

This Report will be made public on 2 June 2021



Report Number **P/21/04**

To: Personnel Committee
Date: 10 June 2021
Status: Non-executive Decision
Head of Paid Service: Dr Susan Priest

SUBJECT: REPORT OF THE HEAD OF THE PAID SERVICE

SUMMARY: This report is from the Chief Executive in relation to the adequacy of resources across the Council.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Personnel Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note Report P/21/04.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Head of the Paid Service of the council is appointed under s3 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.
- 1.2 The council has a duty under that act to provide the Head of the Paid Service “with such staff, accommodation and other resources as are, in his opinion, sufficient to allow his duties...to be performed” (s4(1)(b) of the Act).
- 1.3 It is therefore appropriate to formally report to the Council, via the Personnel Committee, on the adequacy of staff resources that the Council has provided in order to give assurances that they are sufficient to discharge the Head of Paid Service duties.

2. THE RESOURCES OF THE COUNCIL

- 2.1 The council has now significantly concluded its council-wide transformation programme (report C/19/65 gives more programme detail) which implemented new staffing structures and systems. The emphasis shifted through 2020/21 to **continuous improvement** as a cornerstone of bringing about a significantly changed far more positive engaging culture at the council while remaining focused on addressing the needs of customers of council services.
- 2.2 The results of the council’s engagement programme are clearly remarkable, culminating in May 2021 with the council being awarded ‘Outstanding’ status following the Best Companies survey. Specifically members’ attention is drawn to the rankings of 4th in the national Top 10 Best Not for Profit Bodies to work for, and 57th in the Top 100 Companies in the South East; a significant achievement.
- 2.3 Moreover, improvements remain embedded in our approach to Customer Service Excellence as more ‘Compliance Plus’ designations were awarded to the council during 20/21. Again this is something to be proud of and remains a priority as we move to a new Customer Access Point (CAP), initially at the civic centre and then in Folkestone town centre, and in due course (subject to members’ decision) with the development of a smaller, more modern sustainable civic suite at Otterpool Park.
- 2.4 And of course both these significant aspects of organisation improvement were achieved simultaneously as the council responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Support for our residents and business owners, while responding to increased demands from tourists and emergencies throughout the year, deserve acknowledgement as they drew heavily on the available resources of the council and demonstrated both agility and focus. Many colleagues across teams went above and beyond expectations during 20/21 to ensure that the very best public services could be delivered swiftly and effectively.
- 2.5 This brief description gives an insight in to the positive, can-do culture that has now been created at the council; however there is no room for complacency. New major services changes, for example the waste collection

contract, or the significant increase in the volume of local tourists to our beaches etc., have been particularly challenging during the year and continue to place extreme pressures on some teams, many of which are small in size. There has also been increased job opportunities across East Kent through, e.g. the creation of Inland Border Facilities, which has led to increased staff turnover and skill shortages in some teams already under intense pressure. And the ability to sustain the pace of delivery is a concern within the current resourcing framework.

2.6 However, there remains a relentless focus on continuous improvement, innovation to test new ways of working, and operational enhancements where it is considered appropriate to test or adapt.

3. THE FORWARD LOOK

3.1 During this year, beyond the immediate day-to-day demands for high quality council services, the focus of resource will largely be on:

- i. **Recovery from COVID-19** which will continue to demand agile and innovative ways of serving our customers. Delivering against the new corporate plan provides the strategic framework for our COVID-19 recovery activities and embraces continued working with key stakeholders such as the NHS, DWP, KCC and draws on the excellence that has been established through the network of our volunteers and partners of the Community Hubs.
- ii. **Delivering the ambitious regeneration agenda** set by Members including projects such as: Otterpool Park; Princes Parade; Folkestone Town Centre, including a health centre at FOLCA; Biggins Wood; Ship Street; Mountfield Road; investment to support the climate change agenda; the council's housing estate renewal programme; and a significant expansion in the number of new affordable homes into our Housing Revenue Account, etc. The council has made a number of critical decisions that signal their strong support for the delivery of these major projects however there are some resource shortages which is currently preventing delivery at the pace members understandably wish to see.
- iii. **Communicating** effectively about our activities and the positive impacts arising remains a priority and, while recent improvements have been made, the senior team will continue to press the importance with all managers so that the central team is supported with input so that current, relevant information of importance to our residents and visitors can be done so with efficacy.

3.2 The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) of the council remains determined to deliver the decisions of members in the most effective and efficient way possible. Focusing on acute business demands while simultaneously encouraging our senior managers to horizon-scan in order to learn lessons from elsewhere, will need balancing as we progress through 2021/22 as demands are expected to remain high throughout the coming year.

3.3 Of particular note are evident strains on certain activities / teams, for example:

- the range and extent of demands on the development and regeneration teams highlights capacity concerns and skill shortages;
- our strategy team has struggled to secure additional expertise to advise colleagues and members across a range of low emissions / climate change matters;
- our finance team continues to face exceptionally challenging workloads with covid related demands while underpinning the delivery of major projects;
- our licensing and enforcement team is experiencing unprecedented levels of demands across its services;
- the volume of customer contact via telephone remains high and more remains to be done on channel shift to IT enabled self-serve;
- demands remain high on the development management team to progress the volume of new planning applications and an increasing number of enforcement cases; and
- the council's interface with the delivery of Otterpool Park Garden Town highlights that additional senior level capacity is needed.

3.4 However, as an overview of the challenges, this is not necessarily a unique picture to the council as there are wide-spread reports of particular skill shortages elsewhere across local authorities. The council's approach to agile ways of working, along with the improved reputation for being an engaging place to work, will positively support our recruitment endeavours that need to extend beyond our local geography and East Kent economy.

3.5 In addition to serving customers and progressing decisions made by council, the demand for information on operational matters from elected members has been an increasing trend. This in turn is putting additional pressures on staff and advice will continue to be given so that the respective and significantly different roles of members and staff are understood. Relevant parts of the constitution (Parts 8 and 9) are particularly pertinent and members' support is sought so that the Chief Executive can ensure that responsibilities continue to be discharged effectively and efficiently in a supportive culture of trust and mutual respect.

3.6 In summary, the current level of resources deployed cannot sustain the delivery of activities at pace. In the context of the MTFs, CLT is exploring ways of deploying resources against the matters identified above and recommendations will be put before members in due course.

4. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

4.1 Legal Officer's Comments (AK)

There are no legal implications arising directly out of this report.

4.2 Finance Officer's Comments (CS)

Whilst this report does not make any specific recommendations that have financial implications it does focus upon the resource base of the council. As referred to in the body of the paper, changes in resource levels will need to be considered in the context of the MTFS and budget strategy and balanced with the demands placed on the council to deliver the Corporate Plan ambitions agreed with members. Specific proposals will be fully evaluated to consider how they can be funded as they are formally proposed.

4.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (ASm)

There are no specific Diversities and Equalities Implications arising from this report.

5. CONTACT OFFICER AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

None