

Contact Centre Update

Report to: **Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Date: **14 January 2016**

Title: **CONTACT CENTRE UPDATE**

Portfolio Area: **Customer First**

Wards Affected: **All**

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Panel

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

Date next steps can be taken: Any recommendations made by the Panel will be considered, in the first instance, by the Executive at its meeting on 4 February 2016

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the Panel:

- 1. continue to support the work being undertaken to improve Customer Services and monitor performance through regular updates; and**
- 2. endorse the Action Plan as outlined at Appendix C.**

1. Executive summary

At its last meeting on 19 November 2015, the Panel received its latest regular update on Customer Services (Minute O&S.55/15 refers). During the debate on this update, the Panel reiterated its desire to see a far greater improvement in performance and therefore made the following decision:

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'That a clear action plan be produced for Customer Services and presented to the next Panel meeting on 14 January 2016 for its consideration.'

An action plan has subsequently been produced and is attached at Appendix C.

In addition, this report also takes the opportunity to update Members as to the latest performance trends since the last Panel meeting.

2. Background

- 2.1 Following the staffing changes during June 2015, there was a period where gaps in staffing in the contact centre provided some service delivery challenges. This report sets out how these challenges are being addressed.
- 2.2 Pressure should be eased on the service as transition occurs in respect of the move to new technology and as staff training is rolled out and embedded across the workforce.

3. Transformation Programme Update

- 3.1 Delays in the roll out of W2 processes and the loss of experienced staff in June 2015 has meant that the Contact Centre has been working with reduced capacity. Partial go-live of services has also meant that the team have been required to work with both new and legacy systems to resolve customer enquiries.
- 3.2 The table below identifies services that have now gone partially live.

Service Area
Recycling and Refuse Collection
Car Parking
Environmental Health & Licensing
Council Tax & NNDR-Document Management
Planning Portal
Street naming and numbering

- 3.3 Whilst the initial plan was to go-live with whole services in a phased approach, it was subsequently concluded that this approach would put too much strain on case management and specialists carrying out end to end testing and training.

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- 3.4 A 'Dragons Den' type approach was implemented to prioritise the remaining processes in order to deliver the maximum return on investment. A further benefit of this approach was that this also spread the officer effort across more services and therefore avoided taking key officers out of the business for extended periods of time.
- 3.5 The following table shows planned go-live dates for those remaining processes which are deemed to be high priority:

Service Area	Target go-live date (week commencing)
Council Tax	31/01/2016
Remaining Waste processes & linked Street Scene processes	31/01/2016
Further Environmental Health & Licensing processes	31/01/2016

4. Call Volumes and Performance

- 4.1 November 2015 saw a reduction in calls in comparison to the previous month. However, to provide some context, this was still 3,000 more calls than November 2014. In order to improve performance, it is of paramount importance that call volumes into the Contact Centre are reduced. The current call volume trends are outlined at Appendix A.
- 4.2 Footfall continues to decrease across all three sites (Follaton, Kilworthy and Okehampton).
- 4.3 Performance decreased slightly from 82% in October 2015 to 80.50%. A major contributing factor for this slight decrease was that 10 staff members attended a 2.5 day benefit course. In addition, 1046 court summons for Council Tax were sent on the same day for both authorities. The Panel will also note that, at present, sickness absence is running at 9%.
- 4.4 For the reasons detailed in paragraph 4.3 above, the percentage of calls answered within 20 seconds decreased from 51% in October 2015 to 46% and the average call answer time increased from 2 minutes in October 2015 to 2 minutes 25 seconds.

