

Policy & Performance Scrutiny Committee – Annual Report

Cllr Satnam Gill, Executive Member for Finance & Performance

20 January 2022

Resources - key areas of responsibility

1. Human Resources (slide 3)

2. Islington Digital Services (slide 4)

3. Law & Governance

- Democratic Services (slide 5)
- Information Governance (slide 6)
- Legal (slide 7)
- Electoral Services (slide 8)

4. Finance

- Transformation (slide 9)
 - Revenues (slide 10)
 - Finance (slide 11)
 - Internal Audit, Investigations and Risk Management (slide 12)
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Human Resources (HR)

Key Achievements

Leadership and staff development

- SOLACE Emerging Leaders Programme & Islington Management Diploma launched (30 participants) and evaluated
- Black on Board and Thresholds programmes well received
- 'Be A Brilliant Manager' programme underway
- 360 feedback with CMB rolled out – a development tool using confidential feedback from colleagues and peers

Staff engagement and inclusion

- CARE framework designed
- Appointment of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) partner (Cadence)
- Roll out of Reciprocal Mentoring Scheme to 12 pairings and cultural awareness training to 500+ managers
- Safe Space pilot – a confidential facilitated space where staff can share experiences of discrimination and racial inequality
- Staff Survey completed and action plans agreed
- Employee Assistance Programme and Occupational Health contracts extended

Systems, processes and policy

- Recruitment processes refreshed, including Diverse panels
- Internal First recruitment approach rolled out
- Refreshed Senior Officer recruitment training delivered for members
- New/refreshed policies in partnership with TUs – Menopause, Code of Conduct, Organisational change, Long Covid
- Quarterly MI reports for DMTs and CMB
- Learning Management system contract awarded – implementation March 2022.
- Agency contract procurement completed

Key Challenges

- HR vacancies needed to be filled following implementation of the new HR structure. Most vacancies will be filled by Q4.
- System improvements cannot take place until cloud migration has occurred (June 22)
- Challenging candidate-driven recruitment market
- Impact of covid on workforce

Next Steps...

Leadership and staff development

- Expand leadership development programme
- Launch second cohort of Islington Management Diploma
- Review approach to mentoring and job shadowing
- Continue roll out of 'Be a Brilliant' manager

Staff engagement and inclusion

- Embed CARE behavioural framework
- Develop an Attraction Strategy, scope out work on Employer Brand, and review staff benefits
- Agree approach for work experience / encounters, apprenticeships, graduates and internships as part of developing talent pipeline
- Roll out and embed new Welcome Pack and review induction and onboarding for hybrid working
- Deliver action plans to achieve Excellence Level in the London Healthy Workplace Charter, and Disability Confidence level 2
- Embed People Plans

Systems and processes

- Implementation of the digital improvement plan
- Implementation of new agency contract
- Launch of new Learning Management system - 'MyLearning' - and career development portal
- Performance development review completed

Islington Digital Services (IDS)

Key Achievements

- Of the 65 critical business applications, 23 are now in the cloud & 9 are 'in-flight' to move, improving resilience & service to residents.
- Cyber protection & training defended ongoing attacks.
- Data Centre power down achieved to enable generator connection.
- Completion of most of the infrastructure renewal including new Wi-Fi.
- Public Sector Network & other key certifications achieved.
- Technology Roadmap in place. Procurement of major resident-focused service platforms.
- Ongoing adaptation to the pandemic. Hybrid working styles including the technology for the FutureWork pilots.

Key Challenges

- The level of project work has tripled compared to 2019.
- The Critical Business Applications not yet migrated to cloud create the most incidents.
- This rate of change has impacted the number of incidents & outages that have impacted services to residents.
- Recruitment remains very challenging in specialist technical areas.
- Supply chain issues still require significant forward-planning. Laptops and popular IT components can take up to 6 months to obtain.
- Procurement cycles are very long and, combined with staff shortages, are a limiting factor to the pace of change.
- Burnout of key staff is high.

Next Steps...

- Continue the 2-year plan to migrate all IT services to cloud delivery as per the technology Roadmap.
- In particular, the upgrade of Environment & Planning applications together with the Digital Experience platform will provide major improvements for staff & residents.
- Adoption of a new operating model that creates a more sustainable future by
 - Working more closely with partners who can provide skills depth
 - Consolidating supply contracts
 - Lifting our work into being 'Systems Integrators' focusing on resident-impacting change rather than the mundane.

Democratic Services

Key Achievements

- Delivered a full annual programme of in-person, Covid safe, committee, Council and Executive meetings, developing bespoke plans for each.
- Implemented a new Webcasting system to live stream formal meetings held in the Council Chamber, to facilitate remote attendance by members of the public.
- Re-instated in-person Advice Surgeries for those Councillors who wished to hold them.
- Completed Induction for 6 new councillors.
- Managed larger than usual volumes of member casework.

