joint working has enabled us to successfully:

- create the *HR newsroundup* a new monthly staff newsletter with provision for staff to comment on articles and give their views;
- maintain a MEDSPACE resource to include up to date information on Covid recovery, advice and contacts etc;
- ensure urgent messaging is sent to all staff promptly to ensure they remain supported, safe and able to continue their work;
- create an employee benefit MEDSPACE hub with all the benefits available to staff in one place;
- promote new policy, employment benefits, HR initiatives, changes in HR personnel and more on MEDSPACE news and in the weekly MEDSPACE news roundup;
- increase awareness of the employee equality forums and other support networks giving staff more opportunities for support and to have a voice in matters that affect them or their work;
- maintain the MEDSPACE wellbeing hub, during Covid-19 and recovery, including carefirst webinars.

6.3.3 Plans are currently ongoing for a refreshed MEDSPACE HR homepage and various engagement activities to involve staff such as an online Remembrance Service and various Christmas activities.

6.4 Employee benefits

6.4.1 Employee benefits are part of the council overall total remuneration package and are an important factor for both recruitment and retention. The council has a varied selection of employee benefits ranging from a salary sacrifice lease car scheme to shopping discount schemes to the generous Local Government Pension Scheme and flexible working, the more4U scheme has been relaunched and published heavily.

6.4.2 The team are continually looking to enhance our employee benefit provision and are currently in liaison with different sources to do so. They are also keen to promote the benefits more widely both internally to the workforce and externally to prospective new starters. One new way of doing this is through the development of our 'People Promise' or Employee Value Proposition (see below).

6.5 Employee Value Proposition (EVP) – Our People Promise

6.5.1 Our People Promise is a new publication that sets out what the council, as an employer, commits to offer its employees:

- both explicitly within employment contracts (such as pay and conditions),
- but more so in what we offer as our part of our psychological contract. This being an individual's expectations from an employer and how that may affect their decision in choosing to work for us over another employer) – e.g., our culture, a supportive environment, flexibility, a sense of purpose, meaningful work close to home, inclusive workplace, induction, learning and development and career opportunities etc

6.5.2 In developing our People Promise we want to ensure we offer what we deliver to make certain there is little gap in expectations ultimately leading to dissatisfaction and employees leaving. To do this, we engaged with the Medway Makers, HR colleagues and looked at exit information and employee survey data to create a true picture of why people stay/like to work at the council. Our People Promise will also support the HR Strategy going forward and may change if strategic direction changes in the future.

6.5.3 Our People Promise is now in its final stages and will shortly be shared with CMT and Employment Matters Committee for approval.

6.6 Inclusion and diversity

6.6.1 Having an inclusive workforce is a goal we strive for. Not only to enable the elimination of discrimination, bullying and harassment in the workplace – leading to unlimited costs at an employment tribunal - but to enable all staff to feel comfortable to be themselves at work without fear. What's more, a diverse and inclusive workplace enables creativity and innovation to flourish (one of the council's Core Values).

6.6.2 Our commitment to an inclusive workforce is shown through several ways including the establishment of the Equality Working Group (Chaired by the Chief Executive) diversity checked employment policy and processes, learning and development, fair recruitment processes and more.

6.6.3 We are also keen to provide additional support to minority groups and in do so have set up the following equality employee networks for staff to attend during work time.

- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Questioning (LGBTQ+) Forum
- BAME Forum (Black and Minority Ethnic)
- Disabled Workers and Carers Network
- Gender Equality Forum

6.6.4 The forums meet regularly to support each other and also to give their views on new policy, and processes both employment focussed and within services etc.

6.6.5 We also offer support from the Workplace Chaplaincy, Rev Martyn Saunders (Leader of St John's, Chatham) - have a room for quiet contemplation at Gun Wharf and are working with Rev Saunders to promote the support he can offer for staff.

6.7 Make a Difference Awards

6.7.1 Employee recognition is key to a motivated workforce and goes hand in hand with other engagement processes.

6.7.2 In addition to day-to-day recognition from their managers, the organisation values the opportunity to reward excellence and commitment through the annual Make A Difference Awards. This is now the 7th year of the Awards and is a highlight of the council year. The 2021 awards are particularly poignant as they will be mostly focussing on the incredible achievements staff made during the pandemic. With over 400 nomination this year it is evident that the Make a Difference Awards are a valued part of council life.

