

This Report will be made
public on 8 June 2022



Report Number **P/22/02**

To: Personnel Committee
Date: 16 June 2022
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 Chief Executive 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/22/02.

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 Beyond the immediate day-to-day demands for high quality council services, the focus of resource has been placed on delivering key aspects of the Corporate Plan (Reports C/20/77 and A/20/10). Council helpfully made available additional resource during the year to accelerate matters (Reports C/21/32 and A/21/16). Elements of particular note since the last HoPS report include:
 - i. COVID-19 recovery - agile and innovative ways of serving our customers remains a priority and working relationships with key stakeholders (such as the NHS, DWP, KCC and our volunteers / partners of the Community Hubs), has deepened. This has placed us in a strong position as we responded swiftly to the recent demands in providing assistance to those fleeing Ukraine being hosted in the district. Additional resource has been made available to co-ordinate the council’s response to refugee settlement and to work alongside other partners to support those arriving and those residents hosting. Expectations are that these demands will continue to rise and the nature of support needed will change through the months ahead.
 - ii. Supporting residents – there has been growing evidence of increasing cost of living pressures and additional resource has been made available to respond on various welfare matters. Of particular note, and at the time of writing, over 26,000 households have received an energy rebate amounting to some £4m and this has drawn on resources across various council teams: customer service, corporate case management, revs and bens, comms and IT. Some of these activities were not planned and represented additional new activity pressures during the year. Cost of living pressures are expected to continue, potentially deepening further still, and new / additional interventions are being considered through, for example, the deployment of the council’s allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. While members have yet to formally consider such matters, expectations are there will be growing demands on the council’s resources, particularly those advising of benefits available and supporting the welfare of residents.
 - iii. Climate change agenda – additional council resources have been assigned and also secured from external sources to progress the council’s Carbon

Action Plan (Report C/20/76). A series of targeted projects are now underway and the level of general awareness and understanding of the subject matter and challenges ahead deepens within the council. Further significant pieces of work this year, e.g. the District-wide Carbon Plan (Report C/21/94), will provide a framework that captures, encourages and supports various actions across the district.

- iv. Delivering regeneration, housing and place-making projects – resource has been made available during the year to progress projects such as: Otterpool Park; Princes Parade; Folkestone Town Centre; Ship Street; Mountfield Road; and the HRA new build programme. Where possible external funding has been sought to bolster council resource and expertise.

3. THE FORWARD LOOK

3.1 The culture of the organisation generally remains positive and great efforts are made by the senior team to create a supportive environment. The three days of annual leave gifted to staff between Christmas and New Year in recognition of exceptional performance, as acknowledged in the Best Companies survey, was extremely well received and gave opportunity for staff to rest and recuperate. Staff surveys have continued throughout the year providing useful and rich intelligence on morale and associated staffing matters. As per the Chief HR Officer's report considered by committee, interventions are planned to ensure attention is given to this, for example, the staff summer social returns this year providing a much needed opportunity after two absent years for all teams to socialise. In addition, teams are returning to work periodically from the civic centre to ensure cross team and within team relationships remain strong.

3.2 There are however strains on certain teams and posts, which are a cause for concern, and these will be supported by the senior team. For example:

- a. There has been an increasing number of occasions when the council's unreasonably persistent complaining behaviour policy has been considered or applied and this represents a worrying trend. The impact of persistent questioning and complaining can be damaging, stressful for those dealing with the matters, and contributes to the fragility of certain teams within the council. There is a relentless expectation that access to information should be provided and a balance needs to be struck that addresses the transparency priority of the corporate plan while allowing council staff resources to progress matters efficiently.
- b. The demand for information on operational matters from elected members, as reported last year as an increasing trend, continues to remain high. This in turn is putting additional pressures on staff and advice will continue to be given so that the respective and significantly different roles of members and staff are understood; strategic and policy matters are where Members add value with operational delivery arising from those decisions the responsibility of officers. Relevant parts of the constitution (Parts 6, 8 and 9) are particularly pertinent and members' support is sought so that the Chief

Executive can ensure that responsibilities continue to be discharged effectively and efficiently in a supportive culture of mutual respect.

- c. There remain pockets of skill shortages as the labour market is tight and a number of vacant budgeted posts unfortunately remain unfilled. Targeted recruitment activities are taking place seeking to fill these gaps along with incentives to attract and retain talent, particularly those deemed to be at high risk of flight in teams carrying vacancies, with those under exceptional scrutiny, and those teams with high volume of work pressures.
- d. With an aging workforce in some teams, coupled with recruitment difficulties in those teams, succession management remains a focus of attention and this year will see additional trainee opportunities to 'grow our own' as per the Chief HR Officer's report which gives more detail. Strong relationships have been developed with local schools and a variety of activities are taking place to highlight opportunities and to encourage local school-leavers to join the council. At the current time three new entry opportunities have been created in IT, Finance and Building Control. The council's OD team, as an accredited apprenticeship training provider, is well placed to deliver these and other programmes.
- e. The volume of customer contact via telephone remains high and more remains to be done on channel shift to IT enabled self-serve allowing the council's telephone capacity to focus on those most in need of this method of contact and support.
- f. Demands remain high on the development management team to progress not only the volume of planning applications, but also to address the significance of planning applications such as Otterpool Park – most probably the largest single application to a district council in Kent for some considerable time. There is a shortage of planning capacity across the public sector but additional dedicated resource will need to be found to support this project, largely funded by the Garden Towns capacity monies received from DLUCH.
- g. The potential implications of announcements within the Queen's Speech and those Bills included in the legislative timetable for the coming year have yet to be fully appraised. Four significant Bills are: the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill; the Non-Domestic Rating Bill; the Social Housing Regulations Bill; and the Renters Reform Bill and these will contain much substance to be alive to. In addition other important Bills include: the UK Infrastructure Bank Bill; the Energy Security Bill; the Procurement Bill; and the Protect Duty Bill. These come on top of the implications arising from the Building Safety Act 2022 and the Environment Act 2021. The full extent of the implications on the council's policies, processes, systems and resource base is not yet fully understood.
- h. Finally, preparations for the local elections in May 2023 give rise to new demands and requirements on the Returning Officer and Elections team arising from the Elections Act 2022. New systems and processes will be worked through, planned and resourced this year.

- 3.3 In summary while there is a challenging agenda and a number of unknowns remain, such as understanding the full impacts of high inflation on our population and across our activities, the council's resource base is deemed adequate at this time. The senior team is alive to this assessment and will pursue external resourcing opportunities relevant in delivering the Corporate Plan to ensure that unnecessary cost pressures on the General Fund and HRA are avoided and that available resource is used most efficiently and effectively.

4. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

4.1 Legal Officer's Comments (AK)

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

4.2 Finance Officer's Comments (CS)

There are no direct financial implications and the resourcing pressures outlined within the paper are a matter of separate decisions to be taken where relevant by other committees of the council.

4.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (ASm)

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

5. 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
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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

- Corporate Plan - Creating Tomorrow Together 2021-2030
Cabinet 24 February 2021 - C/20/77
Council 24 February 2021 – A/20/10
- Accelerating delivery of the council's Corporate Plan - use of Reserves
Cabinet 22 Sept 2021 – C/21/32
Council 29 Sept 2021 – A/21/16
- Carbon Action Plan and Carbon Footprint Study
Cabinet 24 February 2021 – C/20/76.