

## **COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 13 November 2024 at 6.00 pm in Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG**

**Present:** Councillors E Davies (Chair), E Aston, S Handley and G Thomas

**In Attendance:** L Higgins (Customer Relationships & Welfare Services Service Delivery Manager), K Kynaston (Director: Housing, Customer Services & Commercial), C Pearson (Traffic and Road Safety Engineering Team Leader), R Phillips (Registrars, Public Protection, Legal & Democracy Service Delivery Manager), M Powell (Strategic Transport & Highway Network Management Service Delivery Manager), C Robinson (Operational Policing Unit Inspector, West Mercia Police) D Sargeant (Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services), P Starkey (Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)) and K Thompson (Active Travel & Road Safety Education Team Leader)

**Apologies:** Councillor P J Scott

#### **COMSC7 Apologies for Absence**

#### **COMSC8 Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **COMSC9 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2024 be agreed and signed by the Chair.

#### **COMSC10 Customer Service Strategy Refresh**

The Service Delivery Manager: Customer Relationships and Welfare Services presented an overview of the proposals for the Council's Customer Strategy Refresh for 2025.

The Customer Strategy was first launched in 2021 and set out the Council's vision for developing customer experience when interacting with key Council services. The strategy set out an ambitious programme of developments, which were to be delivered over a 4 year period, with the majority of actions being completed within the first 12 months.

A refreshed strategy was approved by the Council's Cabinet in September 2022 which re-focused the priority for any remaining actions to be implemented over the final three years.

Following the introduction of the current strategy some of the key achievements within the last two years have included:-

- Introduction of Ask Tom digital assistant and webchat tool resulting in 37% of customer FAQs being handled by Tom;
- Significant and sustained performance within the Corporate Contact Centre with the majority of key performance indicators being met each month;
- Successful implementation of a new customer services training programme for frontline staff;
- Expansion of customer insight programme and mystery customers;
- Introduction of a new suite of customer satisfaction surveys including QR code surveys;
- Introduction of a new ward member enquiry process and customer complaint handling policy with reduced response timescales;
- Improvements to My Telford including the launch of a brand new app, improved mapping and a review of closure response codes;
- Launch of new Leisure Services website with self-service facilities; and
- Production of a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy.

In 2021, the Council became a member of the Institute of Customer Services in order to assess where the Council compared to private sector industries for customer service satisfaction. An initial benchmarking exercise was undertaken in 2022 which consisted of a resident's survey and a workforce survey to evaluate how well the current strategy was embedded within the organisation. Key results from the first benchmarking exercise showed that the Council's performance was strong against several measures and an action plan was developed to focus on those areas identified as needing improvement.

At the time of the meeting, the Council had recently completed a second benchmarking exercise which saw an increase in the UK customer satisfaction index to 74.0 from 72.1 and an increase in net promoter score to 19.4 from 16.1. The results also identified that workforce engagement with the current strategy, culture and processes had increased by 1.85 to a new index score of 76.96 from a previous recorded score of 75.1.

Members were advised that the results received would now make the Council eligible to be considered for the Customer Services Excellence accreditation and if successful, Telford & Wrekin would be the first Council in the UK to achieve this accreditation.

The Service Delivery Manager: Customer Relationships and Welfare Services informed Members that a new Customer Strategy is currently in development and would be considered at a meeting of Cabinet in April 2025. The new Strategy would be influenced by the action plan developed following the results of the latest benchmarking exercise but will also focus on how the Council will continue to deploy AI technology to support customer experiences in the future. The strategy would also look to retain an emphasis on providing omnichannel access to Council services to ensure residents are not digitally excluded.

Members were invited to participate in exercises as part of the Mystery Customer programme and attend visits to some of the Council's frontline customer buildings to help inform and shape the new strategy before being presented to Cabinet in the Spring.

Following the presentation, Members posed the following questions:-

*Members raised a number of concerns around previous mapping issues when reporting issues using the My Telford app, specifically in wards that share boundaries with Shropshire Council or have unadopted roads. Members also expressed their concerns for residents who had previously been unable to contact the Council using telephone services out of hours during severe weather to report incidents of fallen trees and if the Council had alternative methods of contact in place to report incidents during circumstances such as these.*

The Service Delivery Manager: Customer Relationships and Welfare Services advised Members that feedback would be taken on board.

