

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Meeting held 29 July 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Denise Fox (Chair), Joe Otten (Deputy Chair), Angela Argenzio, Steve Ayriss, Dawn Dale, Mike Levery, Bryan Lodge, Zahira Naz and Mick Rooney

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Auckland , Mark Jones, Zahira Naz and Martin Phipps.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 25th March, 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th March, 2021 were approved as a correct record and, arising from a query raised by Councillor Angela Argenzio regarding the decision to remove the Access-Able Policy from the Council's Licensing Policy, the Policy and Improvement Officer (Emily Standbrook-Shaw) stated that she would contact colleagues in the Equalities and Engagement Team to find out whether anyone from that Team had been involved in such decision, and circulate the response to Members of the Committee.

4.2 19th May, 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19th May 2021 were approved as a correct record.

4.3 7th July 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7th July 2021, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

6. THE COUNCIL'S REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICE

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Interim Director of Transport, Repairs and Facilities Management providing an update on the Council's Repairs and Maintenance Service.

6.2 The report set out information on the progress made since the Service had been insourced from Kier Services in 2017; the impact on the Service as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and how the backlog of work would be carried out; and how the Service was working with Council tenants to deliver a programme of further service improvements.

6.3 In attendance for this item were Nathan Rodgers (Interim Director of Transport, Repairs and Facilities Management) and Mark Freeth (Head of Repairs and Maintenance Service).

6.4 Nathan Rodgers introduced the report and made reference to an error on page 6, indicating that the percentage figure regarding the number of appointments kept within a two-hour time slot should read 85.34% and not 95.18%.

6.5 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- The Service allocated only one or two jobs a time to operatives to allow sufficient time for them to honour the appointments. Progress was constantly being reviewed throughout the day, and the operatives were encouraged to complete the jobs during that day. If it was not possible to complete a job for any reason, it would either be deferred to the next day or referred to the Out of Hours Team. Tenants would be kept up to date in terms of any decisions made. The Service's co-ordinators would be constantly reviewing the operatives' workload throughout the day. The proposed new systems would result in the process becoming more automated, therefore hopefully, more efficient.
- There were teams of operatives working in different areas of the city, and in those situations where there was a shift in demand for a particular trade in a certain area, resources would be reallocated to such areas. It was hoped that the new IT system would result in the service being more responsive.
- Work was generally allocated on a date order basis, but if tenants wanted additional works, the operative would be encouraged to undertake such works to avoid repeat calls. If any follow up work was required, this would be arranged with the tenant at the time to save them having to make further calls to the contact centre.

- Whilst the contact centre had a high turnover of staff, this did not involve staff working on repairs and maintenance.
- The Repairs and Maintenance Service sat in the Place Portfolio, and whilst staff worked very closely with colleagues in the Housing and Neighbourhood Service, it was not part of that Service. The Service came under Transport, Facilities Management and Repairs.
- The Service recognised the importance of working with tenants and had made every effort to maintain the relationship throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. This had involved attending the Housing and Neighbourhoods Advisory Panel (HANAP) meetings to discuss performance and improvement, and also the setting up of a Tenant Focus Group, which had met three times during the pandemic to discuss, amongst other topics, the Target Operating Model, which some tenants had been involved in. There were also plans for tenants to undertake mystery shopping and ride outs to inspect the quality of repairs.
- The Service had built in a new leg of the new structure to achieve better control of the planned works, in ensuring that staff had the required skills to deliver this work effectively. This should then provide an opportunity for the Service to focus on other types of work, both in and outside the Council. Also, the cost model support development, currently being put together, would support this work, and give clarity and transparency around the Service's overhead. This would result in cost recovery per operative per activity, and would enable the Service to be in a good commercial position at the time the cost model support development was ready to be delivered.
- There had been a backlog of planned work prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and whilst some progress had been made against the backlog during the pandemic, it was acknowledged that progress in general had been slow up to April 2020. There had been an element of progress with regard to the deployment of work to the operatives, but very little on the foundational work being worked on over the last 18 months.
- When the workforce had transferred back in-house in 2017, it was clear that there had been a huge underinvestment in training, commercial skills and performance management, and the Service had made considerable efforts to address this through training, education and renewing processes. The workforce had returned to the Council on a number of different terms and conditions and pay grades which, in some cases, had resulted in an adverse impact on staff morale. Progress had been made in terms of designing a new staffing structure based on volumes, activities and the findings of the Target Operation Model.
- On reflection, the review of the Service and reporting had taken longer than expected, and it was acknowledged that this work could have been undertaken quicker.
- The Service would normally have around 2000 transactions a week, and

