

South Lakeland District Council
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Friday, 04 March 2022
Customer and Locality Services Portfolio Holder
Report

Portfolio: Cllr Philip Dixon

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

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

To drive our Localism agenda.

Polices, 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)

A full report on the outcomes, benefits and future of Customer Connect is being brought to council in December. The report recognises the achievements of the Customer Connect Programme since inception in 2016 and notes the outcomes and benefits the programme has delivered.

In terms of how the remaining activity will be delivered, a Portfolio Management approach has been adopted. This combines a number of programmes including Customer Connect and Local Government Reorganisation with Business as Usual. This approach will highlight the importance of all programmes that need resourcing and will be responsible for the dependencies and benefits being realised across the whole organisation.

With the HMCLG announcement for two unitary authorities for Cumbria there will be a requirement to share resources with both District and County Council to set up, transition and start work in a new authority from 1st April 2023. The Portfolio Management approach ensures that decision making on a day-to-day basis around project priorities, systems, assets, people and data will sit alongside the continuous implementation of the Customer Connect Programme. The key element to implementing this structure is to ensure sufficient resources are applied across all areas to achieve delivery. There is also an opportunity to use the Customer Connect model as a baseline for future LGR activity.

As part of the approach, the remaining Customer Connect activity has been reviewed with a focus on promoting digital channels and reducing customer demand. The outputs from the spring's transition workshops have been included in this programme of work and the council continues to use the agile project management methodology of Scrum to deliver these outputs.

One of our main objectives is to utilise the digital platform to build more online forms that allow customer to self-serve online and provide the organisation with greater efficiencies in the back office. Since July's update, we have started to deliver some of the forms that were highlighted by the services in the transition workshops. This includes:

- An online application process for our handy person scheme, with a back office workflow that supports the service in reviewing the application and working with the contractor
- New versions of to apply for an assisted collection and order a new bin which capture improvements suggested by the services and customers.
- Two new parking forms; report a problem with one of our car parks and challenge a parking penalty notice.
- A bereavement services enquiry form, which allows the team to respond via email.
- An internal form to distribute tell us once notifications to services.

In total, the Customer Transactions Scrum team has worked with services to create new forms or updated existing ones for 45 business processes and 14 COVID related processes.

In the coming months the Customer Transactions Scrum, team will be focusing on online forms for a number of environmental protection and licensing processes. This includes updated forms for report smoke, smell and noise and online applications for licensing processes such as temporary event notice. Work will also continue on an application to support street naming and numbering, whilst further street scene and locality forms are in development. The team will also be carrying out an upgrade to the digital platform.

Our external communications to customer on the benefits of using online services continue, with a focus on customer being able to undertake specific activities. We currently have 8,950 customer registered for a My Account and we had average around 2,900 online transactions a month.

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. The Council's Emergency Plan and Business Continuity Plans have been updated to reflect Covid-19 arrangements.

As an emergency responder, the Council responded to the Yellow and Amber rainfall warnings in late October 2021. Amber events are significant and so a good level of preparedness is proportionate. It is worth noting that high end Yellow warnings can and do attain Amber status. The Council activated several mitigations such as:

- forming an internal coordination team
- linking in with the LRF Command and Control structure
- gaining situational awareness around expected flood warnings, their locations and timings (good feedback received)
- sharing this situational awareness with Community Resilience/Flood Action Groups
- extending depot hours
- making sandbags accessible
- updating the website and social media
- contacting Reception Centres in case required
- contacting Reception Centre staff in case needed
- contacting Reception Centre mutual aid sources in case required
- undertaking communications work
- taking public calls
- providing advice and support following flooding

The Council has most recently been responding to the impacts of Storm Arwen. Council staff have assisted in the multi-agency response, focussed on the wellbeing of people who have suffered power cuts. All council properties have been visited and assessed for storm damage and public safety. A programme of works is progressing to address damage, mostly the making safe and/or the removal of fallen trees.

The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) declared a major incident in the aftermath of the storm, and officers from the authority have been involved in the emergency response at all levels, including strategic, tactical and operational. Additionally two reception centres were established for short periods and support provided to other community led rest centres.

Locality teams have also been undertaking welfare checks of those that have remained without power for several days and supported those in need of alternative accommodation.

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 Councils 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.

Waste has seen a significant rise in tonnages due to Covid with the average increase in waste across the service seen to be in the region of 10-11%. We are still reviewing and waiting for data to see if this will likely return to normal in 2022, or with the additional tonnages become the new norm.

Localism

During 2020/21, 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.

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. Work has been ongoing with the Tactical Visitor Management Group (TVMG) to ensure sufficient resources and measures are in place, and coordinated, to effectively deliver the 2021, Visitor Management Tactical Plan. The TVMG is made up of colleagues from all six Districts, the County Council, LDNPA, Cumbria Constabulary, Cumbria LEP, Cumbria Tourism, National Trust, Highways England and Cumbria Mountain Rescue.

- To respond to the governments evolving guidance (and any potential future local lockdowns/restrictions) that may impact on Cumbria;
- To use established channels to provide effective communications to people who visit/work/live in Cumbria to support the safe social and economic recovery of our communities and tourism businesses; and
- To engage with, and reassure our communities to support the maintenance of trust and confidence in the multi-agency working arrangements.

