

Portfolio for Customer Experience and Review

During late 2017/2018 a review of all of the Portfolios took place resulting in a realignment of areas of responsibility within each Portfolio. This in turn created a completely new Portfolio named as Customer Experience and Review. My areas of responsibility are as follows: -

- Audit
- Central Support Services
- Complaints Handling
- Corporate Reviews
- Customer Engagement – Customer Services and Contact Centre
- Customer Experience – Customer Services and Service Accessibility
- Democratic and electoral services – Voter Registration and Democratic Engagement
- ICT – Business Development and Information Technology
- Performance – Systems and Processes
- Strategic information – Corporate Evidence Bases and Lincoln City Profile

The majority of my first year as a Portfolio Holder has been spent visiting the various departments and service managers. I've spent valuable time with individual members of staff within each department learning in-depth what each area of responsibility means in its entirety. This has helped me understand the different elements and what impacts these have on the Council's service delivery, and the benefits they provide to the citizens of Lincoln. As with anything new there's an element of development and team building, as the service managers themselves learn a new way of progressing and working together as a group, focused on quality service delivery for the benefit of the customer and the council's overall performance. Alongside learning about the individual departments, ensuring the work programme is structured accordingly, the timings of reporting by the department managers has been a strong focal point over this first year. It's been a constantly changing agenda month by month ensuring each meeting has the appropriate representation from officers as required for reporting during each portfolio meeting. I hope that the information on each area provided below is sufficient to give an overview on progress within each department and the planned developments for the months ahead.

High Performing Services

The council is doing all it can to minimise the effects of the financial challenges it faces on our residents. We prioritise services that are needed the most and ensure that we deliver effective and efficient services to all.

We already have many services that perform extremely well and part of Vision 2020 we aim to maintain these high standards so we can continue to improve as an organisation.

There are 14 Vision 2020 projects in relation to High Performing Services. Many of these projects are expected to be long lasting projects – covering the three year Vision and beyond

The council is on a transformational journey and we will only be successful with this change through our people. Engaging our people fully and developing the skills, attitudes and behaviours we will need in the future is an ongoing priority.

The council has always benefited from a skilled, committed workforce and it is through our people that we will realise our Vision 2020. Therefore, a key task for 2018/19 has been the development and implementation of a new People Strategy, to ensure we are in the best possible position to deliver our services and priorities in new and innovative ways. Focus has also been on equipping staff with the right skills and tools to deliver success, and the physical and mental resilience to work through change.

In addition, significant levels of staff welfare support have been introduced over the last year, which has shown results through the decreasing sickness levels in 2018/19

However – there is still more to tackle in the coming year and the council will drive towards a “One Council” approach, which whilst achieving some de-duplication savings more importantly will place the council in the best position to tackle challenges and maintain key services in the future

Customer Services

Our Customer Service team continues to resolve a large number of enquiries from the public, either face to face in City Hall, over the telephone or increasingly by email or through our website enquiry forms.

The Customer Experience Strategy 2017-2020 aims to provide high performing services that achieve value for money, while ensuring our residents are placed at the heart of service delivery. We are working to improve the experience of our residents every time they contact the council while delivering financial savings by moving as many routine transactions to cheaper methods of contact. In many cases, but not all, the cheapest and most efficient contact method is on-line. We are working across all service areas to develop effective on-line forms and self-service access.

Discussions about Customer Service Team performance inevitably turn to the time taken by customers to get through on the telephone. Last year’s telephone response times were adversely affected by problems with the telephone system and also some issues with slow response times on the servers at City Hall which has affected the time taken to deal with each enquiry. We are also dealing with the impact of the rollout of Universal Credit on our residents. The overall average wait to get through to the contact centre up to end of January 2019 was 107 seconds compared to a lower average of 60 seconds for the previous year. We want customers to be able to get through to us easily when they need to speak to us but we also need to balance this with our ambition to persuade those customers who can easily use on-line channels to do so. To the end of January this year we had answered 107,256 calls compared to 116,506 for the same period last year.

The progress in encouraging as many customers who can to contact us online is gaining momentum. Housing Benefit and Council Tax claimants are using an online claim form, and our Business Development and IT team are developing a range of online forms which are integrated into our software reducing the need for staff intervention. Customers can report a wide range of environmental services issues on line and our website repair reporting and tracking tool is proving popular with tenants. The latest project is a study looking at the feasibility of developing a tool enabling tenants to report their repair requests on-line. The housing repairs line is one of our busiest service areas and was responsible for nearly 22,500 calls last year.

The team are enthusiastic about future developments and are currently trialling ways of handling enquiries received from social media apps as more of our customers turn to Twitter and Facebook.

Customer Experience Board

The Customer Experience Board oversee the Customer Experience Strategy which was approved by the Executive in March 2017. The Strategy aims to improve accessibility of services, maximise online delivery and value for money and efficiency, whilst improving engagement and innovation.

