

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Customer Services and Service Delivery held on 19 September 2018 from 7:00 p.m. to 7:50 p.m.**

**Present:** Councillors: Anne Boutrup (Chairman)  
Margaret Belsey (Vice-Chairman)

Liz Bennett*	Michelle Binks	Pete Bradbury
Cherry Catharine*	Sandy Ellis	Claire Fussell*
John Belsey	Anthea Lea	Ginny Heard
Howard Mundin	Kirsty Page*	Dick Sweatman

\*Absent

**Also Present (Cabinet Members):** Councillor Thomas-Atkin. Apologies were received from Councillor Marsh.

**1. SUBSTITUTES AT MEETINGS OF COMMITTEE - COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 4**

Councillor Holden substituted for Councillor Page.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies had been received from Councillors Bennett, Catharine, Fussell and Page.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

**4. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 July 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**5. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS.**

None.

**6. THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL LAND CHARGES TEAM AT MID SUSSEX DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Daniel James, Senior Local Land Charges Officer, introduced the report which informed Members of the work carried out by the Local Land Charges Business Unit. The report specifically focused on the Local Land Charges function, the registration of Local Land Charges (LLC) and the time it takes to complete and return Local Authority Official Searches, which is an important element of achieving fast and efficient property transactions.

The Officer informed the Committee that the team registers each property or piece of land in the district; the register includes details including planning permission, highways, covenants and restrictions and provides a history for the property or land. The Officer

advised that it is a competitive market and the team work to maximise the council's market share and 99% of searches are completed in 3 – 5 working days.

The Chairman thanked the team for the helpful report which provided a clear understanding of their work.

A Member asked about the information provided on the register. The Officer advised that it could include Section 106 agreements, water and drainage agreements or any matter that would restrict the use of the land or would have a financial implication.

In response to a Members question concerning marketing work to increase the Council's share of the market, the Officer advised that they had undertaken a recent marketing exercise by visiting local estate agents in each of the local towns and villages in the district to inform them of the work completed by the team. They advised the estate agents of the difference between a local authority search and a personal search, and informed them that the Local Land Charges (LLC) Team had a quick response rate, had local knowledge and the fee was based on a cost recovery basis. We also cross check the information revealed in a search with the source documents held at MSDC.

A Member asked how many searches were completed by the team. The Officer advised that the demand is seasonal (typically more over the summer and less at Christmas). The volumes are also influenced by the economy and politics nationally. Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services, informed the Committee that the demand is market led and can peak i.e. if the Chancellor gives a deadline for a change in the stamp duty threshold but recent press coverage had advised that some local authorities take weeks to process searches.

In response to a query regarding the 20 working day deadline for Freedom of Information requests the Head of Regulatory Services advised this is a statutory deadline and the LLC is a paid for service so the applicant receives a quicker response time. The Member responded that they were commenting on the automated email which advises that some departments have a 20 working day deadline to reply e.g. the planning department. The Senior Local Land Charges Officer advised that the planning department also provide a drop-in session where the public can receive a quicker reply.

Simon Hughes, Head of Digital, Customer Service and HR, informed the Committee that some service level agreements are governed by legislation and whilst others are a reasonable time to reply. He added that Customer Service standards for responses to the public would be reviewed later on in the municipal year.

A Member queried the charge for private companies accessing the data. The Senior Local Land Charges Officer advised that the register is paper based and private companies can book a half hour appointment to view the Local Land Charges Register and much of the Con29 information is freely available online and on the computers in the council offices. However some Con29 information, for example Building Control applications are not available online. The Con29 contains over 60 questions and private companies can order these in any combination up to the complete set, but this is a paid for service.

In response to a query concerning the cost of this service the Officer advised it is calculated on a cost recovery cost basis. He could not comment on the fees levied by private companies; however they are profit making companies. The Head of Regulatory Services informed the Committee that this area has been subject to litigation and historically private companies have made threats of anti-competitive behaviour. The Council would like to maintain its share of the market without a legal challenge.

The Chairman noted that no Member wished to speak so moved to the recommendation which was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

## **7. DIGITAL PROGRAMME 2018/19 PROGRESS - INCLUDING OVERVIEW OF GDPR PREPARATIONS**

The Chairman advised the Committee that a progress report had been received previously and the Council would continue to support more traditional forms of communication. She praised the comprehensive report and advised that the legends were missing from page 18/19, blue represented the old website and green represented the new website.

