

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

COUNCILLOR MAHFOOZ HUSSAIN

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS: Director CE
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Being a forward thinking and innovative Council

Civil Contingencies Service (CCS)

A total of 186 incidents were reported in Q1 2023/2024, 48 of them being information received and 138 being warnings. There were a total of 5 Strategic Officer and 13 Duty Officer Activations. Some of the emergencies responded to included flooding, fires, water supply issues and concerns around anti-social behaviour.

A summary of recent and planned activity:

Emergency Planning / Preparedness

- The 24/25 Corporate Exercise is being prepared and will focus on emergency preparedness and response.
- Training will be prepared and delivered to Strategic Officers in the autumn, and this will complement the formal Multi- Agency Gold Incident Command training due to take place in October.
- A review of emergency plans has begun, with initial focus on the Council's Local Emergency Response Plan.
- In addition, following the publication of the Government's National Risk Registers, the Council's local Community Risk Register will be reviewed and updated in line with the national and LRF documents.
- The service has also been supporting the LRF with several plan reviews, including Human Aspects, Pipeline, LERP, Mass Fatalities and Excess Deaths, alongside several Risk Workshops.
- In conjunction with health colleagues, we will be looking at winter preparedness.
- Updated information on emergency preparedness has been shared with all elected members for awareness and cascade.

Business Continuity / Business Continuity Promotion

Following the audit of Business Continuity Plans (BCP), all plan owners have been given actions to ensure their plans are updated appropriately and the corporate BCP is now being reviewed. In addition to this, we have worked with colleagues in IT to identify critical systems in the event of a network outage.

Community Resilience / Volunteers

A volunteer networking event took place on 13th September, to ensure continued engagement and to provide important updates to our community volunteers. Going forward, an Internal Emergency Response Group training schedule will be rolled out. The team are also working on Resilient Telecommunication hubs alongside colleagues from the Local Resilience Forum.

Health and Safety (H&S)

There were 165 Council accidents, incidents and near misses reported in Q1 of 2023/24, broadly similar to the previous quarter. Approximately 50% of incident reports come from Environment and Operations, where many of our frontline higher risk services are. 116 incidents were reported from schools in the same period.

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

- 2 Council reports in Q1
- 1 School report in Q1

Near miss incident reports rose slightly to 24 in Q1 with the majority from Environment and Leisure teams.

A summary of recent and planned activity:

- Direct support to Leisure Services is continuing with full H&S audits undertaken and in-person training delivered to managers. The number of incidents reported have increased and accident investigations have improved in quality and outcomes.
- Direct support to services at Davyfield Road Depot is continuing.
- Annual H&S Corporate Compliance checks have now been received from many areas and data is being reviewed.
- The Building Safety Task & Finish Group was set up following a number of recent reported incidents at council buildings.

The Violence & Aggression Focus Group is continuing with various progress made to date.

Schools

Summer Term visits were undertaken, focusing on DSE and H&S clinics as well as some training delivery. The autumn term visit will address Asbestos Management in schools – in line with focus from the Health & Safety Executive (HSE)

Digital Services and Transformation

The team continues to support Children's Services with the Fostering Transformation project. Our User Researcher has built strong relations with our Foster Carers who are at the heart of our designs for the future of the service. Foster Carers can now register an interest and apply online and the statutory checks process has been digitalised. Foster Carers are working with the team to design online forms.

The Family Hubs programme is under way, with 48 recommendations being worked through which will improve existing buildings and the processes being undertaken, using new and existing technology.

The new Public Protection system replacement is due to launch in September.

Website and Intranet

The website content team are working on content for the Family Hubs microsite. This is an exciting development and will become the model for future microsites. We are reviewing the content for Taxi Licensing after feedback was gathered by the User

Research team from taxi drivers and we will continue to liaise with them and ensure that they are able to apply for services easily online.

We are nearing the launch of a new intranet site for staff. The final design is being approved and we are working with the Communications team to ensure we have the correct technology to distribute the weekly newsletter to staff effectively.

Information and Communications Technology

The IT Team has made planned progress in key areas. These include:

1. The installation of Rubrik, a new Backup and Recovery system, which will become functional in September 2023.
2. The creation of tender for the new Unified Communications Environment, which will be published during September. This will allow for full deployment in 2024.
3. A large programme of security penetration testing, which will assist in our continued securing of the technical environment.
4. The continued upgrade of the Council hardware and software environments, Children and Adult's social care systems and the move forward to the latest Microsoft environments.
5. Planning to tender for new laptop devices to replace those which are no longer supported.

This progress has been supported by closer working with the Transformation Team, which has led to more effective deliveries. Furthermore, the team is finding success in acquiring new local talent as we develop a more robust IT team for the future.

Going forward, the new core network will be implemented and enabled during Quarter 3. Deployment of further upgrades will take place in 2024.