Key Challenges

- The arrangements for in person meetings of committees, Council and the Executive and in person Advice Surgeries will be reviewed in the new year, subject to the situation with the pandemic.
- How we deliver Member Induction after the election in May 2021 may be impacted by the pandemic and any impacts will need to be mitigated to ensure that new councillors are able to fulfill their roles effectively.

Next Steps...

- Implementing hybrid meeting technology to allow members of the public and officers to attend meetings remotely, reducing risks to them and those who do have to attend in person is awaiting final approval.
- The new Member Development Manager is starting work on plans for Induction following the election in May.

Key Achievements

- Successfully implement the new case management system (iCasework) to manage Freedom of Information (FOI) and Subject Access Requests (SARs). The system manages the requests from receipt to response and has streamlined existing processes and freed up IG Team to focus efforts in improving compliance
- Information Governance and Cyber Security training platform (MetaCompliance) migrated to the cloud. Updated training rolled out to all staff – training uses videos and interactions to test understanding. This is a key part of supporting the council's compliance with data protection and freedom of information legislation
- Despite an increase in data breaches being reported to the ICO there has been no regulatory action taken. The ICO was satisfied with mitigating actions the council had taken to contain incidents
- New approach to working with Directorates to support accountability with information governance and ensure that any information governance concerns, or risks are dealt with efficiently. Meetings held to date have led to valuable information sharing and greater understanding of corporate processes

Key Challenges

- Demand on the team has increased significantly with a large increase in Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) - required for new data processing and/or systems. This has impacted the team's ability to progress some key project work. 'Project work' days implemented where the team focus on only this work
- Compliance for FOIs and SARs is below ICO target of 90%. The team are working with IGOs where compliance is very low and providing training and support as required
- The 'working abroad process' (requests to work abroad must be approved by HR, IG and IDS) has seen a significant impact on the team - staff do not always follow the guidance and IG Team often need to field all queries/complaints
- The forthcoming data platform and Power BI present new ways of working and IG challenges with linking data sets across the council – the area is very complex, and the risks are not necessarily fully understood by the IG team or other council staff

Next Steps...

- Procurement of a new system (Corestream) to manage mandatory data protection 'paperwork'. Which is essential to ensuring compliance with data protection legislation. It will streamline overly burdensome processes and make it easier to provide accurate assurance and target areas at risk of non-compliance
- Increase proactive publication of information. This will ensure that residents and members of the public can access information quickly and support the council in improving compliance with FOIs
- Design and implement data and information architecture principles to make it clearer how 'unstructured' information should be managed and create data classifications so that data can be protected appropriately and have retention and deletion applied
- Review of Access to Information processes to ensure compliance improves for FOIs and SARs

Key Achievements

- Successfully defended the Council against claim by Ocado, resisted threats of judicial review over People Friendly Streets and enabled housing to be built at Dixon Clark Court by obtaining an injunction.
- Dealt effectively with Court hearings remote, hybrid and in person.
- Granted licenses of Council buildings for use as pop-up vaccination clinics.
- Completed 85 purchases for homeless temporary accommodation.
- Supported PF12 Programme to end the contract and bring the management of the PF12 properties back in house.

Key Challenges

- Managing increased workload with existing resources, e.g., 60% increase of council housing disrepair cases since 2019/2020 financial year.
- Fully implementing cloud based legal case management system.
- Recruitment and retention of difficult to recruit legal specialists, e.g.: childcare advocates and planning lawyers.
- Increase of work because of backlogs in Courts and Tribunals experienced due to Covid-19.
- Recovery of income regarding property and planning due to inactivity during the pandemic.
- Preparing for PF12 legal work to come back in house.

Next Steps...

- Procure a cloud based legal case management system (iCasework), in accordance with our compliance duties.
- Concerto – Digitalisation of Property Terrier index cards.
- Cross working between teams and diversifying areas of legal knowledge.
- Continue to promote development of staff, e.g.: encourage staff to undertake Higher Rights qualifications, Local Government Diploma in Law and Practice and Solace Leadership Course.
- Continue to work collaboratively with clients to provide the best outcomes for residents, e.g.: accommodation for asylum seekers.

Electoral Services

Key Achievements

- Successful Delivery of the GLA Elections and 6 by-elections
- Full borough polling district and polling places review following the Local Boundary review which increased the number of wards in Islington from 16 to 17 and has seen the number of districts increase from 51 to 54
- Several Email and Comms Campaigns which increased registration and participation
- Successful delivery of the Angel BID ballot renewal
- Postal vote email campaign which saw an increase from 20,000 to 27,000 postal voters to help reduce the number of in person voters at polling stations

Key Challenges

- Delivering elections and the election count in a Covid safe environment particularly with the number of candidates and agents at Local Elections
- Delivering the Annual Canvass under new Canvass Reform legislation and improving data matching and data sharing to reduce expenditure
- The Election Bill which will see the introduction of voter ID at polling stations and votes for life for overseas electors

Next Steps...

