

## **Report by Councillor Chris Burke MBA, Portfolio Holder for Customer Experience and Review.**

### **Introduction**

Our guiding principle as a progressive local authority that seeks to serve all the communities of our City of Lincoln is one of effective but caring delivery. This report demonstrates that our teamwork has delivered the work needed to achieve a constantly improving City as it enters the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Every single member of staff can take personal credit for this work.

### **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 as part of Vision 2020 built up a programme to maintain these high standards so we can continue to improve as an organisation.

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

During 2019/20 the council has been working on plans for the “One Council” approach, which will replace the current High Performing Services theme in the next phase of the Vision – Vision 2025. The four pillars developed will place the council in the best position to tackle challenges and maintain key services in the future.

### **Customer Services**

I have been impressed by the Customer Service Team which provide the first port of call for many customer enquiries and service requests. They are also the front desk at City Hall and often have the most difficult direct encounters which they handle so well. The team aim to provide a friendly and welcoming service to residents and visitors to City Hall and over the telephone via our contact centre. Last year (January 2019 to December 2019) the team answered almost 133,000 phone calls from our residents.

Increasingly customers are choosing to contact us by email, social media or via on-line forms which we are developing with our Business Development and IT colleagues. These provide us with an opportunity to update accounts and claims electronically, which can provide a fast, economical and efficient way of updating records.

We are approaching the end of the 2017-2020 Customer Experience Strategy which set out our aims to provide high performing services that achieve value for money, while ensuring our residents are placed at the heart of service delivery. Much has been achieved over the lifespan of this Strategy and we have seen the following developments:

- A move to an estimated 60% of claims for Housing Benefit being made electronically directly by customers.
- An increase of the use of e-move forms for Council tax from 1,618 in 2016 to 3,300 last year
- Working with BDIT (Business Development and IT) to develop a customer focussed new website
- A self-service computer area shared with the DWP, encouraging and assisting customers who want to get on-line.
- City Hall is now cashless, removing the cost and risk of processing coins and banknotes and cheque payments have been replaced by cheaper alternatives.
- Easier Choice-based lettings, making it easier for customers to get new properties

We are currently working on a project funded by MHCLG's Local Digital Collaboration Fund, with Greenwich, Southwark and South Kesteven, which is looking at the development of 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 20,000 calls last year.

## **Customer Experience Strategy and Creating Value Processes**

The Customer Experience Strategy has now become a work strand of the Creating Value Processes pillar of our Vision 2025. The key aims of the strategy are central to our success in delivering the vision:

- improving accessibility of services,
- maximising online delivery
- value for money and efficiency, and
- Improving engagement and innovation.

The Creating Value Processes team will continue to monitor our progress on modernising and improving our interaction with customers over all channels.

## **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:

- Implemented a new website, delivering enhanced services online, and providing opportunities to further extend self-service facilities for customers.
- Developed and agreed a new ICT Strategy, aligning the ICT Service with the Vision 2025 agenda and supporting four key themes:
  - Channel shift and improved online web presence
  - New ways of working enabling a more agile workforce
  - Providing Value for money
  - High Availability and High performance
- Procured a significant investment in the Council's ICT Infrastructure to support services over the next 5 years

- Implemented two mobile working pilots to enable employees to work more flexibly for the customers benefit
- Rolled out a pilot of new productivity software to enable staff to work more efficiently
- Supported process improvements in Housing, Community Services and other services

Over the next 12 months, key focus will be:

- Completing the implementation of the ICT Infrastructure upgrade, increasing speed and resilience of services
- Sourcing a network upgrade to ensure stability of services
- Support for One Council Pillars, particularly Technology and Creating Value Processes
- Rolling out improved and modern equipment and services to employees
- Supporting improvements and changes to corporate systems to ensure sustainable services for the housing repairs service and other corporate services.

### **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 2019/20 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 very pleased to report that the latest annual Internal Audit report (2018/19) provided substantial (green) assurance across areas of governance, risk and internal control.

External Audit is now undertaken by Mazars. Their most recent annual governance report/Annual audit letter provided an unqualified opinion on the statement of accounts 2018/19 including a positive Value for Money conclusion.

A full audit update is provided to my Portfolio holder meeting 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 am pleased to see the Audit Committee is taking a positive and pro-active role, for example follow up of audit recommendations.

### **Electoral Activity**

2019 was an extremely busy year with the City Council elections held on 2 May 2019, the European Parliamentary Elections held on 23 May 2019 and the UK Parliamentary

General Election held on 12 December 2019. The 2019 annual canvass was also undertaken between July and December which, due to the timetable associated with the General Election, had to be completed one month earlier than usual. These significant projects usually take up to six months to plan for but due to national decisions on time line issues it meant that these national elections had to be compressed into an intensive 5 week period, placing a huge amount of pressure on the team. I would like to thank all of those involved, particularly with the General Election and including the many people working with us on the day on an ad hoc basis, very well done!

The team continues to promote and encourage electoral registration at any opportunity in addition to the annual canvass through social media, electronic advertising at the Transport Hub and Waterside Shopping Centre, Council Tax bills and other means such as through the Lincoln City Football Club foundation brochure. I am pleased that local councillors are beginning to include registration information on their surgery leaflets. The team continues to work with organisations such as care homes and Universities in the City. All promotional activity is complemented by national campaigns facilitated by the Electoral Commission in the lead up to the combined Police and Crime Commissioner Elections and City Council elections scheduled to be held on 7 May 2020. The preparatory work associated with these elections is already underway with the City of Lincoln's Returning Officer acting as the Police Area Returning Officer for the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections, meaning that the City of Lincoln will co-ordinate these elections for the whole county. The notice of election for both elections will be published on 27 March 2020, which will commence the pre-election period.

