

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CO-ORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1000 hours on Friday 6th September 2019, Committee Rooms 3 & 4

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Carl Rice (Chair)

Councillors Tahir Ali, Deirdre Alden, Albert Bore, Debbie Clancy, Liz Clements, Roger Harmer, Rob Pocock and Kath Scott.

Also Present:

Peter Bishop, Director Digital & Customer Services

Wendy Griffiths, Assistant Director, Customer Services and Business Support

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (www.civico.net/birmingham) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

None.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES

(See document No 1)

RESOLVED:

The action notes from the meeting held on 12th July 2019 were agreed.

5. CHAIRS ACTIONS

The Chair informed the Committee that the report to Full Council was now agreed and to be discussed at Full Council on Tuesday. Cllr Alden has agreed to second the motion. This is not the end of the process but we will continue to review this. This will include the pilot for early day motions and the membership of CBM. The report will be packaged as part of wider issues including citizen engagement.

With regards to the request at the last meeting regarding the recruitment of a new Chief Executive, circulated to Scrutiny Chairs and to opposition leaders. Two issues were raised by Scrutiny Chairs: firstly the need to emphasise what attracts a candidate to Birmingham, to have a sense of excitement about and commitment to the city; and secondly to not just look at the local authority sector. The Chair will write to the Leader on this.

6. CUSTOMER SERVICES

(See document No 2)

Peter Bishop, Director Digital & Customer Services, and Wendy Griffiths, Assistant Director, Customer Services and Business Support, introduced the report using a presentation circulated at the meeting.

Members then raised the following points and questions:

- Earlier scrutiny work showed that problems were not necessarily at the contact centre, where the blame was often put, but about service delivery;
- Regarding the BRUM account, the figures were very encouraging in terms of those using the account; in response the officers explained that the event at the Bullring was successful and saw 15,000 users take up as a result of that. This helped understand how to publicise it. There had previously been resistance when pushing the portal over the phone when dealing with enquiries;
- The members' portal as previously introduced should not be taken forward; no further investment should be made in this. The Councillor enquiry facility is now providing a good service and getting better (one example was given of a complex case was acted upon with full response within three days), this would not have been the case six months ago; work has clearly been going on behind the scenes to improve the service. If that continues to develop, then we have something that is fit for purpose for councillors. One suggestion was made: when a member uses the facility, could it automatically link to a summary page of that councillor's enquiry. This will enable members to monitor the enquiries.
- Other members found that they had to chase enquiries put through the system.
- Members asked for an explanation of the benefits of using the councillor enquiry system, for members and the Council.

- Any casework system for councillors should encourage that member queries are not just for Council departments but other bodies such as the Police, DWP etc.
- Officers responded that the members' portal had intended to be a single point of contact for Member enquiries, to be able to track these and for the organisation to use the data to improve the service being provided. There have been lessons learned about how that was done and the engagement. The focus now is on solving problems. It needs to be easy to use and give the information required.
- In response to questions, officers stated that complaint data can be analysed by service level to help understand the root causes.
- Members asked how the quality of responses to customers could be improved. Customers noted that there was more information available during the strike as regular notices were put on the website.
- Customers are asked at the end of the call they are asked to take part in a short survey to measure satisfaction with the call. This now also happens on the web. Where there is dissatisfaction, the relevant pages are reviewed. The questions will be shared with the Committee.
- Where enquiries come through Icasework about service failure, they are automatically recorded as complaints. Those coming through the councillor enquiry inbox would have to be recorded by the customer services team. A current review is looking at owning complaints, not passing to the directorate, and the complaints have been dealt with more successfully.
- Using automation in phone calls can sift out the easier enquiries, but for more complex cases, citizens need to be able to speak to a person. Officers noted that this was about changing use of technology, and some local authorities have experimented with this. The key is that the customer contacts in the most appropriate way and is dealt with effectively and efficiently.
- The contact centre is an in-sourcing success story with overall increase in satisfaction and savings.
- The increase in complaints on waste is striking, and not were about the strike. The Ombudsman report shows that there are more reports made about Birmingham's bin service than any other local authority service. Officers informed members that for waste there is a dedicated team based in each depot, to respond to complaints in timely manner. There is a relationship manager in the depots. Feedback is given to the staff and to the trade unions. The Waste service also collect data that shows where there are trends in poor service.
- Some councillors deal with large amounts of casework and more assistance is needed. Members are spending time on these routine calls, not the more intractable or development issues that they should be dealing with. One suggestion is to have a quadrant team to deal with enquiries.

- Some cases are very complex, e.g. around travel assist, and are dependent on officer relationships. Or where there is repeated failure, e.g. where waste is not collected three times in a row, senior officers need to be informed.
- There is an emphasis on collecting all the data, but there will be patterns and do not need to collect every little bit but to focus on the problem.

The Chair referred to motion to council which referred to a 25-year old protocol, which cannot be found. Therefore we need to start from scratch and propose a new protocol for dealing with councillor enquiries.

The Chair then set out the plan for the next phase of the inquiry – to have the 4th October as an informal session to look at waste issues. The basis of the session would be to use case studies from members of the Committee, as membership covered the depots of the city. The current waste review is underway and the report will be available at the end of November. Members will be engaged with that process, as will the public, crews and officers along with external providers. Therefore, this work would feed into that.

The top three enquiries received by the call centre are related to waste, housing repairs and highways.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted.

The October meeting of the Committee will be an informal session to look at waste.

Members would submit case studies for consideration.

An additional informal meeting will be held on 15th November 2019 and further details will be circulated to Members.

A copy of the ombudsman report will be circulated email.

7. REPORTS NOT ON THE FORWARD PLAN/FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION

(See document No. 3)

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services, introduced the report. Members agreed that the Chair write to the Leader on behalf of the Committee emphasising the following points:

- In order to ensure Scrutiny Chairs have all necessary information, the relevant officer(s) is obligated to make efforts to speak to the relevant Chair (accepting that this may not always be possible) and provide a full account of the circumstances leading to the request.
- Where Scrutiny Chairs give their agreement, this should be in writing and all members of the relevant Committee should be informed. A cover sheet should be completed and this should include the reason for lateness/why it is not on the Forward Plan; reason for urgency; and when the request was

received and agreement given. There should be the option for Scrutiny Chairs to record any comments on the cover sheet.

- Where reports are authorised for immediate implementation, the relevant Cabinet Member and Chief Officer should attend the next Scrutiny Committee to give further details and an explanation to the Committee, to mitigate the reduced transparency of these decisions.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document No. 4)

RESOLVED:

The work programme was noted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed and this would be an informal meeting.

10. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL-IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

None.

11. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

12. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED:

In an urgent situation between meetings, the Chairman jointly with the relevant Chief Officer has authority to act on behalf of the Committee

The meeting ended at 1155 hours.