

Policy & Performance Scrutiny Committee – Annual Report

January 2024

Resources - key areas of responsibility

Human Resources (slide 3)

Islington Digital Services

- Technology & Design (slide 4)
- Information Governance (slide 5)

Law & Governance

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Finance

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Human Resources

Key Achievements

- New approach to performance development (check-ins)
- Reset of Challenging Inequality Programme
- Signed Partnership Agreement with Trade Unions
- Developed Talent & Attraction Plan to tackle recruitment challenges with new employer brand
- Refreshed Workforce Strategy
- Career Pathways Strategy inc. Apprenticeships First approach and Work Experience model
- Third cohort of Islington Management Diploma Apprenticeship now underway

Key Challenges

Significant programme of technology improvement underway which is needed in order to enable improvements to service delivery and data provision

- HR System moved to the Cloud
- New Absence module launched
- New overtime module introduced
- New recruitment and apprenticeship systems launching in February 2024
- Move to the Cloud of BACS to provide more payroll assurance
- E-forms and automation being introduced for all processes

Next Steps...

- Staff survey taking place in February
- Leading with CARE programme launching in early 2024 to develop the skills of our top 100 leaders to take forward the Islington Together 2030 Plan
- Inclusive recruitment improvements including refreshed Diverse Recruiter's Scheme by April
- 20 work experience placements aimed at care experienced young people and those with SEN in Islington launching in January

Islington Digital Services (Technology & Design)

Key Achievements

- A new Organisational structure and operating model change has been implemented with go live on 8th Jan '24. The new organisation lifts capability for digital transformation; supports the Resident Experience programme; lifts cyber capability; adds more apprentices and significantly reduces contractor numbers.
- Over 30 projects have been completed this year. Projects of significance include: Upgrades to many of our core systems including Parking, Housing, Environment, HR; Exit of the NWB data centre; new call centre technology; new Mobile Sims for staff; libraries tech upgrade; Data warehouse for analytics and new MyEaccount platform; cyber resilience.
- Dashboards for Housing, Finance and Assistive Technology use cases delivered to provide insight into key metrics & performance for each service.
- Frontline digital inclusion offering by engaging those staff with the council with access to our internal systems including the HR system, on individual smartphones.
- Enhanced Liquid logic functionality so that Adult Social Care workers can get near real time information from both health and social care systems
- 59 Accessibility reviews for resident and staff-facing applications to ensure those with disabilities are fully included.

Key Challenges

- Shut down of analogue public telephone network (PSTN) and 3G mobile cut off by Dec 2025 presents a threat to some services.
- Full align the Services Digital/IT programme
- The complexity of integrating the new My eAccount across the many applications that use it.
- Switching to a full cloud operating model
- Removing the last legacy systems in our data centre to lift cyber resilience and maintain public services
- Streamlining the library IT infrastructure (managed service, hardware and software).
- Laptop refresh for all staff.
- Recruiting to the new organisation at pace and attracting the right skills to strengthen our workforce, especially data, innovation, automation and supporting Resident Experience Programme.
- Vendors continue to be a challenge. In addition, procurement contracts will be more challenging with new legislation. Civica, a large supplier of government systems has been bought out – implications to be monitored.
- Constant watch for evolving cyberthreats – particularly those associated with AI.

Next Steps...

- Co-create the multiyear programme of delivery with the Resident Experience team. It will converge technology with business & digital transformation. Digital Services AD as 'copilot' for the programme.
- Implement a digitally accessible HR recruitment system by end Feb 2024.
- Update network connectivity incrementally over the year to next generation of cloud connectivity to provide faster and far more resilient networks that can withstand high levels of cyber attack.
- 5,000 new Laptops with Windows 11 by June.
- Recruit into the new Data practice in the new IDS organisation by March to make more insightful data analytics possible – eg combining publicly available data with internal council data to give new insights for services.
- Deliver in the first half, new Automation and Robotic Process Automation (RPA) systems to generate savings
- Innovation team to find opportunities for the adoption of AI based capabilities and software. In progress now.
- Get better value from key vendors & contracts as they renew to get optimal value and responsive support.
- Re-engineer the starters, leaves and mover's process by April to reduce turnaround time.

