

# REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

COUNCILLOR MAHFOOZ HUSSAIN

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
CHIEF OFFICERS: DIRECTOR OF  
FINANCE AND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
CHIEF EXEC

Thursday, 26 January 2023

## **COUNCIL: Delivered by a strong and resilient council;**

### **Civil Contingencies, Emergency Planning and Business Continuity**

#### **Civil Contingencies Service**

The Civil Contingencies Service (CCS) has had another busy period with a lot of positive work undertaken. We have a new Emergency Planning Consultant who started employment with us on the 1<sup>st</sup> December and will initially be supporting on the SLA delivery. Some key activities are highlighted below:

#### **Emergency Planning / Preparedness**

- The current Severe Weather Plan is being reviewed and simplified to support Duty Officers when sharing information and responding to severe weather events.
- New procedures have been implemented for activation processes for Human Aspects and the Media emergency planning arrangements. In addition to this, the Authority is looking at the vulnerable people data in order to identify those in need during a potential power outage.
- A mailshot to vulnerable people to encourage them to sign up to the priority user services provided by the utility companies was completed.
- Civil Contingencies Service support/response/notification procedures to support Public Protection and Environmental Health when dealing with an Avian Flu (H5N1) outbreak has been developed and shared with Duty Officers.
- The Albion Mill emergency response/business continuity plan is under review. This is to ensure that it is fit for purpose and will incorporate any lessons identified following the business continuity exercise early this year. It will also address health and safety issues that have been raised to ensure that they are captured within the planning.
- The mandatory Civil Contingencies e-learning package is currently being reviewed and will be live again in the New Year.
- Elected Members training took place on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023 combining a the session with media and health and safety teams.
- The Team continues to support Schools that have signed up to a SLA for Emergency Planning and Preparedness.

#### **Business Continuity / Business Continuity Promotion (BCP)**

We have taken the opportunity to promote and share our business continuity guidance/plan template with businesses within the borough. This has been facilitated via BID and Staywell partners, which has reached over 3,000 businesses.

#### **Community Resilience / Volunteers**

We are planning a workshop in January 2023 for all internal and external volunteers – Emergency Response Group (ERG); Loggists; Community Emergency Response Group (CERV) and Community Champions. This has been promoted at the Community

Champions Network meeting where we asked for expressions of interest. The intention is to promote the wider resilience and encourage / maintain the support that these volunteers can offer.

The service submitted a bid for the Lancashire Resilience Forum Innovation Fund, which, unfortunately, was not successful, but all the suggestions will be adopted through current project streams within the LRF. A scoping meeting with partners has taken place and with a view to focussing on the Schools Community Resilience Project (SCRP), Community Emergency Response Volunteers (CERV), Young People's Resilience and Business Resilience.

The team is currently working on the Power Bi data dashboard looking at how we report our statistical information. Below is the Quarter 3 statistics up until 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022 so not quite a full quarter:-

<b>Duty Officer Statistics – Quarter 3 2022/23</b>	
Information received	100
Warnings	113
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>213</b>
Strategic Officer Activations	1
Duty Officer Activations	8

### **Digital Services and Transformation**

This quarter saw the launch of the new dual application for taxi drivers on the Digital Customer Portal (DCP) along with the DBS Registration process. This allows customers to apply online and upload all their relevant documentation in one place. Drivers have been involved in the process and we will continue to work with them to get more feedback, and alongside this the team will work on digitising the Renewals process. There are now a total of 9 online forms available for Taxi Drivers to assist them to communicate effectively with the BwD Licensing Department

The DCP portal has also been utilised for people to sign up to the Stay Well Pledge for Business which is part of a national campaign. This again shows the versatility of the portal to be used for many different services.

### **Digital Inclusion Strategy (DIS)**

The stakeholders met in early December to discuss user research regarding reasons why residents are presenting at BwD buildings. The purpose of this was to identify if those residents were doing so due to a lack of digital skills or devices. This was true with around 50 % of cases.