The introduction of canvass reform will mean some changes to the annual canvass this year, with a focus on local data matching rather than sending Household Enquiry Forms to every property in the city as part of the first stage of the canvass. It will still be necessary to send forms to some properties in the city, but these changes and a focus on data-matching at the first stage to confirm electors are still living at the same property will significantly reduce printing and delivery costs.

## **Performance Overview**

### **General Performance**

My portfolio has the responsibility for ensuring that there is a process for producing good quality key operational data that is available to those who need or want to see it, on a regular basis. In addition, there are a number of measures directly linked to the services in my portfolio, which are found at the end of this report.

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.

### **Local Performance Management Framework (LPMF)**

The council works within the LPMF recommendations ensuring appropriate measures are in place to monitor performance. This is fundamental to the council meeting its aspiration to maintain 'Professional, high performing service delivery' (HPS). The framework is to be reviewed in 2020 and this review will incorporate a move towards a more performance driven culture and will include appropriate performance aspects arising from One Council.

### **New performance & information management system (PIMS)**

Following consultation with senior managers in mid-2018, a decision was taken to build a new in-house, target-based performance system to replace the ageing and unsupported TEN (IMPS) system. A key aim of the new system was to make it user friendly to ensure this is fully utilised by staff.

PIMS (phase 1) was successfully launched in test mode in Q4 2018/19 and as part of this, a new set of key operational measures was identified, given targets and agreed by Portfolio Holders and was implemented in the new PIMS from Q1 2019/20

There are plans for a second phase of the project to be developed in 2020/21, which will encourage a more performance driven culture across all services. It will consider:

- The changes coming from the development of the new Lincoln Performance Management Framework
- The needs that could be identified from within the Value Processing Board (one of the four pillars of One Council)
- Service Managers' operational needs
- New abilities from the introduction of Office 365 – e.g. Power BI

### **Quarterly performance reporting**

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 Committee can review and challenge any under performance and recognise high achievement. The latest figures for my own portfolio services are found at the back of this report

### **Lincoln City Profile (LCP)**

The Lincoln City Profile's purpose is to provide a breadth of information based on the key demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the city. It is a valuable source of summary information contained in one document, which I recommend to all councillors. It draws and collates information from across a full range of measures and sources available publicly, presented in chapters to aid usage.

The profile paints a unique picture of what it is like to live and work in Lincoln. It has eight chapters containing key statistical data on the following subjects:

Population	Education
Economy	Housing

Welfare	Crime
Health	Environment (including climate change)

The LCP is reviewed annually having been last produced during Q3 2019 and is available for use within the council and also by our partners and voluntary organisations who find it useful in preparing funding bids.

### **Lincoln Project Management Model (LPMM)**

Projects need to be planned and managed in a way that is appropriate to the size of the project (based on cost and anticipated duration), the complexity of the project and the level of risk it brings.

An LPMM guide already exists which has been designed to provide the practical advice, tools and techniques to those staff involved in managing projects at three levels:

- **Significant capital build ('Mega') projects**
- **Strategic Projects**
- **Service area projects**

A project implementation review Lincoln Project Management Model is currently under way and the recommendation will be reported in 2021.

### **Complaints against the Council**

The number of complaints received over the year has yet again reduced. This year we had a total of 291 formal complaints. This compares to 361 and 368 respectively in the previous two years.

34% of complaints were upheld. In instances where a complaint is upheld the situation is put right and customers are offered an explanation and an apology. Additionally, the officer upholding the complaint completes a feedback form for the directorate complaint monitoring officer, outlining lessons learned, training needs and any changes that are required to procedures.

Corporately, the average response time for complaints is 7.6 days. Although this shows an increase in the time taken to respond it remains well within the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) guidelines. In their published best practice guidance for the public on how to complain, it indicates that local authorities should reply to customers within a reasonable time which should normally be within 12 weeks

In 2018/2019 the LGSCO received 11 new complaints and made decisions on 10 complaints about City of Lincoln Council Services. In common with internal complaint numbers, the number of complaints to the Ombudsman are also decreasing with a steady reduction from the peak in 2015-2016 which amounted to 27 complaints. Three complaints were deemed appropriate for the jurisdiction of the LGSCO and were investigated, of these complaints one was upheld.

### **Conclusion**

My own direct team that includes Daren Turner, Matt Smith, Jo Crookes, Heather Grover, Pat Jukes, Graham Watts, Dave Wormald, Alison Hewson and all at Democratic Services have all enabled my work and contributed to this report. I am grateful too for the guidance and support that I have received from Angela Andrews our CX, her staff and Leader Cllr Ric Metcalfe along with my colleagues on the Executive. Claire Turner has played a major role in collating this report. It is our staff that produces the work we need, and I do appreciate their major contribution. I appreciate too the scrutiny process that all councillors participate in ensuring the democratic accountability and oversight central to our democratic system of local government.

Finally, this report covers a major period of investment across many of our departments but notably in ICT and data access crucial to our efficient and effective operation and the implementation of our strategic role. We should be rightly proud of this period and our decisions while preparing for the challenges ahead which as a Council I know we will embrace.

**Councillor Chris Burke**

**Portfolio Holder for Customer Experience and Review**