

SCRUTINY BOARD (STRATEGY AND RESOURCES)

MONDAY, 14TH FEBRUARY, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor A Scopes in the Chair

Councillors S Burke, P Carlill, D Chapman,
S Firth, B Flynn, S Hamilton, J Heselwood,
J McKenna and S Seary

53 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

54 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

55 Late Items

There were no late items.

56 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interests were made at the meeting.

57 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

There were no apologies.

58 Minutes - 24 January 2022

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th January 2022, be approved as a correct record.

59 Matters arising from the Minutes

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser gave the following updates:

Minute 34 – Future Waste Strategy Inquiry – Finance, Contracts and Recycling Expected to be considered at the March meeting.

Minute 46 – Staff Inclusion Update: Improving the experience and outcomes of disabled / carer colleagues at Leeds City Council and Feedback from Staff Networks

Contact had been made with Executive Members Councillors Coupar and Harland in relation to the Grievance Policy, which along with other issues raised will be reported back to the Board once a final position is known.

Minute 47 – Initial Budget Proposals and Minute 50 – Best City Ambition

The Board were advised that composite reports taking comments from all the Scrutiny Boards on these items had been considered by Executive Board at its meeting on Wednesday 9th February 2022.

Minute 49 – Performance Reporting: Culture and an Efficient, Enterprising and Healthy Organisation

Figures in relation to staff absences due to mental health issues will be provided to Board Members as soon as available.

60 Contact Centre Performance and Improvement

The submitted report of the Director of Resources presented the performance of the Council's contact centre and the work that is being undertaken to improve the end-to-end customer experience, address the issues that create avoidable contact and support service areas to ensure that council services are delivered in the most cost-effective way.

In attendance at the meeting were:

- Cllr Debra Coupar - Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans - Director of Resources
- Sonya McDonald - Head of Shared Services
- Polly Cook – Chief Officer Sustainable Energy and Air Quality
- Andrew Byrom - Head of Cloud and Platforms (IDS)

The Director of resources introduced the report informing Board Members of the following points:

- He thanked the staff for all their hard work, helpfulness and politeness even though they were working under pressure.
- It was recognised that the service was not where it wanted to be with average call times at 10 minutes and 8% of calls abandoned.
- The three key areas which the service was focussing on to improve were:
 - Resources
 - Alternative ways to access services; and
 - How services are delivered
- It was noted that £5.4m was spent on the service and that additional resources were not a long-term solution. However, the service could not wait for process changes. The Board was advised that 9 new staff had been recruited since January 2022 with 18 additional staff to be recruited by the end of June 2022.
- The service had an ambition to reduce call times to 5 minutes for general calls and 2 minutes for priority services
- There had been a loss of staff to other services following promotion. It was the intention of the service to try and recruit staff in advance of staff leaving. It was acknowledged that this service had a young workforce with a high turnover of staff and it was recognised that motivation, wellbeing and the fact that this was a tough job which impacted on levels of absence were all factors.
- The retention of staff was being looked at by introducing career pathways.
- There was a commitment for the Council to retain and improve the contact centre and it was recognised that there was also a place for face-to-face contact with residents whilst also trying to divert callers to digital means of contact.

- Looking forward the service planned:
 - To use e-forms to gather information systematically, with more information available on-line
 - The use of chat box technology
 - Develop a digital approach informed by scale of impact and ease of delivery
 - Improve communication to the public, so reducing unnecessary contact
 - Provide clarity about what the contact centre can help with
 - Feedback to services about the causes of calls and work with services across the council to deal with service issues and thereby potentially reduce the volume of calls and provide better services enhanced by using intelligence gathered through the contact centre.

Responding to questions from Members, the Board were provided with the following information:

- £5.4m is the budget for this service. Members were advised that a 'standards diagnostic' has been commissioned for the effective running of the service given the importance of this function. Information on this would be circulated to Members.
- Some services such as Council Tax and Repairs could potentially be moved to on-line services.
- Some Members were of the view that the report did not seem ambitious enough in relation to performance. The Executive Member for Resources said that this was a realistic report, and it was important that the service was transparent about what it can achieve in a short period. The service was looking to transform the way in which people engage with the council by using communications which people understand, use of different forms of access, including digital access. However, it was acknowledged that some people prefer the phone or face to face contact and that option will remain part of the offer to residents.
- Exit interviews are undertaken with staff leaving the service to explore the reasons they are leaving. In most cases staff move on for promotional positions within the council. Members requested data in relation to staff leaving. Members noted that during 2020 during the pandemic very few people left the service, however, in 2021 people started to move posts and this had a knock-on effect to performance.
- Customer satisfaction data pre -pandemic is different as the service is now using a different system from 5th January 2022. Comparison figures to be circulated to Members.
- Members welcomed the report recognising the changes and challenges that contact centre has had to face.
- Members were advised that work had been undertaken to improve the form used to report missed bins with tailored messages sent to provide the next date for collection. It was noted that the service is not currently in the position to use real-time news feeds.

- It was acknowledged that the Leeds City Council website needed improvement, and this would be intrinsic to improving the customer experience and performance of the contact centre.
- The service was looking at the use of Chat Bot technology to inform customers of how their query was progressing rather than answering questions.
- The contact centre, employ 165 staff, the additional 18 staff would be a one-off cost to help reduce calls. The service was still expecting the natural turnover of staff.