Simon Hughes, Head of Digital, Customer Services and HR, introduced the report which provided Members with a progress update on the service redesign and digital programme endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee for Customer Services and Service Delivery on the 13th February 2018. It included more detail on the delivery of the priorities and service improvements and efficiencies. It also highlighted some of the challenges in delivering the programme including supplier and market development. The Officer highlighted the challenges and key projects for the coming year and advised that para 54 on p24 should read 19 hours not 19 days.

In response to the Chairman's query on the impact to the non-digital service the Officer advised that the website had been redesigned after discussions with the public regarding the language used and what they wanted to see on the website and all this impacts on the written communications. With regard to work by the waste team the Officer advised that the team would still offer a non-digital service and call residents about their missed bin collection if that was an appropriate method of communication.

The Chairman enquired whether there were had been any breaches with the move to mobile devices and asked how they are protected against data loss. She also requested information on how the risk of loss or damage was calculated and the cost to replace them. The Officer replied that mobile devices have a minimum of two levels of encryption (hardware and software) which protected the data whilst being transferred between devices and restricted access to authorised individuals. The Council has mobile device management software which can selectively wipe data if required. Small devices are protected by hard cases and the only damage to date was a cracked screen which occurred when the device had been removed for the protective outer case. With regard to replacing equipment the Officer advised that the Council is reducing the lifecycle of laptops to three years which will then provide a contingency for breakage.

In response to a query concerning the emptying of dog waste bins, the missed response rate for answering calls and the savings anticipated with the recent changes, the Officer advised that the data from these bins is now being tracked and can be mapped but the project is still in the early phase, information is received directly by SERCO. The Officer advised that the target time to respond to calls was 30 seconds and the average response has been reduced to 19 seconds. However, the response rate would drop at peak periods when the public are available to call the Council i.e. lunchtimes; they are looking at ways to direct calls to relevant officers but only once the current telephony system is replaced.

The Officer informed the Committee that the Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) was replaced as it had reached the end of its contract and the savings of staff time have been used by redeploying staff to provide other services to customers. He advised that there is a de minimus staffing level to cover response times at peak periods.

A Member asked about the future plan and new telephony system, how could the Council quantify the efficiency savings which were built into the business plan. The Cabinet Member for Customer Services informed the Committee that the time to answer calls and the level of customer service provided is regularly monitored. The team provide a good service on a continual basis, even when training new staff, and some calls can be long. The Head of Digital, Customer Services and HR added that benefits realisation is hard to prove, savings might be made on procurement and maintenance but more significant efficiencies are made on how the service is redesigned. For example, calls can go directly to an officer wherever they are as the number follows them rather than being tied to a single phone. This can improve response times.

In response to a comment on overflowing dog waste bins and their locations, the Head of Digital, Customer Services and HR advised that the location of the waste bins can be shared with the Town Councils and that each bin has a unique number denoting its location.

A Member commented on the progress of transferring data to the Cloud and queried whether officers would work from home in the future and if the Council would rent out the surplus office space similar to Eastbourne Council. In response the Officer advised that there were options for officers to work whilst out on site and such technology is supporting the Building Control department. The Council has home working policies and mechanisms in place and this could have a greater impact on the Revenues and Benefits Teams by allowing the use of peripatetic staff to cover for surges in demand.

The Chairman noted that no Member wished to speak so moved to the recommendations in the report which was agreed unanimously.

## **RESOLVED**

The Committee:

- a) Noted the progress of the service design and digital programme in the past year;
- b) Considered the work for the service design and digital programme for 2018/19 into 2019/20; and
- c) Considered any particular priorities that they would wish to see given within the service design and digital programme.

## **8. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CUSTOMER SERVICES AND SERVICE DELIVERY WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19**

Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services, confirmed that there would be reports on the Customer Services, Open Spaces Review, Waste Recycling Review and Leisure Contract Update later on in the municipal year.

**RESOLVED**

The Committee noted the Committee's Work Programme as set out at paragraph 5 of the report.

**9. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10 DUE NOTICE OF WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN**

None

Meeting closed at 7:50 pm.

Chairman