

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

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

Digital Services and Transformation

The Transformation Team along with the IT team are currently delivering 18 projects.

The Fostering Service Transformation continues to be successful. The team have approximately 4 months of work left and are discussing with Service Leads how the engagement with Foster Carers will continue into business as usual.

The project team for Idox implementation (Public Protection system) has 5 full time staff members. Configuration of the system has begun, and we are still on target to go live by 24 April 2024.

A further 13 online forms have gone live in the past 2 months on the Digital Customer Portal, bringing the total number to 233 across 45 service areas. The Portal will be upgraded around March 2024 with a GDS version and work is ongoing to prepare for this including engagement with customer and community groups to ensure the change is as smooth as possible.

The User Research team were heavily involved in the Budget Consultation providing face to face support for residents to fill in the survey. Additional funding has been acquired to secure an additional Junior User Researcher to assist with the NHS Adults Survey work and the Northwest Fostering Recruitment and Retention Hub.

Website and Intranet

The new BwD Intranet successfully launched in October and has received great feedback. A paper is being worked on to assess what a Phase 2 of this project looks like to include additional development.

The Family Hubs microsite is well underway and content workshops are progressing well.

As well as conducting content audits within Adults Services, the team have successfully fulfilled over 200 web content requests in the past 2 months.

Information and Communications Technology

The IT Team has made planned progress in key areas.

These include:

1. The new Backup and Recovery system is now fully operational and is protecting critical assets.

2. The tender for the Unified Communications Environment is out for competition as planned.
3. A large programme of security penetration testing has been completed and we are using the result to harden our security posture.
4. All Council staff have received new Microsoft working environments through the deployment of Microsoft 365.
5. The new core network infrastructure has now been implemented. This has enhanced performance, security and recoverability.
6. There has been a rise in cyber-attacks of varying sophistication. None have penetrated our defences in any meaningful way. However, increased sophistication of attack requires to respond with increased vigilance and capability during 2024.

Work continues to ensure we create a sustainable team of professionals through the recruitment of talent that has potential to make a long term contribution to the work of the team.

Performance and Business Intelligence

The new suite of corporate performance indicators was formally reported for the first time at Policy Council in November. Work has started on Business Planning for 2024/25 and this will see each department review it's set of performance measures and update targets as required.

The team are also developing Customer Insight reports for a range of council services, these will include data on interactions with residents, response timescales, wait times, customer satisfaction and progress with feedback and complaints.

Customer Services

Quarter 3 saw another busy few months for our customer services teams. We handled nearly 37,000 calls, with three quarters of these answered in less than 1 minute. 83% of callers were very satisfied with the service they received. We also dealt with over 7,000 web chat messages and over 5,000 emails. All three of these contact methods have seen increases since last year.

With more residents choosing to use digital methods to contact us, visitor numbers to our receptions have decreased. This allows our staff to spend more time helping those customers who chose not to, or are unable to, use digital contact methods. We helped 2,400 customers in quarter 3, serving all of these within five minutes of their arrival.

Complaints/Feedback

The data below relates to Quarter 2 of the current municipal year)

The Feedback Team dealt with 178 enquires from MPs offices (a 52% increase from the same period last year). The enquires related to matters including Planning, Council Tax, Highways, Environment, Housing Needs, School Admissions and SEND.

The Feedback team received 271 informal complaints, including statutory Adults Social Services and Children's Social Services complaints. Only 13 of these escalated to the formal Stage 1 of the process. The team also dealt with 16 'Stage 1' complaints (11 from the same period last year) (11) and related to safeguarding (Children's Services), SEND and Housing Needs. Of these only 3 complaints were upheld/partially upheld.

Apologies were provided for the upheld/partially upheld complaints, and service improvement mechanisms have been put forward to avoid such complaints in the future. 11 complaints were submitted to the Local Government & Social care Ombudsman, of which 4 were investigated by the Ombudsman. No cases of maladministration were found, and 2 cases are still open.

We recorded 96 compliments, which is a 37% increase from the same period last year. Social Care continue to see an increase in compliments for Home First and Reablement teams. There was also an increase in compliments in Children's Services - for Residential and Children's Homes, YPS and the Children with Disabilities team.

Registrars

October and November 2023 saw an 18% increase in the number of marriages/civil partnerships, 33% increase in the number of notices of intent to marry/form a civil partnership, 11% increase in the number of births being registered and 37% increase in the number of new British Citizens compared to October and November 2022. Appointment waiting times and levels of customer satisfaction across all statutory services remains excellent at 100%

October November 2023 Registrations

Marriages/Civil Partnerships – 67

Notice of intention to marry/form a civil partnership – 150

Births/ Birth Declarations – 38

Deaths/Death Declarations – 479

British Citizenship - 115