Some key achievements of the last year include:

- Increasing the number of letters sent out through an external company, reducing costs in stationery, postage and staff time required.
- Sending bills electronically, resulting in lower postage costs and modernising customer service
- Development of new online forms for Council tax services, including moving house and direct debit sign up
- Customer services responding to social media requests, ensuring customer satisfaction increases
- Development of customer charter to ensure standards are consistent and understood by our customers.
- New bookings solution allowing easier booking at Hartsholme Country Park
- Easier Choice-based lettings, making it easier for Customers to get new properties

Business Development & Information Technology

The team have been developing the services the Council offers, and the infrastructure to support officers in serving customers more efficiently.

Over the last year the team has:

- Created more options for self-service for Council Tax customers, allowing more customers to self-serve and freeing up Customer Services resources to help people who need assistance
- Supported the implementation of the new Choice-Based lettings solution, facilitating the housing allocations process, meaning that citizens are able to find a new home

- Developed new trial tenancy sign-up procedures, reducing complexity and time for customers to sign up for new homes
- Implemented solutions to help with compliance with the new General Data Protection Regulations, safeguarding customer information
- Implemented a new telephony system making managing of customer enquiries easier and increasing stability of the Council infrastructure.
- Deployed new wireless solutions in council buildings, enabling officers and customers to access wifi services.
- Improved web services to make information more accessible, increasing uptake of efficient online services
- Completed the rollout of new desktop technology and productivity software, providing officers with modern tools with which to serve customer requirements.

Over the next 12 months, key focus will be

- Delivering improvements to the ICT infrastructure, to ensure that the Council has a stable, reliable ICT service which provides support to all services across the Authority.
- Implement an upgraded web presence. By replacing the website management system, there will; be increased opportunities to making services available online, releasing resources to help customers who require assistance.
- Delivering efficiencies and improved customer service in support of the Customer Experience Strategy
- Develop a new ICT Strategy, setting the way forward for ICT enabling technology moving forward
- Develop new mobile working options enabling officers to serve customers more effectively in the community with up-to-date information.

Audit Arrangements

Internal Audit continues to operate effectively, working as part of the Assurance Lincolnshire Partnership. The team continues to work with, and provide Audit services to other councils which generates income.

Internal Audit have provided assurance in some key areas during 2018/19 including financial systems, projects and other service areas.

The team has continued to use its 'Combined Assurance' model to provide a broader level of assurance to management and members.

I am also very pleased to report that the latest annual Internal Audit report (2017/18) provided substantial (green) assurance across areas of governance, risk and internal control.

There were just two individual audit areas which received a Limited Assurance during 2018/19. Actions within these areas are progressing and although not complete are being monitored through management and the Audit Committee.

External Audit is now undertaken by Mazars and previously KPMG. Their most recent annual governance report/Annual audit letter provided an unqualified opinion on the statement of accounts 2017/18 including a positive Value for Money conclusion.

A full update is provided to Portfolio holder meetings which links to the Audit Committee progress reports. This includes updates on all areas of activity including internal audit, counter fraud, finance and treasury, risk management and corporate governance. I have paid particular attention to audits within my own portfolio area including ICT.

I am pleased to see the Audit Committee is taking a positive and pro-active role, for example follow up of audit recommendations and a detailed review of their own terms of reference.

Electoral Activity

The 2018 annual canvass has been completed and resulted in publication of the Electoral Register on 1 December 2018, consisting of 60,138 electors. This figure is slightly lower than the same period the previous year, but the electorate is increasing following the distribution of Household Notification Letters in January 2019 to all properties within the city, enabling residents to check their registration and update their records if necessary. It is expected that the electorate will continue to increase up to the registration deadline for the local elections scheduled to be held on 2 May 2019.

A report was recently considered by the Council's Performance Scrutiny Committee on the electorate and the reason for the slight decline compared to the previous year. It was noted that a similar pattern was experienced by some of the Council's CIPFA statistical neighbours and half of the other authorities in Lincolnshire, meaning that the City of Lincoln Council is not unique in this respect. The Council's Elections and Communications Teams will continue to promote and encourage electoral registration in Lincoln. An advertisement has been published in the City of Lincoln Football Club's community magazine, which is expected to reach at least 20,000 households in the city. Meetings have also been arranged with representatives of the University of Lincoln to encourage registration by students and wider publicity via the Council's social media accounts will also continue. All promotional activity will be complemented by national campaigns facilitated by the Electoral Commission in the lead up to the local elections.

A review of the Council's Polling Districts and Polling Places has been undertaken, with the outcomes and recommendations approved at the meeting of Council on 26 February 2019. The review comprised a visit and inspection of all 55 polling stations currently used in the city and involved a period of public consultation. An overview of the responses received as part of the review was included in the report to Council.

