

This Report will be made public on 27 May 2020



Report Number **P/20/04**

**To:** Personnel Committee  
**Date:** 4 June 2020  
**Status:** Non-executive Decision  
**Head of Paid Service:** Dr Susan Priest

**SUBJECT: REPORT OF THE HEAD OF THE PAID SERVICE**

**SUMMARY:** This report is from the Head of the Paid Service in relation to the adequacy of resources across the Council.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**  
Personnel Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**  
1. To receive and note Report P/20/04.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Head of the Paid Service of the council is appointed under s3 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.
- 1.2 The council has a duty under that act to provide the Head of the Paid Service “with such staff, accommodation and other resources as are, in his opinion, sufficient to allow his duties...to be performed” (s4(1)(b) of the Act).
- 1.3 It is therefore appropriate to formally report to the Council, via the Personnel Committee, on the adequacy of staff resources that the Council has provided in order to give assurances that they are sufficient to discharge the Head of Paid Service duties.

## 2. THE RESOURCES OF THE COUNCIL

- 2.1 In February 2018 Cabinet and Council supported the Business Case for transformation and allocated funds to a council-wide programme. Significant progress has been made implementing new structures and systems resulting in the council being a far more positive customer-focused and IT enabled employer. Cabinet report C/19/65 gives more detail on the delivery of the programme to date and the forward plan. As staff conclude the work through 2020 the ongoing emphasis will remain on continuous improvement as a cornerstone of the changed, more positive, culture at the council.
- 2.2 The council is ambitious and has a strong reputation for clear leadership across services and in high profile projects. During this exceptional year, due to the immediate demands and expected short and medium term impacts arising from the global pandemic, our resource focus will largely be on four key aspects:
  - i. **Recovery from COVID-19** which will continue to demand remote and innovative ways of serving our customers. A central theme of our new customer access strategy is the launch of MyAccount, our new single point of IT access for residents to those personalised services they are most interested in, including those which contain data unique to them. This will greatly enhance the customer experience, transforming how we interact and serve our residents and customers.

A modest phased return to the civic centre is planned through the year for those teams unable to work from home (such as specialist IT maintenance), and operational grounds maintenance staff will continue to adopt covid-secure working practices. The move to flexible ways of working a few years ago set up the organisation up exceptionally well to deal with the current pandemic, meaning that disruption to services during the early stages of COVID-19 restrictions was minimised. The tenanted offices within the civic centre, and the wider council estate, will also be re-opened in a phased managed way, again following the relevant government guidelines.

Work on our new ten-year Corporate Plan will be refreshed to feature, in the short term, details on recovery planning. More information on our approach to recovery will be discussed with Cabinet at their meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June and expectations are that an emergency budget will be presented later in the year. While the council has a reasonable level of reserves, we are exploring very seriously other options to address the additional budget pressures such as undertaking a daily cash flow, reviewing income projections, holding vacant staffing posts, and reviewing the extent and timing of the capital programme.

There will be some difficult decisions ahead, however, unlike some other local authorities at this time, the S151 officer does not advise that we need to consider a S114 notice.

- ii. Continuing the momentum in **delivering the challenging agenda** set by Members including projects such as: Otterpool Park; our High Streets Regeneration; investment to support the climate change agenda; our council housing estate renewal programme; and a significant expansion in the number of new affordable homes into our Housing Revenue Account, etc. The council has made a number of bold and critical funding decisions to signal their strong support for the delivery of these projects. The corporate leadership and management challenge through 2020/21 will be delivering these ambitions with the resources available against the original timescales, at a time of economic uncertainty arising from COVID-19. New resourcing opportunities from the changed context will be explored, including a renewed emphasis to source locally wherever possible to support the local economy.
- iii. Integrating an **effective housing management** function into the council as a result of decisions to close East Kent Housing, the council's Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) is a priority for 2020. Senior level expertise has been recruited, and staff resource redeployed, to ensure that this complex and challenging service area is integrated effectively, and at pace.

From council decision in February 2020 (Report C/19/68; Decision No: 19/068), staff delivering the service will be embedded across the three directorate structure from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020. Wherever possible functions and responsibilities will be aligned with existing teams. For example, customer services and administrative staff will be incorporated into our existing customer services and case management teams, and rent collection activities and debt management will be aligned with the corporate debt team. Estate management and compliance will be clustered within the assets team which will be fully aligned with our existing estates management function.

New employees to the council, or those longer serving housing management staff who are returning to the council, will be supported through the process and a programme will be put in place to ensure that they are embraced within the positive culture of the council.

- iv. **Continuous improvement and excellence in service delivery** in all that we do is the fourth overriding focus for staff resources this year. While the council has made big changes in its working practises and the resulting culture is quite unrecognisable from just two years ago, there is no room for complacency. Encouraging staff to be part of a high performing team, with clear shared ambitions and values, has set the organisation up to be both resilient and responsive. This approach will continue through the coming year with a relentless focus on improving the customer experience. A few teams have been identified for additional help and those managers will be supported as they improve service delivery where it currently falls below expectations.
- 2.3 The new Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) of the council is determined to deliver against the decisions of members in the most effective and efficient way possible. With the immediate and ongoing service delivery challenges there may be some strains in the resourcing of particular teams. For example: our Finance teams have faced an exceptionally challenging workload recently with new grant awarding activity at a time of closing the accounts; the Development and Economic Development teams are interfacing with our industry partners many of whom have furloughed or made redundancies; and our Housing and Community teams who are often faced with customers presenting with multiple and complex needs may experience additional challenges through the widely predicted recessionary times ahead.
- 2.4 A small number of staff have left employment at the Council this year and some areas have intentionally been filled with temporary or fixed term appointments. A strategy is in place to reduce the number and costs of temporary and agency staff employed this year through, for example: (a) the conclusion of time-limited activities; and (b) the move to fill only necessary permanent roles. The council will always, however, have a certain level of demand for short term resourcing needs in specific areas such as those that deal with seasonal activities in the grounds maintenance team.
- 2.5 The new three-directorate organisation structure is included as appendix 1 and resources are now in place to give the necessary senior level leadership across the organisation, while also providing resilience.
- 2.6 The intention remains that the council continues to be known as an employer of choice, with sound financial management, low staff turnover and absence figures, and a clear connection between our values and activities of the organisation remaining strong.
- 2.7 In summary, the current resource is adequate at the present time. However, as we learn more about the impact of the pandemic on the council and prepare an emergency budget in 2020/21, resources will be kept under review against these demands and adjusted accordingly.

### **3. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS**

#### **3.1 Legal Officer's Comments (AK)**

There are no legal implications arising directly out of this report.

### **3.2 Finance Officer's Comments (CS)**

There is a budget for the approved staffing structure for the Council. This means that it is fully funded. In addition, there are controls in place to ensure that additional posts to this structure are only approved when funding has been identified. Employees' costs are monitored monthly with the Corporate Leadership Team receiving a monthly report of projections compared to budget.

### **3.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (ASm)**

There are no specific Diversities and Equalities Implications arising from this report.

## **4. CONTACT OFFICER AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

Andrina Smith, Chief HR Officer  
Tel: 01303 853405  
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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

None

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – CLT & Functional Structure