

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 15 DECEMBER 2022

Question 1

From: Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty ward

To: Cabinet Member, Finance, Corporate Services and Planning

I was concerned to hear last week that the Hoople ICT support team were at half strength, with staff having to do extra shifts to provide cover. ICT is crucial to all Council activities. Will the Cabinet member responsible confirm the steps that they are taking to address this issue?

Response

Hoople IT Services is dedicated to excellence of service delivery wherever possible.

User support is principally delivered via the 'Service Desk Team' who answer telephone calls, e-mails and website-submitted questions and the 'Desktops Team' who would fulfil most in-person support requests. The Service Desk Team consist of fifteen positions, the Desktops Team of ten positions, both teams working across all Hoople customers. Unfortunately, for a short period recently the desktops team of ten staff were reduced to five members. This was a result of the concurrent impact of three vacancies due to resignations, one annual leave request and an unexpected sickness.

If Cllr Shaw was made aware of the pressures to the Desktops Team who were at these reduced numbers then an impression of 'half strength' may have been given (although this team would typically operate with 8 or 9 members across all customers due to normal leave, sickness and training expectations). For IT Support in those same days, overall across Service Desk and Desktops Teams, seventeen people were working, around 77% of normal capacity of twenty two. Operationally, although a risk to service delivery had already been flagged with the Council's IT Client, the commitment and dedication of the remaining staff meant the vast majority of requests have been delivered successfully, with some longer-term tasks delayed to release immediate capacity.

Recent Herefordshire Council work has included a higher than normal number of office relocations under the Plough Lane workspace reorganisations and MASH team moves. This type of work is deliberately completed out-of-hours and at weekends to minimise the impact on other office staff who will subsequently use the facilities. Given the recent number of vacancies this has led to the remaining desktops team members being in high demand. Aware of the pressures, weekend and evening working has been widened to other IT Services staff in other teams, several of whom have accepted the overtime working. Within Herefordshire Council, members of the PMO have offered their assistance during the most pressured times working alongside IT staff within Plough Lane to ensure work is completed on-time and safely. Within Hoople, to address retention and encourage recruitment, a market-forces supplement has already been added to the desktops team roles; a recent recruitment drive has just completed with two offers made to applicants, which follows seven previously unsuccessful rounds of recruitment. Further measures are in active consideration if required.

By working together with other local partners through Hoople Ltd. Herefordshire Council has directly benefited from economies of scale with the IT support teams. Despite the exceptional loss of around five staff members the resilience available from the larger

team saw user support of 22 reduced to 17, allowing core services to remain delivered and key project outcomes largely unaffected.

Supplementary question

What is the current total complement of roles for the Council and for Hoople, and how many vacancies are currently open for each? In other words the number of fte roles currently in the Council and Hoople and how many vacancies in each organisation. Is the mean level of absent roles reflected in a budget reduction? i.e. SWAP (South West Audit Partnership) make a provision of 3.5% of payroll cost saving for vacancies, maternity leave and sickness. Does the Council reflect this kind of saving in its budget?

Response

The cabinet member confirmed that a written response would be provided and asked that the scope of the question be confirmed by the councillor.