The Chair in summing up the debate said that it was recognised that there were challenges around resources in IDS and that technology needed to be prioritised. It was also noted that process improvement needed to be high on the list of priorities across all directorates. Members were in agreement with the Chair's suggestion that a letter should be written to CLT to raise the profile of the service and show the Boards support.

The Executive Member said that there was commitment within the organisation to improve the service provided by the contact centre from across all services, Corporate Leadership Team and Cabinet. It was noted that pre-pandemic data was different to the current data gathered as the service was using a new system for customer feedback and the current data will now be used going forward.

It was acknowledged that the Board would not be able to fit this item into the work schedule again this year. However, it would pass on to the subsequent Board for follow up work in the new municipal year.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.

61 IDS Service Desk Performance

The Chief Digital Information Officer presented a report on the Integrated Digital Services (IDS) service desk which supports staff with IT related issues and supports the wider delivery of services to citizens, patients, visitors and businesses by the Council, Health and other partners.

In attendance for this meeting were:

- Cllr Debra Coupar – Executive Member for Resources
- Neil Evans – Director of Resources
- Andrew Byrom - Head of Cloud and Platforms (IDS)

Following questions at the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board in September 2021 regarding performance against KPI's a further report was requested by the Board to provide an update on actions being taken to recover IDS Service Centre performance.

It was noted that the key areas of focus in the submitted report were actions taken since September 2021 to resolve performance issues, service centre performance levels for the past 12 months and future vision for the service centre.

In response to Members questions and comments the Board were provided with the following information:

- Members were advised that rather than calling the contact centre, incidents, minor issues and ordering of software can be logged using structured forms which can be located on the council's Insite pages.
- Members were advised that the drop-in centre within the Civic Hall was now back open on Wednesdays
- During the summer of 2021, the service had lost 15 staff. It was noted that customer feedback surveys show that the service is doing well despite the challenges that it faces. This is a competitive market and there was a need to look at how the Council attracts and retains staff in this service. The service is currently looking to link with educational institutes to attract people at the start of their careers and look to offer a good career pathway. Benchmarking had taken place to look at pay, however with the councils move towards more remote working skills and expertise would need to be considered. The council need to look at the private sector for improvements to the service.
- The service is looking at new types of kit as more staff work remotely. It was acknowledged that there were inconsistencies in kit being used and work is ongoing to address this.

The Executive Member for resources thanked the team for all the work that they had done during the pandemic, especially given the increase in remote working and the continuation of that working method. The service has adapted to supporting hybrid ways of working and has effectively managed the delivery of new technology and met the challenge of supporting hybrid working at short notice due to the impact of the pandemic. She also commended staff who had assisted the council to continue to work virtually through a challenging and rapidly changing period.

RESOLVED - To:

- a) Note the actions undertaken and current performance
- b) Note the future vision for Service Centre.

62 Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests - Performance and Processes

The report of the Director of Resources requested Member's consideration on Freedom of Information (FOI) requests at Leeds City Council focussing on performance against KPIs, FOI processes and legislation and how elected members interact with FOI regulations

In attendance for this item were:

- Neil Evans - Director of Resources
- Councillor Coupar – Executive Member for Resources
- Louise Whitworth - Head of Information Governance and Cyber Security

Members were advised that the remit of this report had been widened at the request of the Chair to include automation of Freedom of Information requests.

A key area of interest is Member's interaction with Freedom of Information and the alternative options available such as 'need to know' rights. In addition, there is new technology which may assist with some process both for Members and the wider council linked to Microsoft 365.

It was noted that there are plans to embed the new M365 capability consistently across the Council with a new functionality called eDiscovery which is a content search tool. Information Governance are currently undergoing training in the use of eDiscovery. This tool could be used to automate the searches for the information required for statutory requests. If approved for use there would be strict protocols to ensure individuals rights to privacy are maintained, balanced with legal requirements for openness and transparency. Members were informed that West Yorkshire Combined Authority are using eDiscovery and would share their protocols with the council. It was also noted that Kirklees also have eDiscovery available to them but are not using it yet.

Members acknowledged that the performance of the team was good but could be improved.

Members raised some concerns with eDiscovery in relation to privacy.

The Board were advised that Louise was moving to work in the NHS. The Director of Resources thanked her for all the work that she had done in relation to Information Governance.

The Chair also thanked Louise on behalf of the Board.

RESOLVED – To:

- a) Note the contents of the report and the assurances provided as to the council's approach to information management and governance with specific regard to IRR, FOI and EIR requests and accept that the arrangements are improving the performance of the council's responses to these requests through a dedicated programme of work:
and
- b) Re-issue Guidance to all Members on their 'need to know' rights

63 Work Programme

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report requesting Members' consideration in relation to the Board's Work Programme which was attached at Appendix 1 of the submitted report.

Members were advised that the Waste Inquiry would be considered at the March meeting.

It had been noted that the Contact Centre could be an area of work for future discussions.

RESOLVED – To note the content of the report.

64 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 28th March 2022 at 10.00 a.m. (Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.45 a.m.)

The meeting concluded at 11:33