Corporate Performance Update: Q3 (Oct – Dec) 2023-24

ORGANISATIONAL HEALTH (*Resources / Community Engagement & Wellbeing*)

- **Manage our budget effectively and efficiently**
- **Make sure our workforce is diverse, skilled and highly motivated**
- **Harness digital technology for the benefit of the resident**
- **Be open and accountable**
- **Improve the resident experience**

Manage our budget effectively and efficiently   (*Resources*)

Key successes

- **General Fund Forecast Outturn Variance from Balanced Budget reduced** from £5.8m in Q2 to £0.4m in Q3. There was a significant gross overspend of £12.4m before applying (a one-off) c£12m of contingencies, bringing the net overspend down to £0.4m. The improvement in position since Q2 followed favourable movements on corporate items including capital financing/interest payable and interest receivable estimates. These improvements were also supplemented with a lower than budgeted pay award and an additional in year grant from the Government.
- The council continues to successfully manage **financial risk associated with debt**. Total debt and the cost of debt servicing as a proportion of core spending power remain lower than in the previous 5 years. This is expected to reverse going forward as the capital programme is delivered and increased borrowing incurred.
- We are on track to exceed our year-end target for the **collection of business rates**.

Key challenges

- **While stable, significant financial challenges exist**. There were improvements within corporate items however these masked a gross directorate problem which worsened by c£0.5m since Q2 to £19.7m.
- **Collection of council tax has fallen slightly** below target making it unlikely that we'll hit our end of year target, based on pre-pandemic levels of collection, but are likely to achieve similar rates to the end of last year. The target is deliberately set above the level set in the budget. The amount of income is sufficient to achieve a balanced budget.

Focus going forward

- The focus going forward is to bring the directorate level overspend down. The budget set for 2024/25 contains growth to deal with recurrent pressures from 2023/24. This means we go in to the new financial year with a clean slate. Managing growing pressures down will help financial sustainability across the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period.

Make sure our workforce is diverse, skilled and highly motivated   (*Resources*)

Key successes

- **Sickness absence** dropped for the third consecutive quarter to an average of 8.4 days per employee in Q3 and is on track to be lower than last year. This trend was seen across all directorates in the council. Sickness absence in the Council is now considerably lower than the London Councils average (9.27 days) and the public sector as a whole (10.6 days). While short-

term absence increased slightly in Q3 on Q2, which is to be expected in the winter months, the number of staff on long term absence (off for 20+ consecutive days) reduced by 15% (59 people). Long term sickness in Q3 was also nearly 12% (46 people) lower than in Q1. This is good news overall, suggesting that the work of the Employee Relations team in supporting managers with returns to work is helping.

- We continue to see a rise in the percentage of **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff** within the top 5% of earners in the Council. A further increase of 1.4% since Q2 means that this metric is now over 3% above the London Council's average.

Key challenges

- The use of **agency staff** increased in Q3. While this reduced in Q2 (13.94%), it increased in Q3 (16.46%) to be higher than Q1 (14.09%) and is now higher than London Councils average (15%). This trend was seen across all directorates except Adult Social Care, where agency staff reduced from Q1 to Q3 by 1.82%, and Public Health, which had no agency staff in Q1 or Q3. 165 new agency workers were employed in Q3 than Q2. This was driven mainly by an increase in Social and Healthcare Qualified and Admin and Clerical staff. Islington placements over 4 years decreased by 5 in Q3. Job roles over 4 years compare similarly with other London Boroughs with most being in Adult and Children Social Care as well as long-serving Operatives/Drivers.

- **Spend on agency staff** has grown over the year to be 25% higher in Q3 than Q1 and 18% higher than Q2. Homes & Neighbourhoods is the biggest spender by directorate, up by 21% from Q2. It makes up 30% of total spend, driven by more hours, FTE, and timesheets. Carpenter/Multi-trade and other similar jobs added £454K to this area in Q3. Environment & Climate Change is the second biggest spender, at 20% of Q3's total spend (£2.74M). It also had the second highest increase (30.1%) with job titles such as, Loader, Sweeper, and other related jobs adding £411K to this area. Adult Social Care is the third biggest spender, at 14% of total spend for Q3. It had a 9% increase from Q2. Social Workers in Adult Social Care and other similar jobs added £127K to this area in Q3.

Focus going forward

- Reducing **agency usage** remains a priority area. Directorates can access agency data reports, Challenge Panel were completed in Q3, action plans are now in place and quarterly meetings are taking place with Matrix Business Managers to understand and respond to highlighted issues and trends. A new Strategic Resourcing Lead has been appointed and is currently reviewing what initiatives can be taken to reduce agency usage.
- Reducing **long-term absence** remains an area of focus for the Employee Relations team in supporting managers with returns to work.

