

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM 5, GUILDHALL, SWANSEA ON
WEDNESDAY, 31 AUGUST 2016 AT 4.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor J A Hale (Vice-Chair) presided

Councillor(s)

J A Hale
D J Lewis

Councillor(s)

T J Hennegan
M Thomas

Councillor(s)

R D Lewis

Officer(s)

Mike Hawes
Lee Wenham
Steve Rees

Director of Resources / Section 151 Officer
Head of Communications & Customer Engagement
Head of Human Resources & Organisational
Development

Julie Nicholas-Humphreys Customer Service Manager

Adrian Osborne

Category Manager, Commercial and Commissioning Unit

Jeremy Parkhouse

Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): Y V Jardine, A J Jones, E T Kirchner and L V Walton

15 **DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS.**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, the following interest was declared: -

Councillor J A Hale - agenda as a whole - my wife works for the Authority.

Councillor M Thomas - agenda as a whole - my wife works for the Authority.

NOTED that Councillor M Thomas had received dispensation from the Standards Committee in respect of his wife.

16 **MINUTES.**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2016 be agreed as correct record.

17 **CUSTOMER CONTACT ASPECT.**

The Head of Communications and Engagement and the Customer Service Manager presented an update report on Corporate Customer Services.

It was outlined that the Authority's vision was to:

- To improve customer experience.
- To achieve a fundamental shift in customer contact to digital self- service channels.
- To consolidate current customer contact.
- To use customer insight to improve services and achieve the other aims.

With the key principles being:

- Operating as a single customer service organisation, not a number of separate customer services businesses.
- Bringing current customer contact resources under a single management structure.
- Adopting the principle of digital by default and transfer, wherever possible, customer contact from face to face and telephone to digital channels.
- Making every contact count to reduce or minimise demand and change resident behaviour.

It was added that the new Customer Service Manager was appointed on 1st August 2015 and Corporate Customer Services went live on 1st October 2015. Phase 1 brought together five areas of the organisation, as below, into one new service across three sites:

- Contact Swansea
- Switchboard
- Environmental Services
- Housing Repairs
- Blue Badges

In November 2015, contact for the Highways service also migrated into Customer Services. All telephony teams were relocated and amalgamated into one site in the Civic Centre in January 2016 and the multi skilling of advisors commenced. In order not to lose the knowledge and experience gained over many years, each advisor had a 'primary' skill and 'secondary' skill so that they can assist each other during periods of high demand, sickness absence and annual leave.

The Committee were also informed that a staff restructure had saved £235,000 by losing 11 full time equivalent posts.

During our first year the Service had answered 526,642 calls and served 40,615 customers at the Contact Centre face to face, with only 7 Corporate Complaints received in total across both channels since the service was created. A Welsh language Line was introduced in April 2016 and constant review of the website and increasing the ability to report or request services online was starting to pay dividends, encouraging our residents to contact us '**digitally by choice**'. This had resulted in fewer calls through the switchboard and less face to face visits to the Contact Centre. Access times would also be standardised across all services which would be Mon-Thurs 08:30-17:00 and 08:30-16:30 on a Friday.

Development proposals for the Service included procuring voice recognition services for customers and building an 'in house' Corporate Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which would provide the Council with more control and flexibility to develop the product to meet needs and vision of working towards a 'single customer record' across the Authority.

The customer contact strategy identified areas for consideration in Phase 2. A proposal for approval to commence discussions with these services would be submitted to Corporate Management Team in September with a view to replicating the same/similar implementation to Phase 1.

It was added that there were many other areas across the council that dealt with customer contact, for example, social services, planning, education etc. and although the Swansea Standard that sets out best practice in relation to how all staff should deal with customers, the responsibility to ensure staff meet customer needs lied with managers. The recent introduction of the Welsh Language Standards had brought extra demands in terms of dealing with customers in Welsh and all external calls should now be answered bilingually.

It was recognised that there was a need for consistency across the entire council in terms of answering the phone, replying to emails and even issues such as email signatures.

The Committee asked a number of questions of the Officers, who responded accordingly.

Discussions centred around the following: -

- Systems available for dealing with telephone queries, such as IVR;
- Working in partnership with other organisations, such as ABMU Health Authority;
- The Authority continuing to utilise Swansea Voices in order to gauge public opinion;
- Services provided at District Housing Offices;
- Access to services for individuals who do not own a personal computer / mobile phone;
- Options available for the Authority to provide services via Libraries / District Housing Offices;
- Utilising technology to improve services for customers;
- Benchmarking with other local authorities / organisations;
- The Authority continuing to focus upon the quality of call handlers;
- The Committee visiting the Contact Centre in order to observe operations.

The Director of Resources commented that it was important that the Authority embraced technology in order to improve services for customers whilst maintaining business continuity.

The Committee congratulated the Service for answering 526,642 calls and serving 40,615 customers at the Contact Centre face to face, with only 7 Corporate Complaints received since the service was created.

RESOLVED that: -

- 1) The content of the report be noted;
- 2) An update report be provided at a future meeting;
- 3) A visit to the Contact Centre is added to the Work Programme.

18 **INVEST TO SAVE LOANS. (VERBAL)**

The Director of Resources provided the Committee with a verbal update regarding Invest to Save Loans. He stated that the Welsh Government had introduced the loans in 2011 and all public sector bodies can bid for money. The purpose of the loans were to improve efficiency by delivering projects that were designed to make cash savings.

He added that while Swansea had not applied, a number of other local authorities and public bodies in Wales had been granted loans and he gave examples of some of the schemes the loans had been used to support. However, that the loans were non-negotiable and were repayable over 3 years and the successful applicant must put 25% towards the overall cost. Less than 5% of local authorities had generated enough savings to make the loan repayments.

He stated that because of the way the Council had managed its budget, there was sufficient cash in the contingency fund to pay for any schemes the Authority wished to pursue. He added that any potential schemes would be dealt with on merit.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

19 **WORK PROGRAMME 2016-2017.**

The Chair presented an updated Work Programme 2016-2017.

RESOLVED that: -

- 1) The contents of the report be noted;
- 2) A visit to the Contact Centre is added to the Work Programme.

20 **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC.**

The Committee was requested to exclude the public from the meeting during the consideration of the item(s) of business identified in the recommendation to the report on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in the exemption paragraph of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007, relevant to the item(s) of business set out in the report.

The Committee considered the Public Interest Test in deciding whether to exclude the public from the meeting for the item(s) of business where the Public Interest Test was relevant as set out in the report.

RESOLVED that the public be excluded for the following items of business.

(CLOSED SESSION)

21 **AGENCY WORKERS.**

Adrian Osborne presented a report which considered the case for insourcing responsibility for agency staffing from a commercial perspective.

It was explained that unless and until an internal agency worker system was established by the Authority, the existing arrangements for the provision of agency staff should remain unchanged. In accordance with this, the Commercial and Commissioning Unit would proceed with the Invitation to Tender for a replacement agreement for employment agency services (due to be published autumn/winter 2016/17), as the Council's existing agreement was shortly due to expire.

It was recommended that the current arrangements for agency staffing be maintained. It was added that by insourcing responsibility for these arrangements the Council could do so at an increased cost.

The Committee discussed in detail the information contained within the report.

RESOLVED that: -

- 1) The contents of the report be noted;
- 2) The recommendation contained in the report be refused;
- 3) The Authority seeks to develop an internal agency worker system;
- 4) The Authority reduces the number of temporary agency workers it employs by making them permanent employees and making it easier to establish an internal agency worker system.

The meeting ended at 5.30 pm

CHAIR