

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DIGITAL AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

COUNCILLOR MAHFOOZ HUSSAIN

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS: Director CE
Thursday, 14 March 2024

Being a forward thinking and innovative Council

Information and Communications Technology

During the last year, the Council have implemented a new core network infrastructure, as well as a new Wide Area network infrastructure. As such, the Council's 81 networked sites are now connected through an advanced modern core of switches, which will ensure reliable and secure working for all staff. This implementation was completed without any significant disruption to the business.

An updated Cyber Security recovery system is now fully operational, which will help the Council respond to any ransomware attack. Additional funding was secured from the Government to support this project.

Since January 2024, the Council's state-of-the-art firewalls have prevented over 500 million access requests to our network. In addition, the IT team spotted, intervened, and assisted over 100 staff who were under Cyber-attack.

Civil Contingencies Service (CCS)

A total of 217 incidents were reported in Q3 2023/2024, 53 of them being information received and 164 being warnings. There was a total of 1 Strategic Officer and 16 Duty Officer Activations. Some of the emergencies responded to include a gas explosion, flooding, fires and protests.

A summary of recent and planned activity:

- Emergency response co-ordination – including facilitation of internal TCG meetings for Israel / Palestine conflict events and significant incidents.
- Supported with Operation BrightSparx (bonfire night); large multi-agency response to the London Road gas explosion in December 2023; and support with 5 storms over this quarter.
- Human Aspects – addressing new/additional Rest Centres; Human Aspects Liaison Officer (HALO) role and full Plan review.
- Town Centre / Emergency Control Centre and Corporate Emergency Response Plans completed.
- A corporate exercise is in development and will take place on 18th April 2024.
- Work will begin on reviewing the BwD Community Risk Register.
- Work continues to support Departments on their Business Continuity planning arrangements. The annual 'BC Call Cascade' test took place in February for reassurance that departmental business continuity plans activation works, and the Corporate BC Plan is in final draft.

Health and Safety

There were 160 Council accidents, incidents and near misses reported in Q3 of 2023/24, broadly similar to the previous quarter. 100 of these incident reports come from Environment and Operations, where many of our higher risk frontline services are. Leisure and Parking Services teams make up two thirds of this total.

151 incidents were reported from schools in the same period.

There have been 0 Council and School reports in Q3, made to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) under Reporting of Injuries, Disease and Dangerous Occurrence Regulation (RIDDOR). Additionally, there were 9 near-miss incident reports in Q3, a decline since Q2.

A summary of recent and planned activity:

- Programme of Council Audits is underway.
- Depot support is ongoing with weekly inspections and targeted support as required.
- Corporate Compliance checks have been completed, which has helped inform directing the team's resources.
- Building Safety Task and Finish group are supporting a wider review of the safety of Council buildings.
- Health Surveillance is an ongoing programme, and now includes the Recycling team for noise surveillance.
- Violence & Aggression (V&A) Focus Group is ongoing, key updates include:
 - New Policy issued in November 2023
 - Personal Safety and de-escalation training rollout – numerous sessions delivered to teams and excellent feedback has been received.
 - Closer working established with the Community Safety Team to ensure appropriate follow-up on V&A incidents.

Information Governance and Security (inc GDPR)

There were 22 new information assurance incidents during Q3 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.

We have exceeded the minimum requirement of 90% compliance rate during Q3 2023/24 for the following:

- Requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) - 94.96%
- Requests for information under the Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs) - 99.74%.
- Requests for information under the DPA2018 (subject access requests) - 98.55%

Record Of Processing Activity registers (ROPAs) are a mandatory requirement for all schools under GDPR. During Q3 2023-24, the Schools IG Service completed 30 school visits to SLA schools to audit their ROPA and then worked with the schools to update these documents. All schools have access to the Schools IG Training via Me Learning as part of the SLA, with 2 schools requesting face to face training in the quarter.

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.

The Council's updated Procedure and Guidance has now been approved and is on the Council's internet and intranet. Training in relation to Internet and Social Media investigations was provided in August 2023 and December 2023 and further development of staff guidance to ensure compliance is being developed. In the longer-term, it is proposed that a web-based training course is developed by HR and the RIPA Co-ordinator.

School admission appeals

During the period Q3 2023/24, the team successfully administered 99 admission appeals for primary schools and high schools. A breakdown of the results of these appeals are set out below:

Unsuccessful - 62

Successful - 12

Withdrawn – 25

During this academic year (2023-24) and up to 31st December 2023, the team have administered 409 school admission appeals, which is a significant increase compared to the last academic year and up to 31st December 2022 (299). The increase in the appeals is due to a number of factors, including new housing developments in Blackburn with Darwen, families moving into the Borough from other parts of the UK and also International New Arrivals.