

## **BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

### **CO-ORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – INFORMAL MEETING**

**1000 hours on Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2022, Committee Room C, Council House  
Extension**

#### **Action Notes**

**Present:**

Councillor Carl Rice (Chair)

Councillors: Kate Booth, Debbie Clancy,

**Clerk's Note – the meeting was not quorate but proceeded on an informal basis**

**Also Present:**

Deborah Cadman, Chief Executive

Darren Share, AD for Street Scene

Peter Bishop, Director of Digital and Customer Services

Wendy Griffiths, AD for Customer Services and Business Support

Christian Scade, Interim Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services

Daniel King, National Management Trainee

#### **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.youtube.com/channel/UCT2kT7ZRPFqXq6\\_5dnVnYlw](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT2kT7ZRPFqXq6_5dnVnYlw)) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

#### **2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Cllrs: Mohammed Aikhlaq, Deirdre Alden, Mariam Khan, Liz Clements, Roger Harmer, Narinder Kaur Kooner, Ewan Mackey, Saima Suleman and Mick Brown.

#### **3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None declared.

#### 4. CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATE

The Chief Executive introduced the Customer Services Update item to the committee.

The committee was informed that the council had become more resolute everyday about the need for improved services for its residents. It was highlighted that there was global interest in Birmingham as a place to invest in and put roots down, which had given a clear message that Birmingham was a place people wanted to visit, and the council needed to respond to that by providing good quality services.

The council needed to ensure that services areas were informed about the level of complaints that were received about their processes. The council had done this with a clear transformation process, a medium-term financial plan, and a draft corporate plan which would be finalised post-May. These helped identify the grand challenges the city faced and what it needed to do to meet those challenges.

The council's customers rightly expected services that were reliable, joined up around their needs and involved them as equals. Customers benchmarked the council's performance with organisations they engaged with in their everyday lives – whether that was Uber, Amazon, Spotify, and Expedia. These changes in customer expectations and requirements fundamentally challenged how council services needed to be designed; how they were led; how they approached innovation and how it drove change and improvement in a consistent and reliable manner across the Council as a whole.

An effective approach to handling complaints from citizens and members was integral to the success of the new Customer Strategy. If the council did not have the visibility of those complaints, it could not fix the issue and learn from the complaint and would therefore never improve.

The Committee was informed that the council was aware from the complaints received, member feedback, and the analysis work done to develop our new Customer Service Strategy that there was much more to be done.

For example, there were still

- Too many points of contact for customers (multiple websites, contact numbers and addresses)
- Not enough customer service feedback sought
- Under-utilisation of the Brum account- currently only 21% of services have services available on our customer portal.
- The Contact centre was under-utilised – not enough services were currently supported by the Contact Centre.

The most important part of the improvement work was to drive the change in ways of working and behaviours to put citizens at the heart of everything the council did. 'Putting citizens first' was one of the council's four organisational values and it must ensure that the value is inherent in how managers and officers' thought, delivered and engaged. What was delivered for Birmingham must be informed by the people of Birmingham, and must routinely draw on data and insight, along with citizen feedback and lived experience

**The committee then heard from the AD for Digital & Customer Services**

One of the issues that the council had in advance of having the centralised system, was that there were high volumes of complaints, and these went directly into directorates. There were different levels of resources and complaints which were going into a black hole, which meant there was no opportunity to learn from mistakes. The process had now moved into a single system and had enabled the development of a robust process of how data was handled, which was visible, and could be translated to ward/service/road level. There was now a considerable reduction in the general complaint backlog, which was at about 2,215 complaints, but now it had gone down to 863, that included the activity that had come in that week. Amongst this reduction the council has seen a 47% reduction in repeat complaints and that 82% of complaints were now being closed within the 15-day SLA, which meant that learning had happened within the service. This had involved collective working, not just the complaints team or the directorate, but cross-cutting complaints across multiple services.

However, there had been a considerable increase in complaints and comments received, but this is believed to be largely due to the centralised system which captures all complaints, rather than the fragmented system which existed previously, now there was no hiding place for complaints. The strategy had allowed the customer service team to make a heat map of complaints, which you could visualise by month or service. It showed that there was no single service at fault, but that there were around four service areas which were high in terms of complaint volume, and the biggest source of complaints was to do with service quality.

**In the ensuing debate the following points were raised:**

- The Interim Chief Executive outlined that Birmingham's levelling up plan was the best in local government at the moment and that it had used forecasting with complaints but also proper economic forecasting as well, to inform how the council made better use the resources and assets that it has.
- It was noted that Birmingham City Council was the 20<sup>th</sup> biggest landowner in the UK and that future city planning was not just about the city centre but the whole city. What was important to residents, was their local parade of shops, the availability of food, and the prevalence of anti-social behaviour. If all residents could not touch, taste, and feel that inward investment then it was all for nothing.
- It was suggested that responses to housing complaints were still very variable in time taken to respond, some people had received a prompt response, but many others still took a significant amount of time.
- It was highlighted that when customer services looked at its peak it had 16,500 applications for Housing, by December the deployed contact centre staff had reduced it to 4,000 and had cleared the other 12,500 applications.

