

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

COUNCILLOR MAHFOOZ HUSSAIN

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 Civil Contingencies Service have recently updated the Corporate Business Continuity plan and Business Impact Analysis templates. We will be undertaking the 'winter pressures' exercise again to ensure service readiness. The service has supported emergency plan owners, to ensure plans have been reviewed and updated appropriately. The team have reviewed Strategic Officer out of hours arrangements and also completed our Emergency Control Centre plan review.

Engagement is continuing to take place with the Community Champions in order to promote and enhance 'community resilience'. We are incredibly proud that one of our Community Emergency Response Volunteers has recently completed the National Volunteers Certificate.

The service supported the multiagency response to the recent water outage, affecting many properties in Blackburn and Darwen. Given the longevity of the outage, continuous support was required from Civil Contingencies and wider departments. An internal debrief has taken place and recommendations will be reported to the multiagency debrief in October.

Quarter 1 statistics for Duty Officers are as follows:

Information received = 54
Total warnings received = 146
Duty Officer Activations = 20
Strategic Officer Activations = 2

Digital Services and Transformation

The Digital Customer Portal (DCP) continues to digitise and replace manual processes across the Council, providing 24/7 online customer access to services. Over 70,000 customers are now signed up with a BwD online account. There are 174 digital forms for services available through our website. New digital services recently released include the booking of taxi driver knowledge tests and Disability Links Referrals within Children Services.

Office 365 products and features continue to be rolled out and utilised across the business as part of our ongoing development of this product and the team are training to upskill in this area to assist the business and digital champions.

Work is now in the final completion stages for IKEN, our legal case management system and HR & Payroll system phase 1.

Discovery work is underway for the digital transformation of People Services.

Information and Communications Technology

Following senior changes within the IT team reported to Council in July, reviews have taken place across the current IT capital programme. Designs and implementation plans are being updated as a result. The team are also developing a technical roadmap to deliver the infrastructure elements of the BwD Digital Strategy (2021-24).

The team have been working with 3rd parties to review the organisations Cyber Security and IT continuity processes. An IT Assurance Board is in place to provide Chief Officer oversight for IT operations and major projects. A number of operational IT groups have been set up within the IT team to strengthen processes and operations.

Data Strategy and Business Intelligence

The team have worked with Children's Services to develop several new report dashboards. These are in response to the recent Ofsted report and provide the Childrens Senior Leadership Team with increased visibility of performance, especially for children who are leaving care.

A Council Data Strategy has been drafted and will be agreed by the end of 2022.

Information Governance (IG) and Data Security (inc GDPR)

A 62.5% increase was recorded on the number of Data Protection requests received in Q1 22/23 compared to Q1 21/22. An existing FTE was transferred from IT projects into the Subject Access Request (SAR) team to assist with the historical backlog and the increased number of new requests. A back log of 28 historical and significantly large SARs in April 2021 has now been reduced to 15.

There has been a 21.6% increase on the number of FOI requests received in Q1 22/23 compared to Q1 21/22. We are currently meeting the nationally recognised compliance standards in responding to these requests.

The IG team have taken responsibility for SAR file disclosures to Lancashire Constabulary, a service previously undertaken by legal officers. After an initial discussion with Hutton HQ, a new streamlined approach has been designed and piloted including a full digital disclosure process.

RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act)

The new RIPA Procedure and Guidance has been scrutinised by the Policy & Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and was approved by the Executive in July. It is on the staff intranet and has also been published on the Council website. The Council has not used any covert human intelligence sources or undertaken any covert surveillance ('directed surveillance') either in person or on-line since 2019 – the Council's investigating officers generally prefer overt methods of investigation. Internal audit is currently undertaking an audit of those RIPA processes. The Investigatory Powers Commissioner will conduct an inspection of the Council's RIPA processes on 3 November 2022 (they are every three years). The update of the Procedure and Guidance has been completed and some training sessions have been held in response to the recommendations of the last inspection. Further training sessions will be arranged later this year. The emphasis was to ensure officers do not stray inadvertently into covert methods of investigation and thus breaching the Human Right to privacy without using the correct authorisation processes, which start with the completion of an application form to be submitted to an Authorising Officer, as set out in the Procedure and Guidance.

Health and Safety

There were 196 Incidents reported in Quarter 1 – compared with 247 in the previous quarter and 124 in the same period last year. The team also received 90 incidents reported by schools. There was one report made to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) under Reporting of Injuries, Disease and Dangerous Occurrence Regulation (RIDDOR) following a member of public being taken to hospital after a fall. There were 71 near misses reported, a positive sign as evidence shows that increased near miss reports lead to reduced serious incidents.

The team have supported with 'hands on' DSE Assessments and our Workstation Warriors have visited all main sites to support MSK Month. A Violence & Aggression Focus Group has been established with representatives in attendance from all Council areas. Dedicated support has been provided to Albion Mill with ongoing incident support. In person Fire Awareness/Marshal Training has been delivered to all Children's Centre staff following a significant near miss. Face Fit testing was arranged and delivered to all services who use FFP3 face masks (dust & respiratory droplets). A new Incident Reporting Dashboard is now live, which gives real time information incidents. We have reviewed the schools H&S Policy and this has been updated and shared for them to adopt. All schools who had a full H&S Audit (45 in total) last year have received a follow up offer of support.

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

Registrars

This month the Registration Service has undergone a full inspection by the General Register Office. The inspection covers procedures, record keeping accuracy and the security of official stationary. Whilst the full inspection report is not expected for several weeks, the inspector's comments were positive and no specific concerns were raised with the team.

Customer Services

The summer period generally sees a reduction in the overall number of customer contacts. However, two recent government initiatives, namely, the Council Tax Energy payment scheme and the Household Support Scheme have generated significant volumes of contact, mainly via the telephones. Whilst the energy payment scheme has now been completed, there are still customer enquiries requesting cost of living support.

Recruitment and retention of customer service assistants is a continuing priority with a number of positions vacant. The filling of all vacant posts is a key priority in order for the service to respond and deal with the higher number of customer contacts we receive during the autumn.

Digital Inclusion Strategy

A core team has been established to support the development of a Digital Inclusion strategy. The team have met with Leeds City Council who have shared best practice in how to design, structure and implement the strategy which will cover 3rd sector, businesses, partners and commissioned services. The team are working closely with the Cost of Living Crisis group to align any offerings and to optimise our Digital Assisted Service offer.