The DIS will be written by the Digital Designer in Adults (supported by other Colleagues) due to the existing relationships and knowledge already held with BwD partners and third-party agencies.

### **Web site and Intranet**

The new website went live on the 3rd November, which has a more 'GOV.UK like' feel to it. The team has worked closely with a partnership of Local Authorities who develop code for websites that can be shared easily – in essence we have been able to use something that was already built but adapt it to our local needs. The new website introduces new features like step by step processes and guides you through sections with 'Next' buttons, again following GOV.UK design. A lot of work has been done on the search function, which is front and central to the homepage now.

We will continue to develop our digital front door, by listening to customer feedback to ensure that people can find what they need easily negating the need for other more costly contact methods.

### **Customer Services**

In quarter 3, Customer services handled:

- 30,473 calls, with 82% of calls answered in 60 seconds. 85% of customers were very satisfied with the service they received.
- 7,069 chats, with 99% of chats answered within 60 seconds. 68% of customers were very satisfied with the service they received.
- 4,838 emails, with 100% of emails answered within one working day. 63% of customers were very satisfied with the service they received
- 879 blue badge applications, with an average processing time of 7 working days. 96% of applicants 'self-served' via our website.

In October, in partnership with Lancashire County Council, we launched a new online portal for NOW card applications and renewals (concessionary bus travel). This will significantly speed up the application process, as we have seen with Blue Badges, and will allow applicants to submit everything digitally – paper applications will no longer be provided, however as we do with the Blue Badge service, we will offer assisted digital appointments to complete applications over the phone/in person, for residents that do not have access to the internet. This change will reduce the amount of 'paper handling' for evidences/applications and will contribute to the council's agenda for digital first and carbon neutral.

In December, the garden waste subscription was launched for 2023, with Customer Services providing digital support for residents that do not have access to the internet, as well as dealing with any enquiries about the scheme. This always falls at a good time of year for Customer Services as we tend to be quiet in the build up to Christmas and can handle this additional demand.

### **Information and Communications Technology**

During the quarter, there have been significant enhancements in the technical currency of the IT infrastructure. This is focussed on ensuring that the Council benefits from the most up to date, reliable and secure technology to support our digital ambitions. Improvements include the decommissioning of over 50 servers to simplify the architecture and the creation of plans to upgrade over 50 more to current operating environments.

Given the growing cyber security threats that all councils are presented with there has been an investment in time and resources to further enhance our security facilities. This will form the foundation for further investments over the next year. The detailed design work that will underpin our migration to cloud services is now well underway as is the detailed design work underpinning our move to a new council wide Unified Communications environment. The design work has been completed for the new Core Network that supports all of the council's digital services, this will be deployed during 2023. Further network services have been made available to a range of clients inside Schools and Blackburn Markets.

New external funding exceeding £150,000 has been secured from a range of sources to support these efforts.

## **Data Strategy and Business Intelligence**

The team are working on implementing the new Performance Management Framework for the Council. This will see more automated collection of performance data thus enabling more frequent reporting. A new suite of performance measures is being developed which will form the basis for the new Corporate Plan and departmental business plans. These will be produced over the coming months with monitoring to begin in April.

New reporting dashboards are being built using Microsoft's reporting solution, Power BI, to facilitate this; along with a digital solution for tracking our business plan progress. We presented our approach at a recent round table with the Local Government Association and colleagues from other North West Councils.

## **Information Governance and Security (inc GDPR)**

There were 47 information assurance incidents during the 1st half year 2022/23. All incidents are monitored as part of the breach reporting process. None have been of a significant enough nature to warrant referral to the ICO. We have achieved the minimum requirement for compliance (90%) with requests for information under the FOIA for the 1st half year 2022/23 recording an overall compliance rate of 96.9% and with requests under EIR with a compliance rate of 98.1%. In addition, we have achieved the minimum requirement for compliance with GDPR/DPA2018 subject access requests (90%) in the 1st half year 2022/23 with a compliance rate of 92.3%. At the end of Qtr2 there remained a backlog of 6 historical subject access requests, reduced from 20 in Qtr 1.

