

Report to: **Executive**
Date: **14 March 2019**
Title: **Customer Satisfaction Action Plan Progress**
Portfolio Area: **Customer First**
Wards Affected: **All Wards**
Relevant Scrutiny Committee: **Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:
(e.g. referral on of recommendation or implementation of substantive decision) **Council**

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RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1. Note and comment on the progress made to date in improving customer satisfaction as detailed in section 3 of this report.**
- 2. Endorse the next steps as outlined in section 5 of the report.**

1. Executive summary

1.1 This report is presented by the portfolio holder for Customer First and details progress made to date in improving customer satisfaction.

1.2 The report also includes recommended next steps to continue to improve the customer experience.

2. Background

2.1 In October and November 2018 Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Executive resolved to note the results from the Institute of Customer Service Customer Satisfaction Survey, and endorsed an action plan to improve customer service.

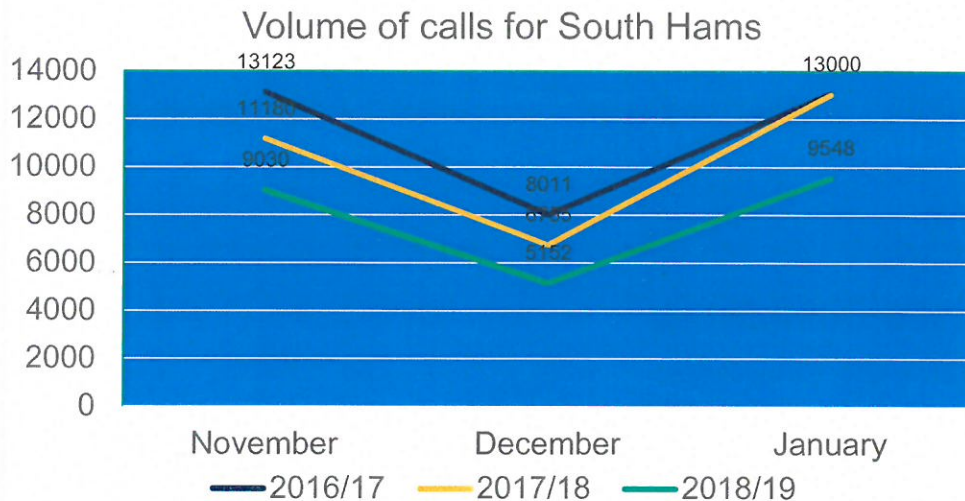
- 2.2 This report therefore provides an overview of progress made to date on improving customer service and ultimately customer satisfaction.

3 Outcomes/outputs

- 3.1 Key components of the Customer Satisfaction Action Plan are:

- a. End to end review of high volume services
- b. Mechanisms for regular feedback from customers

- 3.2 To address point 3.1a above, work has begun on reviewing how we communicate with customers both in Waste and Development Management services. There have been some early, but significant wins in the Waste service as illustrated in the graph below.

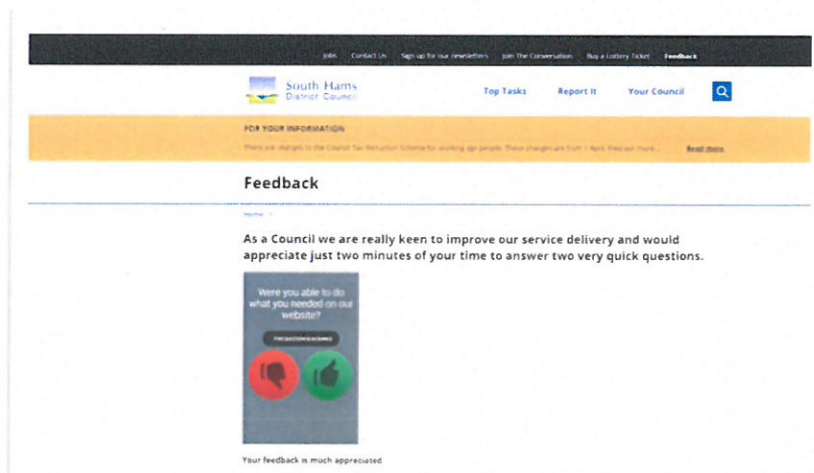
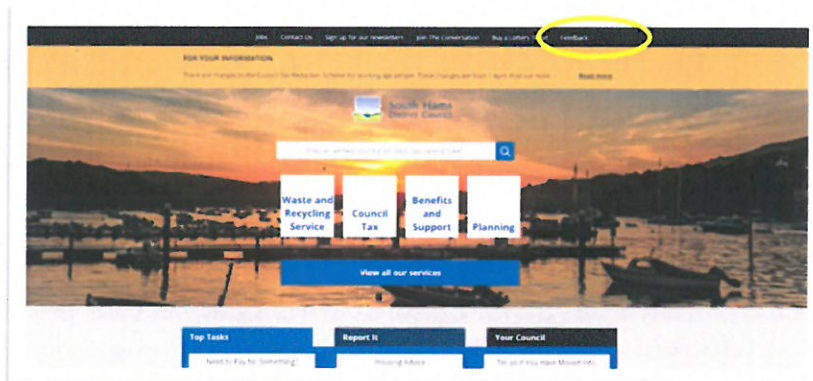