when it returned to normal working conditions after the pandemic, demand had increased by 25%. The Service had different performance measures for different types of work. For example, with regard to day-to-day repairs, it was expected that six jobs a day be completed, which was in line with industry standards, and a target that was being achieved. With regard to the more planned work, the measures were based on schedules and, again, these targets were being met. There was no staff incentive scheme, but there were the usual benefits of working for the Council, such as guaranteed long-term employment, career development and a generous annual leave entitlement. The Service had recently recruited 43 new operatives. The Service was encouraging the one to one conversations about performance with operatives as part of its performance management framework, which had not previously existed under the contract with Kier Services. As part of this initiative, managers had been trained to obtain the relevant skills to have the conversation, mainly to drive customer service focus.

- The challenges regarding materials was changing on a weekly basis but, on the whole, the Council and the Service had done well in terms of managing to maintain supplies.
- It was acknowledged that some tenants found it difficult to complain, mainly due to the difficulties in navigating the Council website. Complaints did not go straight through to the Service but were logged with the main Council contact centre. The Service had strengthened its Customer Service Team in terms of its response to complaints. All information on complaints was fed into the Performance Management Framework for monitoring purposes. In addition, a new Performance Services Manager had recently been recruited, who would be responsible for engaging with the contact centre with the aim of further improving the customer service experience. As part of the Repair Focus Group meetings with tenants, time was allowed for tenants to discuss any casework issues or general concerns. In addition, there was now a dedicated telephone line which Councillors could use to access the Service.
- It was acknowledged that there should have been more information in the report with regard to the work the Service was undertaking, or had planned, to tackle climate change. There was considerable activity taking place in this regard, specifically with regard to material procurement, staff taking part in training courses regarding renewable technology, looking at the shift from the installation of gas boilers to more air-sourced products and a review of the transport fleet, which included purchasing smaller, electric vehicles, some of which we're already being piloted. The Service was also looking at minimising the journey times of operatives, and had installed a number of secure lockers at various locations across the city, from where operatives could pick up, and drop off, tools, equipment and materials, to save them travelling to the main depot.
- It was acknowledged that there needed to be more creativity in terms of how the Service was promoted. As part of the new proposals regarding the redesign of the Service, flexible working was being introduced, which

included an extended working day, making the Service more accessible to tenants. The proposals would also hopefully attract a more diverse workforce, with the aim of attracting more female operatives. There were already a number of female operatives working for the Service, and a number of female apprentices had recently been recruited.

- When the Service was insourced in 2017, it came under the responsibility of the Director of Facilities Management, and there were three separate services - Transport, Facilities Management and Repairs. The only connection between the three services was that they came under the responsibility of the Interim Director of Transport, Repairs and Facilities Management.
- The insourcing of the Service had the protection of The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE), and the experience of employees in such cases has not always been successful, and lessons should have been learnt from this. It was apparent that when the Service had been insourced, there was an under-investment, concerns of performance data, backlogs and a lack of skilled management and commercial expertise. As a result of this, the Service was in the early stages of receiving assistance from the Council's Corporate Services - Finance, HR and IT, with such issues setting the Service back and contributing to the problems currently being faced. Despite the concerns raised, there had been a number of good examples of insourcing such Services in other local authorities, where they had become more resilient, more responsive to tenants needs, where savings had been reinvested in other Council services, more diverse workforces being developed and where services had more influence over carbon reduction measures/schemes. Such improvements were starting to emerge from the Services Target Operating Model. Other benefits included having a local material and labour supply, a contribution to the local supply chain through material procurement and subcontractors, the apprenticeship scheme had been vastly increased and engagement with tenants had improved.
- The Service would draft a document setting out Frequently Asked Questions for the use by Councillors as part of their casework with tenants.
- When the Service was insourced in 2017, the bonus system had already been reviewed, and subsequently withdrawn. The new staffing structure had been launched, and the first round of consultation meetings had commenced the previous week, with proposals for the new rules to commence in April 2022, subject to collective agreement.
- The 7% of jobs not completed in time fell into the overdue category, and were rearranged on priority, and in agreement with tenants. In terms of a manageable backlog, and based on all categories of work, a healthy work in progress figure in terms of jobs per week was 6000. There were currently 9389 jobs awaiting completion, resulting in 3389 jobs being overdue.
- Whilst there were no formal service level agreements between the Repairs

