

South Lakeland District Council
Council
Tuesday, 15 December 2020
Customer, Commercial Services and People
Portfolio

Portfolio: Cllr Phillip Dixon

To work with all Members, the community and organisations in developing and implementing locality working, case management, and specialist services as part of the Council's Customer connect programme.

Delivery of the Council Plan objectives in relation to quality of service and high performance culture.

The organisation of the Authority relating to the Council's central services, including Employee relations.

Providing and maintaining parks infrastructure.

Polices, plans and strategies

- Parks and Open Spaces Strategy
- Customer Charter and Contact Strategy
- Member Development and Training Plan
- Workforce Plan (to be reviewed under customer connect programme)

Key Areas

- Customer services (operational)
- Car Parking (operations)
- Waste Management (operations and service optimisation)
- Street scene
- Member Services
- Member Training and Development
- Legal and Committee Services and HR Services
- Leisure, Public Realm, (Parks and Open Spaces (Including cemeteries, trees, woodland and playground improvement)
- Corporate Health and Safety

Customer services (operational)

The transformation programme, Customer Connect, will deliver better access to services for customers, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is beginning to create more opportunities to self-serve through improved digital options.

Customer Services are undergoing transition as part of phase 2 of the Customer Connect project which was delayed due to Covid-19. The enhanced delivery of new capabilities within the authority will improve the service and experience delivered to customers and staff.

Over 600 core service processes had been identified across the organisation and a significant number of minor processes. The work of the service redesign is continuing to focus on the areas where there is the biggest opportunity to improve, by prioritising the core processes based on customer impact, volume and customer efficiency. The areas with the biggest opportunities were identified as the main focus for the redesign process. This task is ongoing and increased access to digitally enabled services will be rolled out during 2020, including 'My Account.'

There are now twenty one self-service process live on the council's website and accessible through 'My Account'. These include locality forms for graffiti, abandoned vehicle and fly tipping, case management forms for services such as bereavements, complaints and print services and street scene forms for missed bins, assisted collection and requesting new waste equipment. Business grant forms to support business affected by COVID-19 have also been made available online.

Website accessibility

Our website is in a good place, it is highly rated by organisations that measure and benchmark the accessibility of our site. Over the year, in line with government digital services guidance, we have:

- Conducted an independent accessibility audit
- Published our accessibility statement
- Implemented an internal 'accessibility protocol' – guidelines for managing accessibility issues
- Delivered training to help staff understand how to produce accessible documents and web content.
- Introduced processes and procedures to make it easy for staff to produce accessible digital material
- Completed the task of manually editing, or replacing with web content, the 1,500 PDF's on our site so they meet legislative accessibility standards
- Putting controls checks and measure in place to maintain our accessibility standards

Car parking (operations)

Working collaboratively with the Economy, Culture and Leisure Portfolio the Council is seeking ways to increase car parking capacity within the areas of highest demand and respond to the challenges brought to us by Covid-19.

The Council is offering free car parking in Council owned car parks every Sunday in December to attract both visitors and residents into local towns supporting the local economy.

From 25 March until 15 June during the peak of Coronavirus, all SLDC operated car parks were free to use to ensure key workers and volunteers involved in the emergency response could access free parking and to minimise the risk of virus transmission. Following the reintroduction of charging in SLDC operated car parks, safety measures have been installed to slow the spread of the virus through social distancing and contactless card payments or pay by phone are encouraged.

Waste Management (operations and service optimisation) and Street scene

Throughout 2019/20 the Customer and Commercial Services and Climate Emergency and Localism portfolios have been working in partnership to support the waste management and street scene functions.

Throughout the year there has been numerous social media messages to promote recycling and waste minimisation during recent months, supporting the Councils green initiative. The December edition South Lakeland News included significant content regarding waste and recycling.

The street cleansing service trialled 2 electric vehicles, however in both cases the daily operational mileage exceeded the range of the vehicle. The service is continuing to monitor new vehicle technologies, particularly with regard to alternative fuels. Drivers are encouraged to turn off their engines when in stalled traffic.

A decision was approved to extend suspension of green waste collections during January and February 2021, as part of the Councils action to addressing Climate Change. Statistics supported that the quantity of green waste collections is much lower compared to other times of the year, and the Councils collection fleet use significant quantities of fuel to make collections at each household every other week. During the January and early February period the vehicles will be off the road every other week, as there will be alternate weekly grey bin collections, this will therefore create a 50% reduction in the carbon footprint of collection vehicles during this period. This period will also be used to ensure that training is updated which will include Driver CPC training, driver/loader reversing vehicle training, manual handling and managing violence/ aggression training.