**The next report was presented by the AD for Street Scene**

It was noted that before this system of customer service handling, data was made directly to the service managers and refuse depots, but the centralised model for the data now gave much greater clarity to the problems as a whole. The customer service strategy had brought all enquiries and complaints together, previously complaints on bins had gone

underreported, but the service knew the actual number missed because the refuse crew's reported back on them. Now that all the data was going to one place, it had changed the split of enquiries that Street Scene was getting. Previously, 30% of refuse staff were covered by agency, whereas all refuse employees were now full-time, which gave the directorate a greater ability to push down the core values of the council.

**In the ensuing debate the following points were raised:**

- It was acknowledged that complaints with missed collections were going down, but there were instances with whole roads that were still being missed. It was asked if staff were being briefed about the route, as it gave residents the impression that the crew are not bothering to visit their road?
- It was highlighted that there was concern that the behaviour category of complaint was still too high.
- It was agreed that the AD for Street Scene would report back to the committee in the future with the data on people registering complaints on missed collections with no postcode.
- It was also asked what design processes had been done for collection routes on new housing estates.
- It was noted that the refuse routes were developed by computer systems, and an average crew could collect from around 900-1400 properties a day depending on location and that's based on tonnage and the distance between bins. Currently, that information was on a paper map which the crews received.
- It was highlighted that the 'slab in the cab' was in current roll out. Redfern depot had already started utilising it and there were three other depots it was planned to be rolled out in the next three months. It gave crews a google maps of bins and the ability to talk to the contact centre and customer service. Staff have had to be taken through the process, and had been supportive when they have seen the actual programme, which gave live traffic updates, and had all the information about assisted collections.
- Street Scene expected that the 'slab in the cab' would improve a lot of service issues. It also stopped residents recording a tagged binned, which is contaminated or too heavy, from being recorded as a missed collection.
- If there was a broken-down lorry, the manager could lift roads from the system which were blocked and allocate those to other crews which were still out with the 'slab in the cab'. If that crew were struggling, they would be able to lift collections and drop them onto another round. Whereas, currently the process was that the crew came back and to colour a map of the missed collections, and then another crew had to go out and collect it.
- It was noted that new estates were allocated to existing teams but sometimes these were not put into paper copies of maps, the 'slab' would solve all of that - the GPS would show those exact locations.
- It was suggested that the old 'slab in the cab' was implemented before but failed because it was imposed, and there was no buy in or trust from employees. That had now changed, and although each crew had its generic areas, the crew would then test it and amend the routes. It was now up to the driver, they knew the patch, the flexibility had changed.

#### Item 4

- It was noted that excess waste, anything left outside the bin, was not usually taken by refuse crews and was supposed to be tagged, however some crews would take excess waste if they thought they had capacity. The crews might not be able to complete their round if they had taken more bags. The 'slab in the cab' would also record non-presentation with photographic evidence, so it could respond more confidently to complaints.
- It was asked if there were elements of complacency around the volume of missed bin collections. It was noted that the council had issued statements that collections had improved, based on the reported number of missed collections, but that the rate of reporting rate of missed bins was around 1 in 35 to 40. This meant that the actual rate of collected bins was around 91% and not 99%. The service levels were much lower than were being reported in the area, and therefore the statements by leadership did not relate to what residents were experiencing.
- It was highlighted that over the pandemic there was a significant increase in household waste, and also an increase in people sorting their recycling. It was further noted that curb side recycling had improved but it has been cancelled out by increased levels of residual waste crews had seen.
- It was also noted that some waste collections were still running on Covid timetables, which were designed to stagger collections and mitigate the impact of having multiple members of staff isolating. Things were now changing, the really early starts at 5am would start to taper off.
- It was noted that through Neighbourhoods and Homes OSC, Street Scene had six targeted wards with community engagement officers who looked at what rubbish was on the street.
- It was suggested that there needed to be CCTV to enforce the known fly-tipping hotspots.

The chair thanked officers for attending.

Action points:

- It was agreed that the AD for Street Scene would come to a future meeting with the data on people registering complaints on missed collections with no postcode.

#### **5. WORK PROGRAMMES**

It was noted that the next meeting was on 11<sup>th</sup> March. It was explained that this would feature another update on customer services complaint handling, with input from the Managing Director for City Housing along with officers from Planning, Transport and Sustainability. It was highlighted that there would also be an update on recommendations from the Exempt Accommodation inquiry.

#### **6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at 10am.

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The informal meeting ended at 12:00 hours.