7 Children's Improvement Journey

7.1 Our overall vacancy rate for social workers and team managers in April 2021 was 17.40% (43 posts) compared to 40.10% (90fte) in April 2020. From June onwards this has started to increase, and as at September 2021 we have a vacancy rate of 22% (52 posts).

7.2 We have used information from exit interviews to better understand why staff choose to leave and are using this information in our recruitment initiatives. Exit surveys have identified four contributing factors, pay, workload (not necessarily the number of cases), hours/work patterns and career development. The positive feedback is that the majority of staff who leave would recommend Medway to other colleagues and may return to Medway in the future.

7.3 We have used social media and professional publications to promote the employee value proposition alongside Medway as a place to live and work.

7.4 Benchmarking data continues to be undertaken on a quarterly basis and work is being undertaken to consider Medway's total reward in terms of recruitment and retention.

- 7.5 Staff have reported that the complexity of cases has increased significantly since Covid. In addition, the requirement to work from home during Covid has led to a number of practice changes and staff feeling overwhelmed. We have recognised the impact of Covid restrictions on our staff's mental health and wellbeing, and have a weekly well-being group, run by our Principal Social Worker, to support all staff and managers.
- 7.6 Nationally the demand for experienced social workers remains highly competitive with many local authorities competing for the same group of employees.
- 7.7 Skills shortages and lack of relevant experience is frequently reported across the children's social work sector. Through developing talent internally, including upskilling existing employees we can contribute further towards the retention of our workforce. To support this a staff survey has recently been sent to the whole of Children's Services to begin gathering this data. In addition, the Principal Social Worker is holding 'Stay' interviews to identify what we do well and what we can do more of.
- 7.8 Due to recruitment concerns we have taken in house responsibility for locum recruitment in the Social Work Team (CSWT), Assessment Team and Children in Care Team. This remains under review until December.

8 Recruitment and attraction

- 8.1 Working with JobsGoPublic ('JGP') who are our online Applicant Tracking System provider, we continue to improve the system and review the user journey. We have seen success in some areas by taking advantage of a £2000 free advertising platform, which allows us to be more creative in our reach.

8.2 Apprenticeship Academy

- 8.2.1 The Council's Apprenticeship Academy continues to flourish, and our statistics continue to impress, and we are one of very few local authorities to have met the challenging Public Sector Target of 2.3% every year, since its introduction in 2017. 6.5.3 In 2020-21 we recorded 61 new apprenticeship programme starts, equivalent to 2.33% giving us a 3.11% headcount of staff undertaking apprenticeship programmes (apprentices in apprenticeship posts as well as existing staff being upskilled). We managed to achieve this despite facing a global pandemic.
- 8.2.2 Apprenticeship programmes now being undertaken within the authority range from Level 2 to Level 7 (Masters' Degree) and are training people for some of our hardest to recruit to professions i.e., Social Worker, Occupational Therapist and Chartered Surveyor. The age range of our apprentices directly demonstrates the versatility of our apprenticeship provision too, with our youngest apprentice being 16 years old and our oldest being 28 years old. We are keen to support diversity and inclusion and 11.3% of our apprentices (in

apprenticeship posts) declared a disability. We also strongly support the social mobility of young people within Medway and 19% of our apprentices (in apprenticeship posts) reside in the four wards, recognised as Medway's most deprived.

- 8.2.3 Since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017 we have commenced in excess of 400 apprenticeship programmes, at a cost of over £2.2m. We are one of the only large local authorities to be fully utilising all our Levy funds for the benefit of the organisation; effecting large savings against training budgets which previously paid for qualifications i.e., Leadership & Management, AAT, CIPD, CiLEX; and ensuring no clawback of unspent funds by the Government.
- 8.2.4 Since the UK government announced a full national lockdown on 23rd March 2020, HR Services has worked very hard across all discipline to provide additional support and guidance to the organisation as well as continuing to operate a business as usual service. We have ensured the continued success of the Apprenticeship Academy by adapting our services to be delivered virtually, e.g., virtual apprentice forums and regular check in emails. Now we have started to return to a sense of normality we will be hosting a Welcome Back Event for our apprentices, this event is to enable everyone to meet in person and let our apprentices have their say in what events and activities they would like to see the Apprenticeship Academy run in the future.

