

Corporate Performance Update

Q4 (Jan – March 2024) / End of year 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 in 2023/24

- The **General Fund Forecast Outturn** (provisional) **Variance from Balanced Budget** ended the year with significant gross overspend of £12m before applying around £12m of contingencies, to bring the net overspend down to break even.
- The council continues to successfully manage **financial risk associated with debt**. The cost of debt servicing as a proportion of core spending power ends the year lower than in the previous five years. The total debt as a % of core spending power increased this year on last but remains lower than earlier years. A growth in debt is expected and will continue into 2024/25 as the capital programme is delivered and increased borrowing is incurred.
- Provisional calculations of **reserves** at the end of 2023/24 show that non-ringfenced reserves both as a percentage of net revenue expenditure and as a percentage of service spend are likely to be broadly in line with 2022/23. These metrics are not finalised until the net revenue expenditure apportionments are calculated in the council's RO Return submitted to the government later in the financial year. Total non-ringfenced reserves have increased compared to 2022/23 but likely not at a level to significantly outstrip the increase in revenue expenditure. The council plans to build resilience in reserves in future budget processes, this being a key medium-term financial strategy principle.

Key challenges in 2023/24

- **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. The 2024/25 budget setting process sought to address these issues by providing additional funding to problem areas.
- **Collection of council tax and business rates** ended the year comparable to last year and sufficient to achieve a balanced budget, but slightly below the target of pre-pandemic collection levels. Council tax collection started to fall below profiled target from Q2. Business Rates collection has been strong though the year, but receipts declined in Q4.

Focus going forward for 2024/25

- The focus going forward in to 2024/25 can be expressed as two key priorities: The first to ensure that the significant pressures across directorates are not repeated and that emerging pressures are managed. The second priority is about ensuring that the significant gap across the medium

term is closed in conjunction with the articulation of the council's delivery plan and business planning process.

Make sure our workforce is diverse, skilled and highly motivated

(Resources)

Key successes in 2023/24

- **Sickness absence:** After starting the year with a relatively high levels of sickness level, sickness absence dropped through the year to end at 8.1 days per employee – lower than the previous year and one of Islington's lowest rates of sickness of the past 6 years. This compares well to London Councils 2022/23 average of 9.27 days and the public sector as a whole (10.6 days). This reduction during the year was driven by drops in both short- and long-term absence (20+ days) compared to 2022/23.
- The percentage of **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff** within the top 5% of earners in the Council average for 2023/24 was the Council's highest to date (since 2018/19) at 31%, 10% points above the London Council's average for 2022/23 of 20%. Similarly, the percentage of disabled staff in the top 5% of earners in 2023/24 was the Council's highest to date at 11% but remained lower than London Councils' average (14%) and there is a continued drive to increase the number of staff sharing equality data including disability.
- **Apprenticeships:** External apprentice recruits increased through the year to end 6% above last year, 33% above 21/22 and more consistent with 19/20 and 20/21.

Key challenges in 2023/24

- **Agency staff use** was a key challenge for the council in 2023/24. While it dipped in Q2, it increased over the year by 3.4 percentage points to end the year with the highest agency quarterly usage rate (17.5%). Islington's agency use is now higher than London Councils' median in 2022/23 (15%) (although this year's data for London Councils is not yet available). While agency usage (as a % of FTE) decreased in Adult Social Care by 3 percentage points across the year, it increased in all other directorates that used agency staff with biggest growth in Environment & Climate Change (7% points).
- The increase in **agency use** over the last 2 quarters is due to an increase in the use of interim agency support in areas such as project management, building services, operational social care; and an increase in the use of operative roles such as road-sweepers, groundsmen and building workers. This is a result of EU workers returning to their country of origin and post-Brexit immigration rules as well as well-reported, skills gaps in construction and healthcare.
- **Apprenticeships:** 2023/24 saw a decrease in Internal 'FUUSE' apprenticeships compared to previous years. This is an area of focus going forward (see below) and an uplift is expected in 2024/25.