and Maintenance Service and the Housing and Neighbourhood Service, the Housing Service held a number of standards that the Repairs Service worked to. The Services worked closely in defining the categories of the different jobs. Nathan Rogers and Mark Freeth met regularly with the Housing Senior Leadership Team to update on progress. The Housing Service was not able to access live data on individual job progress. It was acknowledged that more could be done in connection with how the Service supported colleagues in the Housing Service, and it was hoped that the new proposed functionality would enable officers in that Service to be able to interact with tenants in terms of the progress of jobs. The new process would also enable the Repairs Service to signpost tenants to other Council services, and record data much better. Whilst Area Housing Managers did not currently receive regular update reports on jobs directly, there was a suite of reports that the Service fed into the Housing Service, which was turned into performance data, and subsequently used for consideration by the HANAP, and which Area Housing Managers could access. It was hoped that such data could be sent directly in the future, and the Service was currently discussing with Area Housing Managers what they would like to see in terms of data.

- The backlog, available resources and supply chain represented serious challenges for the Service, and colleagues in the Housing and Neighbourhood Service had been both very supportive and patient with the Service on these issues.
- 43 new operatives had recently been recruited, with plans for further recruitment. The Service had been liaising with more agencies in connection with further recruitment. A national shortage of skilled labour had been identified, which had raised concerns for the Service as it was just about to commence the process of reprocurng all its sub-contractors.

6.5 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the information now reported and the responses to the questions raised;
- (b) thanks Nathan Rogers and Mark Freeth for attending the meeting, and responding to the questions raised;
- (c) recognises (i) the problems faced by the Repairs and Maintenance Service, and understands that there are plans to tackle the backlog and deliver a quality service and (ii) the frustrations felt by the customers and the workforce, particularly with regard to the delays in repairs;
- (d) requests that:-
 - (i) the Service continues to work towards improving performance in terms of repairs;
 - (ii) the Director of Transport, Repairs and Facilities Management

submits regular update reports to this Committee in terms of performance;

- (iii) the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Service provides improved reporting with regard to the Service's targets and performance;
- (iv) a timeline be produced to assimilate workforce terms and conditions to eradicate anomalies; and
- (v) the issues regarding the accountability of the Repairs and Maintenance Service, specifically regarding the use of a Service Level Agreement, be referred to the Executive Member for Housing, Roads and Waste Management (Councillor Paul Wood), with a request that this issue be referred to the Communities and Neighbourhoods Transitional Committee for consideration.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

7.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer (Emily Standbrook-Shaw) referred to the list of suggested meeting dates for meetings during 2021/22, which had been circulated to members of the Committee.

7.2 Members agreed that Active Travel be added to the Committee's Work Programme for 2021/22.

7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee agrees:-

- (a) the list of dates circulated prior to the meeting as dates of meetings for the Committee during 2021/22, as follows:-

Thursdays, 16th September, 4th November and 2nd December 2021, and 17th February and 17th March 2022, from 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm; and

- (b) that Active Travel be added to its Work Programme for 2021/22.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 16th September 2021, at 1.00 pm.

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