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CORRESPONDENCE FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE MEETING

Committee POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date and Time of Meeting WEDNESDAY, 18 OCTOBER 2023, 4.30 PM

Please find below correspondence send by the Committee Chair following the meeting, together with any responses received.

For any further details, please contact scrutinyviewpoints@cardiff.gov.uk

a Correspondence following Committee Meeting(*Pages 3 - 10*)

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Date: 19 October 2023

Councillor Chris Weaver,
Cabinet Member, Finance, Modernisation & Performance
Cardiff Council,
County Hall,
Cardiff
CF10 4UW



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Dear Chris,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 19 October 2023

Thank you for sharing the Annual Complaints Report 2022/23 with the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee. Following discussion, members have asked me to pass on their observations to inform Cabinet's consideration of the report. Please also pass on the committee's sincere thanks to Isabelle Bignall, Chief Digital Officer, Lowri Morris, Contact Centre Manager and Rory Williams, Complaints and Correspondence Manager, for presenting the report to committee and answering members questions. We applaud the enthusiasm and commitment in clear evidence from the experienced management team.

Standard Operating Procedure

The Committee was pleased that the Annual Complaints Report is viewed as an important indicator of customer service feedback, and the Council sees complaints as an opportunity for learning and identifying patterns. We note there is a standard operating procedure in place across the Council delivered by complaints leads in all service areas, to support the operating procedure, and the role of corporate complaints manager ensures consistency of response to complaints across all services. We also note that the procedure will benefit from a new corporate system, Halo, to be fully rolled out over the next few months. You kindly offered a further opportunity for scrutiny when this is fully implemented.

Accuracy of data

Members reflected that it was a little unclear whether all complaints are responded to within six months. We note officers believe this is the case but that the introduction of the Halo system will provide more information and allow accurate dip testing.

The 5-year picture

The Committee is reassured by the falling number of ombudsman cases, however observed that complaints in 2022/23, whilst lower than 2021/22, remain higher than five years ago. We note that the Council welcomes complaints but focuses on the number of customers that take closed complaints to the ombudsman as an indicator of its improved complaints procedure. You kindly offered to forward additional data on the number of complaints per population head compared with other Welsh Local Authorities.

Telling the whole story

Members reflected that there may be an opportunity in the Annual Complaints Report to identify and analyse areas of poor-quality service. We think there may be an opportunity for moderating complaints performance across service areas. We are also concerned that there is no reference to complaints recorded for Social Services in section 8 of the report. We note your explanation that Social Services are required to produce a statutory annual complaints report, however we consider as a key Council service it would be useful for this corporate report to include a summary of the Social Services complaints position. Members consider it would be valuable to view both reports side by side.

Complaints not upheld

The Committee highlighted that the percentage of complaints not upheld by the Council has significantly increased in five service areas this year. We note officers' response that complaints are often related to statutory responsibilities of the Council and therefore cannot be upheld. For example, Education and school admissions, where often a parent will complain if their child is not allocated a place at the school of their choice. We acknowledge this example of why a complaint might be upheld, however, we request more information on *why* the percentage has increased so much this year in your response please.

Equalities

Members consider it is important that an EIA is attached to complaints. We need to assess whether the Councils' most vulnerable residents have full accessibility to the complaints procedure, and who are mostly affected. This will enable us to assess

whether complaints are a consequence of underfunded services. On a positive note, we were pleased to hear that the digital deprivation team are active to ensure that the data gathered in the Ask Cardiff survey is widely reflective of Cardiff's residents. We are also pleased that EIA's have been re-introduced for complaints this year, and we request that they are included in the report next time.

Compensation

The Committee would like more information as to the cost of compensation paid out by the Council for complaints. We note this is a determination made by the Ombudsman and that where this is the case the sum is charged to the relevant service area budget. We request clarification of the amount of compensation paid out by the Council in 2022/23.

Requests following this scrutiny:

- A further opportunity for scrutiny when the Halo system is fully implemented.
- Additional information on the number of complaints per population head compared with other Welsh Authorities.
- More information on *why* the percentage of complaints not upheld by the Council has increased in five service areas this year.
- That you include EIAs for complaints in the next Annual Complaints Report.
- Clarification of the amount of compensation paid out by the Council in 2022/23.

Recommendations following this scrutiny:

To summarise, the Committee makes 1 formal recommendation following this policy development scrutiny, as set out below. As part of the response to this letter I would be grateful if you could state whether the recommendation is accepted, partially accepted or not accepted and summarise the Cabinet's response. If the recommendation is accepted or partially accepted, I would also be grateful if you could identify the responsible officer and provide an action date. This will ensure that progress can be monitored as part of the approach agreed by Cabinet in December 2020.

Recommendation	Accepted, Partially Accepted or Not Accepted	Cabinet Response	Responsible Officer	Action Date
That future Annual Complaints Reports include a summary of the Social Services complaints position.				