Focus going forward for 2024/25

- Reducing **agency usage** and **agency spend** are priority areas. Work is ongoing with the Challenge Panels to bring down the numbers of agency workers across directorates with a series of initiatives focusing on the conversion of agency to fixed term or permanent roles (where appropriate) and targeted recruitment campaigns in skills-shortage areas. There is also a focus on reducing the cost of the service providing the agency workers through a range of contract management initiatives to reduce agency margins and associated costs.

- Sustaining the reduction in **sickness absence** and further reducing **long-term absence** remains an area of focus for the Employee Relations team in giving managers the tools and skills to manage employee absence and returns to work.
- **Apprenticeships:** Vacant roles at Sc6 and below are being considered for apprenticeships in the first instance to increase opportunities. Apprenticeships are also being developed as part of workforce planning in hard to fill roles. Workforce planning initiatives are being undertaken with directorates to address skills gaps, create career pathways, and increase upskilling opportunities across teams using the apprenticeship levy.

The employee view

A colleague survey was carried out at the end of 2023/24, to which 41% of employees responded. While results are still emerging, some key high-level results are available.

Successes:

- Responses to all questions were more positive (58%) or the same (42%) as the last survey in 2021 – none were down.
- **Employee engagement** is 77% (up 9 percentage points from 2021), which indicates how connected employees are to the organisation and its goals, which is also significantly above local authority benchmarking, by 11%. 76% feel a strong connection to Islington Council – up 10% points from 2021.
- **Staff are positive about the CARE values:** 93% feel they demonstrate the CARE values in their work and staff feel much clearer than in 2021 about how to do this (up 19% points from 2021) and believe that senior management demonstrate the CARE values (up 15% points from 2021).
- Staff were most clear on what was expected of them in their job and the Council's ambitions to create an equal Islington.
- **Management:** staff respond very positively across a range of questions about their manager and great improvement is seen in how staff feel their manager deals with poor performance (up 15% points from 2021).
- Staff respond positively across questions on **equality, equity, diversity and inclusion**.
- **Wellbeing and resilience:** On the whole, staff respond positively across these questions, with 78% feeling they recover quickly after dealing with challenges and 81% feeling their line manager supports them with challenges in their role. However, only 56% would feel comfortable saying a mental health issue was a reason for sickness absence, 66% feel supported by the Council to manage their mental health and wellbeing (up 4% points from 2021) and 67% feel they achieve a good balance between work and home life (up 7% points from 2021).

Challenges:

- The most negative response was around **career progression**, with 39% happy with where they are in their career and not looking to progress and 52% seeing opportunities to progress their career at Islington. However, 84% say their work gives them a strong sense of personal accomplishment (up 8 percentage points from 2021) yet only 44% feel recognised or rewarded for performing well. 31% of staff (the highest proportion) want pay, benefits recognition and rewards to be the top priority.
- Just over half (53%) of staff feel that Islington Council is enabling **dynamic leadership** and governance or investing in a high performing workforce.
- On **innovation and change**, a high percentage of staff understand the need to modernise or change the way we work (87%) and improve our digital tools (90%), but staff feel we

could use our resources more effectively (53%) and only 56% feel we use evidence to make decisions.

- While employee experience is generally high across all questions, only 61% feel they have a **manageable workload**, although this was up 3% points from 2021.
- On **leadership**, only 63% staff feel that senior managers are visible (up 15% points from 2021), the same feel that senior managers have a clear and ambitious vision for the future of the council (up 5% points from 2021) and only 55% of staff have confidence in the decisions made by the Council's senior managers (up 2% points from 2021).

