Runnymede Borough Council

Service Area Plan 24/25
Customer, Digital and Collection Services
FINAL COMMITTEE APPROVED

Approvals

Approved by CLT: Dec 13th 2023

Approved by Corporate Management Cttee: Mar 21st 2024

Service Area Plan for Financial Year 2024/25

Service Area: Customer, Digital and Collection Services

Corporate Head of Service: Linda Norman

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Version: FINAL DRAFT

Mission statement

From April 2023, Customer Services still had vacancies across the service area which had a major impact in service delivery. A new Customer Services Team Leader was appointed in April 23 together with three other staff on the statutory team to try to create some resilience. Customer Services is an area with a high turnover of staff particularly on the statutory team which requires in depth legislative knowledge of both Council Tax and Housing. Housing repair work has transferred to MCP but unfortunately due to technical issues with interfaces, Customer Services have continued to log repair calls on behalf of MCP until November 23 which had a further impact on resources.

Work has continued with the website and customer relationship management system to enable customers to self-serve and reduce the need to contact the Council via more traditional methods such as telephone, letter, face to face and email. Call volumes have started to reduce and following a further vacancy in Customer Services, this post has been reviewed and a new role of Customer and Digital Engagement Officer has been created to sit across both the Customer Services Team and the Transformation Team to continue improving the on-line experience to enable more customers to self-serve.

Staff retention has been an issue across all areas within the division with vacancies carried across Revenues, Benefits, Infrastructure & Operations as well as the Transformation Team.

Revenues and Benefits continue to face legislative challenges with the cost-of-living crisis and continue to administer various grants from the Government in a relatively short period of time. The Business Rates Revaluation has been successfully implemented in April 23 along with the various Energy and Fuel grants. The Enforcement Agent contract is due for renewal in December 23 and the team have undertaken a procurement exercise to include all debt owed to the Council and create a corporate debt contract to facilitate collection of multiple debts. This new contract will commence from 1 April 2024.

The new CTS scheme for 23/24 was implemented on time and to budget and has simplified the process which has reduced the number of days to process new claims from 27 to 19

days. In addition, the Benefits Team continues to administer the various tranches of the Household Support Fund ensuring much needed support is targeted to those most in need. Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery has also transferred to the Housing Benefit Team with £1m to review and collect.

The Homes for Ukrainian Team are responsible for the administration of the Government Homes for Ukraine initiative. The Team comprises of two resettlement co-ordinators and one translator. The team are responsible for supporting both host and refuges families, working with government agencies, voluntary sector and Surrey CC to ensure refugees are supported and assist them with integration into the community. Welfare checks are carried out every three months to minimise breakdowns in relationships and the need to re-match with other hosts. The scheme has been extended until March 24 to reduce the risk of homelessness albeit with a reduced budget per refugee which will bring challenges around how much support the team can offer with regards to housing costs.

On-street parking enforcement returned to Surrey CC on 1 April 2023 with a smooth transition to the new contractors. SCC have extended the agency agreement in relation to the collection and enforcement of residual PCN's which the team are continuing to recover. The new case management system for council owned car parks has gone live and the Environment and Sustainability have approved the capital expenditure to replace the pay and display machines with new updated machines across all car parks with Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) installed in four car parks. The procurement of the new machines will commence during 2023/24 with implementation in 2024/25.

Both teams within Digital Services have been carrying vacancies whilst delivering 'The Getting Fit for the Future' Transformation Programme. The Transformation Team is fully staffed from November 23 and a new post of GIS and Address Officer will be transferred from Building Control team to create resilience and efficiencies around the Council's property data.

Several back-office systems will need replacing over the next four years and cyber security is becoming a high priority across the organisation with a need to protect personal data and ensure systems are safe and secure. A hardware refresh was successfully delivered to support the Hybrid Working Project where over 300 staff were moved to secure access through laptops and facilitated hot-desking by standardising kit across the Council. The team are now focusing on the IT member device refresh and other hardware replacement projects to ensure the Council's various operating systems remain secure.