8.3 Kickstart

- 8.3.1 The team continue to take the lead to coordinate the Council's bid for the Government's Kickstart project initiative and provide 16-24-year olds with six-month job placements. During the period February -September we have placed 39 people, with 4 moving onto permanent employment. As a result of the success from the first round of placements managers have requested a further 14 new placements – New bid has been placed and we are awaiting outcome.
- 8.3.2 Utilising the current development programme offered via our Apprenticeship Academy and, working with our Adult Education team, we have been able to include an enhanced offer to young people on the programme within our programme bid; i.e. functional skills qualifications in English and Maths, interview skills and cv writing training sessions.
- 8.3.3 Progression so far:
- The first 22 placement were invited to attend an online employability skills training which included a Level 2 Award in Employability Skills qualification. The content of their employability training included Mind set (a mandatory unit), and problem solving and working a team.
 - 18 of which completed the course and their work is being moderated by the awarding body later this month.

- The remaining 12 kickstarts will be joining an inhouse employability training course at Gillingham Adult Education Centre in November
- Only 2 kickstarts were employed without their Level 2 English and/or maths qualifications. These employees have/are been progressed onto courses to support their skills development.

8.4 Baseline Personnel Security Standards Project

- 8.4.1 The Employee Authentication Service (EAS-R) audit uncovered widespread non-compliance of LAs undertaking the necessary Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) checks.
- 8.4.2 In line with Cabinet Office guidance, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Local Authorities (LAs) highlights that LAs must implement the Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) checks prior to users obtaining access to DWP and HM Revenues & Customs (HMRC) data. This MoU requirement has been in place since 2011.
- 8.4.3 Lack of compliance with this BPSS requirement has serious implications for DWP in relation to the continued sharing of data with us. They have however realised that removing access immediately would have a detrimental impact on our ability to deliver benefits and initiatives that data sharing supports.
- 8.4.4 The team are continuing to work through the guidance on compliances and have until the 12 April 2022 to take remedial action

8.5 Flexible Working Contracts

- 8.5.1 Due to our recent move to hybrid working several contractual changes need to be considered, this work is in its infancy and is supported by HR policy.

8.6 Recruitment activity

- 8.6.1 Activity since April 2021
- Offer made across the council in excess of 300
 - Jobs approved 208 (Excluding kick start, blanket approval, apprentice, employability points scheme and vacancies left over because of Business Change activities)
 - DBS processed 1561
 - Acting up and Additional Duties processed 46

9 HR Support To Schools

- 9.1 HR has continued to support the Local Authority/Schools/Trade Union forum, offering full support to the chair, the Assistant Director - Education and SEND. This forum helped co-ordinate the leadership response during covid19 and continued to promote best practice in employer/employee relationships by providing open and constructive dialogue, tackling key and strategic issues

and minimising the risk of dispute. The forum was joined by Public Health representation to ensure the timely introjection of local information on covid to inform dialogue and improve knowledge of the key issues facing Medway school leaders.

9.2 In May 2021, the HR schools team was absorbed into the HR Employee Relations Team as part of the HR restructure. The role of HR Business Partner for Schools was deleted to realise savings which were fundamental to ensuring a break-even budget, given the continuing reduction in the number of schools buying back services from the local authority.

9.3 Schools Contract Project

9.3.1 Early Careers and Keeping Children Safe in Education Guidance released a new legislation, this means new contracts need to be issued for all of our schools.

10 Employee Relations

10.1 The Employee Relations team have continued to be at the forefront in providing professional HR advice to Medway Council during the response phase of the covid-19 pandemic and then adapted to the everchanging circumstances in the recovery period, keeping the organisation up-to-date and with workable solutions in relation to the ever-changing guidance which has enabled staff to continue to operate effectively.

10.2 Restructure and improved services

10.2.1 The ER team have themselves have been through transformation change as part of the wider HR Services restructure which has resulted in 4 out of 5 of the HR Consultant roles occupied with new employees. We have brought the Schools HR service under the ER team to provide resilience. We have introduced 2 new roles of HR Investigation Officer and HR Policy Manager. These roles will support the continued transformation by ensuring those undertaking HR related investigations are trained and have tools to support them resulting in quality management reports and that we have policies fit for purpose, the new Speak Up policy an example of this.

10.2.2 The team continue assisting managers with staff issues by coaching and guiding them on complex cases but also proactively providing bespoke training to enable them to manage their people on a day-to-day basis. We have explored HR case management systems available and have identified a system that we are planning to introduce. This will better able us to understand patterns and trends in employee relations issues so that we can enhance our ability to provide proactive support and solutions to the teams in the Council.