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- 4.5 The top 3 highest volume phone call types for November 2015 were:
1. Contact a planning officer;
 2. Waste - order recycling sacks; and
 3. Council Tax - make a payment over the phone.
- 4.6 When a customer calls the main council telephone number, there are two ways that they can be put through to the section they require. They can either use the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and select Waste, Council Tax/Non domestic Rates or Building Control/Planning using their keypad or they can select any other enquiry or hold to go through to Switchboard. At present, the Contact Centre answers 82% of Switchboard calls within 60 seconds. To help gauge performance, Appendix B illustrates how our performance compares with that of other local authorities.
- 4.7 Once the new telephony system is in place, officers will review the performance figures to see if they are still relevant. A key consideration for the Council to prioritise is to decide whether a customer places greater emphasis on their call being answered within 20 seconds or whether they would be prepared to wait for 5 minutes on the basis that their call was then dealt with at the first point of contact.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 Officers carry out constant demand analysis to ensure that the service is identifying 'failure demand'. These are calls that we consider unnecessary, where a change in process would mean the customer would not need to contact us. For example: customers calling to request replacement recycling sacks puts huge demand on the contact centre. This is being reviewed at present.
- 5.2 Officers continue to review the messages that are currently played to customers while they are waiting to ensure useful and timely signposting is used. The Council continues to promote the use of the automated telephone line and the Council website to direct customers with simple enquiries to a quick solution. Those customers who are successfully re-directed will negatively affect the % of calls answered performance figure. This can be monitored and officers have seen evidence of this happening on the Planning line, where we provide clear information regarding: Duty Officers, the website and portal details and what to do if your property is located within the Dartmoor National Park area.

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- 5.3 The Customer Self Service Portal or 'Your Account' has now launched for Waste and Planning. Furthermore, Council Tax is due to go live in January 2016.
- 5.4 The plan for how the Council interacts with its customers (The Channel Shift Plan) is currently under development. This plan will help us target cheaper forms of contact such as Short Message Service (SMS) and email to those people who want and can use it, rather than trying to encourage all customers to use these types of contact. Contact Centre staff will be actively signing customers up to the 'Your Account' facility on the website, which will increase call times in the short term, but will reduce call numbers in the long term.
- 5.5 Other agencies are being used to deliver less complex work for Development Management. Also, the service will shortly be passing work to similar 'on demand' services for Revenues and Benefits having just completed a free trial with a company.
- 5.6 Recruitment of vacant posts is still being prioritised by managers and agency staff are being used as a short term measure to backfill those unfilled vacancies.
- 5.7 Outstanding workloads and customer service measures are now being reviewed on a weekly basis by the Senior Leadership Team.
- 5.8 The website is being updated and Customer Services are being given key messages to reassure customers.
- 5.9 Case Management are cross training staff to provide greater resilience where there is a lack of expertise and reduce backlog processing where possible. Once staff are trained and the backlog is reduced, this should result in a reduction in call volumes.
- 5.10 Council Tax call wait times are currently longer than the service would like. Answering these calls requires a higher skill set and until W2 is live for all Council Tax processes, it takes trainees 6 months to become fully competent to deal with the variety of calls which come through on that line. There is also a need to review how reminders/correspondence is sent to customers. This could mean that batch reminders are sent on a daily rather than a weekly basis.

6. Staffing

- 6.1 Six permanent members of staff have been recruited. The one remaining role will be advertised in January 2016.

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6.2 Three members of staff are currently absent through long-term sickness and officers are actively working to manage them back to work. Two of these three members of staff are due to return to work in early January.

6.3 In respect of staff training:-

- One permanent member of staff left to receive Council Tax training and this will commence in January 2016
- Frontline staff at Kilworthy have been trained to provide phone support to the Contact Centre when they are fully staffed. This should help to make the service more resilient and enable for peaks in demand to be managed better.

7. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance		None
Financial		None
Risk		There are well rehearsed reputational risks associated with the performance of the Contact Centre. In recognising these risks, the service will continue to be closely monitored with focus on ensuring that the services improves.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity	Y	There is a need to ensure we continue to meet our statutory duties.
Safeguarding	N	None
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder	N	None
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	N	None
Other implications		

Supporting Information

Appendix A: Performance Report

Appendix B: Comparison of other authorities

Appendix C: Action plan