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, thank you once again for this pre-decision scrutiny opportunity. With your support, I look forward to continuing the valuable exchange between this Committee and the Cabinet. There are a number of requests and one recommendation following the scrutiny, and therefore I look forward to a response.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR JOEL WILLIAMS
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
 Leaders of Opposition Parties – John Lancaster, Rodney Berman & Andrea Gibson
 Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources
 Isabelle Bignall, Chief Digital Officer
 Lowri Morris, Contact Centre Manager
 Rory Williams, Complaints & Correspondence Manager
 Mr Gavin McArthur, Chair, Governance & Audit Committee
 Chris Pyke, OM Governance & Audit
 Tim Gordon, Head of Communications & External Relations
 Jeremy Rhys, Assistant Head of Communications and External Affairs
 Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services
 Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Officer
 Claire Deguara, Cabinet Business Manager
 Andrea Redmond, Committees Support Officer.
 Abbey King, Performance Lead.

Date: 23 October 2023

Councillor Chris Weaver,
Cabinet Member. Finance, Modernisation & Performance
Cardiff Council,
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Dear Chris,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 18 October 2023

On behalf of Members of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee I wish to pass on the committee's sincere thanks for enabling our in-person familiarisation with C2C frontline services and digital development in customer service delivery. Members were delighted to see first-hand the contact centre in operation and wish to congratulate you on delivering an impressive and effective service. Please pass on our appreciation to Isabelle Bignall, Chief Digital Officer, Rachel Fernie, Customer Services Manager, and Emlyn Nash, Digital Delivery Manager. We offer the following comments, observations and requests, as discussed at the Way Forward.

Digital technology

The committee was delighted to witness the enthusiasm and energy of the contact centre for themselves, how it continues to modernise customer channels and manage social media. The customer is clearly at the centre of the Council's operations via three key platforms, the website, the App, and Bobi the Council chatbot. Members found your presentation most insightful. We note that usage of customer contact platforms differs across Council services and, whilst services are much more on board with digital services, some still require support to move online. We were also interested to hear that over the next 18 months there will be a need for the Council to upgrade its contact management technology.

Sharing expertise

Members explored whether there is an opportunity for sharing Cardiff's intellectual property rights in respect of Welsh language developments for the chatbot, to generate resources for the Council. We note you have considered this, and many

other Welsh and English organisations are interested but find the costs challenging. We agree it is important to ensure the council doesn't find itself subsidising AI development for other organisations and councils, however we urge that discussions continue.

Chat GPT

The committee highlighted the risk of Chat GPT generating misinformation. We note that until now it has been based on knowledge up to September 2021. This is set to change and will increase its power, the risk of misinformation and bias. We note that whilst there are systems that will work alongside Chat GPT to control AI, at this point the council is still researching.

Preserving access for all

Members wish to champion the position of those who are not digitally astute or have no access to technology that enables them to use the latest digital channels. Along these lines we sought clarification of the dropout rate when using Bobi, the chatbot and were reassured that the service will always give an option to drop out to an agent and complete the task should a customer get into difficulty. We note that information gathered from such interactions provides continual learning for Bobi.

Similarly, the committee is particularly concerned that in encouraging a shift from analogue to digital the council might encourage people to seek in-person services, placing a greater strain on hubs. We note there are trials ongoing to train people and explain how to use digital services. We were very pleased indeed to hear you confirm that the council is mindful of those who don't have access to digital services, and it is your intention that the council will always retain alternative customer channels, ensuring that we do not leave the elderly behind.

We highlighted that a 12–20-minute call wait time and an answer rate of 79% prior to August 2023 is disappointing. We note it is improving now and the push for digital is even more important in assisting the council to cut call waiting times. You kindly offered to forward additional information on KPI's.

Recruitment and Retention

Members explored whether the contact centre faces any recruitment and retention difficulties. We note there has been a reduction in resources in recent years however the same number of queries continue and this has triggered a service review. We are interested in operational costs, whether efficiencies can be increased and where the trend is heading. We therefore note that there are service developments you will share with the committee in due course.

Comparison with other councils

The committee was keen to understand where Cardiff sits in relation to other councils on digital offering. We note there is no comparison with Welsh authorities as Cardiff is the only council that has a Bobi chatbot, however there is comparison with English authorities. We were delighted to hear that Cardiff has a particularly high App download rate when compared across the UK. We welcome the additional comparator data you offered.

Opportunity for collaboration

Members enquired where there may be options to collaborate with large public sector organisations such as the civil service and Welsh government. We are delighted to hear that Welsh government refer to the council for call centre requirements, and in fact Cardiff hosts a variety of all Wales public service systems. As an aside we are delighted to hear the council is making the most of its membership of the Institute of Customer Services.

We are keen to ensure that the council actively promotes the use of digital services and shares its learning, not just across council services but also with schools. We note your view that schools have already informed the development of our services and in fact there is a need to target students interacting with the council.

Requests following this scrutiny:

- Additional KPI information illustrating an improvement in waiting times.
- That you share service development plans with the committee in due course.

- Additional comparator data on Cardiff in relation to other UK councils in respect of digital offering and APP download rates.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, thank you once again for the tour of C2C and familiarisation with the digital direction of customer services. You and the team have been most co-operative, and I look forward to continuing the valuable exchange between this Committee and the C2C service. There are a number of requests following the scrutiny, and therefore I look forward to a response.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR JOEL WILLIAMS
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Leaders of Opposition Parties – John Lancaster, Rodney Berman & Andrea Gibson
Isabelle Bignall, Chief Digital Officer
Rachel Fernie, Customer Services Manager
Emlyn Nash, Operational Manager, Digital Delivery
Mr Gavin McArthur, Chair, Governance & Audit Committee
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Tim Gordon, Head of Communications & External Relations
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