



Report of Councillor Mike Hallam Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services

March 2023

1) Customer Services

In the first three quarters of the financial year (to the end of Dec 2022), the Customer Services department has received over 335,000 calls, 74,000 emails and 10,500 face-to-face interactions.

In response to the cost of living issues and increasingly complexities, the team have worked hard with colleagues in other departments, particularly Housing and Revenues and Benefits, to put in place processes which assist customers in a timely and efficient way, with consideration for their specific vulnerabilities.

Connected Customers

Moving all contact centres onto one Customer Experience Management system is partly complete, with the Complaints and Members Enquiries processes going live imminently, and the Daventry hub transitioning onto the same platform over the coming months. This is a huge success, as it allows the teams to work in the same way regardless of their previous sovereign council, improves the customer experience by reducing hand-off points and starts to provide us with invaluable intelligence about our customers.

The roll-out of outreach surgeries which allow us to support the most vulnerable customers in their own community and deal with complex cases face to face, is now seeing customer service advisors and colleagues from other departments attending regular session in the following areas:

- Blackthorn Community Centre
- Brackley Library
- Briar Hill Community Centre
- Crick Old School
- Daventry – Southbrook Community Centre
- Hunsbury Library
- Kings Heath Primary Academy
- Moulton Library
- Salvation Army Centre
- St Luke's Primary Care Centre
- Weston Favell Library
- Woodford Halse

We will also shortly be launching our Accessibility and Inclusivity Strategy, which will focus on making access to information and advice easily accessible for all, with particular focus on translations, easy read and utilising our community networks to promote messages which are important to residents. The first topic we will be piloting will be the Cost-of-Living information available online.

Consultation is currently underway with colleagues in the Customer Contact team of Revenues and Benefits, for them to join the Customer Services division so that residents from all areas of West Northamptonshire receive the same level of service when contacting us.

We are close to finalising the arrangements for the opening of the Daventry One Stop Shop at the Abbey Centre, which will see a multi-agency space open to the public, where residents can complete a range of tasks with assistance from customer services advisors and have access to specialist advice when needed.

b. Emergency planning and Business Continuity

The main focus of the Emergency Planning team has been on planning for the possibility of power outages, working with partners in the Local Resilience Forum to develop plans which can be tested. A 3-day national exercise is taking place at the end of March, to test the preparedness of the local partners in the eventuality of a widespread loss of electricity.

In terms of Business Continuity, we are working with colleagues across the organisation to ensure their contingency and mitigation plans are adequate and up to date, with a specific focus on cyber-security.

2) Legal and Democratic Services

Legal Services:

The work towards a new, in-house comprehensive legal services for West Northants has continued at pace. In January the new structure of the service was considered by the unions and the structure went out to consultation. The proposed structure includes a number of trainee roles to support the growth of our own in-house lawyers and supports the development of those that choose to come and work for us. The structure has now been agreed and the majority of the roles are now out to advert, with the remaining more junior roles to be advertised over the next two weeks. To support the recruitment, a designated legal services landing page has been developed and a number of articles will be appearing in the specialist press to raise the profile of the Council through the work of the Deputy Director and her profile within the wider local government law community. Additionally, the recruitment team will be actively 'headhunting' potential candidates and series of posts promoting the opportunities will appear on LinkedIn.

Work has also been undertaken progressing the new cloud-based case management system which will support the team and the financial charging model which will help to deliver the savings. A communication plan is also underway to explain how the new team will support services across the council and the new charging arrangements.

Development of Legal Services Intranet page have been commenced and will provide a useful resource to officers across the Council when contacting and instructing the team.

The legal team has meanwhile been increasing the volume and variety of work undertaken which includes some previous county council function work and all existing staff members have been informed of what their new position will be in the re-structure. This has prompted interest in progression opportunities and se team members are exploring development opportunities.

