

Corporate Improvement Plan progress update

April – September 2014

The Corporate Improvement Plan explains the key workstreams for the Council’s improvement journey, the drivers for improvement as well as priority services and projects for improvement. It allows work to be planned, sufficiently supported and monitored to ensure savings needs and the improvements required for the Council to meet its priority outcomes are delivered.

Progress on the improvement workstreams and associated projects is reported to Cabinet every six months. The most recent progress report for 2014/15 is shown below.

Efficiency and effectiveness workstream		AMBER
Planning Exploring opportunities to make the Development Management Service more efficient and improve the value for money of specialist advice		AMBER
<u>Update</u> The focus of this area of work is about making the Development Management Service more efficient and improving the value for money of specialist advice. However, due to the issues with the introduction of the shared planning support service and the need to spend time embedding the service properly before moving onto other things, there has been little progress on sharing or jointly procuring specialist advice and maximising the use of pre-application advice. The Business Improvement review of Maidstone Borough Council Planning has also been delayed and is due to start in April 2015. Once the work settles down the Heads of Service will move to matters such as sharing specialist advice and also the potential to standardise pre-app fees across the three authorities within MKIP. In terms of maximising pre-app there has been work undertaken and the Duty Planning Officer Service has been removed to encourage the formal pre-application route. Furthermore, a new category of ‘research’ has been introduced to ensure that the time spent on researching and interpreting planning histories is recouped.		
Economic Development Ensuring we have clear deliverable priorities for achieving growth through economic development and regeneration by working with partners to develop a Regeneration and Economic Development Plan and collaboratively ensure there are the resources and skills required to deliver this		GREEN
<u>Update</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Maidstone Economic Business Partnership has continued to help inform priorities for the evolving Economic Development Strategy with members interviewed on a group and individual basis. The partnership is also helping drive the design of a business to business skills exchange. • A report examining the possibility of setting up a Hub Lite on the Terrace of Maidstone House will come to Cabinet before the end of 2014. • Final amendments have been made with a view to a soft launch of the new Visit 		

Maidstone website in November.

- A number of visits to employers have been undertaken to understand fully their business and skills needs and to promote the benefits of apprenticeships. The first of a six-part series of "did you know" educational articles has been published in the Down Mail explaining apprenticeships and inviting businesses to become more involved.
- An audit of business needs is underway to establish and highlight gaps in course content.
- Maidstone's unique selling points and brand are being worked up; these will help drive development of the new website which will have a sectoral approach to highlight Maidstone's growth sectors and help promote supply chain development.
- The development brief is being finalised for the new business/inward investment website to replace Locate in Maidstone. It is planned to have the new site in place by March 2015.
- The first of six Access to Finance business events has been held with further events being staged in November and through the New Year. The new Business Customer Relationship Management is now live and will help facilitate events in future.
- Work is on-going with Local Plan team.
- Regular meetings continue with Kent County Council to ensure Maidstone's key priorities are recognised.
- Town Centre Action Plan - Internal work with senior officers across the Council has taken place to enable an informed debate to be carried out with stakeholders and external organisations.
- Consultation work has taken place on draft designs for public realm improvement works in the town centre. A New Project Board has been established to take this project forward.
- Directly working with Kent County Council to look at innovative solutions to unlocking stalled sites at Maidstone East, the Mall and Wrens Cross.

Revenues and Benefits

Preparing and planning for the effects of national welfare reforms, analysing the impact of the localised Council Tax and business rate schemes, maximising the collection of business rates and exploring different ways of delivering the service for the future e.g. joint Fraud initiative

GREEN

Update

- Payment direct pilot that was undertaken with Golding Homes has been completed and is currently being evaluated to determine whether the changes should be implemented ahead of universal credit. Evaluation by Golding Homes awaited.
- Local Council Tax Discount Scheme options explored through scrutiny workshop with recommendation agreed by Cabinet. Further report to Full Council in December for approval.
- Formal staff consultation for the fraud partnership completed with service to go live from 03.11.2014.
- Work commenced on reviewing processes for award of council tax discounts and exemptions in line with the memorandum of understanding put forward by Kent County Council (KCC). Meeting arranged with KCC to discuss future funding for fraud initiatives and core funding for fraud team. Report to Corporate Leadership Team during December.
- Debt recovery services business completed in draft. Work being undertaken with Partners to validate financial and legal assumptions.

