

RESOURCES AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2020

PRESENT: Councillors Rahul Tarar (Chair), Vinay Manro (Vice-Chair), Claire Crilly, Steve Heyes, Nick Martin and Adorabelle Shaikh.

Also in attendance was: Councillor Rob Jandy, Cabinet Member for Organisational Excellence.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Oladapo Ibitoye.

7. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

8. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21st September 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

9. Public Question Time

There were no public questions submitted.

10. Customer Services - Channel Shift

Councillor Rob Jandy, Cabinet Member for Organisational Excellence, referred to the two items on the agenda for the Committee to consider at this meeting. Councillor Jandy confirmed that the purpose of both reports is to highlight the improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided by the Council, and to demonstrate that residents have access to those services (with it being ensured that no-one is left behind). Councillor Jandy highlighted how the subject matters of both reports each contribute in a different way to achieve this, but that the ambition remains the same.

The Committee then considered a report designed to initiate discussion about the Council's approach to channel shift. Mr Rob Brown, the Head of Customer Strategy and Operations, introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The Customer Access Strategy 2018-2021 sets out where those customers who are able to contact the council online will be asked to do so, and where those who are less able to do so will be supported through assisted online channels. This is to ensure that methods of support for our most vulnerable service users are protected.
- There is a focus on how residents are supported to access the most effective channel for them, be it face to face, through the post or by telephone or online (all the methods via which customers communicate with the Council in terms of service delivery).
- It is estimated that it costs the Council around £2.15 for every phone call interaction

(with web transactions being around 70p) but that it is difficult to quantify as it depends on the nature of the query and the work that has gone in to that transaction.

- There has been a lot of focus on improving the standard of performance in the services delivered by the Operations Department recently, which fundamentally underpins the successful customer service offer and the channel shift that goes along with it.
- There has been a massive shift in both online take up and the web skills of residents over the last six months as a direct result of the pandemic.
- There has also been a significant shift in web usage over the last twelve months with around a 25% increase (from 200,000 a month in November 2019 to 250,000 a month in October 2020). This has been driven by some engagements moving online such as the Household Waste Recycling Centre booking system.

Following the introduction of the report the Committee discussed the following matters:

- The remaining processes that are planned for a move to online services, with particular focus on payments to the Council being next. The Committee noted that there is very little left that it is not possible to provide online in some way.
- The online referral form in to adult social care that is about to go live which will help to protect resources for those wishing to communicate via other channels.
- The notional target of 85/15 (whereby approximately 85% of interactions will be via online services) and the progress being made towards this.
- Whether the push to move residents to using online services was communicated effectively, as there appears to be panic that access to services via the usual channels has ceased.
- How residents who have raised cases online do not have the option to further the issue should they believe it has not been resolved once closed, and other examples of services acting in a transactional rather than customer friendly way.
- How all online forms (processes) are hosted on the Borough website and are accessible via any device type. The Committee noted that the requirement to register for My Account has been retained in areas where it is needed and/or useful but has otherwise been removed from processes.
- That the focus for around the last six months has been on designing for mobile phones as about 65% of people access websites using their mobiles first.
- How the Motion on Digital Services, agreed by Council at its meeting on 19th November 2020, is being incorporated, including:
 - That housing tenants have been contacted to reiterate and clarify the messaging about their ability to report issues via the Contact Centre.
 - That self-serve options have been rolled out within libraries.
 - That call centre handlers are being trained on how to lead people through the online opportunities available to them.
- The web chat facility, which utilises a friendly search function 'bot'. The Committee noted that it has had a reasonable amount of interaction with around 300 – 400 users a day. Officers are now looking at emerging technologies to help introduce a more interactive / intelligent / anticipative response than what we have at the moment.
- The aim to introduce 'live chat' behind improved bot capability which has fell behind in 2020 due to resources being refocused to deal with the pandemic.
- The IVR messaging for people waiting on the phone, which encourages them to go

online. The Committee noted that the Council does not currently have a way of measuring if this is reason why calls are disconnected, and that all IVR messaging will be updated at the beginning of January 2021 using customer feedback.

- The procedures and contingency plans in place at the Call Centre when background systems fail and call handlers are unable to assist residents with queries.

Resolved – To note the contents of the report.

11. Emerging Technology

The Committee considered a report, which provided an update on the progress made by the Emerging Technologies team since its inception in October 2019. The report contained detail on how the team was set up to 'horizon scan' and bring new technological capabilities to the organisation. The Committee noted that during this time the team has successfully developed new ways of working, delivered impressive efficiency results, and won accolades for their innovative approach and ideas.

Mr Phil Murkin, the Head of Digital and Business Change, introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- Two recent successful projects had been around free school meals and fly tipping, both of which had delivered significant benefits to the Council during the pandemic when these services were in high demand. The Committee noted that both projects had been delivered in a short timeframe using innovative technology, and had been recognised for external awards.
- The current project at the Household Waste Recycling Centre to improve the throughput and customer experience on site.
- The future projects for the team, which include one in business intelligence and analytics around the use of data, and other areas such as sensors, voice technology, assistive technology, and robotics.
- The tangible benefits now being seen for the Council through the use of these new and emerging technologies.

Resolved – To note the content of the report and particularly the successes and future challenges for the team.

12. Work Programme 2020-2021

The Committee considered and noted a report of the Chief Legal Officer setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2020/2021 Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 21st September 2020 and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.

Councillor Shaikh queried the capacity to deliver expectations and to meet deadlines within the enabling functions next year due to the redeployment of officers as a result of the pandemic. Ms Sam Mowbray, Chief Operating Officer, responded and advised that lessons learnt from the first lockdown has led to the second lockdown being less onerous, and that the Council had not categorically failed to deliver anything because of Covid. The Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development will be invited to explore this matter further in her report to this Committee at its meeting on 25th January 2022.

