

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICER: PAUL FLEMING
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People: A good quality of life for all our residents

Customer services

The automated web assistant was launched in June to respond to customers who request basic information or need signposting to the correct web page. Based on early data, 69% of the web assistant requests were dealt with in an automated manner. This new way of working is allowing us to better allocate Customer Service officers to deal with any incoming telephone calls.

Whilst it is still very early days, the customer feedback has also been extremely positive. We will continue to monitor the usage and comments as we seek to improve the web assistant product over the next few months.

Registrars

Over the past few months the Registrars service has been able to reduce the resources needed to support death registrations and reallocate them to wedding ceremonies. Following the restrictions of the last 15 months, many weddings and other ceremonies have either been postponed or cancelled. The team are continuing to support customers in the rebooking of ceremonies and field the many new requests coming through.

Digital Customer Experience

Newly designed forms and services continue to be delivered for customers through the online Digital Customer Portal platform. Recent additions include Covid Champions and reporting of faulty street lights. The work on these digital forms, also includes the redesign of associated web pages on Blackburn.Gov.UK. This is the holistic approach that the team are taking when designing new digital services; ensuring that services are easy to find and use, supported by clearly written and easy to understand content. Since its inception in April 2020, the customer portal has received over 110,000 service requests and has over 55,000 registered users.

As part of our aim to include customers in the redesign of services, we continue to engage with the customer panel who have signed up to provide feedback on our services. We have also started undertaking more detailed user research with targeted groups, for the first time since the pandemic began. The first groups were Keep Blackburn Tidy and Keep Darwen Tidy. The team are using these sessions to understand the life of a volunteer and what “good” would look like to them. We wish to embrace groups like this to build our services for the better with users at the centre of everything we do. This insight will be used to further develop services and starts the formation of long term relationships with citizens in service design.

Council Website Blackburn.Gov.UK

At the start of June we released an updated homepage for the Council’s website. The update was informed by user research, data on how the site is being used and a commissioned audit on the accessibility. The new design has been optimised for people using web browser adaptations for visual impairment, as an example. The team will continue to improve the site through iterations based on research and feedback.

Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient council

Resilience & Emergency Planning Service

The Resilience & Emergency Planning Service has been working in response to the Covid-19 crisis since March 2020 alongside its Lancashire, regional and national partners in support of the Council and to effect a valuable response for its Community and employees; this is achieved through working with the Core Covid Team and Work Stream Leads that support the Chief Executive and Directors.

Whilst BwD has been in this response mode we have also responded to gas leaks in the town centre, chemical and large fuel spills, multiple housing fires and rest centre set up, an electricity sub-station explosion at King Georges Hall and multiple Operation Merlin's (dynamic response to unknown substance eg. gas canisters / chemical leak).

We have reviewed the Business Continuity plans in order to progress the Business Continuity audit process. We have also reviewed "functional emergency plans" to ensure their currency and validity, assisting Blackburn with Darwen Borough council to prepare for any additional incidents during the prolonged ongoing response to Covid19.

We have worked with 6 out of the 7 local school improvement groups to deliver a consistent training package and approach to Emergency Response. This provides a consistent structure for the schools to plan for emergencies. We have also recently delivered two planning exercise sessions to the Community, Academy, Free and Independent schools.

Duty Officer Statistics - Full year 2020/2021

Info received	159
Warning total	792
Total:	951
Strategic Officer Activations	6
Duty Officer Activations	69

Digital Strategy

Since approval of the strategy in April, the team have been developing a number of business cases to support further investment in improved technology. The first of which is to propose an upgrade to the council's legacy telephony infrastructure and enhance the existing Microsoft 365 licences which staff use. Both of which will introduce new tools, functionality and enhanced cyber security.

Technology Support and remote working

With large groups of staff still working from home, the team continue to promote new tools to support remote and hybrid working. The next phase will see a number of meeting rooms equipped with Microsoft Teams video conferencing devices. An initial pilot has proved successful and this will be expanded to test the technology with partner agencies. The new technology will enable some meeting attendees to be present in the room whilst others join remotely.

The IT Team continue to support officers and members with their IT equipment and systems. The team also provided specialist IT support throughout the 2021 elections process, working closely with the Elections Team.

Business Intelligence

The Business Intelligence team are making good progress in developing automated reporting from the Council's digital customer portal. This will enable services to monitor performance and

customer demand in near real time. The team are now starting to work on developing a similar suite of reports for Children's Social Care.

Public Sector Transformation Award

The Digital team have recently been recognised as one of three finalists for the national IESE Public Sector Transformation awards, in the Digital category. Final placings will be announced at a ceremony later this year. The team's entry was based on the Council's digital response to the pandemic.