

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING

CHIEF OFFICER: PAUL FLEMING

7 October 2021

People: A good quality of life for all our residents

Advice Service

Working in partnership with consultancy firm Futuregov, the initial review of the current Advice Service has now been completed. In addition to looking at the current model, the work has sought to consider potential improvements, including an expansion of advice offered and a possible relocation into another town centre building. Whilst further work is still required, it is hoped that the review will provide the basis for the redesign and procurement of a more modern and agile advice service.

Registrars

To provide a safer environment for the registration of births, the registration service has, throughout the pandemic delivered face to face appointments via the Northgate suite in King George's Hall. From mid-September all appointments for this service will be moved back to the Town Hall.

Council: Delivered by a strong and resilient council

Resilience & Emergency Planning

Duty Officer / Out of Hours Statistics Quarter 1

Info = 18

Warning's total = 123

Total = 151

Strategic Officer activations = 5

Duty Officer activations = 14

These activations included numerous requests to support Operation Merlin by the Fire Service (response to an unknown substance – gas liquid etc)

We are supporting Cabinet Office in completing the mandatory risk assessments, descriptions and methodology which have both been revised by government over the last year and with a deadline of March 2022. These are Community Risks e.g., severe weather, flooding, animal disease, human disease, terrorism, protests, chemical releases etc

We are also focussing on working with schools to raise their awareness of emergency planning and their responsibilities as a school to their staff and pupils. This includes, specific training sessions and plan testing sessions.

The Team continue to support the Covid19 response mainly through the Core Team of the Council but also through the Lancashire Resilience Forum – Recovery Co-ordinating Group which Denise Park Chairs.

MHCLG have allocated one off funding (for the first time to an LRF) for Innovative projects to support collaborative working – this funding and posts will be co-ordinated through a small management team which Blackburn with Darwen is part of.

Business Continuity plans have been updated over the last year, the team are committed to conducting quality assurance audit tests with departments to continue to embed business continuity management across the organisation.

Digital Strategy

A number of major projects are now in the scoping phase, including a review of the Councils telephony infrastructure. This significant project will aim to unify the Council communication routes, and remove older software such as Skype and fully replace it with Microsoft Teams for internal and external calling.

Digital Customer Experience

Newly designed forms and services continue to be delivered for customers through the online Digital Customer Portal platform, for example, Pollution, Planning and Registrars. This is moving towards reducing the number of different ways for customers to access digital services, to eliminate confusion. The next major forms to go live will be during the autumn for street cleansing, which will also look to introduce mobile working to the operations team to reduce manual processes.

Two new digital forms have been developed and launched in conjunction with volunteers and the street cleansing team which allow volunteers to notify the Council of community cleans ups and report red & clear bags to be collected. The benefits of the new forms mean that as a Council we will know about Community clear ups in advance and be able schedule collection where possible to coincide with the event, so that collections from these events don't attract fly tipping and provide us with accurate location data to collect bags. A positive joined up approach to assisting with keeping our streets cleaner and tidier.

Technology Support and remote working

New devices are currently being installed into the Town Hall and Duke Street buildings. These allow video conferencing meetings to take place fully integrated with Microsoft Teams and support the Councils approach to hybrid and flexible working. A device will also be piloted in one of the public meeting rooms used for family conferences. This will allow social workers to meet families in a meeting room but, if necessary, have a number of partner agencies present via video link on a large screen.

Business Intelligence

The Business Intelligence team are finalising automated reporting from the Council's Digital Customer Portal and Netcall telephone system. This will enable services to monitor performance and customer demand in near real time and will provide an insight into how services are handling customer enquiries. The team have also started to produce a suite of reports for Children's Social Care teams.

Public Sector Transformation Award

The Digital team recently came first in the national IESE Public Sector Transformation awards, in the Digital and Technology category. The Councils nomination had made it to the final three and was ultimately chosen as the Gold winner when final placings were announced at a ceremony in September. The team's entry was based on the Council's digital response to the pandemic and is well deserved recognition of their efforts.

Complaints

"The annual report on feedback received between 1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021 highlighted a 60% decrease in formal complaints as a result of successfully implementing 'alternative dispute resolution'. The Feedback Team has been supported Managers to engage with complainants at the earliest stage of their complaint to find a local resolution, by meeting them face to face or discussing options on how we can resolve. We

are beginning to see the real benefits of proactive approaches year on year as formal complaints continue to decrease. During the same period and contrary to the Lancashire Telegraph report of 28 July 2021, from all the complaints and queries received only 27 complaints (2.5%) were escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, of which only 4 complaints upheld after further investigation. “