The new Corporate Business Plan will focus on five themes of which the Organisational Development Theme will be the main focus of the division with the four strands; People; Process; Technology and Green will provide a clear framework which will provide effective governance across the division. Investing in both staff and technology, legacy systems will be replaced with modern technology that will support new and better ways of working.

Service Information

Service Area: Customer, Digital and Collection Services

Service Area 1:   Customer Services

Service Area 2:   Digital Services

Service Area 3:   Post and Document Management Services

Service Area 4:   Housing Benefits

Service Area 5:   Revenues

Service Area 6:   Parking Services

Service Area 7:   Homes 4 Ukraine

Description of Service (1) Customer Services

Main Purpose: The aim of the service is to provide our customers with the information they require at first point of contact as much as possible, in a way that meets their needs and desires yet still being affordable to the Council. The Customer Services team is trained in a multi-disciplinary way to answer simple queries on a wide range of services whether the customer visits in person, contacts us by telephone or e-mail. This will deliver a cost-effective modern service which meets customer and corporate needs through the development and use of appropriate technologies whilst maintaining customer care and statutory responsibilities.

This service is split into two distinct areas:

Statutory Team which works on Council Tax and Housing- related matters:

- Moves
- Discounts
- DD
- Refunds
- Payment arrangements
- Housing tenancy management
- Housing Maintenance
- Work schedules, orders, administration
- Garage rentals
- Rent payments; arrears; statements

Community Team which works on Environmental and Leisure-related matters:

- Environmental protection (fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, stray dogs, graffiti, noise, anti-social behaviour)
- Registration of   public health licenses (dog breeding, tattoos, piercing, acupuncture, food safety)
- Parking – processing PCN's, DVLA access, appeals

- Parking permits
- Green waste
- Food waste
- Street cleansing
- Rubbish & Recycling
- Halls & Day centres
- Leisure and sports bookings
- Events in parks

The team deal with general high-volume enquiries including:

- Telephony
- Reception
- Payments
- Council Tax
- Housing maintenance
- Tenancy management
- Green waste

Key Functions and relevant Statistics from Previous Year/ projections for next FY:

- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Customer Services in 22/23 - 51,807
- Number of telephone calls taken in Customer Services in 22/23 - 131,793

Description of Service (2) Digital Services

Main Purpose: The Digital Services team are responsible for all aspects of the ICT service i.e. network, infrastructure, security, applications, hardware, software and support. No aspect of the ICT service is outsourced to a third-party provider.

The core objectives for the team are:

- To keep the network, all applications and systems operational at all times to support the delivery of services.
- To maintain the network, applications, systems, security, hardware and software to the highest level.
- To lead and advise the organisation in the choice, procurement and implementation of new applications, systems, software and hardware.
- To provide the staff and councillors with the necessary training and advice to use the equipment and systems.
- To keep up to date with the latest technologies and inform the Council how innovation can improve service delivery.
- To maintain a working relationship with all other Surrey Districts, Boroughs, the County, third sector, suppliers and business partners.
- To provide a means of ensuring that problems and issues are resolved as quickly as possible.
- To secure the network, data and information against external threats.
- To ensure that applications and systems are fit for purpose and are operating both efficiently and effectively.
- To manage the Council website.

The team have responsibility for:

- Cyber security audit.
- Penetration test and PSN compliance.
- Microsoft home office for staff.
- Member device and support.
- Regular software upgrades of back-office systems.
- Obtain and maintain PCI DSS compliance.
- Obtain and maintain PSN certificate and compliance.
- Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity testing.
- Maintain Digital services contract register & system asset database.
- Update Business Continuity Plan.