Harness digital technology for the benefit of the resident   (*Resources*)

Key successes

The Data Platform programme is delivering 5 use cases, of which two have been delivered in Q3:

- The **Assistive Technology** (AT) programme was run by Adult Social Care (ASC) and its aim was to install tech (alarms, sensors, comms etc...) into the homes of vulnerable elderly people so they may not need much more expensive and disruptive services like domiciliary or even residential care. Our project was to tap into the various recording systems used by ASC and ingest data into the data platform that could then be used to build a Power BI dashboard that shows the KPIs, and other measures used to track performance of the programme.

- The **Finance monitoring** use case's objective was to connect to the Cedar finance monitoring system, ingest approx. 12 database tables, and create 5 data marts that our Finance team can use to create reports and dashboards that would support their monitoring and reporting. The tables and marts have been created; this was the scope of first phase of the project. The Finance team are currently cleansing data in the Cedar system and drawing up the specifications for the reports and measures that they need.

Key challenges

- The number of **down-time incidents** typically affecting more than 100 staff or residents or significantly impairing applications or access increased in Q3 to 19 (from 14 in Q2 and 10 in Q1), although only one breached SLA. So, although the number increased, the impact on residents and staff was relatively low as they were dealt with in a timely manner and resolved within agreed timescales. As with the last quarter, most were caused by hosted platforms and infrastructure. The higher number could also be due to better reporting.

Focus going forward

- To reduce the impact of **downtime incidents**, we continue to work with our suppliers to review and understand their SLA's for dealing with outages.

Be open and accountable (*Resources*)

Key successes

- A huge success was achieved in Q3: 90% of **Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests and Subject Access Requests (SARs)** were completed within target time in Q3. This represents a dramatic improvement in performance for SARs (from a low of 65% in 2021/22) and the first time we have hit targets for both set by the Information Commissioner's Office (90%). It follows steady improvements in performance throughout the year for both areas as the services were fully centralised. The number of FOIs received remained constant through the year, suggesting genuine improvements in performance. The number of SARs received in Q2 and Q3 were both lower than in Q1, suggesting improvements in performance and reduced workload were at play. Should numbers increase, it is possible that performance figures could drop again, but the changes in the services will hopefully continue to produce good results.

Key challenges

- Data quality around **members enquiries** is still too poor to accurately report numbers received and % completed within time, although work on the system has resumed and this should improve. In the absence of accurate data, % of completions is thought to be below target.

Focus going forward

- To ensure that improvements on **FOIs** are sustained, the Information Governance team will continue to work with service areas to speed up responses as well as proactively publish more information so that it is readily available.
- To ensure that the improvements to **SARs** compliance are sustained, further improvements in the process are planned for Q4. These include co-locating council scanning services, improving team access to information (where appropriate) and purchasing specialist software to improve the speed and accuracy of redactions.

- As part of our continued recognition of the need to improve & have organisational collaboration and oversight, the Councils Monitoring officer has requested to attend the **Complaints** board at intervals to establish information behind the data.

Improving the resident experience   *(Community Engagement & Wellbeing)*

Key successes

- Implementation of the resident after-call surveys. All calls scored '0' were listened to and where residents received 1st time resolution and excellent service we share with colleagues. Due to the increase of completed surveys the data is used for feedback and insight into resident opinion of our services officers.
- Upgrade to public pc network and Wi-Fi to improve speed and experience for users.
- Launched a new cloud-based modern intranet, Islington Connect, to replace izzi, extending access to thousands more staff and establishing new ways of communicating – with 22,463 site visits in its first week in December.
- Held the first all-staff briefing from the Acting Head of Paid Service and CMB, with more than 1,000 joining.
- Established a new CARE internal sub-brand to replace various internal communications and OD logos, colour palettes and sub-brands.
- Launched initial public affairs campaigns around the government's Autumn Statement, Wellington Mews and the Household Support Fund, securing media coverage and a question in the House of Commons.
- Website homepage improvements and search went live.

Key challenges

- IT down time for forms and Civica Pay.
- Delay to launching an internal culture change/transformation campaign tied to the 'six fundamental shifts' in the Islington Together 2030 Plan, due to ongoing discussions around governance and delivery.

Focus going forward

- More detailed reports from 8x8 includes wrap up codes on calls, giving a greater understanding of residents contacting us. We have identified changes to be made in Q4 to for response rates, channel shift via IVR messaging and information.
- Agreeing and launching new strategic narratives to frame external communications around the Community Wealth Building, A Safe Place to Call Home and Greener, Healthier missions.
- Developing recommendations to reduce sub-brands for CMT, and a core brand implementation plan and refreshed set of guidelines.
- Developing a new Communications and Engagement Strategy, working with the Strategy and Engagement service.
- Launching a new 'employer value proposition' sub-brand, and marketing collateral, with the Recruitment service, with a unified look and feel and messaging to support recruitment.
- With a steer/support from the new Chief Executive, review the EPICs, Stars of the Month, and organisational change campaign to align with strategic direction of the council.
- Managing tricky external communications around the council's budget, the Finsbury Leisure Centre proposals and green waste charge proposals.

