

Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5 April 2011

Year end update, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

Introduction

This has been a busy year and I have enjoyed getting to grips with my new portfolio. As a Council we have had to achieve significant budget savings and there has been a huge amount of change nationally which has impacted on our services and how we deliver them. This report sets out my areas of responsibility, achievements and progress against priorities in 2009-10.

Areas of Responsibility

- Legal and Human Resources
- Risk Management
- Council tax and Housing Benefits
- Property, Procurement and Projects
- Asset Management
- Regulatory (Freedom of Information and Data Protection)
- Customer Contact and Complaints
- ICT and E-Government
- Democratic Services
- Land Charges
- Budget Monitoring
- Planning for Real

Portfolio Priorities for 2010-11

- To have a Council that is fit for purpose with the right people in the right place at the right time.
- Ensure we concentrate on what we as a council have in our power to deliver to ensure residents have effective and efficient services that deliver value for money.
- Ensure that the Budget Setting process for 2011-12 clearly meets our priorities as a Council and therefore delivers the priorities of local people.
- Ensure that local people have the opportunity to participate and have a real say in what happens in their local area by continuing neighbourhood planning in areas such as Shepway North, Shepway South and High Street Wards. This will be achieved through working with local ward councillors and local residents.
- Continue to progress shared services within the portfolio.
- Ensure that people can access a wider range of services in ways that suit them. This will be delivered through reviewing our website, using tools such as MOSAIC to profile our customers to ensure we deliver services appropriately.

Progress on Priorities and Achievements 2010-11

Effective and Efficient Services

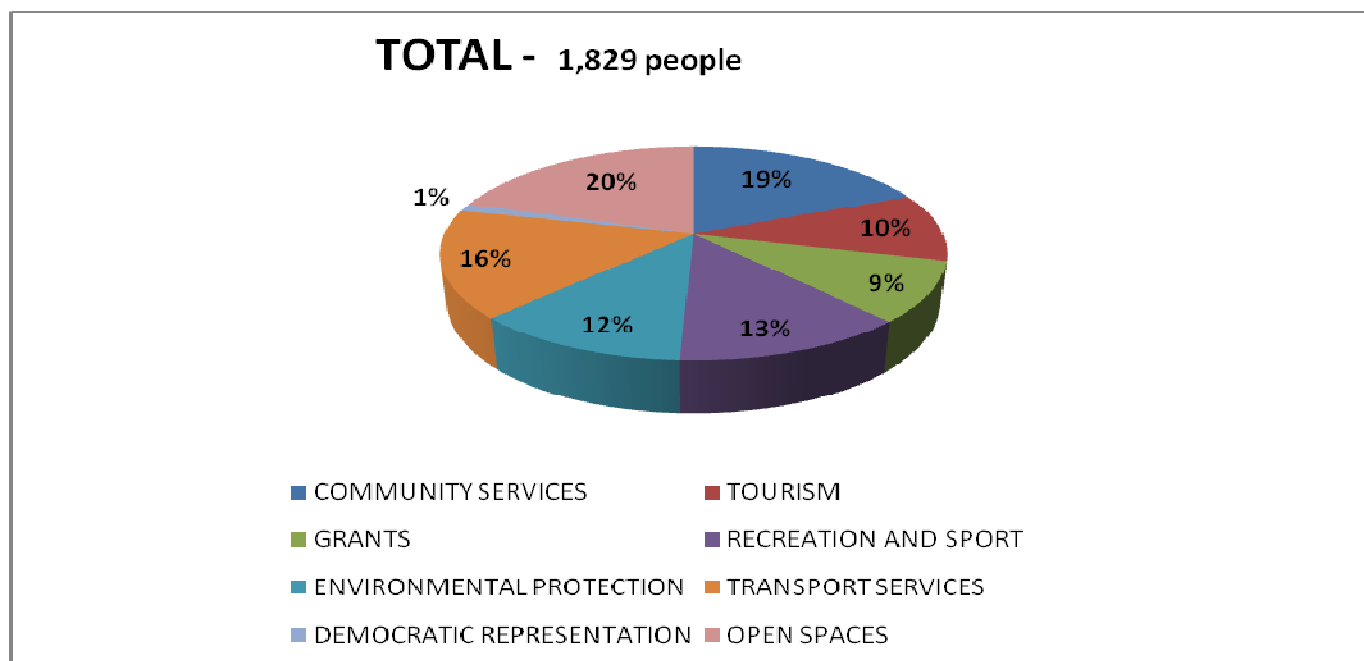
We have continued to make progress in terms of getting the right people in the right place at the right time and delivering efficient value for money services. It was identified during a peer review last year that the Council needed to reduce its priorities so resources were more focussed and we worked more effectively. The new Strategic Plan has reduced our 5 priorities to 3 and 23 key objectives to 6 outcomes. The plan contains a focused set of actions for each outcome and as a result we have significantly reduced our performance indicators by two thirds. One of the three priorities is corporate and customer excellence which is focussed on delivering value for money services that the public are satisfied with.