Key Functions and relevant Statistics from Previous Year:

- Service Desk stats April 2022 to March 2023 is 4780 compared to 5247 for April 21 to March 22

Description of Service (3) Post and Document Management Services

Main Purpose: This team has been moved back into Digital Services and is managed by the Digital Delivery Manager. This section deals with all incoming post to the Council and sorts the correspondence at a basic level for other services areas. It provides scanning and indexing facility as required by departments with a large part of their work back-scanning documents into Information@Work (I@W) once services have processed the paper copy. For some areas, the work is scanned directly into the I@W once the correspondence has been categorised and referenced. Staff have a working knowledge of the Verification Framework Code of Practice for handling Housing Benefit documents.

Key Functions and relevant Statistics from Previous Year:

- Outgoing mail for 22/23 is 224,628 compared to 185,552 for 21/22 year
- Incoming mail from April 22 to March 23 is 15,477. April 23 to Sept 23 is 17,941

Description of Service (4) Housing Benefits

Main Purpose: The Housing Benefits team deal with all aspects of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support administration:

- Appeals
- Hardship and Welfare advice
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Overpayment
- Verification of documents
- Government partnership working
  - Real Time Indicators (RTI)
  - Automated Transfer Local Authority System (ATLAS)
  - Customer Information System (CIS)
- Assessment of
  - Housing Benefit
  - Council Tax Support
- Local Housing Allowance
  - Registered Social Landlords
  - Council Tenants
  - Short term temporary accommodation
  - Private tenures

Key Functions and relevant Statistics from Previous Year:

- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Housing Benefits in 22/23 46,444
- Number of telephone calls taken in Housing Benefits in 22/23 7,484
- Number of visitors to reception in relation to Housing Benefits in 22/23 1,926

Description of Service (5) Revenues

Main Purpose: The Revenues section deal with the more complicated aspects of Council Tax administration:

- Business Rates
- Valuation office schedules
- Completion Notices
- Building works
- Appeals
- Exemptions
- Complaints
- Freedom of Information requests
- Sole or main residence appeals
- Court attendance
- Enforcement agents
- Attachment to Earnings/Benefits/allowances
- Charging orders
- Insolvency
- Tracing absconders

Key Functions and relevant Statistics from Previous Year (22/23):

- Council Tax collection rates – 97.9%
- Business Rates collection rates – 98.6%
- Recovery notices for Council Tax – 20,132
- Recovery notices for Business Rates –1,834
- Number of DD payers for Council Tax – 26,964
- Number of DD payers for Business Rates - 826
- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Council Tax – 11,594 (Back Office) - 11,822 (Customer Services)
- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Business Rates – 3,589
- Number of telephone calls taken in Council Tax - 736

Description of Service (6) Parking Services

Main Purpose: The Parking Team deal with the administration, collection and enforcement of Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) for both On-street and Off-Street Parking. The Team is responsible for ensuring road safety and free flow of traffic across the Borough and for ensuring customers who use Council owned car parks pay for the service provided. In August, the team also took over the management of Runnymede Pleasure Ground car park and the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system installed at that location.

In 2022/23, the team issued 7,603 PCNs and answered 3,392 calls. The Team deal with all aspects from informal challenge to Tribunal Hearings. The Civil Enforcement Officers patrol 37 hours a week across 7 days from 7.00 in the morning to 7.00pm at night on a rota to ensure service delivery.

Description of Service (7) Homes 4 Ukraine

Main Purpose: The Homes for Ukrainian Team are responsible for the administration of the Government Homes for Ukraine initiative. The total budget across two years is approximately £897k which will go towards administering the scheme including thank you payments to hosts and support with Housing costs as required. The Team comprises of two resettlement co-ordinators and one translator. The team are responsible for:

- supporting 106 refugees and 70 host families.
- updating the Home Office portal.
- working with North West Surrey Volunteers and other stakeholders to ensure the refugees are supported and assist them with integration into the community.
- carrying out mandatory checks required by the government to ensure that sponsors are suitably vetted.
- undertake welfare visits at 3,6-,9- and 12-month intervals.

