

Report to: **Overview and Scrutiny (Internal) Committee**
Date: **8 March 2016**
Title: **CONTACT CENTRE UPDATE**
Portfolio Area: **Customer First**

Wards Affected: **All**

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: N/A

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

Date next steps can be taken: Any recommendations made by the Committee will be considered, in the first instance, by the Hub Committee at its next meeting on 22 March 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 of the presented agenda report.**

1. Executive summary

At its last meeting on 6 October 2016, the Panel received its latest regular update on Customer Services. This report gives an update of the situation.

An action plan has been produced to show the work being done to improve our service 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.
- 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	March 2016
Remaining Waste processes & linked Street Scene processes	Feb 2016
Further Environmental Health & Licensing processes	March 2016

4. Call Volumes and Performance

- 4.1 For January 2016 there was an increase in calls from the previous month but that was to be expected. This was still a 1000 more calls than January 2015. 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 (Kilworthy, Okehampton and Follaton).
- 4.3 Performance decreased from 79.5% in December 2015 to 74.4%. This was mainly due to a large reminder run for Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates due to fewer reminders being sent before Christmas. The Panel will also note that, at present, sickness absence is running at 7%.
- 4.4 For the reasons detailed in paragraph 4.3 above, the percentage of calls answered within 20 seconds decreased from 43% in December 2015 to 32% and the average call answer time increased from 2 minutes 34 seconds in December 2015 to 2 minutes 48 seconds.
- 4.5 The top 3 highest volume phone call types for January 2016 were:
1. Council Tax – make a payment over the phone
 2. Waste – recycling question
 3. Council Tax – make a Council Tax balance enquiry
- 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 60.9% 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.

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.
- 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.
- 5.3 The Customer Self Service Portal or 'My Account' has now launched for Waste and Planning. Furthermore, Council Tax is due to go live soon.
- 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 'My 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 is passing work to similar 'on demand' services for Revenues and Benefits having just completed a free trial with a company.
- 5.6 All permanent posts have now been filled for the Contact Centre.
- 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.
- 6.2 One members of staff are currently absent through long-term sickness and officers are actively working to manage her back to work.
- 6.3 In respect of staff training:-
- o Two newly recruited permanent member of staff are left to receive Council Tax training and this will commence in March 2016
 - o 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