10.2.3 We have continued to provide regular and up-to-date communications through our HR Monthly newsletter and have been on hand to answer staff queries through our HR Advice service. We are working with ICT colleagues to

understand further how we can further utilise the functionality for automation and ensure a user experience is smooth and responsive. We have continued to work closely with our Trade Union colleagues and listened to the concerns that are being raised on behalf of our employees and taking onboard their ideas and suggestions when implementing solutions.

10.3 Wellbeing

10.3.1 We are very mindful of the impact the pandemic has had on the mental and physical wellbeing of our staff. We have continued to provide support through our Employee Assistance programme, Care First. We are continually educating ourselves on the long-term health effects of covid-19, working with our Occupational Health provider (appointing a new tender) and sharing that knowledge with managers as we advise them on how to support those employees with long covid. Current figures suggest less than 10 employees have long covid but as more is learnt about these symptoms and effects, so we are likely to see more cases emerge.

10.4 Our ways of working

10.4.1 Having spent a large proportion of time adapting HR policies in the response phase of the pandemic last year we have now returned to normal in relation to the application of our HR policies but the workplace and way we work has changed significantly. As a result, we have, in consultation with managers, staff forums, Medway Makers and trade unions, developed a 'Our Ways of Working' policy to support managers and employees understand all the flexible working options available, agree those ways of working at a service, team and individual level, providing tools to identify and balance the needs of the service with individual needs, ensuring that the back-office processes to implement the policy are aligned, and that managers have training in areas such as how to manage a remote workforce to enable effective implementation. This will be an iterative process and guidance and toolkits will develop and grow as we move through this period of cultural change and learn what impact this change has on our organisation. We have also begun to review other HR policies as well, for example, mileage rates and car user allowance, that align to these new ways of working and other strategic goals such as climate change.

10.5 Business Function

10.5.1 HRBPs have been reduced as part of the restructure and now solely focus on strategic workforce design. They are currently working with Legal, Children's, Adults, Leisure and CABs.

10.5.2 We are undertaking an exercise to analyse our current workforce in a high area of concern – identifying skills and experience.

10.5.3 We are reviewing the demographics within the workforce. For example, how many of our employees are close to retirement age? Is there a higher turnover in particular demographics, i.e., profession, age, gender etc.

- 10.5.4 This along with a simple survey to staff around aspiration and experience, will help us understand which key skill areas need the most focus in our workforce planning strategy. This may include combating staff turnover, replacing senior employees upon retirement, and recruiting for junior roles when existing staff are promoted, growing early talent pipelines, and linking into the full pay review.
- 10.5.5 Once we have analysed our current workforce supply, and future skill demands, we need to identify gaps between the two. This means comparing the skills of our current workforce with the skills Medway needs going forward. This will help us to identify which areas require the most support from resourcing and training, working closely with colleagues in Adult Education and across Medway college of social care.
- 10.5.6 Business partners also support DMT and consider data as part of their overall people plan, highlight any concerns, issues and/or trends being presented.

11 Learning and Development

11.1 During the pandemic, Learning & Development were faced with the challenge of cancelling all face to face (F2F) training and redeveloping as many courses as possible for delivery via alternative digital methods. We converted many F2F courses into Teams/Zoom compatible as well as creating videos of high priority and highly accessed training. Additionally, we mapped our elearning courses against existing F2F training to ensure staff were able to continue their CPD, this is now being aligned to our new ways of working. In 2020/21 Q3 and Q4, 231 courses were arranged, with 29 face to face courses delivered and 184 delivered via Teams/Zoom (280 courses were delivered Q1-Q4 in 2020/21).

11.2 Courses

- 11.2.1 L&D have 685 courses booked from 1/4/2021-31/3/22 with 84 of these being face to face and the remaining 601 delivered via Teams. The number of courses planned is expected to increase through to the end of Q3 and Q4.
- 11.2.2 Of the 685 courses, 435 are delivered via in-house colleagues such as the Children's Principle Social Work Team, Health and Safety Team, Youth Service, Public Health as well the dedicated L&D Trainer, these therefore do not have a cost other than time and their salary costs.
- 11.2.3 The remaining 250 courses are paid for training and the average cost of paid training is £650-750/day. All paid for training must meet the strict criteria of Statutory, Mandatory or Legislative in order to be commissioned and all requests are approved by the Head of Service and the relevant Assistant Director.
- 11.2.4 The significant increase from last financial year to this financial year is a combination of many courses being Teams/Zoom compatible, the increase of

short workshops being delivered by the Principle Social Work Team and the ability to provide F2F training which our delegates are enjoying.

