

SCRUTINY BOARD (CITIZENS AND COMMUNITIES)

MONDAY, 16TH MAY, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors A Blackburn, N Buckley,
C Campbell, R Grahame, M Harland,
G Hyde, J Illingworth, J Jarosz,
K Maqsood, M Robinson and N Walshaw

75 Late Items

The following late and supplementary information was submitted to the Board:

- Agenda item 7 – Addendum to the Citizens and Communities 2015/16 Q4 performance update report.
- Agenda item 8 – Scrutiny draft inquiry reports relating to the development of Community Committees and Community Hubs.

The above information was not available at the time of agenda despatch, but was subsequently made available on the Council's website.

76 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting.

77 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor K Wakefield. Notification was received that Councillor J Jarosz was substituting for Councillor K Wakefield.

78 Minutes - 14 March 2016

In relation to minute number 71 'Migration – Scrutiny working group summary note', further reference was made to the pressures on local services in supporting the education and welfare of migrant children. Linked to work undertaken by Scrutiny, it was acknowledged that this continues to be an area of priority for the Council and relevant partners.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2016 be approved as a correct record.

79 Performance Update

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) provided an update on performance areas relevant to the Board's remit. The Board also received an addendum to this report which provided updated

Libraries information and additional information relating to Welfare and Benefits.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits

The key issues raised were as follows:

- Call answer rates – Members discussed staff sickness rates within the Contact Centre and the impact this has on call answer rate performance. It was suggested that the service works with HR to explore opportunities for using existing Council staff resources to provide flexible coverage in the Contact Centre when needed.
- Calls abandoned – Members requested further information regarding the number of Contact Centre calls that are recorded as being abandoned.
- Postal vote registrations – clarification was sought regarding the number of complaints received about lost postal votes, with reference made to a particular constituent who had registered for a postal vote but it never arrived meaning they were unable to vote. The Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) agreed to follow up this matter.
- Benefit assessments – Members discussed the assessment processes for benefit claimants and particularly acknowledged the decision making role of DWP in this regard and the supporting role of the Council in terms of providing any additional financial advice and assistance where appropriate.
- Monitoring the local impacts of national welfare and benefit policies – reference was made to the public document 'Is Britain Fairer? The State of equality and human rights 2015' in terms of the impact of welfare and benefit assessments on local people. It was therefore suggested that the Scrutiny Board receives regular briefings surrounding the local impact of national policies surrounding welfare and benefit changes.
- Benefit appeals – reference was made to the benefit appeal processes and the Board requested statistics surrounding the number of local benefit decisions made by DWP that have been appealed and the success rate of this appeal process.
- Take-up of Pension Credit – it was noted that the Council routinely writes to pensioners to remind them of their entitlement to Pension Credit.

RESOLVED – That the report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) be approved.

80 Scrutiny draft inquiry reports

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development presented the Board's draft reports following its recent inquiries into the development of Community Committees and the development of Community Hubs.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access

In consideration of both inquiry reports, one suggested amendment was made to the draft inquiry report in relation to the development of Community Committees. Members agreed to amend the wording of recommendation 5 to make it clearer that it is recommending the development of an information sharing mechanism to allow Community Committees to be kept fully aware of how relevant ward based initiative funding and capital monies are being spent within their localities.

RESOLVED – That, with the inclusion of the above amendment, the Scrutiny Board approves its draft reports following its inquiries into the development of Community Committees and the development of Community Hubs.

81 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The Chair reminded the Board that this was the final meeting of the 2015/16 municipal year and thanked Members for their support and commitment throughout the year.

It was noted that the date and time of the next meeting was yet to be determined.

(The meeting concluded at 10.55 am)