Preparatory work is underway for the City Council elections scheduled to be held on 2 May 2019. The notice of election will be published on 22 March 2019, which will commence the pre-election period.

Performance Overview

As part of my new Portfolio, I have the responsibility for performance systems and processes. In that respect my role is to ensure that there is a process for producing good quality data that is available to those who need or want to see it, on a regular basis and in a public format.

Going back in time a little - in 2011, central government removed the formal reporting burden on local authorities, and the onus was placed on local authorities to select appropriate performance indicators to drive their services and priorities forward and to be accountable to their communities, by ensuring they are responding to local needs and that public money is spent wisely and is achieving good value for money.

City of Lincoln Council works within a locally developed performance framework that streamlines strategic performance management and ensures appropriate measures are in place to monitor service performance in a proportionate and timely manner, enabling fit for purpose delivery which is fundamental to the council meeting its aspiration of maintaining 'Professional, high performing service delivery' (HPS)

Vision 2020 also defines two of the four key objectives within the HPS overall aim as:

- Ensuring efficient, high quality services
- Providing high performing services

The council reports to members and the public through a quarterly performance report which covers around 70 strategic measures, some quarterly, and some annual. This dashboard allows a view of performance across the key services so that stakeholders such as Corporate Management Team, Performance Scrutiny Committee and Executive have the opportunity to review and challenge any under performance and recognise high achievement and is attached at Appendix A.

Update on the Development of the New Performance System

City of Lincoln Council has used the TEN software to monitor performance through the IMPS system since 2007. Due to the age of this software and regular upgrades to the council's IT system outside of the software's capabilities, the software has now become out of date and unstable. Following consultation with senior managers and data owners in mid-2018, a decision was taken to build a new in-house target based performance system. A key aim of the new system is to make this as easy and user friendly as possible to ensure this is fully utilised by staff. Over recent years the IMPS system has become less user friendly due to the vast amount of information held and displayed in the system.

In line with the development of the new performance system, officers from the Corporate Policy Team are currently working with senior members of staff to review all strategic measures reported through to CMT, PSC and Executive on a quarterly basis. This follows the existing strategic measure set having been in place for a number of years. Moving forwards all strategic measures will be target based which is a move from trend based performance monitoring in recent years. Once the review of all strategic measures is complete, the new set of strategic measures with targets and

back data will be built into the new performance system. We are currently aiming for the new system to be in place for Q1 19/20 strategic measure reporting which starts in July 2019. Following the launch of the new system with strategic measures, all operational measures currently in IMPS will be reviewed with service managers. These measures are those used by service managers to monitor the performance of their service, but are not reported outside of the service area. We are aiming for the operational measures to be reviewed and built into the system by August 2019.

Complaints Against the Council

To the end of Quarter 3 the council has received 220 formal complaints. At the same stage in the previous year we had received 260. We therefore look set for another annual reduction. Over the last few years we have experienced a year on year decrease in the number of complaints made by the public, and by learning from complaints we hope to see this trend to continue. So far this year 31% of the complaints dealt with have been upheld. This compares to 35% in the previous year. Where complaints are upheld the circumstances and outcomes are discussed at department management meetings and relevant steps are then taken to improve our procedures or prevent recurrence.

The overall average response time for dealing with complaints has increased this year. The mean response time is currently 7.9 days whereas, at the same stage last year the response average was 6.5 days. However this is still well within the recommendations of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Complaints have to be thoroughly and properly investigated before the officer assigned to them can make a correct decision

The LGSCO and the Housing Ombudsman Service have so far reported on 3 complaints which were escalated for independent jurisdiction. In one case the LGSCO has found evidence of maladministration and has upheld the complainant's case. In the whole of last year we had no upheld decisions at all.

	Number of formal complaints received Q3 2018	Number of formal complaints received Q3 2019	complaints upheld Q3 2018	complaints upheld Q3 2019	Average time to respond to formal complaints Q3 2018	Average time to respond to formal complaints Q3 2019
CX	40	42	25%	40%	8.4 days	7.3 days
DCE	56	56	21%	20%	6.0 days	11.5 days
DMD	12	2	58%	2%	8.3 days	2.0 days
DHI	152	120	44%	34%	6.0 days	6.5 days
Total	260	220	37%	31%	6.5 days	7.9 days

Conclusion

Being a member of the Council's Executive over the last 11 months has given me a great deal of enjoyment and insight into the wider working of local government, the challenges that the council faces in context within the present financial uncertainty moving forward and the general channel shift towards being more creative and

focused on income generation to fill the gap left by the removal of the government support grant funding. There are uncertain times ahead, but if one thing remains it is a determination to ensure that the services the council provides are and always will be professional, high quality and customer service focused. My sincere thanks go out to all the department managers and officers I've met and worked with over these 11 months and the support and cooperation that they've provided.

Councillor Jackie Kirk
Portfolio Holder for Customer Experience and Review