Housing

Reducing the number of people and days spent in temporary accommodation and improving the amount and the diversity of housing supply, including in

AMBER

the private rented sector	
<p><u>Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review of the Allocation Scheme was completed, including the consultation with stakeholders and using the action plan from Internal Audit's review. In response to the consultation a number of amendments were made to the document. The amended version has been adopted and training has been provided to staff on the changes, the new version has been sent to Stakeholders and available via the website • The new Homelessness Strategy has now been adopted and delivering against the new actions • Progress against developing a new Affordable Housing supplementary planning document is dependent upon progress with the Local Plan. Discussion is taking place in response to the Regulation 18 consultation with regard to affordable housing • Review the Housing Strategy following adoption of the Local Plan to be commenced in 2015 • Seek out opportunities to purchase accommodation under the Empty Homes Strategy – Magnolia House purchased, returning 8 units back into use. Remedial works are being undertaken and the units should be available for occupation in the final quarter 2014/15 • The Housing Service was fully engaged in the development of Kent County Council's Accommodation Strategy, which has now been adopted. Site visits have been undertaken with County staff to identify opportunities to progress the Accommodation Strategy action plan • Sites are being reviewed with the intention of bringing forward opportunities for the Council's new investment initiative • Aylesbury House was purchased and returned for use within budget and is now occupied as emergency temporary accommodation, helping to manage the expenditure on temporary accommodation and helping to reduce the number and length of stay for households in temporary accommodation 	
<p>Finance Building an efficient service that supports the Council make informed strategic financial management decisions, manage and control budgets and commit and measure resources and investigating how this service could be delivered in the future</p>	GREEN
<p><u>Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Agresso upgrade is on track and still due to go live in November 2014 (planning & budgeting module will be part of this). • The systems team have started to set up direct debits for regular transactions – this is an on-going process given the frequency of certain debts. • The Chief Accountant is in the process of drafting job descriptions for evaluation with a view to introducing career grading. • The business improvement team review is planned for early 2015 (Jan/Feb) – and an initial meeting has been held with the Business Improvement team. 	
<p>Building Control Re-designing the service, diversifying work to undertake more trading rather than statutory work and investigating options for delivery of the service, in particular the viability of a public sector partnership, and developing a model for delivery for the future</p>	AMBER
<p><u>Update</u></p> <p>The number of chargeable applications has increased slightly over Q2 last year and the trading account is in surplus. The Building Surveying Manager is to produce an options report on behalf of Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells building control during November to</p>	

explore shared working.

Environmental Services

Making the Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance services more efficient, including improving work practices and feedback to customers through use of technology

GREEN

Update

The implementation of mobile technology for all street cleansing service requests has now been completed successfully. The mobile devices are being used by the workforce and are managed by the cleansing supervisor and section leaders. This has already improved the accuracy of information captured from residents and enables greater visibility of the work being completed. This is on track to be extended to include scheduled work next year and then to identify opportunities within the grounds maintenance service.

A review of the street cleansing service is also currently being carried out to identify improvements and increase efficiency. It is intended that this work will identify any gaps in the current service provision and ensure that the service meets the current and future needs of the borough. It is proposed that recommendations for improvement are identified by the end of the year.

Customer Services

Redefining and achieving our customer service standards and moving to our 'digital first' customer service model by moving more contacts to our website and away from face to face visits and the telephone

AMBER

Update

- The Consultants, Red Quadrant, have completed their review of Customer Services and have presented their findings and recommendations to Corporate Leadership Team. The Head of Policy and Communications is now working on the next steps and the future changes for Customer Services. The first changes are likely to take effect early in 2015.
- Customer service standards, the customer care policy will be reviewed once the full review of customer services is complete.
- We have continued to develop more on-line self-serve forms. All of the 'Streetscene' forms are now available on-line and the Customer Service Advisors are using the same on-line forms so they go direct to the Maidstone Borough Services Operatives rather than via the Front Office system. A new on-line form for Pre-Application Planning Advice was also introduced. Again there has been a 65% increase in the number of on-line forms completed over the previous quarter however over 1000 forms were submitted by residents wishing to opt out of the edited register.
- The number of telephone enquiries has increased during the last quarter but this is mainly due to the increase in calls for the Planning services as it now includes calls for Tunbridge Wells and Swale as well. There was also a significant increase in calls for Registration Services during the quarter following the introduction of individual electoral registration. The number of calls answered in quarter two was 53,263, an increase from 45,481 in quarter one. Corresponding figures for 2013 to 2014 are 45,686 and 43,686.
- The Gateway no longer deal with Planning enquiries however there has still been an increase in the overall number of customers mainly due to an increase in customers for Benefits, Housing and Parking enquiries. The number of face to face enquiries has increased from 10,703 in quarter one to 11,867 in quarter two, a total of 1164 more enquiries. Corresponding figures for 2013 to 2014 are 13,922 and 13,560 which shows a definite decline year on year in the number of face to face enquiries.