11.2.5 L&D continues to create training videos of high priority and highly accessed training such as PDR for employees and managers, unconscious bias, dementia awareness and customer service. This allows for a blended learning approach and ensuring more people can be trained without additional trainer costs.

11.2.6 L&D promotes our training services externally which has resulted in bookings from Medway Norse and other Local Authorities.

11.2.7 L&D have also booked a number of conferences and external qualifications that cannot be met by the Apprenticeship Levy, these include Certified Internal Auditor, GDPR Practitioner Training, Diploma in Local Government Law, Trading Standard Practitioner Certificate, Chartered Institute of Housing Diploma and Zoo Licensing.

11.2.8 Staff continue to access e-learning training on a regular basis and use this as both stand-alone training and complementary training to our existing offering.

11.3 Leadership academy

11.3.1 The Leadership Academy moved into L&D in April 2021 with a new Managers induction programme being created, a dedicated page on MedSpace created and regular newsletters keeping them abreast of training and other CPD opportunities.

11.3.2 A survey was sent to all managers asking them how well they are prepared for our new ways of working, further courses are being designed in response to feedback and will run from QT4.

11.3.3 In addition we are consider our own in-house tools to support the leadership for change modules which have no budget associated, as the budget is only allocated to the facet five, which remined in Business Change.

11.4 MCSC

11.4.1 The Medway College of Social Care is an external training company providing Social Care training to care homes, domiciliary care agencies and personal assistants. Whilst this is an income generating department of WFD and HR, the golden thread running throughout is to ensure that the residents of Medway are receiving the best possible care, therefore we provide the best possible training and at the best possible price.

11.4.2 As the MCSC training is delivered via Face to face and is hands on training, lockdown has meant that we have not been able to offer the full suite of training. However, in spite of this, once lockdown was lifted, we have been able to offer bespoke training to care homes, domiciliary care agencies and personal assistants, so long as they are from the same organisation and can show a negative lateral flow test. These have taken place in the dedicated

training room in Medway Adult Education Rochester as well as at the homes of Direct Payment recipients.

11.4.3 In addition, MCSC has generated income via the private hire of the dedicated Manual Handling training room. The rental bookings are lower than a non-covid year, however we are seeing regular bookings of 2-3 sessions per month.

11.4.4 With lockdown conditions impacting heavily on MCSC, the expected income is lower than budget forecasts. Skills for Care have not released the 2021/2022 Direct Employer funding as yet, so this has had an impact on funding for the training of personal assistants of Direct Payment recipients. Current predicted income is £10593 (as at end Sept 2021) and the current spend to commission the training is £5500.

11.5 Kent and Medway Teaching Partnership

11.5.1 The Kent and Medway Teaching Partnership (KMTP) includes Medway Council (lead partner), Kent County Council, University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University.

11.5.2 The Department for Education released details of the 2021/22 bid schedule in late March 2021, and we were successful in our bid for £104,000. In August 2021, they released details of a further funding proposal and the KMTP was successful in gaining a further £50,000. In total, the KMTP has achieved funding of £104,000 which is to be shared amongst the partners. Medway Council will receive around £52,000 to spend towards the training and upskilling of the social work staff.

11.5.3 The funding requirements include an emphasis on leadership, management, BAME employees and workforce and labour market planning as well as the upskilling of staff.

11.5.4 During Q3/4 of 2020/21 to present, the KMTP funded the continued rollout of the Signs of Safety training to CSC. This mandatory training was delivered via Teams and has been very well received. The Principle Social Work Team will be responsible for all Signs of Safety training from October 2021 onwards.

11.5.5 The 18 cohorts of 5 Day Signs of Safety Training ran from March 21 to September 2021. These courses completed with a total of 260 staff completing all five days. A total of 23 additional delegates attended but missed one or more days.

11.5.6 This means that, in total, only 283 places were used out of the 360 available (79%) - mostly because of last minute cancellations or non-attendance.