*Members commented on the process for using Ask Tom and that some residents may find the system confusing when calling the Contact Centre and first hear the suggested questioning prompt which includes questions relating to Council Tax.*

The Service Delivery Manager: Customer Relationships and Welfare Services advised Members that Ask Tom provides example questions to identify if queries can be answered before being connected to an operator. Members were informed that feedback would be reported back to the relevant Team to adjust the questioning prompts where needed.

*What support was in place for residents who could not access services digitally or online?*

The Service Delivery Manager: Customer Relationships and Welfare Services advised Members that the Borough's current demographic had been considered when putting a service online. The Council's blue badge service was given as an example of a service that was accessible to residents both online and face to face. Members were reassured that the Council's intention remained to keep every channel open and that if residents were unable to conduct business online, a phonenumber or face to face service would be available. Members also heard that the Council had complemented the introduction of online services by offering digital inclusion workshops for residents. Programmes had been offered across the borough in Parish Council buildings and community facilities such as libraries.

*Were the digital inclusion workshops running as part of community events and did residents have to sign up to attend?*

The Service Delivery Manager: Customer Relationships and Welfare Services confirmed that sessions were delivered as drop-in's and had been dedicated to digital inclusion, providing support and answers to a wide range of questions. Where possible, sessions were held as part of local events to reach more residents directly.

*With 98% satisfaction among those who use it regularly, how did the Council capture feedback from those who don't use it as often? How did you reach those individuals?*

The Service Delivery Manager: Customer Relationships and Welfare Services advised that the Council's regularly receives good feedback from QR codes placed in parks, leisure centres, and changing rooms. The micro surveys ask specific questions such as what was the service like and are well used. The QR code in the Town Park is the most frequently used by visitors and service user. However, the Service Delivery Manager confirmed that the Council could do more to make QR codes more prominent and clearer to encourage greater participation.

### **COMSC11 Creating Safer Roads in Telford & Wrekin**

The Service Delivery Manager: Strategic Transport & Highway Network Management presented the report.

The report provided Members with an update on the Council's road safety strategy, education streams and its current delivery to improve road safety for residents. The report also outlined the progress that the Council had made in the prioritisation and delivery of Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's) and road safety engineering schemes.

During the last 5 years, the Council had invested over £7m in road safety improvements and education streams including the introduction of safer routes to schools and 20mph speed zones. The Council have been an active member of the Telford and Wrekin Safer Roads Partnership and have worked with a number of partners including West Mercia Police and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service. The Partnership aims to reduce the number of deaths or seriously injured persons on roads across the West Mercia area.

Members heard that road safety activities had been delivered across the Borough since the adoption of the Road Safety Strategy in 2015 which aims to identify the causes of collisions. During 2021 and 2023 there had been an increase in the severity of road accidents across the Borough despite delivery of measures to improve road safety and education. This increase had been identified as part of a national trend and remained an area of focus for the Council and national road safety campaign groups.

In 2016, road traffic accidents had peaked to a total number of 252 recorded collisions with 206 slight collisions, 44 serious collisions and 2 fatal collisions with the majority of collisions caused as a result of driver behaviour such as excess speed or medical circumstances. Since this peak, there was a 44%

reduction in the total number of collisions recorded to a total of 141 in 2023, however fatalities had increased to their highest level since 2014.

Since April 2023, the Council had delivered 2,500 road safety education activities and had continued to deliver practical interventions with a focus on working with schools and colleges including schemes such as Bikeability and Be Bright Be Seen, pedestrian training for year 3 and 4 pupils, transition workshops targeted at year 6 pupils moving into secondary education, the introduction of junior road safety officers and targeted campaigns such as don't drink and drive.

Members also heard that the Council had led the way in utilising the latest technology to develop and deliver innovative virtual reality (VR) headsets for road safety education. The package offered facilitates the use of road safety scenarios to provide training on a broad range of issues including the impact of drink and drugs, speed and in-car distractions. As part of the roll out process, headset packages had been focused on new and young drivers under the age of 25 to highlight the importance of passenger safety and peer pressure. Workshops had also been held with mature drivers working in partnership with West Mercia Police and Shropshire Fire & Rescue. Since its launch in March 2024, over 400 people had received VR training sessions and demand had continued to increase with more scenarios planned for delivery over coming years.