Islington Digital Services (Information & Digital Governance)

Key Achievements

- A centralised Access to Information function with new team and operating model has been created. To manage the workload a phased approach was taken with responsibility for areas starting to move over from 5 June. All areas have been fully centralised since 1 September. The team meet weekly to discuss requests, share good practice and highlight any areas of concern.
- The backlog of SARs has been addressed and eliminated. Compliance continues to improve with both FOIs and SARs achieving at least 88% since September.
- New approach to proactive publication and transparency has been developed. Webpages have been updated (pending Comms changes) to improve public information.
- Redesigned data protection assurance forms to make processes simpler.
- Recruited to new Data Protection Lead role who is the main liaison point for the Schools DP service. Reviewed and improved service offer for schools that buy into the service.
- Classroom based training provided to all Caretakers and Repairs Operatives.
- MetaEngage rolled out across the organisation so that the popup functionality can be used for eLearning.

Key Challenges

- The team are often reliant on other areas of the council responding in a timely manner. Often a lack of response from areas has a significant impact on the team's ability to progress work.
- Demand on the team has continued to increase significantly specifically with an increase in Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs)
- There has been an increase of 5% for FOIs and 26% for SARs.
- A 6% increase in information complaints. Unable to identify what is driving this increase.
- This demand was further compounded with capacity issues due to vacancies in the team which impacted the team's ability to progress some key project work. '
- Compliance for FOIs and SARs is below just ICO target of 90%. The team have implemented a new escalation process to highlight areas that are at risk or already overdue.
- Widespread adoption of generative AI and the speed at which it develops results in inevitable data protection and governance challenges.

Next Steps...

- Embed the Information Governance team into the new IDS structure including filling vacant roles by March '24. Drive the Access to Information operating model and continue the strong improvement in compliance, working at Director level where compliance is a concern.
- Increase pre-emptive publication of open information (from April). This will ensure that residents and the public can access information quickly and support the council in improving compliance with FOIs whilst reducing our workload.
- Solve the challenges around scanning to improve processes for historic social care file requests starting Feb 2024.
- Implement redaction software by Spring '24 to improve SARs response times and reduce redaction errors and omissions – resulting in fewer breaches/complaints.
- Redesign Intranet & Internet pages, Comms plan and training using Yammer by Spring '24.
- Monitor the 'Data Protection and Digital Information Bill' and prepare for any changes to our compliance obligations and operating model.
- Schools DP service – reviewing pricing structure and service offer to create a more granular service catalogue in readiness for December publication.

Democratic Services

Key Achievements

- Improved Civic Awards event to ensure recipients feel appropriately valued and obtained external sponsorship to support improvements and reduce costs.
- Review undertaken to improve governance arrangements and ensure the Constitution is lawful.
- Improvements made to Democracy Website to ensure it is as accessible as possible and compliant with corporate branding.
- Review of Remembrance arrangements undertaken. Introduced changes to ensure the events are inclusive.
- School Appeals bought back in house to reduce costs and ensure standards adhered to.
- Developed a Member Development Strategy to recognise the importance of member development and provide a framework for future years.
- Implemented new IT system to help drive improvements in management of Member Enquiries.

Key Challenges

- Improving Member engagement with development opportunities to ensure that members have the appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfill their roles and to ensure that the training provided is value for money.
- Increasing external funding for Civic Awards to ensure that the improvements to the Awards evening can be sustained and allow further improvements made
- Developing improved procedures for School Appeals following learning during the first year delivering the service in house and increasing the number of Independent Appeals Panelists available to ensure statutory deadlines are met and ease scheduling challenges.
- Work to deliver real improvements in the Member Enquiries process and system is ongoing.
- Ensuring that we continue to meet all statutory obligations, without disrupting meetings or decisions, whilst upgrading the Committee Management System and Democracy Website and moving it to the cloud.

