

REPORT UNDER RULE 2(vi) OF THE COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**REPORT BY COUNCILLOR CHRIS BURKE, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND REVIEW****Introduction**

This has again proved to be a difficult year as we recover from Covid but also face the greatest cost of living crisis since WW2 caused by rising energy costs and supply line issues. Covid does remain, of course, and still causes some sickness issues however a very successful vaccination program has rendered the disease less effective. The problems we face as a result of an unresolved climate crisis, greed among energy and other companies paying high dividends to shareholders instead of considering customer basic needs and of course the return of an aggressive and dangerous Russian state affect all of us and our Councils delivery to citizens. Government announcements of action by local authorities without intelligent consultation has also caused a strain on our communication systems as the public, understandably, seeks guidance in large numbers from our staff. Brexit has, as anticipated by reliable economists during the Referendum Debate, caused staff shortages in the Labour Market and this has affected our recruitment processes.

As this report shows we have delivered a high standard despite the difficulties the authority faces. I was particularly pleased that staff provided excellent support for the all council Planning Committee which considered the Western Growth Corridor involving all departments but top marks to Democratic Services for ensuring a brilliant broadcasting event. At five hours it was a marathon event but worth the effort and I would compliment Cllr Bob Bushell's Chairing and the staff who supported him. As a result of this work and subsequent discussions there is now support for this major development across the Board.

Investment in IT is paying off and reorganisation with considerable staff support is also proving successful.

Our guiding principle remains as a progressive local authority one that seeks to serve all the communities of our City of Lincoln providing 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 21st Century and recovers to face our new challenges. Every single member of staff can take personal credit for this work.

Customer Services

The Customer Service team provide the first contact point for residents calling the council to access services. They answered over 127,000 incoming telephone calls in the financial year ending March 2022. In addition to this they processed more than 25,000 email communications and dealt with a vast number of online service requests, which the team check and authorise before being allocated to a service area.

Following the lifting of Covid restrictions the team continue to see customers face to face by appointment rather than the previous drop-in facility. This is far more efficient, ensuring that appointments are made when staff are available, reducing waiting times for the public. Advisers can also prepare in advance for the customer's enquiry and make sure that the appropriate person deals with the appointment. Where necessary interpretation services and specialist support for vulnerable people can be pre-arranged and in place when the customer arrives.

There has been an increase in difficult calls this year, with a growing number of customers finding paying their bills, rent, and other living expenses challenging. The staff try to seek solutions with callers and refer to specialist services where appropriate, but these calls can be longer than expected.

We are working with a group of colleagues from across the directorates in the Creating Value Processes theme, and in conjunction with the Improving Technology pillar, to drive forward our improvements to the way customers interact with us. A new telephone system will make connecting with colleagues in service areas smoother and quicker, which will reduce the time it takes to respond to customer queries

The staff work incredibly hard to support customers and they are rightly proud of the contribution they make to the smooth running of the council

Audit Arrangements

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

Internal Audit have provided assurance in some key areas during 2021/22 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. There was a slight shortfall in resources this year whilst the Audit Manager post was recruited to, some of this was covered through the engagement of an audit consultancy company.

I am very pleased to report that the latest annual Internal Audit report (2021/22) established that overall, the Council was performing well across areas of governance, risk and internal financial control and performing adequately on internal control. There are some improvement areas in relation to IT disaster recovery, risk management and the implementation of agreed audit actions.

External Audit is undertaken by Mazars. Their most recent Annual Report issued for the year ended March 2021 provided an unqualified opinion on the statement of accounts 2020/21 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 that the Audit Committee continues to take a positive and pro-active role.

Democratic and Electoral Services

The Electoral Services team successfully delivered the local elections on 5 May 2022, which applied to a third of the City Council's membership. The Electoral Services team worked on the annual canvass. The electoral register will be published in accordance with legislation on 1 December 2022.

The Elections Act 2022 received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022. This legislation contains substantial changes for polling at elections, as well as electoral registration in the UK, including the requirement for voter identification at polling stations. The regulations were recently laid before parliament and are currently working their way through both houses. The polls on 4 May 2023 will be the first date to implement voter identification.

As highlighted at a recent meeting of the Council, the Association of Electoral Administrators, which is the national representative professional body, has expressed serious concerns to the relevant minister in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities over the deliverability of these changes given the short timeframe. However, in preparation for these changes, members of the electoral services team have been attending training events and seminars. At one of these events, there was a demonstration of the digital platform, which will be used to process requests for voter identification, which electoral services will be required to administer. The digital platform is due to 'go live' in mid-January, however no councils have received training on this system. In addition, there is a programme board of officers in place to oversee the changes.

