REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD   **PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING**
                                            CHIEF OFFICER: PAUL FLEMING
                                            25 March 2021

People: A good quality of life for all our residents

Customer services

The reopening of our receptions, including Town Halls, will coincide with the lifting of national restrictions on non-essential retail. This is currently planned for the 12th April 2021 and is dependent on the progress against the government's roadmap out of lockdown. During lock down restrictions, our Customer Services team have continued to predominantly work remotely to maintain our service and support to residents.

Over the past 12 months, the number of customer requests received through online chat has more than doubled to over 14,000. The number of emails and telephone calls to Customer Services have both decreased compared to the 12 months prior to COVID-19. We will undertake analysis after year-end (April), to further understand this shift to digital channels.

The team will soon expand online chat to provide an automated 24/7 service. This will offer customers an easy, online option for straightforward questions as well as sign posting to web pages and forms.

Registrars

The reduced infections of COVID and the improving picture in the borough has had a direct impact on the numbers of death registration required by the team. The reduction to more manageable numbers has allowed the team to look at planning for the relaxation of restrictions and the expected significant increase in rescheduled and new wedding requests.

Registrars have continued to provide essential services throughout the pandemic.

Resilience & Emergency Planning Service

The Resilience & Emergency Planning Manager has been supporting the response to Covid19 since March 2020, and is part of the team progressing with recovery planning and moving to new business as normal, taking into account the Lancashire Resilience (LRF) revised ways of working and the Governments new "roadmap".

The Emergency Planning training that the Service is delivering to all Community schools is now being rolled out to all Independent, Free and Academy schools too. This will ensure awareness and consistency across the borough in delivery and support. The exercise element of the support is currently being worked up to deliver across three sessions, to be delivered to schools between June and July 2021.

The service is now working on translating the National Risk Register and National Security Risk Assessment risks and consequences into a local set of community risk assessments. This is alongside the support to the LRF in assessing county wide risks, and then progressing subsequent local mitigations e.g. revised plan, revised processes and training.

Quarter 3 Sept to Dec 2020
Information & Enquiries received = 208
Warnings received = 96

Total = 304
Duty Officer Activations = 23 & Strategic Officer Activations = 1 (Gas Cloud incident)

Digital Strategy

Over the last few months the team have been working with colleagues across the Council to update our Digital Strategy. This will outline our approach to transforming services and our technology infrastructure during the next four years. The strategy articulates a vision for the borough which includes;

- A future-proofed, high speed, connected borough
- Improved access to digital services and opportunities
- Co-ordinated skills offering to help residents utilise new technology and compete for jobs

This will be supported by a number of workstreams which includes;

- A digital-first approach, making our services easier to access and available online 24/7
- Increasing digital and transformative skills for staff
- Improved insights from data, to better understand resident's needs and inform decision making
- A future proofed technology infrastructure which is cost effective, secure and resilient

Digital Customer Experience

Usage of our Digital Customer Portal continues to grow, providing residents with more opportunities to utilise and interact with services online. Latest additions include Active Travel consultation, allowing residents to provide ideas, comments and concerns on the use of the existing transport network and to propose new schemes / improvements; this takes our total number of online services to 50.

The DCP continues to support the COVID effort and in light of recent government announcements the team have produced a number of new online forms and advice to assist with isolation support and grants to businesses affected by the pandemic. The team have also developed new forms for businesses to use, to order lateral flow testing kits.

Work on waste services is progressing and the Digital team are working with the DCP software supplier to co-design a user-friendly online experience. This will allow customers to report issues as well as book a wide range of council waste services.

Since its launch in Spring 2020, the customer portal has received over 100,000 service requests and now has over 34,000 registered users. In February 2021 over 10,000 online appointments and permits were booked by residents for Household Waste and Recycling Centres alone.

Other key successes during the pandemic have included using the Digital Customer Portal to receive and workflow Help Hub requests and provide access to online forms for financial support for both individuals and businesses. By using the Digital Customer Portal for all of these interactions has meant that individuals and businesses can self-serve and request support 24/7.

Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient council

Supporting remote working

The digital team continue to provide remote systems and support to the large number of staff working from home during the pandemic as well as enabling remote council meetings for Members.

The introduction of Microsoft Teams at the start of the pandemic has enabled the council to continue to operate effectively, remotely, keeping staff, members and residents safe. The amount of work-based travel costs in the council is forecast to have halved, enabled by new ways of meeting and communicating. In addition, commuting to and from work has been minimised, contributing further to the challenge of improving air quality in the borough.

The council currently has over 1800 active users of Microsoft Teams with over 9000 attendances at remote meetings per month. There are over 80,000 chat interactions over Teams each month throughout the council.

Business Intelligence

The team have continued to develop data dashboards to inform senior officers and Members around the COVID-19 impact and response. Recently we have delivered a 'Secondary Impact' dashboard, informing relevant leads around Help Hub demand and the economic impacts of COVID-19 on our resident population.

We have expanded the data available through our primary COVID-19 dashboard to include numbers of patients discharged from hospitals into the community 'Virtual COVID Ward'. This data is now presented alongside COVID cases, testing, deaths, hospital admissions and our local contact tracing partnership performance. Presenting the data through visual dashboards has informed decision making throughout the challenges of the pandemic.

Services across the organisation have been given access to the new Business Intelligence platform throughout the past 12 months, including Highways, HR and Adults Services. Multiple dashboards have been developed and leads have recently formed a Business Intelligence Centre of Excellence across the council.

Business Operations

The team have worked closely with all departments to drive forward digital transformation, supporting a wide range of services to transition to smarter ways of working, and make effective use of communication technology such as Microsoft Teams. A major success has been the enabling of all statutory meetings across Childrens and Adult Services to be undertaken, virtually; ensuring vital services can continue to operate to support families.

IT Support & DevOps

Our IT support teams have continually supported officers and Members. Over the past 12 months we have rolled out additional IT equipment including mobile devices and headsets to enable increased remote working. We have maintained a reduced face to face appointment service in a COVID safe environment for those that need it as well as facilitating delivery of equipment where relevant.

The DevOps team have implemented improved IT infrastructure to meet the demands of remote working, increasing security and network capacity. We have increased our capacity around Cyber Security, re-designating an existing role to specialise in this increasing critical area. The council's

critical IT systems have remained stable and reliable throughout the past year and our infrastructure has enabled a work from home policy across large parts of the workforce.