Harness digital technology for the benefit of the resident

(Resources)

Key successes in 2023/24

- In 2023/24 we have successfully delivered 26 projects. These projects had a high impact to residents and the overall councils IT infrastructure and resilience. The Projects that had high resident impact were:
 - DEP Council tax use case – This DEP use case aimed to transition existing council tax services from my eAccount to My Islington allowing residents to manage their council tax accounts on a modern digital platform. The New My Islington Resident Portal went live January 2024. Over 70,000 existing Council Tax My eAccounts were migrated to My Islington allowing simple sign up for existing customers. Refreshed processes for view account, adding/linking account, and paperless billing processes went live 16 January
 - GovMetric Complaints system – The project implemented a resident complaints capability to allow online complaint submission and the associated complaint management processes for Access Islington
 - Commercial & Domestic waste Phase 2 (Report it Waste management) – This phase implemented an online form for residents to report domestic waste issues.
 - Commercial & Domestic waste Phase 1(Street Cleansing) – This phase Implemented a new back-office Waste Management Application (Alloy) to modernise service delivery for Street cleansing.
- There were no successful **cyber attacks** this year, demonstrating the success of the safeguards in place to manage attempts on our digital systems.
- Over the year, the number of **'downtime' incidents** (typically affecting more than 100 staff or residents or significantly impairing applications) was lower than in the previous two years and most of these were dealt with in a timely manner (within agreed timescales) – in fact, the average annual rate of resolution within agreed timescales was the highest to date this year – and so impact on residents, revenue and staff was relatively low.

Key challenges in 2023/24

- In 2023/24 we averaged at 81% for projects on track which was in line with the target.
- Since then, to enable us to maintain and exceed targets, we have continued to work with PM's and have introduced a PMO capability within the team to provide KPI's, reporting and QA. This year we are already at 100% on track for projects that are Amber/Green.

Be open and accountable

(Resources)

Key successes in 2023/24

- The **Mayoral elections** ran well in May 2024, particularly considering the concerns with the new requirements for photo ID. Of the 46,786 who voted in polling stations, only 195 (0.4%) turned up without acceptable photo ID. 141 (72%) came back to the polling station with acceptable

photo ID and voted. Therefore, only 54 (0.1%) of those who turned up at polling stations did not vote. This suggests a successful communications campaign raising awareness of the changes.

- Significant performance improvements have been made this year in completing **FOIs (Freedom of Information) and SARs (Subject Access requests)**. Despite receiving a record number of FOI requests, the rate at which these were completed within target deadline (88%) was close to the ICO (Information Commissioner's Office) target (90%) and the highest annual rate to date. Similarly, 34% more SARs were received in 23/24 than in the previous year yet we achieved a higher rate of completing within target deadline (23/24: 75%; 22/23:73%). Although this annual rate of completing SARs within target deadline continues to be a way off ICO target (90%), the target was hit for Q3 for the first time since records began in 2018/19. This shows the impact of changes put in place throughout the year as services were fully centralised.
- Only two **high risk data breaches** were reported to the Information Commissioner's Office in 2023/24, one incident remains open with no further contact yet received from the ICO and one was closed by with ICO with no further action.

Focus going forward for 2024/25

- To sustain improvements on **FOIs** compliance by continuing to work with service areas to improve responsiveness and publish more information proactively.
- To continue improvements to **SARs** compliance, further improvements are planned which include co-locating some members of the team with council scanning services to improve both the time taken to scan files and the quality of the scanned documents; obtaining access to key systems (where appropriate) to reduce reliance on officers across the organisation and; purchase specialist redaction software to improve the speed and accuracy of redactions.

Improving the resident experience

(Community Engagement & Wellbeing)

Key successes in 2023/24

- Launched two high-profile external campaigns on voter ID requirements and the Islington Support Payment Scheme, to drive applications and raise awareness.
- 46,000+ new email subscribers through campaign and implementation of My Islington customer portal
- Upgrade of Public Wi- Fi and servers which has improved the capacity and speed of both the Wi-Fi and public PCs. We have seen a dramatic drop in the number of complaints relating to these issues.

