

COUNCIL

10 March

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

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| REPORT OF | COUNCILLOR Ann McLachlan |
| CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR | Governance and Improvement |
| CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER | Director of Public Health/Head of Policy & Performance |

Executive Summary

Since the last report to Council in October there has been significant progress in delivering on our improvement and governance agenda.

1. Improvement

A report is being prepared to provide an overview of progress towards the “next steps” agreed at the final meeting of the Wirral/LGA Improvement Board in November. External members of the Board will return on 17th March to review progress and provide feedback to the Council. I look forward to sharing their thoughts with you following this.

Cultural Change Programme

Embedding culture change was a vitally important element of the improvement plan. The focus has been on delivering a step change shift in the way senior staff and managers think, plan and act to build the skills, knowledge and behaviors needed to transform the council. During February and March every employee will be invited to a session being delivered by their Head of Service to launch the council’s new organisational values. Culture is often described as ‘the way we do things around here’, and the new values set out clearly what is important for us as a council.

2. Members Survey

As part of the drive for continuous improvement, two Member Surveys have been undertaken. One related to proposed amendments to the Council's Constitution and the other related to Member Perceptions and Experiences of the current Governance Arrangements. The responses received have been the highest level of response from Members in relation to any Member survey or similar exercise. The responses to both surveys have and are being considered by the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee and its cross-party Working Group. The proposed changes to the Council's Constitution have been recommended to Council for approval at this Council meeting. The Committee and the Working Group will now analyse and evaluate the responses to the Member Survey on Perceptions and Experiences of the current Governance Arrangements as well as review the Ethical Framework. It is fair to say from the responses received, that the overall view of the current governance arrangements is a positive. It is important that the Council continues to maintain the momentum to review, refresh and improve its governance arrangements.

The Council has undertaken an exercise to improve its information governance arrangements. The services will be delivered by a specialist in information governance and will enable the Council to successfully review and update its information handling processes to (i) achieve level two compliance with the Department of Health Information Governance Toolkit for each of the 40 Local Authority requirements on the 2013/14 Information Governance Toolkit; and (ii) establish robust processes and procedures to help ensure the Council meets all its obligations when processing information. This support will work closely with the Council's Information Governance Board which leads and co-ordinates the Council's improvements on information governance.

3. FOI

The Council between April 2013 and January 2014 received a total of 1,193 FOI requests – this is an increase of 41% from the same period last year (842 FOI requests). The highest number of FOI requests received in any given month was in January 2014 in which 158 requests were received. Despite the increases in the volume of FOI requests, the Council since June 2013 has been achieving a response rate of 85% or above – since November 2013 the response rate has been 90% or above. However, whilst improvements in the response rate are welcomed, it is recognised that more needs to be done to ensure information is more readily available to the public and others so that the need for anyone to make an FOI request can be mitigated. A Scrutiny Review of the how the Council deals with FOIs is currently underway and that is actively looking at how Council information can be made more comprehensive and accessible. The Council is clearly making good progress in this area and it is important that that momentum and drive for continuous improvement continues.

4. Commissioning Strategy

A Members Event was recently held during which our initial thoughts on developing a commissioning approach for the Council were shared. We are currently developing a commissioning strategy to support the Council becoming a more commissioning-led organisation, and will engage further with Members to help shape the outcomes and priorities that will drive activity. We currently have a 'burning platform' – rising demand and expectations versus reductions in funding and our historic response of salami slicing, raising thresholds, back office efficiencies, and budget freeze will no longer be enough to deliver the level of change required. We will focus on the outcomes we want to achieve, the resources that we can either directly or indirectly use and find the most efficient and effective ways of delivering those outcomes.