Next Steps...

- Scrutiny Review underway to update arrangements and ensure Scrutiny is as effective as possible and increase resident engagement by July 2024
- Constitution review to be undertaken to make the document clearer and more accessible and to further improve our governance arrangements by Autumn 2024
- Developing the annual Member training programme ensuring all training opportunities are accessible, that training is high quality, relevant to Islington and value for money and to increase member engagement
- Planning for Local Democracy week in Oct 2024 to ensure that we achieve engagement with under-represented groups
- Continued modernisation of the Mayor's Office and procedures to ensure that effective support is provided to the Mayor and Deputy and that the Mayor's Office represents the Council in an inclusive and appropriate way.

Legal Services

Key Achievements

- **Successfully supported adoption of the local plan**
- **Completed purchase of 35 new homes for refugees & supported high value procurements**
- **Advocacy by in-house lawyers in civil & criminal courts up to the Court of Appeal**
- **Fall in overall caseload of disrepair cases & reduction in damages paid out in each case**
- **Achieved successful outcomes in legal proceedings for ASB injunctions, closure orders, prosecutions, licensing appeals, care proceedings, Court of Protection matters and ET cases**
- **Supporting senior officers/Members in high profile/complex matters - decision not to re-instate the ice-rink at the Sobell and school closures**
- **Demonstrating resilience through changes in leadership within Legal Services – service delivery has not been affected & there is improved collaboration/stronger relationships across the Legal Management Team**

Key Challenges

- Embedding new cloud-based case management system
- Changes in management/provision of business support services
- New legislation affecting planning, leasehold enfranchisement and procurement
- Meeting income targets from property & planning
- Increased workloads across all teams
- Resourcing Legal Services to meet work demands – reducing reliance on agency staff & recruiting and retaining staff in a competitive market

Next Steps...

- Building resilience in Legal Services by recruitment to vacant posts to reduce reliance on external lawyers and agency staff and understanding service delivery needs are fit for purpose- restructure planned early 2024
- Working with colleagues in Business Support to develop administrative support tailored to the needs of Legal Services- to commence in Jan 2024
- Pay/structure review to ensure that pay and the structure is future proofed for effective service delivery to ensure that there is a high performing workforce restructure planned early 2024
- Part 2 of the Constitution Review including external review and refreshed schemes of delegation- on going
- Ongoing legal support to Members & across all council services in areas of governance to ensure legal and reputational risks are considered and minimised-ongoing
- Attendance at Corporate induction sessions to increase awareness of the Council's Constitution and decision making processes at the earliest opportunity- to begin Jan 2024

Elections and Corporate Support Services

Key Achievements

- Improvements in the use of technology to streamline operations and to support resident outreach work
- Enhancing accessibility for voters
- Proactive outreach activities to under registered demographics
- Successful delivery of the annual canvass following changes to ward boundaries
- Collaboration with other services to promote the requirement for Voter ID

Key Challenges

- Delivering the changes introduced by the Elections Act 2022
- Adapting to evolving technologies and systems
- Navigating changes in legislation and maintaining transparency to uphold public trust
- Resident focused communications to raise awareness of the changes to all eligible residents, ensuring voting is accessible for all
- Embedding new application processes and portals so that they become business as usual
- Legislation changes to EU franchises
- Planning of the GLA election with the possibility of a combined Parliamentary election
- Business Support Restructure, delivery of Improvement plan and efficiency savings

Next Steps...

- Delivery of the GLA election with the first manual count
- Parliamentary election with new boundaries in Islington North
- First Election in Islington with new Voter ID requirements
- Full borough Polling District and Polling Places Review

Revenues & Technical Services

Key Achievements

- Over ½ £Billion collected in tax revenues (2022/2023) with a slight surplus on our estimated income
- 87% of local suppliers paid within 10 days (2022/23) meaning better cash flow for businesses
- Very low level of upheld complaints compared with the total open accounts (0.01% of accounts had a complaint which was upheld (Q1 2024 [12 upheld / 120,000 accounts])
- Catching up a Covid related backlog in activity of over 11,000 customer contacts to a normal level resulting in a better service and less complaints

Key Challenges

- Ongoing cost of living crisis adversely impacting residents' and businesses' ability to pay their tax
- The key piece of software used by the team to operate efficiently has been sub-par since an upgrade. We have been pushing the provider to resolve the issues.