Key challenges in 2023/24

- **Members Enquiries:** According to the central system used for recording and managing members enquiries, nearly 2,000 enquiries were received in 2023/24 (by Executive Members and Scrutiny Chairs). The top three issues were captured as housing repairs, housing needs & anti-social behaviour. However, there are limitations to this data, as most members enquiries received (those by Emily Thornberry and Jeremy Corbyn) are not centrally recorded and many put on the system are replied to outside the system.

Focus going forward for 2024/25

- **Members enquiries:** A review is in progress to comprehensively change the way that members enquiries are dealt with which will in future provide accurate reporting and higher quality responses. This review includes the configuration of the system, staff resources, staff customer service training and other aspects.

Resident View – COMPLAINTS (WHOLE COUNCIL)

Stage 1 complaints

- **Stage 1 complaints** increased by 15% in 2023/24 on 2022/23 to 3,926, missing the corporate target of 5% reduction on the previous year. 78% were received by Homes and Neighbourhoods and responsive repairs received the highest number of complaints.
- CWB complaints increased mainly due to new services joining in February 2023 including New Builds. There has also been improved logging and handling of complaints with the placement of a complaint lead and team.
- The increase in Environment complaints is attributed to three main areas: Parking, LTNs and blue badge complaints.
- CEW complaint volume is the lowest with most complaints due to customer services.
- 62% of **stage 1 complaints** were **upheld** this year, rising to 74% in Homes and Neighbourhoods. Over the last 3 years, the average percent upheld was 50%. This increase could indicate a lack of improvement in service delivery.

Stage 2 complaints

- The number of **Stage 2 complaints** received significantly increased in 2023/24 to 953 cases, nearly triple the number received in 2022/23. The increase in stage 2 complaints is mainly due to the increase in complaints for Housing Repairs, the quality of responses at stage 1, lack of follow up on complaint outcomes, and level of compensation awarded in recognition of service failure and distress. 61% of **stage 2 complaints** were **upheld** compared to 46% the previous year.

Ombudsman

- In 2023/24, Islington Council received 185 **Ombudsman investigations** compared to 39 in 2022/23: 145 from the Housing Ombudsman and 40 from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- There were 70 cases with findings of **Maladministration** in 2023/24 compared with 18 in 2022/23.
- The Housing Ombudsman will routinely investigate the landlord's complaint handling, this has contributed to the increase in upheld findings, due to the backlog in complaint investigations at stage 1 and 2.
- The Housing Ombudsman still has a **backlog** of cases, currently of approximately 12 months. Decisions can take 12 months or longer to be received and therefore some decisions received in 2023 are for cases investigated by the council in 2021/22. Most cases in 2023 are still pending an Ombudsman assessment or determination.

New measures

- A new complaints system was introduced this year for efficient handling of complaints and reporting on trends and outcomes and a Complaints Board established for improved governance.
- As part of the Resident Experience Programme, detailed analysis is being undertaken to map the journey, service and process improvements, and identify trends.
- In line with the complaints policy, stage 1 responses must now be signed off at head of service level.
- For every stage 2 where the decision is overturned, the central complaints team share a summary of learning, setting out what is found and how the stage 1 complaint could have been avoided or the stage 1 responses improved to prevent an escalation.
- Homes & Neighbourhoods has developed a detailed action plan in response the Housing Ombudsman (HO) scrutiny of complaint handling by the council. Task and finish groups have

also been established to target specific areas and improvements. The CCCT is involved in both plans/groups.

Resident View – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & WELLBEING

- I had to ring Islington Council regarding a PCN that I had trouble paying on automated service. Shirley and Michelle who I spoke to today not only delivered an 'old school' customer service, they went above and beyond to help me today. Michelle even rang me back to help and see if it was all sorted. Outstanding customer service from you ladies. Thank you.
- I would just like to say how helpful Jermaine on the Hub desk was to me. He was so polite & caring so felt I had to let you know very pleasant young man.
- Here to Help - I have received a further £100 from the fund. I just want to say, thank you so much. It is hugely appreciated.