

OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on MONDAY, 18 MARCH 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Criscione and B Donald (Co-Chair)
Councillors G Driscoll and G Sell

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Director of Corporate Services), B Brown (Director of Environmental Services), P Holt (Chief Executive) and C Shanley-Grozavu (Democratic Services Officer)

Also Present: Councillors P Lees (Leader of the Council) and N Reeve (Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Climate Change)

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence or declarations of interest.

9 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record.

Councillor Criscione said that it had been a difficult meeting, but he hoped that the group would move forward and look positively at the lessons learnt.

10 BROADER OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE

The Chief Executive provided an overview of the work being undertaken to identify any system weaknesses within the Council.

He explained that he had initiated an organisation-wide review of all business functions to assess system weaknesses and the existing resilience in place. He had begun by requesting that all Heads of Departments have discussions with their teams and report back in order to obtain as much information as possible. These risks would then be tested for their likelihood and impact, and the existing documentation and back-up arrangements would be reviewed. Once the assessment had been completed internally, it would be appraised by officers at Epping Council who would be acting as a “critical friend”.

Members provided their feedback on the ongoing review, highlighting in particular the need not to spend too much time managing and monitoring risk when there was other work to be carried out. It was acknowledged that not all risks could be captured and assessed within the review, for a range of reasons such as unpredictability, the time allocated for the review and the capacity of officers to go into very fine levels of detail. Therefore, priority needed to be given to those weaknesses on the higher scale of risk as well as those that needed

greater management; for example where there were lower qualified managers, a lack of ability to delegate at the current time or a lack of existing documentation.

Members also asked questions regarding the openness within the culture of organisation, as this would be crucial within the review and future resilience. The Chief Executive clarified that he led by example and frequently advocated the value of openness. He gave the example of the recent Council Housing rent miscalculation and how it was important to commend the individual for reporting the mistake. Furthermore, he was introducing more changes to create an open culture within the organisation. This included refreshing the appraisal system and requiring in-person attendance at quarterly staff briefings.

Concerns were raised regarding the current reporting of risks, given that the revocation of the Operator's Licence was not featured on any risk registers despite being a single point of failure. Officers confirmed that the Corporate Risk Register would now be collectively reviewed quarterly by CMT, rather than annually. During these meetings, there would also be consideration given to the Service Risk Registers in order to promote or demote anything of relevance. In between these reviews, the Chief Executive had power to add immediate risks which had emerged from unexpected events, such as a humanitarian crisis. In addition, the Chief Executive had incorporated risk management into Directors' annual appraisals in order to ensure that they were having direct conversations with their services that may not be complying with their statutory requirements. Those that continued to not comply, would be escalated back to the Chief Executive.

In the cases of risks within specific posts which may not appear on the Risk Registers, such as the loss of required qualifications, further work was being carried out to review Job Descriptions and have risks flagged up through the HR systems when there is a vacancy or absence in order to put step-in arrangements in place.

Members requested that a current draft of the Council-wide resilience review be circulated to them outside of the meeting.

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OUTLINE OF COSTS INCURRED

Members considered an outline of the costs incurred from the disruption to the waste and recycling services.

In response to questions, officers clarified the following:

- The invoice from Braintree District Council (BDC) had not yet been received. Officers said that they had double counted, so expected the invoice to be £10k-20k higher, although it was still lower overall than anticipated.
- The tipping fees charged by BDC would be reclaimed from Essex County Council. Officers had yet to invoice for this, although they were confident to receive it soon as they exchanged money with the County Council on a routinely basis.

- The net cost for Widdington Skips' services was approximately £300 per day which included tipping fees, a vehicle and staff. Some organisations had also offered to help, however at a higher cost.
- Should the costs result in an overall overspend of the Waste Service's budget for the financial year, then funds would be drawn out of the Waste Management Reserves. This budget had previously been used due to the regular variation in recycling costs, as well as to cover temporary staffing.
- The costs for the disruption accounted for approximately 2% of the services' budget.
- The pay of the Interim Licence Holder was factored within the overall costings at approximately £4,400 during the period of disruption.
- The Interim Transport Manager was employed on a rolling contract which required a month's notice from either side. Officers were currently updating the Job Description for a permanent staff member and this would go out to market in due course. A decision had yet to be made on whether to rely on the advert itself or receive assistance from recruiters.
- Officers were unable to comment at the current time on whether they were looking to recruit a candidate with more experience or more potential. The most important aspect was that the candidate was fit for the culture that they wanted to promote.
- There was no relocation budget available for any potential postholder. It was noted that the press coverage had brought forward a number of local people with the relevant qualifications who were interested in assisting the Council.
- The crew for the additional 11th round were currently assisting on the existing 10 rounds. The new route would be rolled out as soon as a vehicle was secured; whether this be when the new vehicle is ordered and built or sooner if a hire vehicle is secured.

Members commented that the costs outlined within the report were non-avoidable and there was no way that these could be reduced. However, officers had selected options which were financially palatable and had made the total lower than expected.

They agreed that these findings should be included within the group's final report.

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EMERGING CONCLUSIONS

Members discussed arrangements for reporting their emerging conclusions, including the lessons learnt.

They agreed to meet privately to discuss their conclusions and draft their initial report which would then be considered at the next meeting. The Chief Executive would provide a skeleton template with agreed headings.

They highlighted the need to produce a report which would be endorsed by all four members and was clear, readable and digestible for the Scrutiny Committee. They said that the emphasis needed to be on the operational resilience and applying the lessons learnt, as opposed to reporting on the Waste

Service Disruption; although it was important to address certain points on this such as their rejection of a possible Council Tax rebate.

Meeting ended at 20:52