In January 2020 the Council supported a joint operation with Cumbria Constabulary and the DVLA to take enforcement action on untaxed and abandoned vehicles. Over the past year over 300 reports of abandoned vehicles were received by the Council and the operation supported enforcement actions to be taken against 30 vehicles in Kendal, Milnthorpe, Staveley, Windermere and Ambleside.

In response to Coronavirus the Council introduced monthly collections of green waste across the District throughout May and June 2020. This was undertaken in response to reduced staffing levels due to Coronavirus and to ensure crews could work safely and comply with social distancing guidelines. During the November 2020 Lockdown the Council was able to maintain regular grey, green waste and recycling collections.

During the first Lockdown the Council made sure that all available vehicles were on the road each day and loaned vehicles from other authorities to continue with the scheduled grey waste and recycling collections. With the increased number of people working from home the Council has seen a very significant increase in recycling tonnages collected.

Member Services and Member Training and Development

The 2019/20 training plan had offered a variety of training opportunities available for members. Examples of this training available include:

- Social Media and Web skills
- Digital Skills Workshop
- Introduction to Your Ward
- Committee Inductions
- GDPR, FOI and Data Management
- Chairing Committee Skills
- Submitting Member Expenses Online
- Carbon Literacy Training

Feedback on the training provided had been extremely positive. Member Services are continuing to encourage members to receive committee papers electronically through the use of corporate IT kit. Corporate kit allows members to access council used systems such as Skype for Business, Mod Gov and SharePoint which support the Customer Connect Programme and GDPR regulations. In total 42 out of 51 members now use SLDC corporate kit (with use of a corporate email account). Non-essential training for members has been postponed due to Coronavirus, however several virtual briefing sessions have been undertaken focusing on Local Government Reorganisation, Understanding My Role and Responsibilities as a Corporate Parent, United Utilities Haweswater Aqueduct Resilience Programme and Covid-19 briefings.

The Member Support Steering Group (MSSG) had trialled the Local Government Association Councillor E-Learning Package to allow Members to undertake training remotely. The feedback received to date has been positive and it has been circulated to all members with corporate kit. The MSSG are working towards achieving the Level 2 North West Employers to coincide with the Customer Connect Programme.

The Coronavirus pandemic has explored the Council's capabilities to use technology to conduct meetings and keep connected. All Councillors have been given access to new equipment and training on Microsoft Teams. This new virtual platform has allowed members to take part in virtual meetings internally and externally.

Legal and Committee Services and HR Services

The new report writing system has been fully embedded across the organisation. Officers can write, share and submit reports digitally using the system and introduces a more effective tracking method for all committees. Further training is being organised.

Legal Services are working effectively reducing debts and being proactive in taking the appropriate action. Encroachment debts have been reduced by 25% since October 2019. Work continues to prioritise the completion of S106 agreements. The service has been instrumental in addressing the impasse on some outstanding s106 agreements, taking reports recently to Cabinet and the Planning Committee. It is hoped that many of the agreements will now progress to early conclusion.

Workloads on contracts, grants and funding agreements have significantly increased together with property related work. Complex criminal and civil litigation is also being carried out.

The team has also supported the work required recently on Local Government Reform organising additional meetings and providing legal advice.

The team have established and implemented the Councils Virtual Meetings supporting effective decision making. The team have processed numerous emergency decisions both executive and non-executive.

Introducing new ways of working to ensure the Council has been in a position to respond quickly and effectively to Government policy, funding allocation and distribution. The team have advised at numerous committee and council meetings. Training Councillors and providing advice and guidance on the use of Microsoft Teams.

Work is commencing on revising the Councils constitution, meetings are being arranged and reports will be brought to future council meetings. The team are also considering the Local Government Associations recently issued Model Code of Conduct for members. Reports will be taken to the standards committee and consultation with Group Leaders and councillors will take place.

The HR team has continued to be heavily involved in supporting the organisation and its employees through an incredibly challenging period, Wellbeing has been a major focus with a wide range of activities delivered including;

- The figures for 2020 are showing a significant improvement on sickness absence figures in comparison to the previous year
- Launching the new Mental Wellbeing at Work policy featuring lots of helpful hints and tips including the Wellness Action Plan
- Extensive use of our Employee Assistance Programme including counselling support (more than 160 calls in the past year) The new Healthy app that will be launched and information will be shared soon
- Family friendly policies including Smart working, Flexible working, Flexi-Time and Special Leave
- Extensive use of Occupational Health to support those in work as well as those on sickness leave
- Stress and COVID risk assessments
- Ongoing HR professional support
- Regular 'coffee mornings' with Team Leaders to provide, support, advice and directions to them and their teams and for them to share best practice
- The COVID site on sharepoint #together we can, desk based exercises, homeworking wellbeing etc.
- New weekly updates from the leadership team on sharepoint
- The new team talk sessions
- The staff wellbeing survey and what our approach will be once we receive the feedback
- Smart Working
- Resilience workshops

