

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES **16th July 2020**

COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICER: PAUL FLEMING**

People: A good quality of life for all our residents

Digital Customer Portal (DCP)

The DCP has supported the Council's Help Hub through three iterations of changes and improvements now since its launch in late March and is now the case management system for Neighbourhoods as the Help Hub moves into a new phase, building on its success. This has been a hugely successful collaborative piece of work across several departments with over 3500 Help Hub forms completed on the DCP.

The HWRC booking system, launched in May, also utilises the functionality of the DCP and has already gone through two iterations of changes, most recently moving from 30 minute to 20 minute booking slots for residents. The booking system, demonstrates how the DCP is playing its part in providing safer services for staff and residents and we've had over 11500 forms completed online.

The system has also provided COVID-19 digital application forms for Business Grants and assessments for Discretionary Grants. There have been more than 5000 forms completed by business online.

In total over 21,000 requests have been logged through the DCP, with 70% of these being done by residents online. The remaining 30% were predominantly telephone enquiries to the Council's Customer Services dedicated Help Hub number. 12,000 new accounts have been created on the new digital platform, which provides a good foundation for promoting the platform later in the year, once it has been further developed. The Project Board will be prioritising the next transformational piece of work, which will incorporate designing services with user and resident research. Agile delivery of work will continue which allows the project to be fluid and react to change as required.

Customer Services

Darwen and Blackburn Town Halls are scheduled to reopen on the 13th July. All appropriate safety measures have been taken to ensure the safety of both staff and members of the public. Whilst we will be providing a significant number of services from the facilities, we are still asking customers to use online and telephone options where possible. Following advice from the Council's Health and Safety Team we will not be providing access to the Town Hall's public access PC's or telephones.

Due to the social distancing guidance, the number of customers accessing Blackburn Town Hall at any one time will also be restricted, as a consequence, it will be necessary to queue customers outside of the building.

Registrars

The new telephone process for registering deaths has worked well through the pandemic. Whilst there has been an increase in the numbers of deaths registered, fortunately this has not been as significant as originally forecast and as such the service has been able to cope, particularly given the additional resources redeployed from other areas of the council. In readiness for the expected increase, 8 staff were trained and worked within the Registrars Team over the period, thereby ensuring a 7 day-a-week service.

It is anticipated that the registration of births, and the ability to hold wedding ceremonies will be recommenced on 20th July. To reduce the footfall within Blackburn Town Hall these services will be delivered in the short term out of the Northgate suite. This facility has significantly more space and is therefore more able to accommodate the larger family groups that tend to accompany birth registrations.

Advice Services

It is expected that the number of customers seeking access to the Advice Service will increase significantly as the furloughing scheme is reduced and job losses increase. We are currently in discussions with Shelter to ensure the safe opening of the service, however no date has yet been agreed.

Digital integration of Health & Social Care

Work has restarted around digital support for discharge from hospital to Social Care and around digitally integrating NHS and Social Care records. Work was paused in March due to COVID-19. The go live for integrated records is now estimated for September 2020 and the deadline for the digital discharge project is March 2021.

Council: Delivered by a strong resilient Council

Support for remote working and communications

Digital systems were upgraded in the first phase of COVID-19 to support the majority of the workforce to work from home and remotely. This ensured that critical services to residents could continue to operate safely. Up to 70% of the workforce have worked remotely at any one time through the pandemic.

The migration to Microsoft Office 365 email was completed during the first phase of COVID-19, with Councillors and Chief Officers moving across to the new system. This has enabled improved resilience as well as easier smart phone access to key communications systems.

The Digital Team have rolled out the Microsoft Teams product to all areas of the Council. This has enabled around 10,000 virtual meetings to take place remotely during the crisis. The Digital Team have also supported Democratic Services and Councillors to enable virtual Council meetings to take place using Microsoft Teams Live events. We have replaced Android tablets for councillors with laptop computers as well as replacing some smartphones to improve efficiency and experience of systems.

The team have continued to blog about their work [here](#), working openly in accordance with our commitment to the Local Digital Declaration, which the Council signed up to in February 2019.

Business Intelligence

The Digital Team have continued to work across the organisation to improve Business Intelligence by building data dashboards for COVID-19, which have enabled senior officers to track data such as cases, death rates, Help Hub demand, school attendance and key workforce data on a 24/7 basis.

Improving Digital Infrastructure and Technical Services

The Director of Digital & Business Change has commissioned reviews to help the council to improve technology service provision and to develop a future-proofed technology infrastructure vision. This will see increasing numbers of systems moving to Cloud technology over time. The outcomes will be improved organisational resilience and agility as well as increased ability to support Council services to deliver high quality services to residents.

Resilience & Emergency Planning Service

The Council has been in response to Covid-19 crisis since March 2020 and is working with its Lancashire and regional partners to effect a good effective response for its Community and employees.

Whilst BwD has been in this response mode we have also responded to floods, fires etc, We have committed to completely reviewing the Corporate Business Continuity plan to ensure its validity in case of a second wave of Covid-19

We will be working with schools in the new academic year in resilience planning.

Complaints

The Team have been working on Complaints, MP enquiries and the planning of the new Canvass Reform during the lockdown period. We have seen a 20% increase in MP enquiries for this period compared to the same period last year.

We have received 120 enquiries for Quarter 1 2020 (1st April 2020 – 30th June 2020) compared to the 95 enquiries received for the same period last year.

Given the nature of the enquiries, this is as result of the uncertainty around new Government legislations being introduced on a frequent basis during this difficult period. The team have worked hard with Managers across all services to ensure that responses have been provided within timescales wherever possible.