

South Lakeland District Council
Council
27 July 2021
Customer, and Locality Services Portfolio Holder

Portfolio: Cllr Phillip Dixon

To work with all Members, the community and organisations in developing , case management, 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.

To take the lead on Strategic Waste Management/Recycling and relevant Council Plan measures under the environment objectives.

To drive our Localism agenda.

Policies, plans and strategies

- Waste Management Strategy (environmental impacts)
- Emergency Plan
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 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)
- Emergency Planning
- Waste Management and Recycling Strategy
- Localism
- Water Quality
- Car Parking (operations)
- Waste Management (operations and service optimisation)
- Streetscene
- Member Services

- Member Training and Development
- Legal and Committee Services and HR Services
- Corporate Health and Safety

Customer services (operational)

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

Phase 2 of the Customer Connect transition was delayed due to Covid-19. Transition has now resumed, and in May the first round of workshops were completed with teams in tranche one. The teams in tranche one are; street naming and numbering, the handy person scheme, bookings, building control, land charges, waste, parks and open spaces, licensing, benefits, environmental protection, private water, debt recovery and revenues.

All the actions arising from the first round of workshops have been compiled into a programme of work. The council will be using the agile project management methodology of Scrum to deliver these outputs and progress the transition. We already have two existing Scrums established. Customer Contact Scrum is focused on the customer and delivering channel shift whilst the Customer Transactions Scrum designs and builds online forms in our digital platform. Alongside these two Scrums another two are being set up, one to develop IT functionality needed to support transition and the other to ensure we have the right policies, procedures and process guidance in place to support our new ways of working going forward.

The organisation has been utilising the digital platform to build online forms that allow customer to self-serve online and provide the organisation with greater efficiencies in the back office. There are now 28 online forms covering a number of services, including Street Scene, Locality and Case Management. These forms allow the customer to access services online 24/7. The Digital Development Team has also developed 14 COVID application forms to support the various business grant schemes and test and trace application, as well as a number of internal forms, which allow for work requests to flow through the organisation more efficiently.

Since the enablement of the new forms and My Account in May 2020, there has been an increase in the number of online transactions. In 2020 (May to December) there were over 8,000 transactions and since January 2021 there have been nearly 12,000 transactions recorded.

As of July 2021, a total of 7,371 customers have created an account. Since the last update in March, over 4,500 have been created.

This heavy uptake has been reached with the start of communications plan to external promote the account. Integration of the account with grant forms and the revenue and benefits system has seen sign up increase in recent months, as have the number of online transactions - residents interacting with us digitally without having an account. We have also finalised testing on the ability to take payments online as part of a form. This functionality is now live as part of an update to our pay your council tax form and we plan to roll this functionality out across further forms in the coming months..

The Council has undertaken a Communications Plan alongside the annual billing process to promote customers to set up an account, including a recent competition to win an iPad.

Emergency Planning

The Council continues to be an effective partner within the multi-agency Cumbria Local Resilience Forum (CLRF.) The Council is involved in developing and enhancing emergency plans at an LRF level – and participates at strategic and tactical levels within incident response. As such, the Council has maintained a significant organisational wide response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including for example physical arrangements, safety precautions, grant payments and ensuring business continuity of services – including the successful delivery of the recent election. The Council's Emergency Plan and Business Continuity Plans have been updated to reflect Covid-19 arrangements.

Waste Management (Operations and Service Optimisation) (Recycling Strategy) and Street scene

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 Council's green initiative.

The Street Scene service has placed an order for an electric vehicle, which is due to be delivered in 2022. In addition, 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 stationary in traffic.

Green Waste collections were partially reinstated from March 2021, with a monthly collection due to ongoing staffing pressures caused by Covid. This returned to the full service by Easter.

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.

During pre-Covid times, the crews would normally collect around 26 tonnes of recycling each day. During the pandemic, there has been an increase to between 30 and 35 tonnes per day, depending on the level of restrictions in place. Green waste has also been exceptionally high in 2021; with daily tonnages between 65 and 70 tonnes, which is around 10 tonnes higher than normal. Although the residual waste tonnages also remain high, there are some signs that these are slightly lower than last year and that awareness of waste reduction continues to be a matter of public concern.

Localism

During 2020, Cabinet Members held successful meetings with a number of town and parish councils to discuss the benefits of localism and listen to their views. The Council was then able to establish a comprehensive list of community development opportunities to inform SLDC where support mechanisms could be put in place.