Work undertaken in the South Lakeland Area involved a significant increase in car parking over the Summer of 2021, increased litter collections, co-ordination of litter collections with local groups, highway improvement works to reduce traffic pressures, increased signage and Marshalls being deployed to key hot spot areas.

The Council is still offering free car parking to those receiving a Covid vaccination at the Westmorland Shopping Centre. This will continue until March 2022.

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. Currently, the proposed fees and charges can be seen to have been fair and reasonable with targets being exceeded in the National Park areas.

The Council is installing new EV charging points in 10 No. car parks within the District. These will be installed and completed in January 2022.

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 has been 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
- Reminders of how we deliver Member briefings, 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.

Six new Members joined the Council following the by-elections held in May, August and September 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
- Charing Skills
- Online expenses training
- Licensing Committee Decision Making and Taxi Licensing training
- Committee related refresher training

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

Legal Governance and Democracy Services

The Lead Specialist Legal Governance and Democracy is the Technical Lead for the Legal and Democratic work stream of the LGR work and Chairs the Cumbria Monitoring Officers Group. Reporting to Lawrence Conway who is the Sponsor for the work stream.

Work has been focused on the response to the draft Structural Changes Order and preparing for the requirements of the Order including the establishment of the Joint Committees and the Shadow Authority. Work streams have been identified and include but are not limited to member allowances, the member code of conduct, the constitutions, the Legal and Governance Structures and contracts.

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. Training will be provided on delegated decision making through the system aligned to the recent improvements made to the Councils Constitution. The team are working hard to implement agile functionality to the system. They are also proactively engaged in the LGR work.

The team have organised and delivered a number of Council meetings since the last report. All held face to face and we have supported officers, members and the public in attending the meetings. An increase in work relating to licensing has seen an increase in the number of licensing hearings.

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. Training has been delivered on the new Member code of Conduct to all new members and existing members.

Training has been provided on the Armed Forces Covenant by the Monitoring Officer for all staff and positive praise was received from members.

The Legal, Governance and Democracy team have been extremely busy, working on strategic priorities such as S106 agreements relating to affordable housing. S106 agreements have been addressed led by the Monitoring Officer and the team has progressed 38 agreements, completing 30 (6 of which have been completed in the 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 Review of the Constitution continues with this being treated as living document to review rather than an annual review approach. Cabinet and Council have approved the changes to the Contract Procedure Rules, which will clarify decision-making and ensure that agile decisions can be taken. Further reports are being considered by Cabinet and Council in December relating to the Finance Procedure Rules and delegated decision-making relating to Property Services resulting from the insourcing of the Property Services Contract.

The team are embedding new ways of working and are holding Business-partnering meetings with services.

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.

Our Litigation Specialist has been coordinating the Councils response to the Judicial Review regarding Local Government Reorganisation. We have dealt successfully with a Licensing appeal and were awarded our costs, which we are now recovering.

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, as at 5 November 2021, is £111,944.30. The debt has been reduced by £93,055.70 in under twelve months and overall the outstanding Debt position continues to improve.

The team have been contributing towards the delivery of corporate priorities recently completing the Braithwaite Fold Lease to Caravanning and Camping Club and agreements to permit Cumbria County Council to access Gooseholme and New road to progress the footbridge works.

We have been completing a number of agreements relating to Cross a Moor Roundabout scheme, Coastal Communities grant funding agreements, Choice Based Letting Contracts and other strategic contract work.

Finally, the Legal team were shortlisted for an 'In House Team of the Year' award by the Law Society. The Law Society awards are national awards open to all solicitors in private practice and in house. Despite a challenging year for all solicitors, our shortlisting was national recognition of the outstanding work accomplished by the team. Although we did not win the overall award, the team were thrilled to have been recognised in this way.

Human Resources

The Council continues to work hard to recruit new employees and develop existing employees with a view to delivering an excellent service to our customers. Recruitment activity has

remained extremely busy throughout the year, with the additional challenge of an increasing number of vacancies across the UK.

We have conducted development conversations with most employees during the year, and are now starting to deliver training solutions to meet the needs of our employees. This process has been bolstered by the introduction of 'Your Conversation' appraisal sessions whereby we have achieved a near-100% completion rate against our target population. We are also running a leadership development programme for all people managers within the organisation, building on the skills and toolsets available to our leaders.

We continue to support our colleagues through a wide range of wellbeing activities and support networks, and via regular two-way communication sessions. We have run two health and wellbeing surveys this year and have seen overall positivity increase from 68% in April 2021 to 70% in October 2021.

Corporate Health and Safety

There is continued focus on improvement to health and wellbeing. An employee health and wellbeing survey has been undertaken. There is continued work on improving risk assessments and safe working practices, including a regular updating of arrangements for Covid secure operations.

Tracking Information

Signed off by	Date sent	Date Signed off
Section 151 Officer	N/A	N/A
Monitoring Officer	N/A	N/A
CMT	N/A	N/A

Circulated to	Date sent
Lead Specialist	03/12/21
Human Resources Lead Specialist	N/A
Communications Team	N/A
Leader	N/A
Committee Chairman	N/A
Portfolio Holder	03/12/21
Ward Councillor(s)	N/A
Committee	04/03/22
Executive (Cabinet)	N/A
Council	N/A