Data Strategy and Business Intelligence

Our new suite of Corporate Key Performance Indicators have now been approved and are being monitored.

We are working closely with Children's and Adults Services to continue to build new reports to track performance across those departments. These reports enable departmental management teams quicker access to key data items, which are used to manage operational services and also to report to government departments and inspectorates.

Information Governance and Data Protection

There have been 14 new information assurance incidents within Q1 2023-24. 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.

292 FOI requests were due for disclosure during Q1 2023-24. 95.21% were responded to on time. As such, we are complying with the FOIA during this period.

In Q1 2023-2024, 391 EIR requests were due to disclosure, with 98.21% responded to on time. Therefore, we are complying with EIR during this period.

128 GDPR/DPA2018 subject access requests were due for disclosure in Q1 2023-24. There was a compliance rate of 90.63%, meaning that we are complying with GDPR/DPA2018 during this period.

Following recent cyber-attacks across the country, we continue to ensure that all staff and Elected Members have completed their annual Information Governance and DOJO Cyber Security training. We have also implemented the Data Protection Officer's recommendation that staff are made aware of the training's importance in ensuring the security of the Council's network.

A total of 62 schools have bought into the SLA for the 2023/24 financial year, generating a total revenue of £53,286.

RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act)

There have been no applications for authorisation for undertaking covert surveillance or to use a covert human intelligence source for a number of years nor have there been any such activities outside the RIPA legislation that merited the use of the NON-RIPA application process. Much of the Council's enforcement processes are done openly. This does not exempt the Council from having to have processes in place and the Council is subject to scrutiny by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) so training is ongoing and RIPA Officer's Group meetings are being held quarterly.

In November 2022, there was an inspection of the Council's RIPA processes by an inspector appointed by the IPCO. The IPCO recommended minor amendments to the Council's procedure and guidance, mainly around the secure storage and use of documentation including RIPA authorisations and strengthening of the processes for the lawful access to publicly available social media information. The Council's RIPA Co-ordinator has submitted a report to Executive Board to this effect. Training in relation to Internet and Social Media investigations was provided in August 2023. A web-based training course is currently being developed by HR and the RIPA Co-ordinator.

Customer Services

It has been another busy quarter in Customer Services, with over 30,000 calls, 4,600 emails and nearly 7,000 chat exchanges with residents. Chat messaging is proving a popular way for residents to contact us, with growing numbers choosing to use this method as it becomes more prevalent with other suppliers such as travel firms and utility companies. We also processed over 900 blue badge applications, with 94% of applicants 'self-served' via our website.

As residents choose to use digital and phone methods, we have seen demand decrease in our reception centres. This quarter we have seen the taxi licensing application process being made available online. This has been well received and used by taxi drivers, who now no longer need to produce evidence in the town hall.

Complaints/Feedback

During July 2023 and August 2023 the Complaints team has dealt with: 112 MP Enquires, 182 Informal Complaints, 10 'Stage 1' complaints and 5 Ombudsman Enquires. The team also received 72 compliments during the same period, the majority relating to Adults services (53).

There has been a 10% decrease in informal complaints compared to July/August 2022, and a slight increase in the number of 'Stage 1' complaints.

The number of MP enquiries received has increased (total 112) compared to the same months last year (69 s received for July - August 2022). These mainly related to Environment & Operations.

Overall, the team has worked well in resolving most complaints at the informal stage and without having the need to invoke the formal complaints process (hence only 10 from the 182 informal complaints). Also, the team worked well in 'gate keeping' to resolve those complaints that did require dealing with under 'Stage 1', without the need for any complaints to be investigated under 'Stage 2' of the complaints process.

During the year 2022/23, 28 complaints relating to Council services were referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), of which only 3 were upheld (Adults Social Services - 2 and Children's Social Services - 1).

School admission appeals

During the period 1st July to 31st August, the team have successfully administered 75 admission appeals. A breakdown of the results of these appeals are set out below:

Unsuccessful - 54

Successful - 7

Withdrawn - 12

The school appeals team is still seeing a significant increase in appeals, and are currently working on over 60 appeals (September 2023).

During this academic year (2023-24) the team has so far (inc. September) administered 310 school admission appeals, which is a significant increase compared to the academic years 2022-23 (375), 2021-22 (345), 2020-21 (239) and 2019-20 (242). The increase in the appeals is due to a number of factors, including new housing developments in BwD, families moving into the Borough from other parts of the UK and also International New Arrivals.

Registrars

It has been a busy period for the service, particularly August, which saw a 14% increase in the number of deaths registered, 16% increase in the number of marriages and 25% increase in the number of couples giving their intention to marry compared with July 2023. Appointment waiting times and levels of customer satisfaction across all statutory services remain excellent at 100%. The demand for marriages looks set to continue going into the autumn.

Testing is currently underway for the new online appointment booking. Initially, this will enable customers to book birth registration appointments online, and if this is successful, online death registration appointment bookings will be introduced.