11.5.7 Following successful delivery of the first phase of Assessment and Next Steps training by our external Signs of Safety consultant, the Assessment and Next Steps training is now delivered internally by the Principal Social Worker Team.

11.5.8 These internally delivered courses began in May 2021, with seven initially planned up to March 2022.

11.5.9 To date, four of these new courses have run with 43 staff attending out of 65 delegates who booked a place (66%) – no change since the last report.

12 Payroll

12.1 Payroll have successfully onboarded the Kyndi monthly and fortnightly payrolls along with administering their new pension scheme The Peoples Pensions at an already busy month of April. We have also successfully applied and paid the Bikeability employees through HMRC Job Retention Scheme (Furlough) and the retention payments for Medway Council casual staff such as Libraries, Sport Centres, Events throughout the pandemic, this entailed pulling off data from the system to calculate average hours worked from the previous financial year on a monthly basis.

12.2 GBC shared service remain a payroll client and the current SLA in under review, with a focus on value for money and service design.

12.3 Currently we are onboarding a new Teachers pensions monthly calculation reporting project for all employees we administer pensions for in line with Teachers Pensions Regulations, to be completed by February 2022 ready to go live in April 2022.

12.4 Schools services

12.4.1 Unfortunately we continue to struggle with retaining some Academy customers, the main reason being them merging or joining a multi academy trusts who already have their own payroll provider, or some of them are looking for a multi-functional combined HR, Payroll and Finance system and some are looking for a digitised exchange of data between the trust and easier access to their payroll data/management information. Whilst we are currently transforming our system, we are unsure if we are able to complete commercially with private sector developments, this is largely down to budget.

12.5 Local Government Pension

12.5.1 We have inherited an enormous backlog of Local Government pension queries dating back to 2008 which KCC have appointed a 3rd party provider to administer who are sending these to Medway, this has added additional pressure and workload to the Payroll & Pensions team, however with the review of the HR, Payroll and Systems services the wider HR teams have been able to assist with this ongoing project. In addition, there are outstanding Pension Year End queries KCC are chasing along with the current day to day backlog of retirements, estimate request, opt ins/outs etc to administer.

12.6 HR and Payroll Systems Transformation Project

12.6.1 In May 2021, Payroll Systems was brought back under the remit of HR and now report to the Deputy Head of HR (Strategic). A review of the HR & Payroll systems has commenced with the overall aims of:

- Improving People Experience
- Enabling And Informing Managers
- Maximising Income From External Customers
- Improving Efficiency/Reducing Loss
- Data Quality, Accountability And Responsibility
- Analytics - Understanding & Ensuring Evidence-Based Decisions

12.6.2 A Project Board has been put in place to oversee the review with a remit to provide regular updates to the Transformation Board.

12.6.3 The coming together under HR with System developments has shown early benefits for all, below are some examples of some quick win improvements so far:

- Costing substitution - has reduced workload for Payroll not having to manually change cost codes monthly for shared pay elements with Gravesham.
- Employee Bank changes - no longer require Payroll's authorisation process as confirmation email sent at source when employee changes details on Myveiw.
- Development of a standard suite of payroll reports to use, these are ongoing.
- Payroll working collaboratively with the Systems team have been able to implement spinal tables and grades of each individual external school customer, allows customers to choose when Pay Awards are applied and will reduce the manual intervention by payroll staff ie Teachers Pay Award.
- Plus as part of the systems transformation project we have migrated to Expenses 2 - improving performance when submitting/authorising claims and facilitate attaching receipts to claims supporting our digitalising programme reducing our reliance on paper. This has also resolved the 502 Error message we have had since going Hosted in 2019 that employees received when submitting multiple claims which were due to timing out issues, therefore reduced the high level of queries for the HR & Payroll teams.

13. ICT

a) Covid Recovery

13.1 The Covid loan scheme was setup in 2020 to enable Medway users to work remotely from home and take full advantage of M365 to continue to run their

service / business area remotely. These devices issued were funded by the Covid Budget. As part of the back to better way of working an additional 250 devices have been purchased in 2021 to support the Gun Wharf project in supporting the business areas that will be relocating within Gun Wharf due to the new tenants occupying space on level 2.

13.2 ICT will be working with business change to introduce collaborative workspaces within Gun Wharf to provide teams tools to be able to work with team members remotely and face to face at the same time.

a) Mobile phone project

13.3 Medway ICT had up to 5 mobile phone carriers all charging different prices and was issued to a range of departments with different cost codes. The legacy system was inefficient & time consuming and was very difficult to manage. The legacy system also was not the most cost-effective solution, and so the team worked to find an alternative and negotiate a better deal.

