

Date: 23 October 2023

Councillor Chris Weaver,
Cabinet Member. Finance, Modernisation & Performance
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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
Chris Pyke, OM Governance & Audit
Tim Gordon, Head of Communications & External Relations
Jeremy Rhys, Assistant Head of Communications and External Affairs
Abbey King, Performance Lead
Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services
Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Officer
Claire Deguara, Cabinet Business Manager
Andrea Redmond, Committees Support Officer.