

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

25 September 2019

COUNCILLOR S BUTIKOFER - CABINET MEMBER FOR STRATEGY & CORPORATE SERVICES

For the period July 2019 to September 2019

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Benefits

The speed of processing target for change of circumstances is 14 days and our current performance is 7 days. We are hoping to reduce this further by introducing a new Verification Policy.

The target for new claims is 20 days and current performance is 15 days. This is a reduction to the time taking to process a new claim of 4 days compared to the previous month. This can be partly attributed to a significant change to customer service delivery, whereby customers who come into the council offices to make a new claim will be dealt with by a Benefit Officer. The Benefit Officer is taking responsibility for the new claim end to end, giving the customer a single point of contact for the administration of their claim. This is making the process much more efficient for the customer and the council.

Housing Delivery Division's (HDDs) Performance Development Team (PDT) is responsible for monitoring and engaging with LAs about performance. One of the areas monitored is performance of VEP (Verification of Earnings and Pensions Alerts Service). This service provides a digital notification to LAs of changes to customer's earnings and pensions. The PDT monitors LAs performance management of these notifications to identify the percentage volume of VEP alert outcomes recorded against those made available to LAs.

For Quarter 1 (April 2019 to June 2019) the management information collected by the PDT has confirmed the top quartile benchmark nationwide as between 97.9% to 100%. We are very pleased to confirm that NNDC is currently at 98.6%.

This is a significant achievement and shows our commitment to focusing on reducing fraud, error and debt within the Benefit system.

127 applications for Discretionary Housing Payment have been paid. The 127 successful applications have been awarded for the following reasons:

- To secure property through a Rent Deposit = 5
- To prevent homelessness by assisting with rent arrears = 19
- To support vulnerable residents who have been subjected to welfare reforms (LHA levels, Benefit cap, Room Restrictions, etc) = 94
- To support disabled applicants in an adapted property = 2
- To secure property or prevent homelessness through short term help = 7

Revenues and Benefits attended the Greenbuild event last week to promote our online service. This was extremely successful, seeing nearly 100 people sign up to the online service. Over the weekend we were also visited by a number of members and it was great to see the interest in what we were promoting.

Benefits will be part of a Customer Service Survey which is being launched on 1st October. The feedback will cover Customer Service delivery in Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services. This will help deliver customer service excellence at NN. The survey will run up to 31st March 2020.

The recovery of Housing Benefit debt has been moved across to the Benefits Service. Staff are undergoing overpayment and debt recovery training so that recovery in this area can be maximised as well as income for the authority.

The Benefit Service will be piloting joint working with Revenues whereby the council tax account will be updated by the Benefits Team at the same time their Benefit claim is updated. This will allow for a more efficient customer service for the customer and for NN.

Eastlaw

Information Governance

NNDC's first quarter performance 19/20, for responding to FOI requests (FOIs) within the required timescales was 97% (national target 90%) and a 100% performance rate for responding to individual's subject access requests (SARs). Eastlaw also provides a co-ordination of information requests service to BCKLWN with a similar performance rate of 96% FOIs and 100% SARs.

Legal work

Officers have been working on a health and safety prosecution in regard to a caravan site in the district. This relates to an incident of a near-drowning by a member of the public at a swimming pool. The defendants have indicated guilty pleas and the matter is listed for sentencing this month.

The enforcement notice served requiring the demolition of the property known as Arcady, Holt Road, Cley has been formally appealed.

An application to divert Cromer Footpath 11 to facilitate planning reference PF/12/0376 is being processed. The diversion Order has been made and is currently out for consultation which expires on 4 October 2019.

Eastlaw has seen 2 Trainee Solicitors qualify and depart the organisation in August, and has appointed a new Trainee Solicitor to start her training contract with us in the coming months.

Democratic Services

The team provided the administrative support for the Council's first Environment Forum on 22nd August. The event was extremely well attended and there has been a lot of positive feedback. Work is ongoing to capture the information gathered at

the Forum and subsequently at Greenbuild so that it can be fed into the development of the Corporate Plan and the formulation of an Environmental Charter.

With a new academic year starting, the school engagement programme is beginning to pick up pace, with several enquiries regarding visits to the Council offices for primary school children to learn about democracy. It is intended that the programme will be widened over coming months to include high schools and colleges.

The number of hard copy agendas for committee meetings has dropped substantially following the introduction of the committee management system, Modern Gov. We have recently introduced the option to subscribe to email alerts and updates for committee documents via the website, so that people can tailor information to their specific topics of interest, committee or ward.