13.4 Projected savings once everyone has been transitioned to new mobile carrier £240K per year. The setup of new corporate phones will take advantage of technology and allow the devices to be handed to the user and can be setup by the user by just logging in. Users will get an increased 10GB data limit allocated each month.

13.5 As of September 2021, the migration of 800 users to the new carrier packages has taken place. The migration of remaining users continues to take place.

b) Public Service Network (PSN) Code of Connection Compliance

13.6 Medway ICT have achieved Public Service Network code of connection compliance until September 2022 thereby receiving certified assurance from CESG that our ICT infrastructure meets all the recommended security controls.

13.7 As part of the compliancy works, many operating system environments for Leisure, Parking, Printing, Libraries and GIS have been upgraded

c) Corporate Wi-Fi Refresh

13.8 The corporate Wi-Fi replacement began in August 2020; great strides have been made already with the deployment of the equipment. The estimated completion will be the end of February 2021. This will improve coverage of govroam Wi-Fi across Medway and providing staff with the ability to work from multiple locations.

13.9 The Wi-Fi project has been successfully completed across all corporate sites.

13.10 The Medway Libraries are currently being migrated to the new Wi-Fi solution. This will provide public Wi-Fi and additionally will provide Govroam Wi-Fi.

d) Omni Channel Contact centre and Telephony refresh.

- 13.11 The current contact centre solution has proven to be a key area to interface with Medway Councils residents, however in its current form it is very limited. The need to bring together all forms of communication from a text message, voice, email and social media into a single pane of glass has become key to the council so that it allows its residents to use whatever platform they prefer to connect with the council.
- 13.12 The solution that has been procured in November 2020 will take advantage of many of the new advancements in technology, one of these being artificial intelligence (A.I.). A.I. brings many tools that we can develop during the lifecycle of the new system. Some examples of this is to use a chatbot to collate a series of questions to allow it to either provide a solution to the resident or enable the contact centre agent to be given all the information they need from the resident so they can handle the query noticeably quicker. This data that is collected before the query is dealt with will also help with getting that query to staff members that hold specialist skills in that area of work. The integration of chatbots will also allow residents to interface with the council 24/7.
- 13.13 As of the September 2021 the telephony project has been progressing on target with the project plan.
- 13.14 2732 Corporate numbers have been migrated.
- 13.15 All telephony provisions at Health and living centres have been migrated.
- 13.16 260 Kent and Medway CCG telephony users have been migrated.
- 13.17 Education telephony services provided by Medway Council have been migrated.
- 13.18 All contact centre users have been migrated.
- 13.19 Development of the test environment for the addition communication channels to the contact centre solution has begun.

14. Legal

a) Place Team (Contracts, Planning, etc)

- 14.1 Like many teams within the Council the Place team has encountered difficulties in recruiting staff. This creates a limitation on capacity within the team which if not addressed will have long term impacts on our ability to support clients throughout the Council.

- 14.2 Despite these challenges the team have continued to perform at an extremely high level, completing contracts to allow for major works to take place such as the alteration of the A289 near the Medway City estate and the continuing development of Innovation Park Medway.
- 14.3 The property team have delivered to an exceptional level with a high volume of transactions continuing despite the on-going impact of the pandemic and have continued to support MDC in particular as they are working to deliver their sites within Medway.
- 14.4 The Council's litigation team have also had an extremely busy year with multiple Judicial Review challenges brought about by a supermarket war within Medway and planning enforcement encompassing high court injunctions and committal proceedings for breaches of those injunctions.

b) People Team (Childcare, SEN/Education, Adult Services)

- 14.5 The average duration for childcare court proceedings for the last 12 months is 43 weeks. The target is 26 weeks. A substantial number of childcare proceedings were delayed during the national lockdown which has impacted the average.
- 14.6 CAFCASS collects data showing case duration per quarter broken down by local authority. The latest release for Q4 of 2020-21 showed the national average for care and supervision (s31) applications duration is 43 calendar weeks. The data collected by CAFCASS shows that none of the 43 areas (Designated Family Judge areas) averaged 26 weeks or less in Q4 of 2020/2021 and only one area achieving an average of 26 weeks or less in Q1, Q2 & Q3 of 2020/2021.
- 14.7 Legal Services continue to work with Children's Services to meet the 26-week target whenever possible and identify the reasons for any delays so that issues within the control of the local authority can be addressed and other issues raised with the Court at the regular meetings with the local judiciary attended by the Assistant Head of Legal Services (People Team).
- 14.8 The People Team are facing challenges with staff retention and recruitment; the issue appears to be linked to salaries and career progression. This has increased the need to temporarily rely on locum staff.