Throughout the pandemic, Council has been in regular contact with Town and Parish Council virtually to understand the challenges communities have been facing during this time and share guidance and support.

Town and Parish Councils have also been involved in the consultation surrounding The Bay proposal for submission towards Local Government Reorganisation. All Town and Parish Councils have now been encouraged to take part in the consultation event launched by Government.

Water Quality

The Council undertakes a statutory function to carry out private water tests at various locations across the district to ensure the safety of communities, implemented by the Private Water Supplies Regulations 2016. Council has been continuing to undertake risk assessments and monitoring across all private water supplies in accordance with Covid-19 regulations and safety precautions. Where required, the Council continues to investigate any failure to meet standards and takes necessary enforcement action, always-ensuring communities are protected.

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 to those receiving a Covid vaccination at the Westmorland Shopping Centre. The Council is also providing free parking permits for all NHS staff working within the vaccination centre and has extended the opening hours of the car park. This will end in July in line with Government advice.

The new car parking fees and charges were introduced in April 2021. Fees were increased in the Lake District National Park area in line with increased demand. Charging for 1 hr and 2 hr was increased in Towns outside of the Lake District National Park to car parks central to Town Centres. This is to help encourage visitors to park outside of the Town Centre and walk into Town. Early bird offers to key car parks were retained to help those from low-income households who work in our Towns.

Member Services and Member Training and Development

The Coronavirus pandemic has resulted in the comprehensive suite of training and development opportunities for Councillors being delivered either virtually or by eLearning.

- ELearning courses include:
- Holding Council Meetings Online
- Handling Intimidation
- Commissioning of Services
- Equality and Diversity
- The Effective Ward Councillor
- Supporting Your Constituents
- Stress Management and Personal Resilience
- Scrutiny for Councillors
- Police and Crime Panels
- Planning
- Licensing and Regulation
- Influencing Skills
- Handling Complaints for Service Improvement
- Facilitation and Conflict Resolution
- Councillor Induction
- Community Engagement and Leadership

A full training package was delivered to allow Councillors to continue their work virtually, involving:

- Rollout of corporate kit for all Councillors
- The introduction of Microsoft Teams
- One to one virtual sessions to familiarise Councillors with Microsoft Teams
- Electronic user guides and step by step instructions
- Review of how we deliver Council meetings, with supporting etiquette guide

The training plan for 2021-22 has been designed and is being delivered with a hybrid approach to training delivery, i.e. face to face, virtually or a combination of the two.

Four new Members joined the Council following the by-election in May 2021 and inductions have been delivered using the same hybrid as described above. Ongoing committee related inductions and refreshers continue to take place.

Training delivered to date since May 2021 includes:

- New member inductions
- Planning Committee induction
- Microsoft Teams induction
- Skype induction
- IT induction
- Climate Science Solutions
- Code of Conduct/How To Be An Effective Member training
- Licensing Committee induction
- Chairing Skills
- Online expenses training
- Licensing Committee Decision Making and Taxi Licensing training

Further training throughout will continue in line with the training plan.

Legal Governance and Democracy Services

The team advises and supports all the Council meetings. The team has delivered virtual meetings, including innovative pro-active approach to challenges by introducing initiatives such as procedural scripts for Chairs of meetings to improve confidence and to assist with smooth-running meetings / anticipating any issues; Advising at 36 virtual meetings in period May – December 2020 with up to 51 members participating remotely in any one meeting, along with members of public , with additional meetings to May 2021. The team recently ensured a Covid safe Annual Meeting took place and ensured that all the necessary actions were taken for the start of the next calendar of meetings. The team have adapted again to the need for face-to-face meetings.

The Governance and Democracy team are working on increasing the use of the Mod.Gov committee system and have been promoting the use of the app to councillors and officers. Further work is planned.

A series of Council wide Governance awareness raising sessions have been planned across the Council. To be held virtually for staff. Covering topics such as Governance and Accountability, the Forward Plan and Executive and Non-Executive decision-making. These have been received very well by officers who have attended the first sessions.

The Review of the Constitution continues with this being treated as living document to review rather than an annual review approach. Reports will be brought forward shortly.

The team have anticipated challenges of COVID-19 and pro-actively implementing effective emergency decision making enabling business to continue. Emergency decision-making enabled approx. £100 million of Government grants to be allocated as quickly as possible to those locally in need during the pandemic.

Using emergency decision-making delegations and constitutional amendments to complete contracts totalling nearly £1million (£906,386 was the figure) for purchase of goods/services enabling council business to continue during pandemic.