In March this year we gained re- accreditation of Investors in People giving a recognition of the work that the organisation continues to do to ensure that people are clear about the priorities of the organisation, how they fit into delivering these priorities and the training, development and support they will be given to undertake their role

The HR service has taken on the payroll for Swale Borough Council including the full roll-out of Employee Self Service on the new itrent system.

Budget

As part of the budget setting process this year we have consulted over 1800 people asking them to vote for their most important discretionary services. These are the services the council is not required by law to deliver.



The three services rated by the public as lowest priority were democratic representation, grants to voluntary organisations and tourism. Democratic representation includes the Mayor's events, twinning, parades and civic events. As a consequence of the public

consultation, the Council will be reviewing our budgets for these areas and this has been reflected in the budget strategy.

During the budget consultation the public were asked for additional suggestions for savings; staffing costs were identified as an important area for the public. The Council has already taken action that will reduce management costs and will take further action to reduce staffing costs. This will include reviewing the back office functions to make savings which will include a shared HR service.

Shared Services

HR

As well as taking on the payroll service for Swale we have also agreed to move a full HR shared service with Swale.

Revenues and Benefits

The decision to enter into a shared service with Tunbridge Wells was made in October 2010 and followed significant work to consider the different options to provide efficiencies within the service, including a review by the Business Transformation team and a private sector benchmark. The final business case was presented at a joint Cabinet meeting held at Maidstone and identified a range of benefits:

- Financial savings
- Increased resilience
- Service improvement
- Commercial viability
- Performance and customer service

Following decision to progress with the shared service a formal consultation process was undertaken with staff and trade unions, with the views put forward taken into account in defining the final structure and implementation process. The first phase of the implementation then commenced, with a number of key appointments – Head of Service, Revenues Manager, Benefits Managers, Assistant Managers and the Business Support team.

The second phase of the restructure will begin in April 2011 and along with the savings from the first phase, is expected to provide a total staff saving of 14.9 FTE. Through voluntary redundancies, holding of vacant posts, ending of fixed term contracts and a number of changes to individual working hours, total savings of 14.85 FTE have already been achieved, putting the project ahead of schedule and on target to deliver the proposed savings.

In addition to the reviewing the staffing requirement, negotiations have taken place to draw together the key IT contracts that support the service, with Maidstone to host a new IT system for Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Swale. This is to deliver an additional £74,500 for Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells. The new IT system will facilitate and release other efficiencies within the service and in total will provide a total revenue saving for the two councils of £437,190 in 2011-12 and £587,900 each year after. This will allow for the cost of implementing to be repaid and a cashable savings achieved from 2012/13.

Looking beyond the shared service, the Revenues and Benefits team have a difficult task ahead with a host of short-term changes to the housing benefit system and longer term prospect of wider welfare reform through the introduction of Universal Credit. In preparation for these changes the service has been working with colleagues in other parts of the council

to prepare customers and landlords for the changes ahead. As well as providing training for all front line staff, the service has started the process of writing to every household affected by these changes to explain what to expect and what they can do to prepare. These changes and the longer term plans for the introduction of Universal credit represent a significant amount of work and will be the focus of the service going forward.

