

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CO-ORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

**1000 hours on Friday 15th October 2021, BMI Main Hall, 9 Margaret Street,
Birmingham, B3 3BS**

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Carl Rice (Chair)

Councillors: Deirdre Alden, Mick Brown, Debbie Clancy, Roger Harmer, Narinder Kaur Kooner, Ewan Mackey, Saima Suleman

Also Present:

Cllr Brigid Jones, Deputy Leader

Rebecca Hellard, Director of Council Management

Wendy Griffiths, Assistant Director of Customer Services and Business Support

Peter Bishop, Director of Digital and Customer Services

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services

Christian Scade, Interim Head of Scrutiny 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/UCT2kT7ZRPFCXq6_5dnVnYlw) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Cllr Liz Clements and Cllr Mick Brown gave apologies for the meeting.

3. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Committee noted the appointment of Councillors Mick Brown and Saima Suleman to the Committee

4. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None declared.

5. UPDATE FROM DEPUTY LEADER: CUSTOMER SERVICES, DIGITAL INCLUSION AND PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

ITEM 5A: OS COMPLAINTS UPDATE

Cllr Brigid Jones, Deputy Leader, introduced the report on customer services and stated that the new system had come out of the work that Scrutiny had done a few years ago, and measures were now in place to deal with those issues uncovered. At the stage where the council is now, the Council are starting to get useful information out of the centralised complaint system, which enabled learning from mistakes.

The Assistant Director (AD) of Customer Services and Business Support, Wendy Griffiths, then gave a presentation to the Committee outlining the key challenges which customer services faced in combining separate customer complaints systems, and noted that sometimes complaints were not being captured in any of those systems. The old system didn't give a good understanding of issues or the ability to see the whole picture. The new system had three clear tasks, understanding current performance, exploring service delivery to look at root causes, and understanding how to make sure officers respond to members enquiries. Post launch and five months after employing 29 staff, there are some good quality reports coming through.

Commitment to clear the service area backlog by December was given. The Council should be able to reduce complaints by 300 a month and a root cause analysis is going to make the real difference to customers. A number of citizen feedback sessions had some good feedback on clarity of process. There was also feedback that said the complaint process is still delayed and in some cases the quality of response is not where it needs to be.

There were more complaints than two years ago but fewer than last year, probably due to the pandemic. But there are more complaints being turned around within 15 days, and more being closed at stage 1, than in previous years. The top three areas of complaints: housing repairs, missed refuse collections, and council tax.

There is a focus on the root cause of complaints, for example, tackling missed assisted collections for people who cannot pull the bins out themselves. Refuse crews would be given a printed list, and temporary staff struggled keeping up the process. But the 'Slab in the cab' will result in data being sent directly to the vehicles, to flag in real time which bin is for assisted collection. That should reduce complaints by 140 a week in terms of missed collections.

In the ensuing debate the following points were made:

- There is a need to first address the root cause of issues, which the new system allows the council to address, to meaningfully and proactively reduce the number of complaints that customer services must deal with.

- Currently many residents are waiting over 15 working days to hear back from customer services, and when they send reminders, this period begins again.
- Members of the public are not going to read a customer service strategy; they take satisfaction levels from their direct personal experiences, and some are still not very good. The feedback is that the Council is not taking ownership of customer service at the ground level in frontline services, and this will take a while to fix.
- The AD for Customer Services said that the issue suggests that there are wider HR questions about how the Council are inducting new staff, how it deals with temporary staff, and is the Council refreshing those skills for people who have worked for the Council for many years, when was their last training session?
- It was suggested that missed assisted collections are simply far too high currently and serious work will be needed to reduce them, but the AD noted that the size of the problem only has the visibility it has because of the new customer service system. Before complaints were centralised, the problems with assisted collections were not known, because the complaints ended up in different areas.
- Whilst one member said they were glad the council is trying to figure out what is going wrong, they noted their dissatisfaction with the way the Council is going about it. When residents ask for something it is because the system is broken and they need a quick reply, sometimes they need to speak to a human being who can fix it.
- The Chair acknowledged the need for service leads to come together to discuss what they do with the data they are receiving, and for a separate meeting with Cabinet members where there are issues in their portfolio.
- It was agreed that in an emergency case Members should be able to bypass the complaint system.
- One member asks that if response time has varied between departments, can data on response time by department be shared? Can good practice be shared across departments from the departments that are performing well?
- It was also noted that the level of communication customers receive back from the council is as important as getting a prompt response. Is the use of language and the forms using fit for purpose?

ITEM 5B: PROGRESS UPDATE ON BROADBAND IN THE CITY

Director of Digital and Customer Services, Peter Bishop, introduced the report on broadband in the city. It was noted that working on full fibre access in the city and ensuring there were no 'not spots' is important for economic development. There is to be a consultation over whether the Council will actively intervene in the market and put more fibre in the ground. Central Government announced the Midlands will have significant investment in giga-bit technology, although it is not clear how much yet. Virgin and Openreach are considering investing in Birmingham. Members made the following points:

- A priority will be intervening in housing to secure fibre connectivity into large housing blocks so residents can access fast internet. But it is difficult to influence companies to invest in the parts of the city it is needed as these may not be commercially viable for private sector investment.
- The need to engage with a third party which specialises in low-cost fibre connectivity was noted.
- The Chair stated that in the initial stages of lockdown we realised how important digital access is, quality of life is improved as a result of connectivity.
- It was noted that the monopoly of BT/Openreach means there is no real competition in the market. However, in smaller cities such as Coventry, Peterborough, and Hull, they have managed to procure contracts for fibre connection with third party entrants into the market.
- Birmingham's size works against it when trying to find a cheaper third-party alternative, and what the Council is willing to put into the pot to contribute needs to be considered.

ITEM 5C: PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Director of Council Management, Rebecca Hellard, introduced the report on performance reporting, stating there were three different elements, the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are shown in the monitoring reports, the deliverables in the Delivery Plan for May 2022, and the transformation programme attributed to each director. These give the Council absolute clarity and accountability of ownership.

It was noted that financial reporting would be aligned with performance reporting . Although, performance would not be monitored on a monthly basis like there is for finance, as more time is required to make a performance forecast. The aim is to make data more accessible for residents to see. Making it more visible means it is easier to call officers and members to account, which in turn should encourage improvements in service.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was noted.

7. REQUESTS FOR CALL IN

None received

8. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

9. AUTHORITY TO CHAIR 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.

