

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

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PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS: Strategic Director
of Resources (SIRO)
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COUNCIL: Delivered by a strong and resilient council

Civil Contingencies, Emergency Planning and Business Continuity

The Service recently coordinated an internal Covid-19 de-brief, as part of post incident learning and in preparation for potential work as part of the national Covid Public Inquiry. Engagement is also taking place with the Covid Community Champions in order to promote and enhance 'community resilience'.

Following the recent launch of our Service Level Agreement we attended the Head Teachers Forum to share the recently published Department for Education School Emergency Planning and Response guidance and promote the SLA, along with the School's Community Resilience Project.

The Annual Corporate Exercise took place for the first time since 2020, which was a Tactical and Operational level, multi-agency exercise testing the Multi Agency Flood Plan (Part 2) and local planning arrangements.

We have completed Strategic Officer, Duty Officer and Functional Plan consultations and the new rotas, procedures, training and plan updates are underway in order to enhance the current emergency response protocols. The Emergency Control Centre is being re-located to the CCTV hub with Davyfield Road remaining as backup.

Below are the Quarter 4 and full year Duty Officer Statistics:-

Duty Officer Statistics 2021/22	Q4	Full year
Info received	118	253
Warning total	226	665
Total:	344	918
Strategic Officer Activations	0	5
Duty Officer Activations	15	51

Digital Services and Transformation

During the last quarter, digital strategy delivery milestones have included:

- Hybrid meeting rooms completed, allowing modern workplace arrangements for our residents, service users, businesses and partners
- A new Digital Skills Hub has launched to enable all staff to upskill in digital tools enabling them to drive digital improvements across the Council.
- Changing Futures service launch using BwD technology for pan Lancashire
- Multi Agency Risk Action Group digital service launch
- Disability Links for SEND children digital services launch

- User research has been carried out recently across Taxi Licencing, Pest Control and Fly Tipping services.

Digital Inclusion Strategy

We are currently engaging with VCFS partners and businesses on a new strategy. Proposals will be developed later this year for wider consultation.

Council Website

Content migration to our new platform has started, with a plan to complete in early autumn. This will ensure our website continues to be accessible and meeting Government Digital Service standards allowing for continuous improvement based on user research. The Council website is currently rated 92/100 'Excellent' for accessibility by the independent UK ratings site [Silktide](#).

Customer Services

The start to the new financial year has seen an increase in the number of residents contacting Customer Services. Whilst some of the contact is as a result of customers accessing the council post Covid, demand has also increased in several specific areas, for example, Garden Waste and Taxi Licencing verification.

There has been a large number of residents contacting the council regarding the Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate payment. In the main, the contact has accessed the Council Tax and Benefit helplines which have increased 42.4% and 9.1% respectively, compared to the previous year. It is hoped that the Rebate payments will be completed by August.

Information and Communications Technology

We recently commissioned an external Cyber Assessment and are awaiting findings. The learning will help us to identify and implement improvements to the Council's cyber resilience.

On the 25th & 26th June the IT team identified and proactively managed a serious cyber threat. No services were disrupted but the event was a reminder of the cyber risks that all organisations face in the modern era.

Implementation of Multi Factor Authentication is now complete on the Council's systems, providing an additional layer of security.

We have successfully recruited to a number of key, senior IT posts and during July have welcomed a new Head of IT to the team.

The IT Service Desk received 32,397 contacts for support during the financial year 2021/22 this was an increase of 18% from the previous year. This can be attributed to increased demand for technology since the pandemic as well as the introduction of key systems and technological changes across the council.

Data Strategy and Business Intelligence

The team is leading on the recently released Census 2021 data. So far, high level population and demographic information have been released, however there are further data sets to be published into the Autumn which will offer a deeper insight into changes within the borough since the last Census in 2011.

Information Governance and Data Security (inc GDPR)

Of the information assurance incidents logged during the 2nd half year 2021/2022, none have been of a significant enough nature to warrant referral to the ICO. During the same reporting period we have achieved the minimum requirement for compliance (90%) with requests for information under the FOIA (95.75%), the EIR (97.98%) and GDPR/DPA2018 subject access requests (90.65%). We have increased the resources available to process subject access requests, through redeployment within the wider team.

In 2022/23, 2 academy trusts (Incorporating 10 Lancashire schools) and 56 individual schools have bought back into the Schools IG SLA for 2022/23. One BWD Primary School returned to the SLA service after failing to take up the offer in 2021/22. Ongoing marketing work continues to try and expand the service out of Borough.

RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act)

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) provides a statutory framework whereby officers investigating criminal offences which carry a maximum sentence of 6 months can apply for authorisation in order to undertake covert surveillance and use covert human intelligence sources. The Council is obliged to have in place a Procedure and Guidance document for officers to follow to ensure that they use the processes properly and lawfully. The aim is to ensure compliance with Article 8 of the ECHR which is now enshrined within the Human Rights Act 1998. Article 8 is the right to a private and family life. There was an inspection of this Council by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner of the Council in 2019 and he found overall compliance good but the existing Procedural Guide was not fully up to date in that there were certain aspects of the new Home office Codes that had to be included (mainly technical) and he also recommended training in the form of desk top exercises. This Council has not had any investigations that merited the use of covert powers of investigation which would be caught by the provisions of RIPA since before 2016. However, the IPCO will still have a duty to inspect and the next inspection will be later in 2022. At the next inspection the Council will have had the new, updated Procedure and Guidance approved by the Executive Board and will be able to show that it has completed two sessions of desk top training sessions with scenarios, thus showing the IPCO recommendations have been adopted.

Meanwhile the Council's RIPA Group made up of officers representing a cross-section of the Council's functions continues to meet every 6 months to report any investigations that may require covert methods whether within RIPA or not and to discuss developments in the law, training, preparation for inspections and changes to the Procedure and Guidance that may be necessary.

Health and Safety

The Annual Health & Safety Report has recently been published and was presented to the Audit & Governance Committee and highlights the Health, Safety and Wellbeing team's activity during the period from April 2021 to March 2022. It also highlights the key areas of focus that are under way for the current financial year which include;

- Corporate Health & Safety Policy has been reviewed, updated and shared with employees.
- Service Level Agreements for schools have been renewed and the level of custom maintained, with 51 schools purchasing our service
- All Health and Safety guidance documents and templates will be reviewed and updated where required

- A 'back to basics' campaign will commence over the summer with reminders to all on various Health & Safety topics.
- A focus group on violence and aggression will be established with the aim of reducing the number of incidents
- Health and Safety groups at key sites will be established and will feed into the wider Health & Safety Consultative Committee
- Full H&S audits will be undertaken at high risk locations and services
- A review of the governance arrangements for the Events Safety Advisory Group will be undertaken
- A programme of Health and Safety Training will be developed and made available to staff.

PEOPLE: A good quality of life for all our residents:

Registrars

The Registrars service has, since 24th March 2022, been administering death registrations via a new Government procedure. The new process has allowed for the continuation of electronically sent medical certificates from hospitals and GP's to the Registration Service. Upon receipt of the certificate, Registrars will then seek to contact the next of kin to book a face to face appointment to complete the registration.

The delivery of appointments for death registrations via the new process have in the main been timely for customers, however, the service has received additional contact from families who are unsure if a registration can take place. The process is dependent upon the hospital and GP's transferring the information quickly. In some cases, the certificate has not been transferred to the Council promptly, resulting in undue delays for bereaved families.

This is an extremely sensitive area and the Registrars Service is continuing to monitor delays and make representation to the hospital and GP's when necessary.