- The number of emails received continues to be high at around 6,000 per quarter although there was a slight decrease during the last quarter compared to the previous quarter. The most efficient way of handling emails will be considered as part of the customer services review.
- Web chat will be considered once a new telephony solution for Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP) is agreed as Web Chat has been included as a requirement in any future system requirement.
- We are continuing to use the Front Office system but we have now started to consider its future use.
- Discussions on the best use of the Gateway from 2016 are continuing.
- Website resource continues on a temporary basis as the Contact Centre and Gateway still require their full complement of staff.

MKIP shared services and operational model

AMBER

Working with partners, in particular our MKIP local authority partners, to establish closer working arrangements and partnerships in more services, as well looking at all the services we share and deciding on and delivering the best operational model for the future

Update

The projects for Environmental Health and Planning Support have now been completed and both teams are working through a list of post-implementation issues. Performance in Planning Support has dropped and the team are working hard to recover to a business as usual position. Performance in Environmental Health has remained steady, but there remain some significant challenges to resolve. Collaboration Agreement and SLAs are in the process of being created for these two new services.

Work has been undertaken to consider what other services might be shared, and MKIP is currently working collaboratively to deliver Digital First initiatives across the three partners, and has submitted a Transformation Challenge Award to DCLG to assist with this. The results of the bid will be known in November.

The Mid Kent Services Director trial will continue until May 2015 and baseline evidence to measure the success of the trial has been gathered. A mid point review of evidence will take place in October to ensure the project is on track.

An external consultant from IESE has been engaged to conduct a short piece of work to increase our understanding of the key issues and challenges that are affecting productivity and efficiency within the partnership. The consultant will be speaking to a range of officers who work in, or closely with, partnership services to gauge whether the issues are transient or systemic within our organisations, and will present recommendations for addressing the key challenges. The consultant will report back to a joint meeting of the three Chief Executives and their senior management teams early in November.

Information and knowledge management

GREEN

Implementing the recommendations of our external Information Management review to ensure we make more efficient, secure and smart use of information we gather and store. This includes improving our information governance arrangements, agreeing relevant policies, improving our systems architecture and finding ways to turn information into knowledge

Update

An Information Management Officer has been appointed on a fixed term contract. Work

commenced on the action plan in September. An identified weakness of bringing in an external candidate was a lack of knowledge of the organisation, scale of the task and losing expertise at the end of the post holder's contract. To help with this the Performance and Scrutiny Officer is now supporting the project for 25% of their time. Discussions have also been held with Tunbridge Wells about sharing work as they are addressing many of the same issues.

Actions progressed to date include:

- New FOI and Data Protection Guidance developed
- Training Programme for staff under development
- Asset Register creation begun
- Public Disclosure Log for FOIs now on the internet
- Begun drafting Information Sharing Policy
- Produced guidance for staff on information Sharing
- Research carried out for Information Management Strategy and Information Sharing Policy
- Identification of approach to the Information Risk Register
- Research into best practice and approach to record retention and disposal

The Information Management Officer has also attended project management training and had support from Anna Collier in the business improvement team in terms of handing over work already completed as part of the audit and planning the next steps.

Income generation workstream	AMBER
Maidstone Culture and Leisure Using our cultural and leisure assets like the Museum and Mote Park better to bring in a sustainable income	AMBER
<u>Update</u> Good progress has been made with developing the plan, and with the restructure. In addition charging for enquiries has now been entered into the fees and charges schedule. Maidstone Culture and Leisure is moving towards a decision on 17.12.2014 in respect of the Adventure Zone and charging for car parking at Mote Park.	
Waste and Recycling Working to achieve the target of 50% recycling by 2015 and making a surplus from our commercial waste service	GREEN
<u>Update</u> The Council has achieved a recycling rate of 50% for the first 6 months of 2014/15 and is continuing to engage with residents to increase this to 60% by 2019. New stickers have been attached to residents' wheeled bins to promote which items can be recycled and a door knocking campaign is about to start to engage with local residents in lower performing areas. Our Commercial Waste Service currently has 224 customers and is working to generate further leads. The service is generating a contribution to the Council's overheads but is	

yet to make a surplus. Work is being undertaken with Economic Development to help promote the service to more businesses and increase the annual turnover. The service continues to work hard at process improvement, particularly in regard to payments and cash collection. It is hoped this will result in a more robust operating system which can cope with increased numbers of clients and is cheaper to operate.

