

**COUNCIL: 28 JANUARY 2021**

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## **FINANCE, MODERNISATION & PERFORMANCE STATEMENT**

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### **Business Support Grants**

The Council continues to work closely with the Welsh Government to ensure that business support grants relating to the Covid-19 pandemic are paid to all eligible businesses as promptly as possible. Application forms are clearly signposted on the Council's website and, since the start of the initial lockdown in March 2020, Revenue Services have made over 10,000 business support grant payments totalling £88.349 million.

### **Audit**

The Council's Audit and Investigation Teams have continued to provide advice, guidance and support in cases where there has been a need to adapt council services and to establish new systems in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Particular advice and support has been provided on the design and application of process controls in the administration of Welsh Government funds for a range of grant and relief payment schemes, and data matching exercises have been undertaken to provide further assurance on the correct allocation of public funds. Specific audits have also sought to provide assurance on the application of good governance and controls during the pandemic in respect of purchasing, income and debt management, business grant administration, and management communication and reporting. Further work is underway to provide continued assurance on good governance and controls.

### **Xerox Hybrid Mail Service**

The Council's Xerox Hybrid Mail service has proved invaluable to those working from home and needing to send mail since the start of the initial lockdown in March 2020. The Change Delivery Team, based within Finance, is responsible for the Hybrid Mail project and has created a SharePoint training & information site, making it easy to switch to using this service. Staff have been able to continue to send out important communications to customers without coming into the office, which they would not have been able to previously.

Currently, over 3,200 staff members have access to Hybrid Mail spanning every service area of the Council and this number is growing on a daily basis. Since the Council has switched to using Hybrid Mail, over 1 million items have been sent, averaging approx. 54,000 letters per month. This includes over 700,000 letters that have been sent to customers and residents since the initial lockdown in March 2020.

Many of these have been critical Covid-19 related communications, such as shielding information; Free School Meal vouchers; Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) and, most recently, over 160,000 letters to residents about the rollout of vaccinations in Cardiff.

### **Cardiff Works Expansion**

Following the move of Cardiff Works to the Council's Into Work Advice Service, the types of employment opportunities that can be filled are being expanded. This includes collaboration with the Employer Liaison and Adult Learning Teams to launch a recruitment drive for carers and cleaners initially, supporting peaks in demand due to Covid-19. This follows on from work undertaken during the first wave of the pandemic where 21 staff were recruited into the Community Resource Team (CRT).

Each new candidate will register with Cardiff Works and have the option of undertaking training in a relevant field, gaining an accredited qualification with Adult Learning before being put forward for a position. If unsuccessful, a candidate will be referred to the Into Work Advice Service for further support. This programme will ensure that every candidate has an opportunity to find employment and receive training, whilst ensuring that key posts are filled by members of the local community.

To promote these new opportunities, Cardiff Works has a new website (<https://cardiffworksrecruit.co.uk/>) where vacancies are posted. A publicity campaign to advertise and increase awareness of this website is due to be launched in the next few weeks.

### **Butetown Employability Project**

The Into Work Advice Service bid successfully for £100k in funding from the UK Government Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) to support a new 12-month employability project in Butetown for 18-24 year olds. The project will develop the employability capacity of youths aged 18-24 in Butetown and surrounding areas by engaging them in active participation in community growth using an all-inclusive approach through projects that may include sport, recreational, social, group seminar, cultural/religious and/or educational activities. It also aims to empower and improve the lives of those signed onto the project by supporting them to remove barriers holding them back from sustainable employment and providing them with support to find employment, access meaningful work experience through volunteering, gain work skilled qualifications, and pursuing further education.

This project started on 1 December 2020 and the team has already made great progress in a short space of time, even taking into account the Christmas holidays and the latest Covid-19 lockdown. In the first month alone, 25 new clients signed onto the project and, to date, the team has helped 12 people to apply for corporate trainee jobs with the Council and will support them with interview preparation and through the interview process.

Contact has also been made with Admiral and Hays call centres in the city to initiate an ongoing collaboration with the project to help find work for clients. More contacts will be made with other local businesses and educational institutions following the end of the current lockdown period. In addition, the team is developing an action plan, including the organisation of future events, to encourage the involvement of 18-24 year olds in Butetown in community development.

## **Website**

There was an increase in visitors to the [www.cardiff.gov.uk](http://www.cardiff.gov.uk) website in December 2020, with 180,000 people viewing over 650,000 pages of information. Popular topics included information relating to recycling over Christmas and there was also a surge of visits for information on highways drainage and flooding on 23 December 2020. Information relating to service changes due to Covid-19 remained popular with nearly 28,000 page views. Visitors to this section peaked on the weekend of 19-20 December 2020 as a result of the announcement of the latest Wales-wide lockdown. There were also significant visitor numbers to pages relating to financial support, with 15,000 page views for "Support for Businesses" and 7,000 page views for information on self-isolation payments.

## **Mobile App/Digital Service Developments**

The CardiffGov mobile app has now been downloaded 37,452 times, with 1,088 downloads in December 2020, which was an increase of 3% from November 2020. Digital services across the app and web saw an 80% increase in the number of look ups for the Waste Calendar as residents looked to confirm their household waste collection schedule in the run up to Christmas and also to check on any service disruption due to the latest Covid-19 lockdown measures. Work is ongoing to ensure that the right information is in place for residents in advance of the forthcoming waste changes and to introduce a new process for reporting missed collections.

## **BOBi (ChatBot)**

The use of the Council's ChatBot, BOBi, has continued to rise steadily, with a significant increase coming as the result of BOBi being promoted to a more prominent position on the website's Contact pages at the beginning of December 2020. This resulted in an immediate increase in chat volume, with numbers of automated conversations continuing to rise in subsequent weeks. Feedback from users of the service remains very positive, with 87.88% recording a 'Very Good', 'Good' or 'OK' experience and, during Christmas week, this rose to 91.13%. The Digital Delivery Team continues to analyse and address opportunities to improve the ChatBot's responses and conversation flows.

Work is underway to review and improve some of the Waste Management conversational processes, and to deploy a service for reporting missed collections. BOBi's scope will also be broadened to include commonly used services, including Council Tax. Prioritisation of services is being led by analysis of common contact types handled by the contact centre and a review of the types of enquiries handed off to C2C by BOBi.

### **Connect to Cardiff (C2C)**

C2C remained busy throughout December 2020, dealing with 30,675 calls and 3,602 emails. This was against a backdrop of a significant proportion of call centre staff continuing to work from home where possible. The team within the contact centre has also handled 10,147 social media messages and 1,691 webchats. The most popular subject for posts was Coronavirus (1828), followed by Waste Collections (1091), Waste Recycling (745), Economic Development (563) and Schools (501). Both the Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts saw an increase in followers during this period.

**Councillor Chris Weaver**

**Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance**

**21 January 2021**