Resident View – COMPLAINTS (WHOLE COUNCIL)

The number of **stage 1 complaints** continued to grow in Q3, with a 10% increase in the number in the year to date compared to the same period last year. A similar percentage was upheld compared to previous periods. 81% were received by housing. The top three complaints areas remained: responsive repairs, anti-social behaviour and targeted tenancy services.

The number of **Stage 2 complaints** investigated also continues to grow and is 28% higher in the year to date than the same period last year. This was in part attributable to previous backlogs of stage 2 cases. A relatively high proportion (62%) of these were upheld (mostly due to housing) and this year is set to have the highest rate of stage 2 complaints upheld yet (since 2019/20).

In Q3, 90% of **cases escalated from stage 1 to stage 2** were for housing repairs. We continue to see high escalations from stage 1 to 2 for housing complaints currently standing at around 25% against a monthly target of 8%.

Compensation: In the year to date, £103k has been awarded in compensation at stages 1 and 2.

The number of cases initiated by the **Ombudsman** also continues to grow, with more than three times as many cases initiated in the year to date (107) than the same period last year (32). 75% (80) of these were from the Independent Housing Ombudsman. In the year to date, there have been 64 **decisions of maladministration** (upholds) compared to 7 in the same period last year. 69% (44) of the determinations were from the Housing Ombudsman. The increase in IHO cases can in part be attributed to the backlog of cases held by the Ombudsman. This said, there was a slight decrease in ombudsman maladministration decisions in Q3 with 19 decisions, reflecting improvements in complaint handling and response times.

The **ombudsman decisions** up to Q3 relate to complaints processed from 2020 to date and most reflect issues known during this time. These include **delays in complaint handling**, **non-compliance to the Housing Ombudsman Code** Dec 2020, **increase in cases of damp and mould and ASB**. Reoccurring themes include **poor communication**, **record keeping**, **complaint handling**, **following council procedure in respect to ASB and repairs**.

Table: Upheld Ombudsman decisions by Directorate (64) April 2023- Dec 2023

Directorate	Decisions	Service failure
Housing	44	Failures in complaint handling at stage 1 and 2. Responsive repairs (21), including handling of damp and mould, property conditions, Handling of ASB (10), others include homelessness and tenancy matters.
Environment	5	Blue Badge assessments – LA wide increase in complaints to the ombudsman as a recourse to overturn decisions. Ombudsman ordering reassessments of applications.
Adult Social Care	4	Care plan, payments fees and communication.
Children's Services	3	SEND service – service provision, providing appeal rights.
PFI & TMO	3	Failures in complaint handling at stage 1 and 2. Repairs and property conditions.
Community Engagement & Wellbeing	2	Late stage 2 and usage of community centre.

Community Wealth Building	2	Benefit assessment and planning decision.
Resources	1	Public Report, Council's backlog of Stage 2 complaints.

A high number of ombudsman activity and upheld decisions are expected to be seen in the rest of 2023/24 and into Q1 of 2024/25.

Compliance: Big improvements have been seen throughout the year in terms of the percentage of stage 1 complaints completed within deadline, rising from 28% in Q1 to 83% in Q3. Stage 2 complaints are still being completed within deadline.

Resident view – RESOURCES
- Few stage 1 complaints – reducing throughout the year and on track to have the lowest year to date (since 2020/21), with 8 upheld.
- Few stage 2 complaints received (3), only 1 of which was upheld – again a record low.
- No complaints investigations initiated by the ombudsman.

Resident View – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & WELLBEING

Complaints received included – young people smoking outside of the libraries, Black History Month activities not being displayed on the website, USB port on library pc not working.

To celebrate **National Libraries week** in October users told us why they love libraries, including:
- The wide range of books, resources and services. It also provides an oasis of tranquillity.
- It has very nice books and it has activities some days.
- It is my safe space, my place to get books/graphic novels, print, be calm and enjoy seeing staff (who are excellent).
- When I visit the library, the staff help me and I feel happy, comfortable and able to get all the help and support from staff. Lovely books and a great place for everyone no matter what the age.
- It is real and personal. Not electronic!
- It is local and a core part of my community.

Customer service:
- Thank you once again for providing such a high level of service, and please extend my appreciation to your employee for his outstanding assistance.
- I called the Islington council this after at around 4.09pm and explained that I needed some information about my sister's council tax refund, and that the information was sent to the witness address instead of myself, who is actually the attorney for my sister. Kathy, was very polite, understanding and a very good listener and excellent telephone manner. Who advised me what to do via emailing the appropriate department and updating them. It is not often that council staff get the recognition that they deserve from customers/ clients.