Corporate Support

Investigating whether our Print services could be a viable commercial service and/or whether our Corporate Support services could be shared with local authority partners

RED

Update

The service has made good progress in capturing work that had previously been carried out by external printers, therefore adopting a commercial approach and providing better value for the Council. Examples include the printing of poll cards and canvass literature internally and less recent the printing of council tax and business rates bills.

There have been on-going issues with print management software which have restricted the resources available to further develop a commercial offering. There are also concerns over the ability of the print room staff to deliver a customer focused commercial operation and the cost of setting one up. The Commercial Programme Manager does not have the capacity to assist the Corporate Support team this year so it is likely that the focus of the team for 2014/15 will be on the successful implementation of the print and post room solution and capturing external spend on printing rather than the implementation of a wider commercial service.

Bereavement Services

Exploring options for delivery, introducing more efficient working practices and expanding the offer at the Crematorium

GREEN

Update

Cataloguing Burial Records: A plan has been developed to effectively record burial and cremation information, including historical data. This will simplify the sale of memorial and other plots increasing revenue. This work will also make the records more able to be searched possibly opening up opportunities for commercial selling of ancestry/local history information.

Increased Use of On-Line Forms: The Bereavement Team is working with the Business Improvement Team to bring more of the complex system of forms and legally required documentation on-line. In addition to improving customer services this will free staff time to develop new ventures and further increase the use of the service.

Website: We are exploring the possibility of having a stand-alone website that will allow us to communicate with our Funeral Directors better, but also offer more take home memorials to the public – a more user friendly shop window.

More efficient working: We now send out our memorial packs and questionnaire together and have saved a substantial amount in postage. By having dedicated staff to each section, Crematorium, Cemetery and Memorials, means that we are more efficient in our delivery to our customers.

Pet Crematorium: The detailed business case has been completed this was agreed by the Project Board. Final amendments are being made in response to comments from the Finance and Legal departments. This will go to the Commercialisation Group on Tuesday 4th November for further scrutiny before it is presented to the Cabinet Member, Cllr Ring.

Green Burials: The high level business case showed there was viable a potential market, hence it was looked at in more detail. This further study recommended that this project should be put on hold and revisited in 2016/2017 because of land costs, capacity within

the organisation and other factors.

Commercialisation

AMBER

Update

Brunswick Street car park The feasibility study is underway and is due to be finished 31.10.2014. Aiming for Cabinet 17.12.2014.

Potential Charging for parking in Mote Park The second part of the market research is due to start 29.12.2014. Aiming for Cabinet 17.12.2014

Adventure Zone The second part of the market research is due to start 29.12.2014. Aiming for Cabinet 17.12.2014

Debt Recovery Now owned by MKIP. Scheduled for MKIP board in December 2014. Targeted commencement of Service 06.2015.

Renewable Energy We now have identified opportunities at the depot, the leisure centre and Maidstone United Football club to install Photovoltaic arrays. The Commercial Projects Manager is arranging quotes for the arrays and will present business cases 12.2014. The wider programme has progressed slowly and steadily. Engagement with potential partners is scheduled for November 2014.

Asset Management workstream

AMBER

Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS)

Adopting our Integrated Transport Strategy and delivering this to ensure the infrastructure is in place to support the development proposed by the Core Strategy and to address some existing traffic congestion issues

AMBER

Update

The further traffic modelling is underway and progressing. As a result of the new secondment arrangements there may be some delay to the commencement of modelling results analysis, and some discussion required as to whether this is carried out by JMP or Mott MacDonald. Officers are making progress in discussions with KCC at officer level however the political dynamics still make discussions at this level difficult. There will still need to be continuing dialogue and negotiation, particularly as further Local Plan site allocations are progressed.