Since 2018/19, the Council had invested £850k into safer routes to school programmes with the delivery of over 35 schemes including advisory 20mph zones, traffic calming measures and amendments to parking restrictions. A pilot project known as New School Journey had been delivered to 1,600 children and young people to encourage more active travel to schools over one academic year. At the start of the year, 51% of pupils travelled to school by car and on completion the most common mode of transport was walking.

A new TOR Management System had been implemented to digitalise the Council's TROs including a map based approach. As a result, all current and proposed TROs could now be viewed online by residents to ensure transparency and to reduce the need for residents to log enquiries in relation to TRO measures. Briefing packs had also been sent to Elected Members approximately 6-8 weeks before advertisement.

As part of the continued delivery of road safety engineering schemes, annual reports had been developed for each Town and Parish Council area outlining known road concerns and planned works.

Following the update, Members posed the following questions:-

*As a primary school teacher for Year 4, you see various initiatives like "Be Bright Be Seen," providing gloves for children to take home. Given the focus on primary schools, will there be a similar review for secondary schools and will there be initiatives involving VR in college environments?*

The Active Travel & Road Safety Education Team Leader advised Members that the Team had recognised a gap in road safety education between Year 7 and Year 10 and that the Council was currently exploring how to utilize VR technology for pupils in these age groups. The Council would be looking to introduce VR initiatives in Years 10 and 11 and to college and A-level students in the near future.

*Speeding is a real key issue in the Borough with the biggest issues faced by Parish Councils being road safety. Having recently commissioned a traffic survey on the B4394 through Allscott Meads, it identified that the majority of vehicles were travelling over 70mph. Could the Council consider putting forward a traffic calming scheme for Allscott Meads, similar to the one that has been proposed for Roden?*

The Traffic and Road Safety Engineering Team Leader advised that the implementation of a traffic calming scheme in Allscott Meads had been delayed due to TRO and signage issues as a result of developers. It was confirmed that the speed limit proposal had recently been approved without being opposed and new signage would be installed from March 2025.

*Can you advise why there is a significant delay with installing speed indicator devices (SIDs) that have been requested by Parish Councils?*

The Traffic and Road Safety Engineering Team Leader advised that the original locations for SID devices in Roden had been proposed as part of a revised scheme and that the devices had now been moved to their permanent positions and would be operational within a few weeks.

The Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services informed Members that the Council had completed significant work in relation to TROs to increase awareness and advised that if there are road schemes or TROs that are of importance to Members, the Council would be happy to work with Parishes to prioritise them.

Members received an update from the Operational Policing Unit Inspector for Telford and Wrekin on the work of the Community Safety Partnership. The Operational Policing Unit Inspector informed Members that the Partnership had recently introduced a Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI) working group whereby Local Policing Area (LPA) leads had been invited to participate in the coordination of force operations and assets. Issues raised at the working group meetings were fed back to Parishes and Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs). Members also heard that at the time of the meeting, Telford & Wrekin had the least amount of KSIs across West Mercia with 5 fatal collisions recorded in the last year as a result of drink or drug driving compared to Shropshire who had 21 fatal collisions recorded in the last year.

Members participated in a live demonstration of the VR headsets during the meeting and thanked officers and West Mercia Police for their attendance.

**COMSC12 Work Programme Review**

The Service Delivery Manager: Registrars, Public Protection, Legal & Democracy presented the updated work programme to the Committee. The next two formal meetings were scheduled to take place in January and March 2025 and would look at items on domestic abuse grants and affordable warmth.

**COMSC13 Chair's Update**

The Chair updated the Committee on the recent presentation delivered to the Council's Cabinet at its meeting on 7 November 2024 which sought agreement from Cabinet to formally adopt the recommendations made by the Committee as part of the Elections Review work that took place earlier in the year.

The Chair thanked Committee Members for their hard work and participation in the review and extended their thanks to the Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer.

The meeting ended at 7.17 pm

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:** Wednesday 22 January 2025