The efforts of the City Solicitor and Democratic Services in arranging the Planning Committee on 12 January 2022 were vital in ensuring the smooth and successful running of the Council's largest planning application. This meeting attracted a lot of positive feedback on the efficiency and professionalism of the meeting. This meeting was watched online by more than 170 viewers. This helped ensure the meeting had the greatest reach and accessibility; and also helped safely manage capacity at the venue. As a result of this positive experience, the Council is exploring options for improving the equipment in the committee rooms to enable more meetings to be livestreamed at a good quality. However, this equipment would come at a cost. The Democratic Services and Elections Manager is in the early stages of a procurement exercise to make this possible.

Business Development and IT

Business Development have continued to support the organisation. In addition to providing covid support, including assisting with payments of grants to local businesses, other services have continued to move forward. These include:

- Design and development of processes for refuse collection services so that customers can report issues/access services online
- Website improvements including improved accessibility

- Supporting Council Tax energy rebate payments
- Upgrades to core ICT applications to ensure software
- Procuring a new telephony system for enhanced communications and customer support
- Reviewing options for replacement of web-based self-service channels for customers
- Automating customer service feedback processes
- Intranet development, developing Yammer staff communications solutions and investigating e-learning packages
- Developing new project management tools
- Delivering migration of Local Land Charges service to HMLR, as well as assisting HMLR on a national level
- Delivery of new mobile device contract and hardware to staff
- New Intranet to replace City People
- Leading for Lincoln on the DHLUC funded national Housing Repairs Service, presenting at Digital Leader's week and promoting the project nationally.
- Upgrade of Council's document management system to new user interface
- Supporting issues and enquiries coming through Fix My Street
- Replacement of electronic payments provider to make savings and efficiencies
- Support for Council Tax year end processes and billing

The ICT Team have also been engaged in supporting new ways of working including:

- Rollout of devices and new software to almost all staff and Councillors
- Rollout of O365 Citrix Services to staff
- Design and Development of O365 desktop services (what it looks like)
- Design and Development of O365 in our Citrix Environment
- Enhancing the secondary data centre to provide better Disaster Recovery facilities
- Enhancing connectivity into Disaster Recovery facilities e.g., Citrix and VPN at Hamilton House
- Upgrading systems to ensure they are fully supported
- Enhancing ICT security to protect customer data
- Reviewing options for replacement of infrastructure
- Developing new solutions for enhanced desktop services and tools
- Upgrading telephony monitoring facilities in advance of a new telephony system
- Upgrading core network infrastructure to ensure continuous service
- Upgrading core virtualisation infrastructure to ensure support and compliance
- Development of automated process to deploy new kit more quickly
- Design & Development of O365 access on Mobile Devices (tablets and phones)

Performance Monitoring

General Performance

Under my portfolio I have responsibility for ensuring there is a process for producing good quality key operational performance data, which is used to monitor and drive performance improvements across the council.

Quarterly Performance Reporting

The council continues to report performance to elected members and the public through a quarterly performance report. The report covers performance outturns for all 86 strategic performance measures, and for a range of corporate measures. Of these measures the majority are reported on a quarterly basis, with a small number of measures being reported on an annual basis. Included in the report is an analysis of performance outturns for each measure against the targets set. This analysis is presented in the form of a dashboard with supporting analytical and descriptive text, which provides a clear view of performance across service areas. This enables key stakeholders such as the Corporate Management Team, Performance Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee to easily identify those measures with performance below target, above target and within target boundaries and the reasons for this. There continues to be a number of volumetric measures reported, which are those where a team cannot influence the outturn but are still valuable for contextual information. The dashboards included in the report are extracted directly from the PIMS performance system, which allows for clear referencing between the report and the system. The format of the quarterly performance report continues evolve and improve to meet the changing needs of the organisation.

External Audit on Performance Monitoring

During the summer of 2022 an external audit was undertaken on performance monitoring at the council. The following actions were identified from the audit. In most cases the Corporate Policy Team were already aware of the actions identified in advance of the audit, however Covid-19 and the diversion of the Corporate Policy Team onto Covid-19 work streams, specifically the emergency befriending service, necessitated a planned delay. In addition, resource pressures in the team have impacted on the delivery of the scheduled work. This follows two members of the Corporate Policy Team leaving the authority.

However, throughout this time a full range of performance management information has continued to be accurately reported and utilised to effectively identify and address performance issues across service areas.

Actions identified from the audit as areas of focus –

1. Update of the Local Performance Management Framework (LPMF) incorporating the Data Quality Policy.
2. Ensure all performance measures have associated control sheets.
3. Assess the Performance Information Management System (PIMS) and how it delivers against the original design brief.
4. Create a table for tracking outstanding requests from Performance Scrutiny Committee.
5. Include a recommendation within all Corporate Management Team and Performance Scrutiny Committee covering reports, which asks officers and members to feedback on whether the report continues to meet their needs.