Implementing customer connect model – including new triage system to allocate incoming work, introducing instruction forms, team-wide priority lists, training to case managers. This will be complemented by the introduction of a new legal case management system, which will bring greater efficiencies and modern ways of working.

The team are embedding new ways of working and have for the last year been implementing Business partnering holding regular meetings with services, e.g. weekly s106 meetings with planning team

Litigation continues to increase and the team have been in attendance at a number of on line court hearings relating to licencing and other matters.

The team have been working hard to reduce the debts outstanding on the Lake and have achieved positive results with the debts being reduced from £205, 000 in December 2020, to £135,000 approx. in the last 6 months. The figure of £135,000 includes the 2021/2022, invoices (approx. £61,000) which have been raised but unpaid and during the pandemic which affected the debt collection work. Therefore, overall the outstanding Debt position continues to improve.

The team have been contributing towards the delivery of Corporate priorities for example the Boon Town disposal to SLH of the ransom strip is a notable success given the complexity of the structure of the sale, transfer of replacement ransom strip, leaseback, deed of variation, additional parties involved, statutory issues to be addressed (open space requirements), change in state aid rules to the new subsidy control measures and very tight timescale (less than two weeks from cabinet approval on 18th March). Strategically this work will support the delivery of affordable homes.

The team have also been involved in the EA flood relief scheme and advising on legal matters arising.

The Council has completed on a number of land and property matters, including encroachment licences, public open space transfers, and affordable homes grant agreement and right to buy matters.

S106 agreements have been addressed led by the Monitoring Officer and the team has progressed 38 agreements, completing 26 (11 of which in last 6 months). The team has received recognition from Director, other Leadership team members, Chair of Planning, Planning Committee and Leader of the Council in response to this work.

The team continue to advise on strategic projects, legal/governance advice, e.g. Crossamoor, Boon Town, Cumbria Choice Based Lettings working across 12 partner organisations and leading on the legal advice – contributing to Council Plan objectives.

Award Shortlisting

The Lead Specialist Legal Governance and Democracy was shortlisted for the Inspirational Leader award for Lawyers in Local Government. This was for extensive support and Leadership of the Team, professionalism, resolve and resilience during the Covid period. This was especially for work on mentoring, support and focus on team well-being and self-care.

The Legal Governance and Democracy team were also shortlisted for the Innovation award for Lawyers in Local Government. This was for the delivery of work during the Covid period, the work on Virtual meetings, the strong team approach and adapting to new ways of working. I am pleased to say that the team received a commendation.

Human Resources

The Human Resources (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
- Launched a Mental Wellbeing at Work policy
- Extensive use of our Employee Assistance Programme including counselling support and the new Healthy app has now been launched
- Introduction of 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.
- The new team talk sessions
- Conducted Staff wellbeing survey's
- Resilience workshops

Virtual training activities have resumed 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 bite size 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
- Further leadership training planned with Leadership Team, supported by development work with Council Members
- Launch of an extensive catalogue of E-learning courses

Throughout the pandemic, the Council has conducted the recruitment process via virtual interviews.

Corporate Health and Safety

Throughout 2020/21, 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 regularly reviewed at the Councils Internal Health, Safety and Wellbeing Board, which 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.

A review of the Councils Safety Management System has been completed. 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 has now been broken down into new areas containing appropriate sub sections in line with team requirements, which would support monthly checklists. This review of the system has been well received and encouraged usage.

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 and Street scene are now also available in specific service area policies.

At Town View Fields, new working arrangements and rota have been introduced as well as violence and aggression training to better support staff.

During the Coronavirus Lockdowns, the Council had installed protective and preventative measures to reopen its assets, which protect both staff and communities. Measures included 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 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.

In recent months with changing Covid Restrictions and the requirement to hold in person Committee Meetings, we have ensured that all meeting rooms are risk assessed and that Covid guidance is adhered to protect both the Public, Councillors, and Officers.

Government Covid Restrictions are due to be completely lifted from 19 July 2021, so SLDC will re-assess our own guidelines in due course.

Signed off by	Date sent	Date Signed off
Section 151 Officer	Not applicable (N/A)	N/A
Monitoring Officer	N/A	N/A
CMT	16/07/2021	16/07/2021

Circulated to	Date sent
Lead Specialist	N/A
Human Resources Lead Specialist	N/A
Communications Team	N/A
Leader	N/A
Committee Chairman	N/A
Portfolio Holder	16/07/2021
Ward Councillor(s)	N/A
Committee	N/A
Executive (Cabinet)	N/A
Council	N/A