

POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 OCTOBER 2023

Present: Councillor Williams(Chairperson)
Councillors Ash-Edwards, Carter, Chowdhury, Henshaw,
Hinchey, Hunt and Thomson

26 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received.

The Chairperson was advised that Cllr Hinchey would be slightly late to the meeting.

The Chairperson formally welcomed Cllr Bernie Bowen-Thompson as a returning member of the Committee, as nominated by Council on 21st September 2023, and expressed thanks to Cllr Ed Stubbs as an outgoing committee member.

27 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

28 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

29 : C2C FAMILIARISATION VISIT

The Committee undertook a familiarisation visit to C2C at this point and the meeting was adjourned for 45 minutes.

30 : C2C - CUSTOMER FOCUS PRESENTATION

The Chairperson thanked Isabelle Bignall and her team for a first-hand tour of the Council's C2C service, adding that Committee appreciates that customer services continues to move in a digital direction, and Members will continue their familiarisation with any further developments in this item.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member Finance, Modernisation & Performance; Isabelle Bignall, Chief Digital Officer, Rachel Fernie, Customer Services Manager, and Emlyn Nash, Operational Manager, Digital Delivery for this item.

The Cabinet Member was invited to make an opening statement after which Members were provided with a presentation from Officers.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members explored the possibility of sharing Cardiff's intellectual property rights regarding Welsh language developments for the chatbot with other organisations to generate resources for the Council. Members were advised that although there is

interest from other organisations, the costs are challenging. Members acknowledged the importance of not subsidising AI development for other organisations but urged discussions to continue.

The Committee expressed concerns about the risk of Chat GPT generating misinformation as its knowledge base expands. Officers explained that while systems are being researched to work alongside Chat GPT to control AI, the Council is still in the research phase. This will continue to be looked at going forward.

Members emphasised the importance of preserving access for those who are not digitally proficient or lack technology access. Members inquired about the dropout rate when using Bobi, the chatbot, and were reassured that the service always provides an option to connect with an agent if a customer faces difficulties. Members were assured that the Council is mindful of ensuring that alternative customer channels are retained to support those who don't have digital access.

The Committee noted a 12–20 minute call wait time and a 79% answer rate prior to August 2023. Members noted that although there have been improvements, the push for digital adoption is seen as important to reduce call waiting times. The Committee requested additional information on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Concerns were raised about recruitment and retention challenges within the contact centre. Members noted that the reduction in resources despite a consistent number of queries has prompted a service review. The Committee was interested in operational costs, efficiency improvements, and future trends, which Officers plan to share with them.

The Committee inquired about how Cardiff's digital offerings compared to other Local Authorities. Members noted that while there is no direct comparison with Welsh Authorities due to Bobi being unique to Cardiff, comparisons have been made with English authorities in Core Cities. Members were assured that Cardiff has a notably high App download rate in the UK.

Members explored options for collaboration with large public sector organisations, such as the Civil Service and Welsh Government. Officers advised that the Council actively participates in such collaborations and makes the most of its membership of the Institute of Customer Services. Officers added that there is a desire to promote the use of digital services and share learning not only across Council services but also with schools, and that schools have already influenced service development. Officers explained that there is a need to engage more with students in Cardiff as they are often accessing Council services for the first time.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

31 : ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2022/23

Members were advised that Committee would consider the Council's Annual Complaints Report, covering complaints and compliments the Council received between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member Finance Modernisation & Performance; Isabelle Bignall, Chief Digital Officer; Lowri Morris, Contact Centre Manager, and Rory Williams, Complaints & Correspondence Manager for this item.

The Cabinet Member was invited to make an opening statement after which Members were provided with a presentation from Officers.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members acknowledged the importance of the Annual Complaints Report to gather customer service feedback and noted that there is a standard operating procedure in place across the Council, led by complaints leads in various service areas. Members were assured that a corporate complaints manager ensures consistency in responses to complaints across services and were advised that a new corporate system called Halo will be fully implemented in the coming months to support the procedure.

Members were unclear from the presentation whether all complaints are responded to within six months. Officers advised that they believe this is the case to the best of their knowledge, however the implementation of the Halo system is expected to provide more accurate information and allow for dip testing.

The Committee noted that the number of ombudsman cases has been decreasing, but complaints in 2022/23, while lower than in the previous year, remain higher than five years ago. Officers advised that the Council focuses on the number of customers who take closed complaints to the ombudsman as an indicator of its improved complaints procedure. The Committee requested additional data on the number of complaints per population head compared to other Welsh Local Authorities.

Members discussed the opportunity to identify and analyse areas of poor-quality service in the Annual Complaints Report. Members also expressed concern about the absence of reference to complaints recorded for Social Services in the report. Members were advised that Social Services are required to produce a statutory annual complaints report, however the Committee believed that as a key Council service, it would be beneficial for the corporate report to include a summary of the Social Services complaints position.

Members noted that the percentage of complaints *not upheld* by the Council has significantly increased in five service areas this year. Members were advised that some complaints are related to the Council's statutory responsibilities and, therefore, cannot be upheld, however the Committee requested more information on why the percentage has increased this year.

The Committee stressed the importance of attaching an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) to complaints to assess whether the Council's most vulnerable residents have full accessibility to the complaint's procedure. Members considered that this would help determine if complaints are a consequence of underfunded services. Members were pleased to hear that the digital deprivation team is active to ensure that the data gathered in the Ask Cardiff survey is widely reflective of Cardiff's residents and requested that EIAs be included in future reports.

The Committee requested more information about the cost of compensation paid out by the Council for complaints. Members noted that this determination is made by the Ombudsman, and where the Council is responsible, the cost is charged to the relevant service area budget. Clarification on the amount of compensation paid out by the Council in 2022/23 was requested.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

32 : RLDP JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE INQUIRY

Members were reminded that there is a joint scrutiny inquiry currently underway to inform the RLDP, and the Task Group has prioritised three topics that smaller sub-groups are currently taking evidence on.

The three priority topics members agreed are:

- Securing Planning Obligations/s106 (chaired by Cllr Williams)
- Public Transport (chaired by Cllr Jones)
- Local and District Centres (chaired by Cllr Wong)

As the joint inquiry will be producing one report to Cabinet the sub-groups have agreed an overarching Terms of Reference.

The timescales to which all 3 sub-groups are working are as follows:

- Evidence Gathering – October 2023
- Drafting of key findings, recommendations, and report – November 2023
- Agreement and sign-off of draft report 5th – 13th December 2023
- Submission to Cabinet – 14th December 2023

The Chairperson requested that Members note the Terms of Reference for the Joint Scrutiny Inquiry on Cardiff's Replacement Local Development Plan as attached at Appendix 1 to the report. Members were advised that the draft report arising from this Inquiry will be considered by Committee at its meeting on 13th December 2023.

RESOLVED: To note the Terms of Reference for the Joint Scrutiny Inquiry on Cardiff's Replacement Local Development Plan.

33 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

22 November 2023, 5.30pm.

The meeting terminated at 7.25 pm