Next Steps...

- Increase the number of residents using MyIslington to self-serve their need and therefore get a better outcome quicker quarter on quarter
- Increase the number of residents opting out of paper billing (paperless billing) saving cost, carbon and resources quarter on quarter
- Extend the "Expanded Retail Relief Scheme" to 2024/25 (discount worth 75% to qualifying businesses) to support local enterprise in place from the 1st April
- Review of our systems and processes in our debtors function to maximise the collection of money owed to the Council will take place by Autumn 2024.

Finance

Key Achievements

- The new Finance structure is well embedded, and there has been successful recruitment to several key roles on a permanent basis.
- 2023/24 budget set which funded all manifesto commitments
- Draft 2022/23 financial accounts published by deadline of 31 May 2023 ahead of most other LA's.
- Pensions Annual General Meeting 27th November well attended and well received by staff and members of the public.
- Pension Fund investments carbon intensity reduction of 40% from 2016.
- Comprehensive review of financial procedures and pension fund ensuring stronger governance.

Key Challenges

- Although inflation has started to reduce, it is still running higher than in previous years, so continues to have an impact on the expenditure of the Council.
- Significant in year financial pressures exist across the Council for 2023/24 particularly in demand led services.
- Interest Rates remain high impacting the cost of the Council's borrowing, with little sign of rates retreating to 2021 levels.
- Although it will not be known until the settlement, the Autumn Statement indicates no new money for local government, despite demonstrable rising needs.

Next Steps...

- The Council is due to set its budget on 29 February 2024. The draft budget presented to Executive on 11 January 2024 proposes a fully funded and balanced budget.
- Islington leads a London wide workforce strategy development group. This aims to boost apprentice roles and increase the profile of Local Government in the employment market, particularly within finance. Our first intake will be Summer 2024.
- Further work to be done on the financial procedures and governance arrangements for capital early in 2024.

Internal Audit, Investigation and Risk Management

Key Achievements

- The Internal Audit Plan was aligned with the Council's Principal Risk Report, to ensure that audit resource was effectively directed towards high risk areas;
- A number of audit recommendations were made in high risk areas, which sought to enhance controls;
- A revised Anti-Fraud and Corruption strategy and policy was introduced, to ensure that the Council is better placed to protect the public purse;
- A new Principal Risk profile for 2023 was agreed, to assist with the effective mitigation of key risks;
- The Council joined the National Fraud Initiative (NFI)'s enhanced hub, with the objective of using data matching to prevent and detect fraud.

Key Challenges

- Recruitment and retention of staff a particularly difficult recruitment market, across London and nationally, in relation to high quality auditors and investigators;
- The demand for the service (across the three teams i.e., Internal Audit, Investigations and Risk Management) exceeded capacity. A risk based approach is applied to ensure that resource is effectively directed;
- The amount of time taken to complete audit follow ups (which assess the level of implementation of audit recommendations). This was as a result of auditees 1) not responding to Internal Audit within agreed timescales 2) not implementing recommendations within agreed timescales

Next Steps...

- Continue to ensure that resource is directed in the areas of highest risk throughout the year;

Internal Audit

- Continue to report audit follow up outcomes to the Corporate Management Board's bi-monthly risk sessions;
- Close the 23-24 audit plan and draft the 24-25 audit plan by April 2024.

Investigations

- Increased proactive anti-fraud activity, particularly data matches as well as proactive reviews in key risk areas such as Housing Repairs throughout the year

Risk Management

- Launch the risk management e-learning module in Quarter 1.