A work programme has been developed to deliver the actions identified by the audit and procedures have already been put in place for actions four and five from Quarter 2 2022/23 performance reporting. Further details on actions one to three are provided below.

1) Update of the Local Performance Management Framework (LPMF) incorporating the Data Quality Policy.

The council continues to strictly follow the Local Performance Management Framework and the current LPMF continues to work well. It is expected that the framework will be refreshed by June 2023 to reflect slight changes to performance reporting, and to ensure the framework remains fit for purpose looking ahead. A specific focus will be on driving a more performance driven culture. As part of this refresh the Data Quality Policy will also be reviewed to ensure this continues to meet the needs of the council and ensure a high level of data quality is maintained.

2) Ensure all Performance Measures have Associated Control Sheets.

There is an acceptance that data quality can always be improved, and to help improve this further, all council performance measures will have an associated control sheet in place by the end of April 2023. The control sheets will clearly define each performance measure and include the calculation(s) used to determine the measure outturn and to ensure data quality. The process of ensuring all performance measures have accurate and detailed control sheets in place commenced in early November 2022.

3) Assess the Performance Information Management System (PIMS) and how it Delivers Against the Original Design Brief.

The council's performance system (PIMS) continues to be an effective tool for collecting and monitoring performance measure outturns and supporting commentary. A review will take place running up to June 2023 to confirm the system continues to deliver against its original brief, but also with a specific focus on identifying what further performance analysis / tools the council would like to attain from the system.

Target Setting

Performance targets continue to be reviewed on an annual basis to reflect changes in the marketplace, the council's strategic direction, as well as current outturn achievements. The targets for 2022/23 were reviewed in November 2021.

For each targeted measure, both a high and low target is agreed with the service manager, Assistant Director, Director, and Portfolio Holder. For those measures recorded as quarterly in the system, just one high and one low target is set for the year, whilst for those cumulative and seasonal measures, individual quarterly targets are set. A number of measures in the system are recorded as volumetric and have no targets allocated to them. Targets continue to be formally approved by the Corporate Management Team, Performance Scrutiny Committee and Executive.

The target setting process for 2023/24 is expected to commence in January 2023, which will ensure targets are agreed and in place ready for Quarter 1 2023/24 reporting.

Lincoln City Profile (LCP)

On an annual basis the City of Lincoln Council produces the Lincoln City Profile report. The report provides the latest demographic data for the City of Lincoln in one central document, drawing data from national, local, and internal data sets. The profile paints a unique picture of what it is like to live and work in Lincoln. The contents of the Profile are split into eight key chapters. These include:

- Population
- Economy
- Welfare
- Crime
- Health
- Education
- Housing
- Environment and Climate

The latest Lincoln City Profile 2022 includes an additional chapter focused on the impact of Covid-19 on the city. Within this section includes a breakdown of Covid-19 cases in Lincoln, vaccination data split by age, furlough data and the number of support grants issued to businesses in Lincoln.

The latest data for each dataset included within the LCP is presented within a chart showing clear comparison of Lincoln data against data for the East Midlands region. A link to the data source is also provided, which allow users of the profile to access the very latest data available post the publication of the current version of the LCP. The current LCP can be viewed on the council's website via the following link and I would encourage all members to take a look at the wide range of informative data included - [Lincoln City Profile 2021/22](#).

Data collection for the next version of the LCP is scheduled to commence in January 2023, with the Lincoln City Profile 2023 expected to be published in May 2023.

Project Management – The Lincoln Project Management Model (LPMM)

The LPMM continues to provide practical advice, tools and techniques to council staff involved in managing projects to ensure all projects are planned and managed effectively taking into consideration the size of the project, cost, anticipated duration, complexity, and the risk it brings.

The LPMM is split into three levels of projects. These are:

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

To ensure all LPMM guidance is easily accessible, a project management section has been developed on the new staff intranet, Hub. Included in this area are a wide range guidance documents, together with a range of templates to assist in each stage of the project management process. Using a standardised set of guidance and templates

ensures the approach to project management is delivered consistently across the council and ensures all key elements of project management are fully considered.

The LPMM continues to be reviewed regularly to ensure this remains fit for purpose and in line with the requirements and expectations of the council.

Conclusion

I conclude by again praising our staff for their brilliant response during a crisis year that will prove more challenging yet. That said I am hugely impressed by the preparations everybody is making to deal with what is ahead and I am sure that we will ensure that our citizens continue to receive the best possible service.

I would also like to welcome all new employees to the council and thank you all for hitting the ground running and contributing to our success over the past 12 months. Needless to say, Government cuts also continue to challenge us as we seek to continue the development of our brilliant City but even so we are preparing to move to the next stage of our shared Vision 2025 and be ready to play our part as our City community moves positively forward.

**Councillor Chris Burke,
Portfolio Holder, Customer Experience and Review**