



Report To: Scrutiny and Overview Committee

4 September 2014

Lead Officer: Alex Colyer –Executive Director Corporate Services

Contact Centre Half-Yearly Performance Review

Purpose

1. To present to Scrutiny and Overview Committee the Contact Centre Performance (**Appendix A**) for information and comment

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the report be noted.

Reason for Recommendation

3. This report provides a review of the Contact Centre's operation for January to July 2014. The performance has been reported on a monthly basis from January 2013 following its launch in December 2012.

Performance of Contact Centre

4. The performance figures to date are set out in **Appendix A**.
5. The performance of the Contact Centre is not as robust as 2013, the reason for this has been identified by Contact Centre management.
6. The review of the Contact Centre performance has highlighted that for 2014, the number of calls which have been handled during March and May in 2014 was not significantly different to the same period in 2013 and this is reflected in the performance figures provided.
7. The performance of the team during March to May 2013 was masked by the employment of 5 temporary customer contact advisors employed to manage the impact of the changes to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, following changes introduced as part of the welfare reforms.
8. It appears from the review of 2014 performance that the welfare reform did not as anticipated, significantly change the number of calls which were received during March and May 2013. Traditionally the months of March to May are busy for the Contact Centre due to significant increases in the amount of correspondence sent to residents, which includes New Year council tax bills, rent increases letters, and benefit notification letters.
9. The target of first time call resolution of 80% continues to be achieved and performance against this indicator remains strong.
10. Performance for percentage of calls handled needs to improve, together with call handling and answer times.

11. The proposed changes to the Contact Centre and the reception service which staff are currently being consulted on, combined with the recruitment of additional permanent staff, should enable more customer contact advisors to be available at peak times and enable the Contact Centre's performance to improve.

Background

12. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee conducted its annual review of the Customer Contact Centre in January 2014 (**Appendix B & C**), and it was agreed that Contact Centre performance should be reviewed again after 6 months.
13. The Contact Centre was launched in December 2012 and following this launch the Council implemented the changes to housing benefit and council tax support as part of the welfare reforms. A small team of customer advisors was employed during March to June 2013 on a temporary basis, to manage the expected increase in call volumes.

Considerations

14. The team has been working on a plan to implement changes to service design and to minimise call waiting time, building on the successes of the team but looking at areas where key improvements are necessary.
15. We are currently in a period of formal consultation with staff on proposed changes to the Contact Centre and the reception service, to improve the service provided to residents.
16. The proposal will build on the excellent achievement of 80% first time call resolution, with the main objective of reducing the numbers of calls which are not answered and dealing with the peaks and troughs in call volumes in a more effective way. The main changes to the Contact Centre and reception service will be:-
 - 1) There will no longer be dedicated reception staff; all customer contact advisors will provide advice and resolve queries to residents via multiple channels including face to face, telephone, email, and other channels as these come on stream.
 - 2) Staffing rotas will be more effectively planned using data captured since the Contact Centre was launched at Cambourne, which will allow more staff to be available to take calls when we know the service is at its busiest.
 - 3) Rota changes will mean that there will be more staff available to take calls when the Contact Centre is at its busiest and fewer staff available when the contact centre is quiet. These changes should allow more flexibility for staff to take TOIL and annual leave.
 - 4) All members of the team will provide reception services and be available to take telephone calls whilst still providing the reception service.
 - 5) Change processes to enable administration to be streamlined within the customer contact centre.

- 6) Self – Service options to reduce the number of telephone calls and face to face visitors by continuing to:
- a) Publicise and promote to residents the website as first option for information
 - b) Introduce electronic forms in key service areas
 - c) Promote and increase the use of self-service portals
 - d) Work with service areas to embrace email correspondence to residents.
17. The Contact Centre has been covering vacancies on a temporary basis and is currently recruiting for additional permanent staff, which will increase the current number of permanent staff by 5 (2 full -time and 3 part-time). This is an increase of 2 full time members of staff compared to the original staffing level; we expect that the cost of this will be covered by savings from staff vacancies.
18. The new permanent part-time staff will work at times when call volumes are busiest and enable peak periods to be covered more effectively.
19. A review of sickness levels by the HR team has suggested that these are not significantly different to other service areas, although clearly when staff have cold symptom's this will affect the level of attendance as they are unable to conduct their normal duties.
20. There has been a significant level of compliments each month although this should be tempered with the number of complaints which have been received during periods of high demand, when the percentage of calls handled is lower. The changes to the Contact Centre and reception, currently proposed to staff, will look to address staffing levels in the main. However it should be noted that during periods of extreme demand, we may still not be able to answer all calls.
21. The software has not been as robust as expected, which has resulted in significant performance issues at times. Performance of software is improving and management are working closely with the software supplier to ensure that this continues and appropriate action is being taken to resolve outstanding issues.
22. The team are undertaking work to promote other contact options to residents. Changes to the South Cambs Magazine will promote the use of the Council's website and email, to encourage those who can to contact us using these options rather than telephone or face to face.

Implications

23. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal staffing, risk management , equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other issues, the following implications have been considered;

Financial

24. We are aware that there could be some budget pressures if the savings from staff vacancies do not cover the cost of the additional 2 full time customer contact staff.

Staffing

25. The proposed changes to the Contact Centre and reception service are being managed currently; the formal consultation was launched on 13 August 2014.

Risk Management

26. The changes proposed to staff as part of the formal consultation process will enable more staff to be available at peak times, which will mitigate the risk with regard to performance.

Effect on Strategic Aims**Aim 1 – We Listen and engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure that we deliver first class services and value money.**

27. The contact has provided an improved service to residents at a substantially reduced cost; the current proposed changes to contact centre and reception service will look to provide improved service to resident with an increase in the percentage of calls being handled,

Background Papers

No Background papers were relied upon in the writing of this report

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