Democratic and Electoral Services:

Democratic Services have facilitated a number of high-profile scrutiny reviews, including the scrutiny of the 2023-24 budget and a review of child and adolescent mental health and the risk of self-harm. These are examples of the type of reviews the Council's overview and scrutiny function is able to deliver in order to support the Council and its partners to fulfil their strategic objectives. The team have also been working with colleagues from other departments to improve the potential of meetings spaces in Northampton in order to improve the range of meetings that are webcast via the Council's YouTube account. This work should be completed by the time of the annual meeting in May. Work has also started on the final phase of the review of electoral boundaries, following publication of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's proposals earlier this month.

The elections team have completed work on the annual canvas and have now distributed the register to political parties, credit reference agencies and other organisations entitled to receive a copy. Much of the teams' focus has been on ensuring the Council is ready to implement the provisions of the Elections Act. This includes managing the new Voter ID process and reviewing polling stations to ensure they are able to meet new access requirements. The team are also in the process of procuring contracts for elections software and printing.

Coroners and Registration:

Since Ceremonies online went live in October 2022 the Registration Service has been looking at the old legacy website and working with the web team on moving all historical information to the West Northants Website and the changes are due to go live Wednesday 8th March.

On 27th February 2023 the legal age of marriage rose from 16 years to 18 years. The service implemented changes to the booking system and updated all approved venues in West Northants.

It's been a busy period since the last update for both services due to winter pressures and increased deaths. The Coroners Service delivered training and site familiarisation at The Leys to Northants Police in November 2022 for Excess Deaths. This partnership working will support the county in the event of a Mass Fatality. Health reported this winter as the worst winter pressures in history. The Registration Service had already increased death Registration appointments by 50% in preparedness to start after Christmas and for the first 2 weeks of 2023, but this was extended until the beginning of February 2023.

Referrals to the Coroners Service and total deaths registered in January 2023 have increased when compared to January 2022. (Coroners in January 2022 was 218, and this year January 2023 resulted in 272 referrals. Registration in January 2022 we registered 300 deaths, and this year 336 registered).

The increase in deaths placed pressure on both KGH and NGH Hospital mortuary capacities, and the request to activate The Leys was made live on 28th December. Staff were diverted from the Coroners Service to run The Leys with support from Northants Police, and Fire and Rescue for the body transport system. The decision to deactivate The Leys happened on 7th February. The Leys received 120 deceased during this activation. The impact in the spike in deaths was felt by other NHS Trusts regionally and The Leys received requests from other x3 other Local Resilience Forums to support for mutual aid. These requests were escalated and approved, but each area was able to manage and did not utilise The Leys.

The services are now forward planning for the new Statutory Medical Examiner system due 1st April 2023 and making the relevant changes in the diaries for Easter, and the 3 Bank Holidays that are due in May to support bereaved families and Hospital Mortuaries during these tim

3) Human Resources

Pay & Grading:

Local pay bargaining with the recognised Trade Unions commenced in January following submission of the joint pay claim. The team are currently modelling options for consideration later in March following the national pay award off which was made on 23 February 2023 which will see a minimum rate of pay on the national NJC payscale of £11.59 per hour.

Increments: Qualification for incremental progression is currently being reviewed and increments will be implemented in the April payroll.

Pay and Grading Project: Implementation has been delayed to 1st June 2023, backdated to April. This was because of the number of factors including the size of the workforce now on interim terms (c. 46%) and delays in receiving completed matching paperwork. The implementation date of June reflects a number of scheduled activities in business systems

affecting all partners, and payroll, including ensuring the payment of increments, meaning June was the next available implementation window.

Learning & Development: The disaggregation of the team from NNC is on track to complete on 31 March, which will leave only the Apprenticeships service under the IAA and supplied by NNC (for another year). We are currently reviewing the future structure of the team and will be restructuring shortly.

The learning management system has been successful split from the combined system and on 3 March 2023 we launched the new look 'ilearn' platform which is fully branded for West Northants and picks up elements of our 'where careers thrive' employer branding.