Training activities have resumed after the initial COVID lockdown with the following being delivered:

- Customer service training – 'Connecting with our Customers' – delivered to more than 200 people this year via face-to-face and virtual means
- Personal resilience training piloted for 20 people, with more planned in near future
- Team Leader bitesize training sessions with HR have commenced. Four out of five subjects delivered

- New starter meet and greet sessions with Chief Exec and Directors
- Staff drop-in sessions with Leadership Team started in October 2020
- Further leadership training planned with Leadership Team, supported by development work with Council Members
- Launch of an extensive catalogue of E-learning courses

The introduction of new a technology platform (Microsoft Teams) has enabled the Council to continue with the recruitment process via virtual interviews during Covid-19.

Leisure, Public Realm, (Parks and Open Spaces (Including cemeteries, trees, woodland and playground improvement)

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy identifies the importance of good quality green spaces throughout the district. The strategy is designed to providing clear direction for the management of council owned parks and open spaces over ten years. The strategy is reviewing the day to day maintenance and identifying improvements to parks and open spaces through working in partnership with communities, local businesses and partners. The strategy has incorporated a variety of different spaces including parks, sports fields, trees and woodlands and cemeteries.

In 2019 Rayrigg Meadow Playground on the shores of Lake Windermere was accredited with a Bronze award for its commitment to inclusivity. The playground met the minimum requirements of good accessibility throughout the play space, provision for at least three senses to be accessed from a seating or standing position and an opportunity for all children to use their 'whole bodies' in dynamic play through sliding, climbing, spinning or swinging. As the playground enhances progresses it is hope that a silver award will be achieved in 2020.

In May 2019 new playgrounds were opened at Millerground, Rayrigg Meadow, Yew Tree Playing Fields and Maryfell, Sedbergh. All the works undertaken at each park were completed by working in collaboration with community groups and have been designed to be inclusive and provide capital investment for 20 years.

Following a £125,000 investment and funding raised with the Friends of Abbot Hall Playground the Abbot Hall playground has been revamped. An opening ceremony took place on 1 September 2019 for families and included activities such as face painting. A new play area also opened at Castlefield and Greenbank in Ambleside where the Resident Association had helped to raise £85,000. An opening ceremony took place at half term.

The Council has been working with Grasmere Village Society and we have now opened the new playground at Broadgate Meadow. This was delayed firstly by wet conditions last winter and a delay to the drainage work due to Covid 19 restrictions. The playground is receiving great reviews and extra picnic benches are on order to finish this project.

The new playground at Lightburn Park also opened in September with a very low key opening event. This should have been open for the summer so only a short delay. The Friends of Lightburn Park worked alongside SLDC and the Town Council to raise £120,000 to replace the existing playground. The play area has a new footprint to allow park users to walk around the park without going through the play area. The new site offers a great variety of challenging equipment for all ages and abilities. Due to the close proximity of Sandside School, Locality staff consulted with the staff and head teacher for advice on the most appropriate equipment to make this playground inclusive. The feedback has been very positive.

The funding has now been achieved for North Lonsdale Road playground and procurement has just been completed. The contracts are with Legal Case management and once completed the order will be placed. The installation will start in February and be open for the Easter break. Consultation has been challenging with this project due to Covid 19 but local parents and the Town Council have been involved, the finished playground will offer a great play experience for children up to the age of 14 and with all abilities

The Beckside Community Centre outdoor fitness trail was installed in March 2020 this incorporates outdoor gym equipment in two locations to encourage healthier lifestyles. A consultation with residents was completed in October 2019 and demonstrated support from local residents for small groups of outdoor gym equipment in the large area of open space close to the Beckside Community Centre.

The plans for the redevelopment at Queens Park Windermere are progressing well and the project has now been split into two phases. Phase one will include the new playground and a pump track. Phase two will be to replace the skate park. Funding has now been secured for Phase one and the tender will be advertised in December for 8 weeks. Evaluation will be carried out by the Locality Team, Windermere Park for All group, who have been instrumental in fundraising, and Windermere and Bowness Town Council. The final £30,000 of the National Lottery Grant is going towards this and will be the ninth project to benefit from the original £200,000 award.

SLDC have also been working with the residents at Hayclose Crescent to add some play facilities to this awkward play space. Goals and an astro turf kick-about area was installed in June and extra play equipment, new fencing and a secure gate has been installed at the end of November.