- 3.3 The substantial drop in calls December 2018 and January 2019 can largely be attributed to the good work done in the Waste Service. The Service simplified messaging about waste and recycling collection during the Christmas period. The team analysed what caused issues in previous years and ensured clear and reliable information was in place.
- 3.4 In Development Management focus has been on creating a process to keep customers informed throughout the application process. An application status field has been created which is visible when the application is viewed in the planning search on the website. This status will be updated by officers throughout the life cycle of the application.
- 3.5 Also in Development Management a collection of automatic update emails have been produced that will keep the customer informed about key stages in their application. Agents were consulted on this proposal at a recent forum and were supportive of the move.

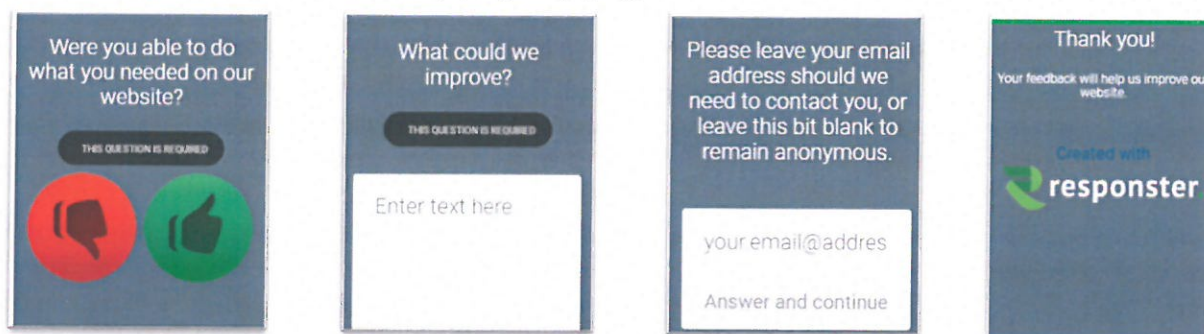
- 3.6 Both these changes in Development Management should keep customers better informed, decrease the amount of inbound contact from the general public, agents and applicants, and increase customer satisfaction. These changes are set to go live in early March after all the officers have been trained to complete the updates. At the time of writing this report training is well underway and going well.
- 3.7 Since starting the review of Development Management processes a number of improvements have already been made to IT. This includes the resolution of the problem which was making the submission of Letters of Representation over the website repeatedly fail. We have also seen another couple of fixes to bugs which had been highlighted by officers. In addition the implementation of Cadcorp (mapping software) is underway, which will greatly improve planning history searches. At present mapping is very time consuming for staff and not available currently online for our customers. Cadcorp will therefore save staff time and allow customers to self-serve online. The staff training alluded to in the paragraph above has also highlighted other ICT processes that will help hone internal and external communications.
- 3.8 Service improvements have also taken place in other areas. The Council Tax team receive approximately 600 pieces of new work each week. In February 2018 current cases sat at 1,574, in February 2019 they more than halved to 776 cases. This improvement in service can be attributed to a number of strategies, with the most influential being the introduction of a work prioritisation model which helps decision making around the most urgent pieces of work. Other changes include linked objective and target setting for both the team and individuals, as well as, weekly progress reviews and performance reporting to the team members.
- 3.9 The Benefits team have seen improvements in service performance due to a different strategy which moved all incoming calls to the team. Resource was moved from the Contact centre to the Benefits team with all calls being answered within the team. This reduced missed calls to virtually nil and wait times to approx. 1 minute. It has also reduced double handling with more queries being resolved at first point of contact. This approach coupled with the linked objectives, target setting, and weekly performance reviews has resulted in significant improvement in processing times. See table below:

	Average processing time for new claims	Average processing time for change of circumstances
Jan-2018	23.30 days	4.86 days
Jan-2019	13.12 days	3.19 days

- 3.10 The work prioritisation model, which has resulted in resolving queries quicker and prioritisation of the most urgent cases, has also recently been introduced in Housing Benefits, therefore we expect to see further improvement.
- 3.11 These resource savings have enabled us to flex the case management resource for the last few months and support other teams in need i.e. Housing, Contact Centre & Revenues.
- 3.12 Improvements have also been made in the timely collection of outstanding debt. Many customers, both business and residential, are caused undue distress due to the delayed collection of monies owed. South Hams has a target not to exceed £700,000 of sundry debt at any given time. At the end of January sundry debtors equated to £566,585 i.e. £88,500 less than the same time last year, when it stood at £655,171. The improvements in this area have also allowed us to flex the case management resource and support some of the Waste Service back office functions.
- 3.12 To address point 3.1b above a simple feedback survey has been embedded on the Council website. The survey can be accessed by clicking on a feedback button at the top of the Council's homepage. This free, survey software provides a quick and easy mechanism for customers to provide feedback.
- 3.13 Visuals of the feedback survey and how to access it from the Council home page are as follows:



A snap shot of the survey page by page:



- 3.15 Feedback from the survey to date has been really helpful. Customers appear to be using the feedback button as a last resort, because they haven't been able to find what they want on our website. By listening to this feedback we are able to respond to customers and hone the website to better meet customer needs. Feedback provided by customers can be found at Appendix A of this report.
- 3.16 Officers are also using the survey tool above to create bespoke surveys for high volume services requested by customers online. Surveys to date have been created for planning and waste requests. Once a customer has completed a request online they are invited to complete an optional feedback survey to let us know whether they thought it was easy to make their request and again what we could improve. Feedback to date shows that 67% of customers requesting a development management service found it easy to make a request. Whilst 90% of customers requesting a waste service found their request easy.
- 3.17 Detailed comments from each of these surveys can be found at Appendix B of this report. The Waste and Development Management Teams are regularly checking this customer feedback and responding where required, as well as refining processes to ensure customer satisfaction is further improved.

4 Options available and consideration of risk

The Council is committed to improving customer service. It is therefore considered prudent to continue with the implementation of the Customer Satisfaction Action Plan. Early actions as detailed in section 3 above are already improving customer service.

5 Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 To gain further insight from customers, it is suggested we embed quick, optional feedback surveys each time the Council electronically contacts a customer. This will help the Council further hone its service offering by pinpointing what does and doesn't work well for customers at a given time during their interaction with us.

- 5.2 The next phase of work as part of the Customer Satisfaction Action Plan is around pre-empting customer needs and managing expectations. The focus for this will be improving our website by using feedback from the survey detailed in section 3.11 above coupled with findings from Google analytics. Thus ensuring regularly searched information is quick and easy to access and in turn reduces the instances whereby customers call the Council simply because they can't do what they need to do on our website.
- 5.3 Website improvement plans include: improving search terms; the ordering of top tasks; better labelling of links and easier to access page content. A customer focus group will be convened ensuring customers are an integral part of this work.
- 5.4 Work is also underway to analyse customer complaints to make sure lessons are learned and that service delivery is improved accordingly.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	Executive has a responsibility to provide Leadership to the overall activities of the Council.
Financial	Y	There are no financial implication as a result of this report that have not already been budgeted for.
Risk	Y	A failure to review and act upon the Customer Satisfaction Action Plan could lead to: Lack of coherent delivery Reputational harm Ineffective use of resources Poor quality service These risks are mitigated by: The recommendations outlined in this report
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		None – no policy or service change is proposed in this report.
Safeguarding		None – no policy or service change is proposed in this report.
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		None – no policy or service change is proposed in this report.
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		None – no policy or service change is proposed in this report.
Other implications		-

Appendix

Appendix A – Website Survey Feedback

Appendix B – Waste and Development Management Survey Feedback