Compliance with mandatory IG Training 2022/23 course stands at 82.05% and the DOJO Cyber Security Training 2022/23 course compliance rate stands at 79.12%. The target is 95%. This will be escalated to department leads during Qtr 3.

## **Complaints & Compliments**

During the Quarter 3 period, the Complaints/Feedback team in Legal & Governance have received and dealt with: 92 MP enquiries, 221 informal complaints, 48 'Stage 1' complaints, 9 'stage 2' complaints, 6 Ombudsman enquiries.

A total of 51 compliments have also been recorded during Quarter 3. The majority of compliments received were in relation to Adults Social Care (26). The Feedback Team have been working together with the managers in Adults Services to capture positive feedback.

The team have also been working closely with Digital Transformation to set up a complaints dashboard on Power BI to enable for managers and Directors to access up to the minute feedback data for their service area/departments. This piece of work has been prioritised to allow early access to data in readiness for external Adults Services inspections.

## **RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act)**

The Investigatory Powers Commissioner conducted an inspection of the Council's RIPA processes on 3 November 2022 (they are every three years). The Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Inspector examined the documentation, including the new Procedure and Guidance, Data Protection and Retention Policies, and some of the Group Meeting minutes. The result of the inspection was that the IPCO was pleased with the Council's current processes. Some recommendations were made which involved some minor additions to those processes and some amendments to the Procedural Guidance.

Those recommendations are currently being examined with a view to adoption as soon as possible.

### **Health and Safety**

There were 217 Incidents reported in Qtr2 – compared with 196 in Qtr 1. The team also received 56 incidents reported by schools, albeit this included the summer holiday period.

Reports made to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) under Reporting of Injuries, Disease and Dangerous Occurrence Regulation (RIDDOR) were:

- 0 Council reports in Quarter 2 (though 2 in October 2022 which were fully investigated and remedial actions taken)
- 4 School reports (3 slips and trips involving staff members and 1 child trapped their fingers in a door)

There were 72 near misses reported, similar to the last quarter.

Some key activity highlighted below:

- The Terms of Reference and membership of the Health and Safety Committee have been reviewed and revised to ensure they are fit for purpose.
- A Violence & Aggression Focus Group has been established with representatives in attendance from all areas. The next meeting in January 2023 will review progress on the work plan, including the approval of a new Violence and Aggression policy, an update on a lone worker device trial, a detailed explanation of how the Caution List operates and any personal safety/de-escalation training requirements for Council teams.
- Reminders about mandatory H&S e-learning training have been issued and include Fire Safety Training, H&S in the Workplace and Manual Handling. In addition, Working with DSE for those categorised as “DSE users” under the legislation. These are to be completed every 3 years and are now due to be completed between November 2022 and February 2023.
- Health Surveillance clinics have recently taken place for employees exposed to noise and vibration during the course of their work.
- The Team continues to support Schools that have signed up to a SLA for Health and Safety.

## **PEOPLE: A good quality of life for all our residents;**

### **Registrars**

The online appointment module for births and deaths registrations has been fully tested and is waiting to be deployed by the software company. This new module will check that the death certificate has been received from the hospital or GP prior to an appointment being offered. It is hoped that this service improvement will take pressure off the telephone lines and provide the 24 / 7 access customers have previously requested.

All attendees of registration appointments can now register their arrival at the town hall using their own mobile phones. This enhancement allows registration staff to be notified immediately that the attendee has arrived. It is expected that this new facility will assist with the more efficient throughput of customers and appointments.

### **School admission appeals**

The Governance team also manages and administers independent school appeals hearings relating to admissions and exclusions. Between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022, the team have successfully administrated 119 appeals, which is an increase for the same period in 2021.