Once the analysis is complete work to revise the ITS in line with the emerging Local Plan must be prioritised, including some form of consultation, although the timing of this may need to be considered in light of both the emerging Local Plan consultations and also the borough council elections in May 2015.

Major assets review

Reviewing the Council's major assets as part of the Asset Management Plan to make savings and/or maximise income potential. This includes considering long term options for Council accommodation in the town centre, looking at the future use of the Town Hall, exploring options for the King Street, Medway Street and Brunswick Street car park sites, as well as improving and maximising income from the Park Wood industrial estate.

AMBER

Update

Funding of various workstreams in connection with office accommodation strategy was approved at Cabinet last week, enabling external Consultants to be appointed to progress matters.

Rent reviews, lease renewals and lease extensions at Park Wood Industrial Estate are progressing, where the terms of the leases apply, using external advisors to ensure best value.

We are also following a policy of reletting property, when it becomes vacant, on improved terms, subject to market rents, instead of disposal.

A feasibility study of the potential for redevelopment of the Brunswick St site is underway.

Commercial property investment

AMBER

Increasing our property portfolio by identifying and purchasing secondary property market options and converting the Chillington Street building for residential use

Update

Chillington House is currently being converted to four flats, and should be available for letting in late 2014/15.

The administrators of the fund that own the Equilibrium units at Park Wood Industrial Estate have decided not to proceed with the disposal of the freehold of ten units to the Council. The Council was also outbid in attempts to buy the freehold of another plot at Park Wood Industrial Estate and a development site at Junction 6 of the M20. Other opportunities are being followed up.

Looking forward, the rising property market could lead to the yield from investment reducing to a level that barely covers borrowing costs, with asset appreciation being the main return. The management arrangement options for residential properties also need to be examined.

Empowerment and self-sufficiency workstream

GREEN

Right to bid, right to challenge and community asset transfer

GREEN

Investigating which assets and services might be appropriate to be delivered by the community through the 'Right to Bid' and establishing an effective mechanism and approach for supporting the transfer of community assets where this is appropriate, demonstrating value for money and maximising their use

Update

Interest remains low particularly in relation to community asset transfer and Right to Bid. Consideration is being given to the opportunity for play areas, particularly in rural areas, to become community asset transfers as part of the Play Area Strategy review. Tentative discussion commenced with Kent Association of Local Councils that was met with a positive response.

Digital inclusion

GREEN

Working with partners to identify the geographical areas and communities that are most likely to be digitally excluded and work with them to identify solutions. This could mean increasing or signposting publically accessible computers, running training courses or accessing cheap computer schemes

Update

Research has been undertaken into good practice elsewhere, including the work that Camden Council has carried out. A copy of their Digital Strategy has been acquired and will be used to facilitate a discussion with the new Forum that will be set up and running

in the New Year.

In preparation to build a strategy based on some of the priorities and work areas highlighted the Terms of Reference (based on the Financial Inclusion terms of reference) have been updated. This draft document has been circulated to key stakeholders for comment including taking advice on the proposed membership.

Financial inclusion

GREEN

Working with partners to improve financial awareness and identify solutions to reduce the impact of financial exclusion. Financial inclusion is the ability of an individual, household or group to access appropriate financial services or products. There are a number of barriers to financial inclusion including debt problems, fuel poverty, poor financial knowledge, no affordable credit and low income. Those most likely to be financially excluded include people over 60, young adults, single parents, people with disabilities and people on low and insecure incomes

Update

The third forum meeting was held in September. Sub groups have now been reduced from three to two as the same people were attending money management and crisis management and the work crossed over.

Two money advice for practitioner seminars were held in July and feedback from these was excellent with 95% saying the information would help them advise their clients and 59% saying their knowledge had increased.

A residents' money advice day was held in Marden. Unfortunately despite a substantial amount of advertising, and the event being held in a café, only four residents attended. We will therefore be reviewing our approach for any future events.

We were successful in two small bids from the Illegal Money Lending Team which will be used in another reporting period.

The Financial Inclusion Project Officer post has been extended until March 2015 using funding for the implementation of welfare reform.