The Learning & Development Business Partners have been talking to services to understand learning needs in order to help us define and shape the core learning offer and other directorate specific/specialist training requirements.

People Strategy: Year two delivery is now underway following revisions to the delivery model. The main focus for year two is around talent management, succession planning, EDI, culture and management excellence.

Health Safety and Wellbeing: The Wellbeing Strategy is now live, and the team are working closely with Public Health on various wellbeing activities including our newly launched Walk West. The Health & Safety Advisors are also fully engaged on the building optimisation project and in addition reviewing processes and tools that support our lone workers to stay safe, putting in improvements to practise and ensuring all lone worker devices are being fully utilised or re-assigning them to other services.

Payroll: Continues to provide a strong service across all its customers with over 99% accuracy rate. The new helpdesk system Halo launched in the Autumn and we are starting to see the data from it showing that 98.5% of feedback responses were positive about the service they had received from payroll: *"Great service. Answered my query promptly with exactly what i required. Brilliant"...* *"Staff were helpful, friendly and professional, I was really pleased that payroll issues for my staff were not delayed."...* *"Having experienced other services in health I am so impressed with this service. So quick to act and helpful and supportive. Thank you*

4) Digital, Technology and Innovation

Telephony

We have recently concluded our tender for new telephony and will be able to announce our new supplier imminently. This new tool will be the first cross-WNC system uniting all of our sites with a single solution, erasing some of the technological divides that still exist between former council premises. It will enable us to site staff in any location and maintain a full service,

and the contact centre we are procuring will allow us to engage with residents seamlessly in ways they choose in the future: phone, instant message, social media, WhatsApp and more. We expect to roll this out over the next six months.

Hardware refresh

We recently awarded a contract to supply staff computer hardware and desk kit (CDW) for the new four years. Our rollout will provision all staff with modern computers and simple, powerful kit at office desks to work with. For the first time, staff devices will work seamlessly across all former council locations and staff will be able to visit their most convenient office location for any necessary changes or repairs. This will be a rarity: our new computers can be repaired remotely even when software is critically broken. Our turnaround times for shipping new devices are planned to fall from a lead time of up to three months, to five working days.

Cyber Security

We have signed a deal with Cysiam for our new cyber security SOC and SIEM solution. This tool will patrol our digital borders, actively scanning every computer on our estate, combing through the digital equivalent of seven copies of the collected works of Shakespeare every second of every day, looking for evidence of intrusion. This is backed up by a 24/7/365 monitoring team at our partner who will analyse any threats founds and immediately raise the alarm for our internal staff to react and provide intelligence on the issue. This is a huge step forward for our digital security.

Garden Waste

Our new Garden Waste system went live last week and allows all residents to sign up online for 2023-24, and to enrol for direct debits for ease and convenience.

Online Ceremony Registrations

We put live a new online registration system which allows couples to book ceremonies online themselves. This tool has put the tools directly in the hands of our customers, but also allowed us to release three temporary admin staff, cut the time for service for our main team and cleared the waiting lists. An excellent example of digital automation in action, and how technology can drive benefits and savings.

West Ways of Working

We have been working with the Place team to remodel our property use and migrate large cohorts of staff to new office locations for more efficient ways of working. In addition to the move, we are now developing plans to revamp office WiFi, printing and network access and will bring forward plans in the coming months to improve our office experience.

New capabilities

- We are mid-hiring an Architecture team: the first time the Council has had a technical function that looks at the blueprint for all of our systems and finds ways to consolidate the entire estate to drive better outcomes.
- We are expanding our new Cyber Security function: again, the first time we have had a dedicated team protecting and defending our systems.
- We have hired a new Innovation Manager who is setting up an Innovation Hub: for the first time, a dedicated technology function that will advise on the latest developments internally, partner with the community to co-design and sponsor good ideas, and bid for innovation funding to come to WNC.

Councillor Mike Hallam

Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services