Accessing Services and Mosaic

The customer must always be the starting point in looking at how services are delivered. The Council has used Mosaic to profile customers who contact us for different services, which has allowed us to form a better picture of how the people who use our services would like them to be delivered. This information, along with other important data like volumes of calls, Gateway visits, visits to the website and avoidable contacts, is being used to inform our Channel Shift Strategy and help us prioritise where we should make improvements and changes to deliver services in the most appropriate ways.

In the last year we have seen overall use of the website increase by about 10%. We have seen increase used of our map information pages, particularly during the roll out of the Food Waste Scheme, with people using them to get information or to request advice. Several new waste and recycling forms have been launched or revamped over the last year, with on line reporting of missed bins accounting for over 66% of the total reported over the Christmas and New Year period.

Property and Procurement

After a number of successful years working almost exclusively for Maidstone, the procurement section is becoming increasingly busy procuring services through the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership, generating considerable savings for ourselves as well as our partners. Recent successes include banking contracts for Swale and Tunbridge Wells, and parking enforcement for Maidstone and Swale.

Current projects include joint pest control tenders across a number of districts, building maintenance for Tunbridge Wells and environmental enforcement for Maidstone. A more comprehensive range of opportunities across MKIP is currently under development. An e-tendering package has recently been purchased which will become a cornerstone for tendering activity across the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership, streamlining and standardising tendering procedures as well as significantly reducing the amount of paper normally produced.

Scaffolding will soon be coming down from around the Old College Southern Gateway on the corner of College Avenue and College Road. For years this was an ivy covered deteriorating ruin, formerly part of the College of All Saints originally constructed in the 14th Century, and a Grade II listed building and scheduled ancient monument. A combination of Council funding and a £40,000 grant from English Heritage has enabled the Council to carry out much needed restoration and repair. Landscaping of the surrounding grounds will provide a fitting setting for an important example of Maidstone's heritage.

Support for the Council's capital programme continues through a careful and considered land and property disposal programme. Sales of a number of properties are in various stages of the process, with our former offices in Tonbridge Road in the fore.

After a comprehensive survey of the Council's bus shelters a three year programme of refurbishment and repair has been prioritised which, in many cases, involves replacement of

rather scruffy looking perspex panels with smart metal mesh which is much more resistant to vandalism and can easily be re-sprayed to remove graffiti. This will contribute to our objective of Maidstone being a decent place to live.

Before



After



Customer Services Progress April 2010 to March 2011

There are three areas within Customer Services: the Gateway, the Contact Centre and Corporate Support.

Gateway

The Gateway has continued to grow during the last year and overall there has been a 15% increase in the number of customers. The busiest service continues to be Benefits where over 17,000 customers have been served in the last year, followed by Housing where over 12,000 customers have been seen. Some new Partner Organisations have joined the Gateway, for example Connexions Kent, and others have left like the Children's & Families Information Service. The Citizens Advice Bureau are the busiest partner and have seen over 3,500 customers while in the Gateway in the last year.

A Volunteer Scheme was created as a joint venture with Voluntary Action in Maidstone and this is lottery funded. A Project Officer was appointed by VAM using the lottery funding and volunteers have worked in the Gateway since the beginning of September 2010. There are on average around 15 volunteers working in the Gateway at various times of the day and they assist customers with a variety of enquiries like helping them to use the payment kiosks, assisting with the self help PC's and generally helping with any queues at the Meet & Greet desk. The scheme is a success and has not only helped provide a good service to customers but has also provided work opportunities to those who had found finding employment difficult.

Some basic statistics are shown in the table below:

	2010-2011	2009-2010
Overall Totals: (note these figures are based on Apr to Feb data only)		
Total Customers seen by MBC & Partners	46,605	43,532
Total Casual Callers	22,025	16,270
% Customers seen within 20 minute target	75.21%	72.06%
Average Wait Time	00:13:56	00:13:46
Average Transaction Time	00:19:54	00:20:04
MBC Major Service Enquiries: (note the 2010 to 2011 figures are based on Apr-Feb data only)		
Benefits	17,120	18,134
Housing	11,957	10,423
Parking Services	5,271	5,919
Revenues	3,803	4,147
Planning	1,913	2,713
Others	3,986	3,955
Partner Enquiries: (note the 2010 to 2011 figures are based on Apr-Feb data only)		
Total number of Partner enquiries	5,605	5,479

Contact Centre

The Contact Centre has had a busy year although overall there has been a decrease in the overall number of calls offered of around 5%. This decrease could be attributed to a channel shift in more customers now using the website and emails to contact the Council. There has also been a decrease of around 9% of calls to the switchboard.