- To deliver Household Notification letters to all households in the borough to communicate polling station and ward changes to residents and to help increase registration in the lead up to the Local Elections
- Delivery of Local Elections in May 2022 which will be the first elections for the new wards

Transformation

Key Achievements

- Establishment of Directorate Delivery Boards and the Transformation Board to provide assurance and oversight of the organization's change programmes.
- PMO Centre of Excellence to enhance project management standards and methodology across the council.
- Support across a wide range of key transformation programmes (incl equalities work, resident experience, integrated health and social care, to name a few)
- Led on the corporate response to emerging issues (e.g., Afghan refugee response, LFT Testing, etc.)

Key Challenges

- We're working on strengthening the way we move our resources to the key priorities to make sure of the biggest impact for residents.
- As with many critical services right now, there is a difficulty in recruiting high caliber individuals to lead the scale of change we want within Islington
- Funding the level of ambition within the borough is a delicate balance given the difficult economic outlook.

Next Steps...

- Embedding a corporate approach to project and programme management to improve outcomes.
- Horizon scanning what is coming our way to help shape the organisation's future direction.
- Continued embedding of transformation enabling the delivery of the Council's vision, benefits realisation of impact for residents and the achievement of our objectives.
- Support to the organisation to allocate its resources to where they get the most benefit for residents.

Revenues

Key Achievements

- Successful distribution of over £19 million in Covid-19 "Restart Grants" to 2,000 businesses.
- The volume of outstanding customer contacts has been successfully managed down to a business-as-usual level following unprecedented levels throughout the pandemic.
- Despite an extremely challenging environment, collection of Council Tax is on target to the budgeted level.

Key Challenges

- Resourcing the service is becoming increasingly difficult. This is the experience of all Revenues teams in the region. Our response to the difficulties in recruitment was to try and train our own revenues officers from scratch but initiatives such as the creation of a team of "Kickstart" Revenue Trainees had to be unsuccessful for lack of resident take up.
- Business rates collection levels remain stubbornly difficult, tracking around 2.4% below pre-pandemic levels on a year-to-date basis. This is the case across the region.

Next Steps...

- The Accounts Receivable service was reviewed and the improvements from that will be implemented to secure the income due to the Council.
- The government announced
 - a further discretionary grant to support NNDR paying businesses, a proposal for which is being worked up with Community Wealth Building colleagues for Member approval.
 - a further grant worth up to £6k for businesses in the hospitality and leisure sector
 - an extension of the current "Expanded Retail Relief" scheme.

Key Achievements

- Tracking of Covid grant funding, including maximising our grant claims
- Successful conclusion of the budget process for the 2021/22 financial year and medium-term planning period
- The close management of our finances means that we are achieving our financial strategy.
- The Pension Fund has performed well, despite a turbulent economic situation whilst also reducing its carbon footprint and how its investments impact on emissions
- Annual Pension Benefit Statements were sent out to all members by the due date.

Key Challenges

- Statutory financial reporting has been a challenge due to ever increasing requirements of the Financial Reporting Council. LBI was one of 90% of authorities not to have their audit complete by the deadline.
- The local authority audit market is facing extreme challenges at present. The Council has an option to continue within the PSAA collective procurement or undertake its own arrangement.
- There is still a large degree of political and economic turbulence which results in short term settlements from the government and therefore challenges in long term financial planning.

Next Steps...

- The Finance Department recently consulted on a restructure which sought to modernize the service in support of the organisation. This will be embedded over the next few months.
- The Council is due to set its budget on the 3rd March 2021. The draft budget presented to Executive on the 10th January proposes a fully funded and balanced budget.
- There is huge uncertainty over Islington's long-term funding. We are still awaiting the fair funding review and a longer-term spending review.
- Increase the number of Islington residents in apprentice roles.

Internal Audit, Investigations and Risk

Key Achievements

- Successful launch of the Controls Board and Good Governance Group to further enhance governance arrangements;
- Implementation of prompt anti-fraud checks to our emergency covid response measures, safeguarding public money whilst supporting businesses;
- Alignment of the Internal Audit Plan with the Council's Principal Risk Report, ensuring that audit resource was directed towards areas that highest risk;
- Successful joint working and collaboration with the wider London Internal Audit and Anti-Fraud community to ensure that intelligence and good practice was shared as we navigated the pandemic.

Key Challenges

- Recruitment and retention of staff;
- A particularly difficult recruitment market, across London and nationally, in relation to high quality Internal Auditors;
- Demand for the service (across the three teams i.e., Internal Audit, Investigations and Risk Management) exceeded capacity;
- Ad hoc, unplanned need for work that had to be delivered at short notice;
- Ensuring staff wellbeing during the pandemic.

Next Steps...

Strategic

- Continue to deliver a high-quality Internal Audit, Investigations and Risk Management service to ensure the best outcomes for our residents;
- Continue to ensure that the work of the service is aligned with the Council's overall objectives;
- Continue to champion good governance;

Operational

- Draft the 22/23 Internal Audit Plan in alignment with the Council's Principal Risks;
- Revise the Council's risk management framework and draft a risk appetite statement;
- Increase pro-active anti-fraud activity.