South Lakeland District Council
Council
19 December 2017

EXECUTIVE REPORT – Mid-Year Update 2017/18

REPORT FROM: Cllr Brenda Gray - Council Organisation and People Portfolio Holder

Portfolio Responsibilities

The implementation and renewal of the Council Plan.

The Council Plan objectives in relation to quality of service and high performance culture.

The organisation of the Authority relating to the Council’s central services including Member Services and Employee relations.

Policies, Plans and Strategies:

- Council Plan (Incorporating the Five Year Strategy)
- Performance Management
- Equality Scheme
- Emergency Plan
- Member Development and Training Plan
- Workforce Plan

Key Areas:

- Community strategy/ area planning/ development of recovery group
- Emergency Planning
- Performance Management
- Legal and Committee Service and HR Services
- Member Services
- Member Training and Development
Council Plan (2018 Update)

The Council Plan is currently undergoing committee approval for the 2018 update. The plan sets out the vision for South Lakeland which is supported by the four priorities.

The 2018 update incorporates progress achieved over the last 12 months and details the key projects that contribute to achieving the four priority areas. The measures of success have been amended in the recent update to reflect progress and will continue to be reported on a quarterly basis.

Subject to approval from Council on 19 December 2017 the reviewed Council Plan strategy will be adopted and implemented for 2018.

Community Development of Recovery Group

The Community Flood Recovery Group has now reduced the scale of meetings undertaken. The next meeting is due to take place in early 2018 and the previous meeting was held in June 2017.

The group continues to share strategic and partner updates, identifies any issues that may be escalated and develop resilience activities for the community.

Emergency Planning

This autumn the Council has played a strong role in preparing for potential incidents. The Council continues to keep a watching brief by monitoring Environment Agency Flood Warnings and Met Office Weather Warnings - and participating in Cumbria Resilience Forum teleconferences. These teleconferences might be Flood Advisory Teleconferences or Strategic Coordination Group Teleconferences. A resource document has been produced for community resilience groups called ‘Community Resilience across South Lakeland’. This provides communities with links to established resilience tools – for example a plan template and a list of the types of incidents that are relevant to Cumbria. The document also lists existing community resilience groups across the area – making it easier to find out who is involved and how to get in touch.

Performance Management

The Council Plan Monitoring report is being prepared for Quarter 3 – this shows progress with the Council Plan Measures of Success and the management of the Strategic Risks. The Performance Management Framework and the Risk Management Process will be reviewed for their annual updates in Quarter 4.

Legal Services

The Legal & Committee Service has continued to provide high quality support and advice to the wider organisation both at an operational and a strategic level.

In the first half of 2017/18, legal colleagues have, amongst other things:-

Successfully recovered significant outstanding sums due in relation to lake encroachments
Undertaken a number of successful prosecutions in respect of fraudulent flood grant applications
Introduced an electronic case management system for the day to day management of work
Provided training to members in respect of licensing, planning and code of conduct
Since the start of 2017/18, committee services colleagues have continued to provide a professional clerking service to all council meetings and provide a robust, well organised Overview & Scrutiny function. Particular highlights include:-

Increasing the number of Members who are now working paperless 
Organising and servicing a number of additional, high-profile meetings at short notice 
Increasing the level of Member engagement with the IRP process

Officers within Legal & Committee Services will continue to operate as an effective support service to the organisation in delivering the Council’s priorities for the remainder of 2017/18 and beyond.

HR Services

The HR Services team has continued to provide a high quality strategic and operational HR support to the Council, and has supported the Customer Connect programme with professional advice and expertise in relation to the people elements of the project.

The service has launched a revised Recruitment and Selection Policy which has greatly improved the organisation’s recruitment process, the merit list is being used as a pro-active approach by matching potential candidates to job vacancies and managing a talent pipeline into the Council. Recent changes to the Council’s on-line recruitment portal now provide a professional and contemporary experience for job applicants, CV’s can now be uploaded directly into a candidates application and further enhancements now include the ability for shortlisted applicants to select their own interview times from a schedule uploaded on the system by HR. This provides for a sleek external experience for the candidate, whilst reducing routine administrative tasks in the team. Training workshops have been provided to line managers on the new policy and a further training course will be delivered in December to compliment the workshops. Feedback from candidates and line managers has been positive in response to the new policy, and the addition of the merit list has been universally welcomed.

The existing Sickness Absence Policy was reviewed and replaced by a new Attendance Management Policy, approved at HRC 14 November. The revised policy encompasses a more pro-active approach to the management of attendance and sends a positive message of management responsibility for well-being and personal responsibility for attendance at work. A new section providing sensitive guidance and support for employees diagnosed with a terminal illness has been included in the new policy. This section was developed in close consultation with the Unison trade union. Other changes in the policy reflect updates in legislation and best practice affecting the management of workplace attendance. Training events and workshops are planned for December to launch the new policy.

HR have provided robust support to line managers in the management of sickness absence, a more pro-active use of the Occupational Health service has ensured that employees are referred earlier in their absence and this has shown to assist positively in supporting them to return to work. Our sickness absence levels remain well below the public sector averages and are comparable with the levels reported in the private sector.

A new Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) was launched on 1 October, this is delivered by an external provider Health Assured who provide the service to a large number of public and private sector employers. The EAP provides a range of support mechanisms to employees and their families and includes 24/7 counselling services, legal and consumer information services,
financial and debt management, serious illness and accident support, health and wellbeing resources to support healthy lifestyles etc. The provision of the EAP is a positive addition to the employee benefits package, it is designed to support the health and wellbeing of our employees, however it also delivers benefits to the Council as an employer, through reduced absence and increased productivity.

Further policy reviews are planned for the forthcoming months and these include reviewing the policies supporting business change including redundancy and early/flexible retirement to ensure that they remain up to date and fit for purpose. It is also planned to introduce a new Employment Screening Policy to consolidate a number of existing policies into one new document, including DBS checking and pre-employment checking processes. This will ensure that our pre-employment practices are transparent, easily understood by recruiting managers and candidates and that recent legislative changes are incorporated into the policy.

**Member Services/ Training Development**

There are a number of initiatives for Member Services that are underway. Member Services are aiming to move towards becoming a digitally accessible service, including a member’s sharepoint page with key information for new members as well as guidance and training available on-line. Corporate IT equipment has been offered and rolled out to members of the Member Services Steering Group and Shadow Cabinet. The roll out to all other members is expected to take place in 2018 following the District Council Elections in May. All members will then be able to engage with the Council digitally by accessing committee papers online and submitting expenses online. In exceptional circumstances, e.g. for disability accessibility issues or lack of broadband in the ward, members will be able to continue to use current processes for claiming expenses or receiving committee papers.

Role profiles for the roles of Member, Leader, Deputy Leader, Chairman and Committee Chair have been drafted and will be presented to full council in February 2018. These profiles take into account the digital engagement which members will be able to undertake upon the issuing of corporate equipment, as well as recognising the work being undertaken in the Customer Connect programme.

SLDC were recently reviewed for the North West Charter and were successfully awarded Level 1 in October 2017 for member development. Work has now commenced to achieve the Level 2 scrutiny award in 2018.

The North West Charter Level 1 considered the development of Members including personal reviews (PDP’s), training and development available and what work is being undertaken to allow for interaction with new technologies and ways of working. The Level 2 award will look at how training and development has impacted on the work of the Council and its decision making particularly in community development and robust decision making.

Member Essential Training have been undertaken across the organisation that included the Code of Conduct and Member/Officer protocol training. Training for committee members in Planning, Licensing, Audit and Standards is ongoing.