

Minutes

FINANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

8 February 2024



Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors John Riley (Chair), Wayne Bridges (Vice-Chair), Kaushik Banerjee, Kishan Bhatt, Narinder Garg, Raju Sansarpuri and Stuart Mathers (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Liz Penny – Democratic Services Officer Matthew Wallbridge – Chief Digital and Information Officer</p>
57.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>There were no apologies for absence.</p>
58.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
59.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 11 January 2024 be agreed as an accurate record.</p>
60.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED AS PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items of business were in Part I and would be considered in public.</p>
61.	<p>THE COUNCIL'S DIGITAL JOURNEY & RESIDENT/MEMBER EXPERIENCE (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>Matthew Wallbridge, Chief Digital and Information Officer, presented the item. Key points highlighted included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• By 2026 officers aimed to invest in digital, data, technology and transformation to become a digitally enabled, modern, well-run Council. Residents would be able to access the services they needed quickly and at their own convenience and processes would be more efficient and effective. Once successfully delivered, the changes would facilitate an improved resident in accessing services and information. Residents would be able to carry out simple transactions quickly and easily, with a more joined up approach ensuring they only needed to make contact once. Staff would be happier, more efficient, and

equipped with the most appropriate technology they needed to do their jobs. Some of their manual duties would be removed enabling them to focus on higher-value tasks. Officers would have a better understanding of local residents, through the smarter use of joined-up data thereby enabling the Council to continuously improve its services and make better decisions to the benefit of residents. A more sustainable financial model would be in place to improve service delivery while maintaining or reducing costs;

- The focus would be on meeting the needs of residents, particularly those who were most vulnerable. Research and data would inform decision making regarding the products and services residents needed. The aim was to make the Council's services easily accessible to all and improve digital inclusion. At present residents were unable to track the progress of their service requests hence this was an area for improvement. Officers would invest in reducing bureaucracy and paperwork to facilitate quick, data-driven decision making. New business models would be driven by data and cross-functional project teams across the Council would work in a more collaborative and innovative way;
- There had been considerable progress over the last year, but it was acknowledged that there was still plenty to do. It was noted that Hillingdon Council had been the first to deploy an automated voice and web chat solution at scale. It had also been successful in delivering a modern and flexible infrastructure and a programme of connectivity improvements, largely with BT, increasing bandwidth across all sites and across the Borough; this constituted the biggest improvement of any London borough over the last four years;
- In terms of the future, it was recognised that AI was changing society dramatically and it was essential that Hillingdon Council embraced this change. There were 5 current plans in place which related to Customer Experience, Automations and Integrations, Business Intelligence, Consolidating and Improving Systems and Enabling;
- With regard to the Customer Experience, an end-to-end customer journey would ensure residents were updated on their enquiries and transactions. The Council's website would be revamped, and the current 116 telephone numbers reduced to one. A digital inclusion programme would ensure residents had the skills, connectivity and technology they needed and contact with digitally excluded and vulnerable residents would be prioritised;
- In terms of Automations and Integrations, a single front door would be introduced for high cost / high demand services such as Social Care and Housing. Systems would be better integrated, translations automated and AI used as a power for the good;
- Business Intelligence would facilitate evidence-based decision making to challenge current ways of working and service delivery models. A better understanding of residents would assist in predicting demand. Live Ward data would be available to Members;
- Systems would be consolidated and integrated to provide an improved customer experience, better data and to maximise staff productivity;
- A learning and development programme across the organisation would enable officers and Members to be more productive and utilise the technology available. Technology in Committee rooms would be improved;
- The Members Enquiries system had been launched on 11 January 2023. It was acknowledged that there was room for improvement. Feedback from the Select Committee had been taken on board and the system was currently under review. The plan was to improve the current system where possible, provide

further training and then look to provide an improved case-management system in the future.

Members thanked the Chief Digital and Information Officer for his thorough presentation commenting that the Leader and the Cabinet were committed to the digital journey. It was noted that the resident experience was of paramount importance - an easy and convenient system was essential. Members heard that, in future, the majority of residents' enquiries would be handled digitally rather than by telephone. Technology would enable residents to engage with the Council at any time hence would be much more convenient for them. In respect of Housing Repairs, the system would keep residents updated so they did not need to wait at home all day. Technology would also facilitate auto-interpreting and auto-translation to the benefit of residents.

Noting the limitations of AWS, the Committee enquired how the Council was able to keep up with technological changes and the cost effectiveness of moving to another platform. Members were informed that the Council had a multi-talented approach and worked with different providers. AWS connectivity worked well with the Microsoft Azure environment. The aim was to build the Microsoft platform in the future. Microsoft Cloud was already in use and APIs were heavily utilised to enable systems to communicate with each other. It was recognised that there were some limitations as data was constructed in different ways across different systems. A platform was being developed to connect all the strands of data together and the aim was to move to a low code environment using MS power platform. Officers would then be able to take control and make the required changes in-house. It was acknowledged that there were some excellent products available, but cost effectiveness was an issue in many cases. Hillingdon was learning from other organisations. Improvements would be forthcoming but would take time to implement.

In respect of the customer experience, Members expressed concern that some pockets of residents would be left behind; particularly those who had disabilities, were elderly or for whom English was not their first language. It was confirmed that the plan was to disinvest in those able to help themselves and invest in those who needed more support. A digital approach was cheaper and more efficient than relying exclusively on a contact centre – a digital front door and improvements in first time resolution would facilitate reinvestment to assist those who lacked digital connectivity or required further training. The contact centre would continue to support the more isolated or vulnerable residents in the community.

Members commented that some residents had reportedly been unable to log a missed bin collection until after 1pm on the day while others had been unable to locate their address on the system. In response to the address issue, it was acknowledged that data quality needed to be improved across the whole organisation. An exercise was underway which aimed to improve data quality over the next three months. It was noted that AI relied on good quality data. In respect of the reporting of missed bin collections, it was agreed that Councillor Garg would follow up with the Chair on this after the meeting who would raise the matter with officers. It was recognised that the Council needed to be better at engaging with residents and seeking their feedback.

In response to further queries from Councillors, it was noted that outages were rare. Investment in a cloud-based system would further reduce the risk of outages in the future.

In terms of risk management, Members heard that having the right team in place with

	<p>the required set of skills was essential. Business Intelligence was moving apace hence there was a need to recruit data engineers and data scientists. It was noted that Hillingdon Council had a good reputation and its ambition made it an attractive place to work. Hillingdon was investing in people before technology and aimed to harness the best of local talent.</p> <p>With regard to data privacy, it was noted that this was challenging as there was always the potential for human error. Phishing and cyber attacks were increasingly sophisticated hence staff training was required to help people recognise them. Hillingdon was mitigating the risk by learning from others and adopting good practice where possible. Predictive analytics would help the Council to better support local residents in the future.</p> <p>In response to further queries from the Committee, it was acknowledged that there was room for improvement in terms of engagement with residents. Videos and guides were being produced to support residents and help them access the Council's website.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the update on the Council's digital journey and resident / Member experience be noted.</p>
62.	<p>CABINET FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan be noted.</p>
63.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>At the request of Members, it was agreed that an item regarding cyber security, data governance and risk management would be added to the Select Committee's Work Programme.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That an item regarding cyber security, data governance and risk management be added to the Select Committee's Work Programme; and 2. That the Work Programme be noted.
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.42 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Liz Penny on epenny@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.