Planned Activities

Total number of planned activities	Types of Activities				CBP / SAP Activities	
	Project	Review	One-off	New Core Activity	CBP Activities	SAP Activities
24	**15**	**2**	**1**	**6**	**10**	**14**

Project

Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
Project	ANPR and Pay Display	Economic Development	01 February 2024	01 February 2024	31 March 2025	In progress
Project	Event management and bookings software	Economic Development	01 December 2023	02 January 2024	30 September 2024	In progress
Project	HR & Payroll System Delivery	Organisational Development		01 May 2023	31 July 2024	In progress
Project	Members Device Refresh	Organisational Development	01 April 2023	01 July 2023	30 May 2024	In progress
Project	Waste & recycling software	Environmental Sustainability	01 December 2023	01 February 2024	31 March 2025	In progress
Project	Financial Management System	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 December 2025	Not started
Project	Gazetteer software replacement as SaaS	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
Project	Procure and implement a new Environmental Services system	Organisational Development	01 April 2025		31 March 2026	Not started
Project	SAN replacement		01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
Project	SIEM upgrade to SaaS	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
Project	Telephony review	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		30 November 2025	Not started
Project	UCS replacement	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
Project	VOIP for remote sites	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
Project	WAN replacement of Unicorn lines	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
Project	Web chat options to help customers access information and services.	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started

Review

Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
Review	Digital Services training requirements / skills audit.	Organisational Development		01 April 2023	31 March 2026	In progress
Review	EV Charging Point Implementation	Environmental Sustainability	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started

One-off

Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
One Off	WCAG 2.2 Web Accessibility	Organisational Development	01 December 2023		30 June 2024	Not started

New Core Activity

Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
New Core Activity	Continuous improvement plan for Website, CRM and online forms and services	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
New Core Activity	Cyber Security Training	Organisational Development		01 April 2023	31 March 2026	In progress
New Core Activity	Digital Services to provide IT training to newly elected members.	Organisational Development	01 May 2024		30 September 2024	Not started
New Core Activity	Online content annual rolling review and improvement programme.	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
New Core Activity	Technology continuous improvement.	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
New Core Activity	Welfare reform software	Empowering Communities	01 December 2023		31 March 2025	Not started

Corporate Business Plan Activities

Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
Project	Members Device Refresh	Organisational Development	01 April 2023	01 July 2023	30 May 2024	In progress
One Off	WCAG 2.2 Web Accessibility	Organisational Development	01 December 2023		30 June 2024	Not started
Project	HR & Payroll System Delivery	Organisational Development		01 May 2023	31 July 2024	In progress
New Core Activity	Digital Services to provide IT training to newly elected members.	Organisational Development	01 May 2024		30 September 2024	Not started
Review	EV Charging Point Implementation	Environmental Sustainability	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
New Core Activity	Online content annual rolling review and improvement programme.	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
New Core Activity	Technology continuous improvement.	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
Project	Web chat options to help customers access information and services.	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
New Core Activity	Cyber Security Training	Organisational Development		01 April 2023	31 March 2026	In progress
Project	Procure and implement a new Environmental Services system	Organisational Development	01 April 2025		31 March 2026	Not started

Service Area Plan Activities

Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
Project	ANPR and Pay Display	Economic Development	01 February 2024	01 February 2024	31 March 2025	In progress
New Core Activity	Continuous improvement plan for Website, CRM and online forms and services	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
Review	Digital Services training requirements / skills audit.	Organisational Development		01 April 2023	31 March 2026	In progress
Project	Event management and bookings software	Economic Development	01 December 2023	02 January 2024	30 September 2024	In progress
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Project	WAN replacement of Unicorn lines	Organisational Development	01 April 2024		31 March 2025	Not started
Project	Waste & recycling software	Environmental Sustainability	01 December 2023	01 February 2024	31 March 2025	In progress
New Core Activity	Welfare reform software	Empowering Communities	01 December 2023		31 March 2025	Not started

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