15. Category Management/Procurement

a) Whole life benefits

- 15.1. The Category Management team, since its creation, has been recording the benefits that it has delivered back to the Council. Whole life savings over the 8-year life of the Category Management team now stands at approximately £75m.

b) Working with others

- 15.2 Since the launch of the Category Management team in December 2013, the skill and professionalism of the team has been recognised and evidenced by the number of external bodies that have been keen for Category Management to not only undertake their procurement exercises but have used our established Frameworks.

c) Creation of new frameworks

- 15.3 Category Management continuously review public framework compositions to ensure officers have the most appropriate means to accessing the market on any given project. Whilst the team has established a range of internal framework to speed up the tendering process, they also utilise the work other public bodies have conducted.
- 15.4 By using a two-pronged approach, officers are able to freely access a wider range of frameworks to meet their needs.

d) Supporting the local economy

- 15.5 The team is keen to develop local supply chains and as such holds relevant market engagement events. These events have increased in popularity and the Team believe that some of the increased outcomes achieved from procurement activity stems from them – namely value for money, communication, approachability with the market and increased competition.
- 15.6 Furthermore, as the team procures during the aftermath of the UK's exit from the European Union and during the pandemic, the adoption of Social Value to drive quality plus deliver organisational aspirations increases.

e) Reducing red tape

- 15.7 The team has adopted and continues to fully utilise standardised documentation to increase the likelihood of SME participation in tender activities.
- 15.8 Standardisation also serves to reduce the financial pressure as well as complexity of tendering during uncertain times and through this consideration of suppliers, the team has seen a blanket rise in the quality of tender submissions received.

f) Sustainable Procurement

- 15.9 We have embedded internal self-service when using frameworks via the Kent Business Portal to speed up awards. The relevant teams are given training and their subsequent awards/projects are sporadically spot checked to ensure compliance to what a normal procurement activity should look like.

15.10 The team facilitates a flexible approach to contract management to ensure all services can proactively manage their contractual deliverables with a process for escalating matters for resolution.

g) UK's exit from the European Union

15.11 It was not envisaged that the UK's exit from the European Union would directly impact the team's ability to procure, as the legislation governing public sector procurement was abridged for post transition.

15.12 However, since the last report, many significant market altering events have taken place and officers are noticing that works-based projects are costing considerably more than this time last year. This is largely in part to the current cost of shipping/importing.

15.13 Whilst it would be easy to say we should focus on our local supply chains; this negates the fact that they too are often importing the same materials from abroad. To truly overcome this bottleneck, manufacturing facilities need to be located close to the buyer.

h) Covid-19

15.14 Covid-19 illustrated the resilience of Medway's procurement team when reviewed in line with the above deliverables. By having already streamlined and facilitated quicker, compliant means to the market, the team was able to assist with organisational deliverables in respect of Covid without it impeding performance in other areas of service delivery.

15.15 An area the team is particularly proud of is the proactive management of supplier relief as well as the facilitation of PPE to the organisation.

16. Travellers

16.1 National Planning Policy and legislation dictate that Local Planning Authorities should understand the need and plan for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople's accommodation within their areas. The Planning Policy Team is doing this through the development of the new Local Plan.

16.2 So far the Planning Policy Team has completed a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA). The GTAA assesses the need for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling show people pitches/plots in the Local Plan period. The results of this assessment outlined a need for 36 pitches for Gypsy and Travellers and 3 plots for Travelling Show people.

16.3 To calculate if Medway can accommodate the outlined need in the GTAA the Council has also been undertaking site assessments on potential sites. This work has involved a review of existing sites and search for new sites. Supporting this work is the development of a new planning policy relating to Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show people to be adopted in the new

Local Plan that will be used to manage any proposed development for Gypsy, Traveller and Traveller Show people use over the plan period.

- 16.4 All results of this work are to be adopted into the new Medway Local Plan when it is adopted.

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Appendices

None

Background documents

None