

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 04/06/18
Questions on the 2017/18 Year End Performance Report

1. CST2 – will the phone waiting times data be available from Q1 2018/19?

Limited data will be available. Arrangements are being made with the interim telephony supplier to have limited performance data available for 18/19 within the constraints of the current system. In the longer term, we will ensure that the new telephony system (aligned with the anticipated move to Shire Hall) will support the generation of fit for purpose management information.

2. CST3 – why has the number of complaints shot up, is it only due to complaints about Amey?

The rise was due in large part to an increase in Amey-related complaints (more than 50% increase from 2016). This was fed back to Amey's Account Director in early 2018.

3. What other measures will be coming forward?

While we are going to make best use of the existing systems and data in 18/19, we are somewhat constrained by them. Therefore, our focus is on ensuring that the new systems allow us to have more visibility of outcome-based performance measures such as percentage resolved on first contact, number of self-serve transactions completed successfully and others being identified in the Service Planning process.

4. HR2 – why did the number of working days lost shoot up in Q4.

The increase in number of working days lost in Quarter 4 when compared to Quarter 3 was, in part, largely due to a number of sickness absence cases moving from medium term to long term sickness absence. The number of short term sickness absences, particularly in respect of absences due to colds and flu, stress/depression (caused predominantly through personal as opposed to work-related stress) and as a result of surgery, also increased. Seasonal absences due to colds and flu are also to be expected in the reporting period for Quarter 4 and impacted adversely on short term absence levels.

5. HR4 – what evidence is being looked at to try and understand and tackle this?

We are aware that the increase in absence levels from Quarter 3 to Quarter 4 is high for the reasons outlined above and are taking proactive measures to address this increase. Continued promotion of the HR and Occupational Health service is taking place with managers advised to obtain specialist advice at an early stage to address both short and long term sickness absence issues within their teams in a timely and appropriate manner. A number of sickness absence cases have been referred to the Specialist Case Team for formal meetings with successful outcomes being effected in these cases. The Employee Assistance Provider (EAP) service is also being further promoted to staff and managers are encouraged to seek advice from the Occupational Health advice line for further guidance as appropriate. Organisational sickness absence levels are reviewed on a monthly basis in detail at the Senior Management Team Meeting with reports also containing information on those who are reaching the Council's absence trigger points so that cases of repeated short term sickness absence

can be managed appropriately via Heads of Service and Service Managers. Training is also to be provided to Team Leaders and Service Managers on the effective management of sickness absence to ensure that fundamental principles of effective sickness absence management, such as conducting return to work interviews for all periods of sickness absence, covering staff wellbeing in one to one meetings as part of the appraisal process and considering attendance management plans are in place. It is anticipated that these proactive interventions will effect an improvement in absence levels over the coming quarter.

6. What kind of operational challenges is H1 referring to?

As Members will be aware, during 2017/2018 the Together Gloucester programme saw the merging of 3 housing teams into one Housing Service. The new service came into being on 1st June 2017, and as with any change such as this, there is time required to establish new roles, manage the knowledge transfer of departing staff and put in place in new operational arrangements. Things are now settling down and the next steps will see the service review its processes and procedures to make sure that we are as efficient as possible when dealing with the variety of applications the service assesses and determine.

Last year saw the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and Universal Credit and all Councils were required to implement additional measures and IT infrastructure to meet the new obligations placed on us. This required resource from within the team to be re-diverted for certain periods of the year.

Unfortunately, during 2017/2018 the service suffered from a range of sickness absence across front-line staff and although we endeavoured to recruit additional resource this proved difficult particularly through the agency market. Additional key permanent posts have now been recruited into the front line of the service that will all contribute to ensuring that we are processing cases effectively and efficiently moving forward.

As predicted, the challenges outlined above inevitably led to some operational disruption and the impact of which was that we processed fewer homeless applications than the previous year. It is critically important to point out however that as Council we continued to meet our key obligation in that anybody who was owed a homelessness duty was placed into accommodation pending a decision being made. This is a very important message as it could be perceived in some quarters that a reduction in the number of homeless determinations means that residents have been pushed away by the council to fend for themselves whilst we determine their application. This is absolutely not the case and through our officers working in partnership with key agencies we continue to support residents through a variety of measures.

The year has also seen noticeable successes with our annual rough sleepers count indicating that the number of rough sleepers in the City had decreased at a time when nationally this number is increasing. This is testament to the partnership arrangements in place between our Council and key agencies such as Greensquare Group and P3. Of particular note was the implementation of the Social Impact Bond for Entrenched Sleepers which supports our safe and

attractive streets policy, the ethos of which is to support and engage those who find themselves sleeping on our streets. Through this programme we have been able to house and support 22 entrenched rough sleepers who were based in Gloucester with a further 2 being engaged with currently. A key focus for us this year is the acquisition of property so that we can increase the number of units available to us in Gloucester to provide temporary accommodation. This work is underway and we are hoping to develop business cases over the next 3 months to bring this about. I would also draw your attention to the recent Cabinet Report which outlined how as a service we intend to improve on the situation reflected within the performance report and this is a key priority for us as a Housing Service in 2018/2019.

In addition, housing and homelessness will now be the focus of two cabinet members following the changes introduced to portfolio responsibilities at annual council in recognition of the importance of reducing homelessness and increasing housing capacity in the City. Cllr Watkins will be spending time in the department over the next few months supporting the proactive work of the housing teams and looking at prevention of homelessness in more detail. We look forward to receiving and considering the well overdue Overview & Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group recommendations on tackling homelessness to aid us in this work.

7. H1 & H2 – please explain how they relate to each other?

There has been an increase in the number of residents presenting to us at risk of homelessness and naturally there has been an increase in the number of residents for whom we have accepted a duty to place into temporary accommodation pending their case being determined further. This increase in volume has also played its part in increasing the time it is taking to determine cases with caseloads increasing. In the short term, temporary resource has been introduced into the service to work on clearing legacy cases and moving forward a review of processes and procedures within the service will soon be undertaken that will mean that homeless applications are dealt with in both an effective and efficient manner.

8. H3 – please explain reduction in more detail?

This figure is not reflective of the successful prevention work that was carried out by officers in 2017/2018 when dealing with those residents who were at risk of being made homeless but at that stage we did not have a legal duty (at risk of being made homeless within 28 days) to assist them. We did however assist them to remain in their home or find alternative accommodation but these numbers were not recorded as part of the return. With the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the legal duty now being to support people at risk of being made homeless with 56 days these figures will be recorded through a new IT programme that will support this work.