Local flood plans

AMBER

Completing our investigations of how we and other local and national agencies responded to the floods in December 2013 and, over the longer term, working with Kent County Council, the Environment Agency and the Flood and Coastal Regional Committee to consider whether any flood defence schemes are viable and whether these could be pursued. Also, working with local communities at risk of being affected by flooding in the future to help them formulate local flood plans. This will help ensure that communities directly affected by flooding will be able to work together in a planned way to minimise the impact of any floods on people and their property

Update

The action relating to the floods was set out in a report to Cabinet on 8 October which includes an action plan in the appendix. At the end of October, around 25 members, including representatives from the parishes, attended a briefing on the flood related work. Updating the Housing Emergency Plan is a key action which should be completed by the end of December 2014. The on-going work will also focus on trying to get across the various roles and responsibilities around emergency work, which the Kent Resilience Forum are leading on. We have also planned communication with public about what they can do in the event of an emergency via Twitter, Facebook and Borough Update.

A large number of applications for support have been received from residents affected by flooding in response to publicity and the nearing of the deadline for applications to be

received at the end of October. Applications are running at 96 to date, with further enquiries likely to result in additional applications being received before the cut off date. In August over 30 applications were received, which was more than the total for the preceding months. Whilst the initiative was originally expected to be managed by an officer in addition to their existing duties this is no longer practical. Some additional resource was provided to give administrative support but this is no longer adequate. A further resource is being identified but this will result in a delay in processing applications. The aim is to have processed all the applications by the end of November, but this may be challenging.

Organisational culture

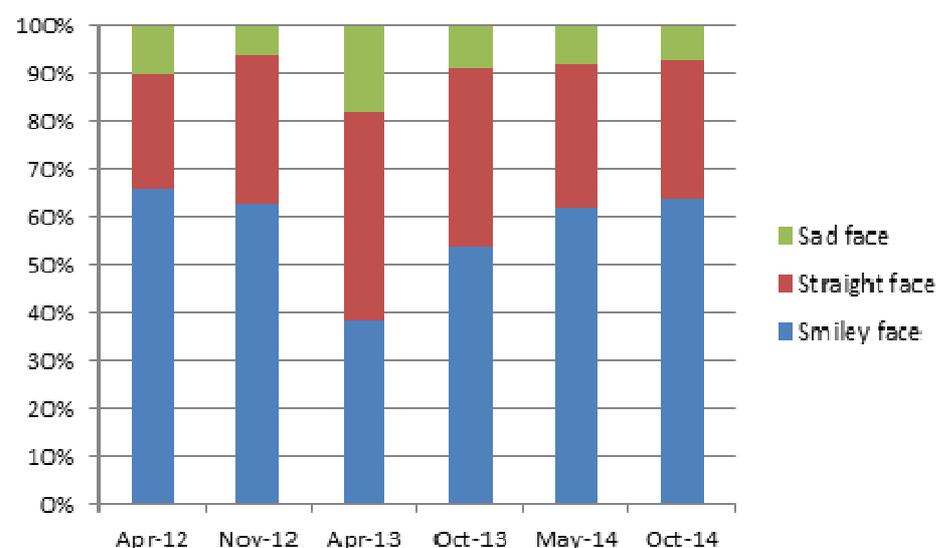
GREEN

Ensuring that staff and members can contribute to and understand their role in delivering organisational priorities. Embedding an organisational culture where staff are empowered to do their jobs through appropriate training and managerial support, where there is permission to experiment and time to learn, including looking at best practice in other organisations, and where all officers and members are engaged and are able to give their feedback and ideas. Improving collaboration between different parts of the organisation, ensuring that change is well managed and there is the capacity and capability to deliver the required outcomes. This will all contribute to our aim of achieving Investors in People (IiP) Gold by 2015.

Update

- Work on the 'employee voice' since the last One Council briefings have resulted in comment boxes around the organisation and other engagement activities commencing, including birthday teas.
- One Council briefings have been delivered and overall quite positive feedback:

	Apr-12	Nov-12	Apr-13	Oct-13	May-14	Oct-14
Smiley face	66	63	38	54	62	64
Straight face	24	31	44	37	30	29
Sad face	10	6	18	9	8	7



- Team brief exercise is out which will build on the John Lewis 'what makes a great

organisation' – combined with ideas on a poster in breakout area

- Best Companies survey closes 24th October – by midday we had 48% the last time we had the survey we had 60% return rate – this is disappointing – the analysis should come through in December. The next phase of the programme will be determined following this feedback.
- The tender evaluations are in process for 360⁰ feedback process to be part of the April 15 appraisals and the consultation process is in process for changing the appraisal to include the 'talent grid'
- The calendar of staff engagement activities has also been updated