During the year the Contact Centre have introduced some new services and have started taking calls for Registration Services, Planning Enforcement and Community Safety. In addition, the Contact Centre has started dealing with more in-depth enquiries for benefits and council tax.

To assist with channel shift, more development work of the website has been completed and there are now more self service processes available especially for Environmental Services and the new Food Waste scheme. The number of emails coming in from the website that the Contact Centre have dealt with in the last year has increased by 58% overall with a 118% increase just in February 2011 compared to February 2010.

Some basic statistics are shown in the table below:

	2010-2011	2009-2010
Overall Totals: (note the 2010-2011 figures are based on data to 15 March only)		
Total Calls Answered	180,479	191,551
Total Calls Abandoned	11,099	10,151
% Calls Answered	94.21%	94.97%
Average Wait Time	00:01:09	00:00:59
Average Call Handle Time	00:04:25	00:03:22
Total Switchboard Calls Answered	105,870	116,638
Total Number of Emails Received	8,166	5,164
Calls for Major Services: (note the 2010- 2011 figures are based on Apr-Feb data only)		
Environmental Services & Waste	31,469	38,046
Revenues	40,989	48,996
Benefits	22,952	28,102
Housing	13,270	13,971
Parking Services	15,860	20,089
Planning	11,703	14,310
Some Others	17,338	9,595

Corporate Support

The Corporate Support Team have continued to provide a full incoming and out-going mail service, an internal print room function, a document scanning and indexing for all major functions, processing and printing of all cheques and the administration of the Concessionary Bus Pass scheme.

Promotion of the use of Cleanmail has continued and an average of 62% is going out as Cleanmail which has resulted in an overall saving to the Authority of over £7,200 so far in the last year.

The Corporate Support Team have continued to promote the work that can be done within the internal print room function and are currently in the process of printing and issuing Annual Billing for Council Tax which has always been done externally in the past.

Some basic statistics are shown in the table below:

	2010-2011	2009-2010
Overall Totals: (note the 2010- 2011 figures are based on Apr-Feb data only)		
DIP Pages Scanned	535,613	49,225
Items of Post In	122,758	165,072
Items of Post Out	344,285	415,324
Average % Mail going out as Cleanmail	62%	n/a
Cleanmail Saving to the Authority (only up to January for 2010-2011)	£7,263	£8,338
Number of Internal Print Jobs Processed	1,253	928
Number of Cheques Processed	0,177	47,856
Number of New Bus Passes Issued	2,182	n/a

Neighbourhood planning update

Between the autumn 2009 and summer of 2010, Maidstone Borough Council worked with residents and partner organisations to produce a pilot Neighbourhood Action Plan in Park Wood utilising Planning for Real®. Nearly 600 residents took part raising 2800 issues and ideas. Community safety and crime stood out right from the start – young people hanging around, drinking problems at the parade of shops and people afraid to go out at night. Also important were dog mess and litter. In relation to housing – damp and condensation and noisy neighbours were the top issues. Other ideas and issues included a skate park, parking problems, road safety, bullying on the estate and a job search club. Measures to address all of these issues are already underway.

The plan was formally adopted by the council in November 2010. However, there were some key issues that weren't widely identified by residents in the initial consultation:

- Health
- Educational attainment and qualifications
- Unemployment
- Teenage pregnancy

The council and its partners including Kent County Council, Golding Homes, the police and health services, have therefore asked that further work be carried out with residents to examine these issues. Discussion groups are being held with residents, a resource mapping exercise undertaken and a roundtable meeting to identify actions to address these issues is to be held. Having learnt the lessons of the pilot, it is intended for the new Community Development Unit to roll out neighbourhood planning to other areas in 2011/12.