All Council owned playareas were re-opened in June 2020, following the end of the national lockdown restrictions and remained open throughout the recent lockdown in November.

The project at Town View Fields has demonstrated a strong relationship with multiple agencies with the Natural Flood management scheme. Working with the support of the Friends of Nobles Rest, The Environment Agency, The South Cumbria Rivers Trust and Cumbria County Council to create a scheme to slow the flow of floodwater during heavy rain. Funding has come from SLDC and the EA's DEFRA fund.

The project has opened up the Culvert to create a meandering stream running into a small wetland area before re-joining the culvert downstream. Two leaky timber dams known as "Ker Plunk" structures will store and slowly release the water. As well as naturally slowing the flow of storm water, the newly created "bog garden" will hopefully attract a richer variety of wildlife to Town View Field, such as dragonflies, voles, frogs and toads. After the culvert work is completed, the field's biodiversity will be further enriched by the planting of a wildflower meadow and a small damson orchard to help attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies. SLDC Locality team are working on some interpretation boards to explain the scheme and the wildlife and planting we hope to encourage on this site.

In 2019 the Council contacted parish and town councils across the district to invite proposals for tree planting sites. In total six parish council owned sites have been secured with a total of 36 trees to be planted across the sites, planting which began in January 2020.

The Parish tree planting letter sent out also identified locations to plant 55 trees on SLDC owned land, 8 trees on LDNPA owned land and 9 trees on private land adjacent to publically accessible areas. In total the Parish Tree Planting Letter has identified 173 tree planting locations. The scheme in Ford Park in Ulverston will create a new Arboretum and community orchard when 65 trees are planted.

In partnership with leisure providers GLL, the Council supporting the promotion of leisure facilities available in Windermere, Ulverston and Kendal. These have included opportunities such as outdoor swimming lessons for children, health check days for over 55's and workplace sport tournaments. Work is taking place with GLL to see how the Council can support GLL through the Pandemic. The Council have entered into an open book process with GLL to understand the deficit posed by the pandemic and to see how the Council can best support the service.

Corporate Health and Safety

Throughout 2019/20 the Council has been using the Health and Safety Strategic Improvement Plan to ensure that the health, safety and wellbeing of staff is continuously improved. This plan is continuing to be regularly reviewed at the Councils Internal Health, Safety and Wellbeing Board. The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee meet on a quarterly basis. Each quarter a safety summary is presented to the committee to outline the accident data, what is affecting the Council, what the Council is doing well and methods to improve.

Following consideration by the committee it was agreed to undertake a review of the Councils Safety Management System. Usage showed that the reporting platform Safety Cloud was not well used due to the difficulty navigating the system. Following a review a new and improved, simplified system has been rolled out across the authority. The system had been broken down into new areas containing appropriate sub sections in line with team requirements which would support monthly checklists.

In partnership with the review of the reporting platform a review of generic policies and risk assessments had taken place to reduce the high level of duplication. Generic risk assessments relating to South Lakeland House are now available under a single sub section of the system. Areas of specialism assessments such as Town Fields Hostel or Street scene will be available in specific service area policies.

The authority has also reviewed the risk assessments associated with Town View Fields Hostel. New working arrangements and rota have been introduced as well as violence and aggression training to better support staff.

The Annual Health and Safety Report was approved by Cabinet in November 2020. The report provided an overview of the Councils actions in relation to Health, Safety and Wellbeing through 2019/20. A key highlight within the annual report is that a total of 23 injuries and incidents were recorded which supported the continuing the trend of a low number of accidents.

As reported in the Promoting South Lakeland Portfolio Holder Report, the Council closed its assets to the Public during both the Coronavirus Lockdowns. The Council also installed protective and preventative measures to reopen its assets which protect both staff and communities. Measures include markings to adhere to social distancing, protective screens, sanitising facilities and staff continuing to work from home where possible. The offices at South Lakeland House has remained open for employees unable to work from home, with the appropriate safety precautions installed.

The Health, Safety and Wellbeing of SLDC employees is key and all employees working within the community have been provided with the appropriate PPE and guidance to slow the spread of the virus i.e. Collection Crews, Locality Officers and Cash Collectors. The organisation is continuing to share internal messages, using the hashtag #Togetherwecan, to share home working experiences and helpful hints and tips. Cleaning regimes were

upgraded and all mandatory compliance tests were completed when the buildings were closed. A flushing regime was put into place to prevent the need for extensive flushing and chlorination when the buildings were re-opened. Risk assessments were reviewed along with policies and procedures and they were made Covid-compliant to ensure the safety of staff and members of the South Lakeland community.