Coventry City Council

To: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee   **Date: 20th December 2010**

Subject: Report of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Task and Finish Group – Customer Management

1   Purpose of the Note
1.1   To inform the Committee of the findings and recommendations of this Task and Finish Group.

2   Recommendations
2.1   The Committee is recommended to endorse the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, which are as follows:

  a) that the Customer Management abc review includes the following :

     i)   an end-to-end review of the process for dealing with complaints/requests about potholes and bin collections, aimed particularly at improving the speed of feeding back information from the back office to the Contact Centre, so that responses to customers'/Members' requests are made more quickly. This work to be completed by February 2012

          Any proposals for improvement must be capable of being applied to all services, not just these two, and any future complaints/requests process must include service standards, particularly target response times.

     ii) work to see how the City Services Business Services Centre could be used to address the issue of closing down service requests, with the current backlog being given top priority and cleared as a matter of urgency. This work to be completed by December 2011

     iii) work to see how the Customer Relationship Manager system (CRM) and IT solutions could be used to improve the service to customers/Members in the longer term, including how the Members' Casework Tool and the CRM could fit together. This work to be completed by end of April 2012

  b) that the Cabinet Member Community Safety and Equalities considers authorising the purchase of a "bolt-on" for the Council's website, which will make it more accessible for customers using smart phones and which will eventually allow customers to report issues/problems more easily;

c) that, at the same time, in order to improve customer contact as quickly as possible, the Cabinet Member asks officers to investigate the feasibility of providing appropriate mobile phone applications as an interim measure, which could be implemented should it become apparent that the "bolt-on" solution is likely to take some time to implement.

d) that a report on the progress made on these recommendations be submitted to the Committee in six months' time.

3   Information/Background

3.1   The full report of the Task and Finish Group is attached as Annex A.

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Coventry City Council

ANNEXE A

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REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE
TASK AND FINISH GROUP – CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT

November 2011

1. Background

1.1   On 23rd March, 2011, a briefing was held for all Members about the Customer Management abc review, which was looking at improving and making more consistent the way in which the Council manages contacts with its customers. At that briefing Members said that they wanted to be involved in this review by means of a task and finish group supporting specific aspects of the work.

1.2   Therefore, on 15th June, 2011, the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee established a task and finish group comprising Councillors Fletcher, Johnson, Lucas and M. Mutton who had expressed an interest in this issue. Subsequent to this Councillor Ruane expressed an interest and was invited to join by the Chair of the Committee.

The Group appointed Councillor Fletcher as its Chair.

1.3   The Group was supported by officers of the City Services, Customer and Workforce Services and Chief Executive's Directorates.

1.4   The Group's recommendations are set out in section 2 below: the process by which it reached those recommendations is set out in section 3 below.

2. Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group recommends:

b) that the Customer Management abc review includes the following :

i) an end-to-end review of the process for dealing with complaints/requests about potholes and bin collections, aimed particularly at improving the speed of feeding back information from the back office to the Contact Centre, so that responses to customers'/Members' requests are made more quickly. This work to be completed by February 2012

Any proposals for improvement must be capable of being applied to all services, not just these two, and any future complaints/requests process must include service standards, particularly target response times.

ii) work to see how the City Services Business Services Centre could be used to address the issue of closing down service requests, with the current backlog being given top priority and cleared as a matter of urgency. This work to be completed by December 2011

iii) work to see how the Customer Relationship Manager system (CRM) and IT solutions could be used to improve the service to customers/Members in the longer term, including how the Members' Casework Tool and the CRM could fit together. This work to be completed by end of April 2012

b) that the Cabinet Member Community Safety and Equalities considers authorising the purchase of a "bolt-on" for the Council's website, which will make it more accessible for customers using smart phones and which will eventually allow customers to report issues/problems more easily;

c) that, at the same time, in order to improve customer contact as quickly as possible, the Cabinet Member asks officers to investigate the feasibility of providing appropriate

mobile phone applications as an interim measure, which could be implemented should it become apparent that the "bolt-on" solution is likely to take some time to implement.

d) that a report on the progress made on these recommendations be submitted to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee in six months' time.

3.   The process followed by the Group

3.1   The Group held five meetings between August and November and also visited the Council's Contact Centre, to experience first-hand how the staff worked and the types of call they received.

The issues covered at each meeting and the resulting outcomes were as follows:

1st August, 2011

The Group agreed that the focus of its work would be the migration of services to the Contact Centre, particularly the design of the front/back office processes, with the aim of improving customers' (including Members') experience. In order to do this, it decided to use as examples the processes involved in the reporting of complaints/requests relating to potholes and bin collections.

7th September, 2011

The scope of the review was agreed (see Appendix)

The Group found that the lack of appropriate IT systems in the back offices was a major problem, meaning that real time information about the progress on customers' (and particularly Councillors') complaints / requests could not be given to the Contact Centre. Examples of the current situation were:-

a) systems were still largely paper-based in Waste Management and 3 different IT systems were used in Highways Maintenance.

b) Informing the Contact Centre of the outcome of complaints/requests could take up to 2 weeks after work was completed. The Group noted that, although administrative staff levels had reduced as part of the migration of work to the Contact Centre, this situation had existed before the migration. However, the new directorate Business Support Service should help to address this in the short term.

The Group concluded that introducing appropriate IT systems would improve not only the provision of "real time" information, but also the efficiency of the whole process of addressing customers' complaints/requests. The Group asked the Head of ICT (Kevin Malone) to come to the next meeting to discuss with the Group how this problem might be addressed

Other issues raised at the meeting were:

i)   Although complaints made via Councillors were given priority, Councillors were not given enough information about the progress of complaints/requests and the completion of work. Officers undertook to look at how this could be improved.

ii) Customers were not told when a replacement bin had been delivered. The Group suggested that customers should be given a leaflet telling them when this had been done and officers said that they would consider doing this.

iii) Consistency in the questions asked by the Contact Centre relating to missed bin complaints. Officers said that there was already a high level of consistency, but indicated that they would consider adding a question to the Contact Centre advisors' script aimed at reminding customers that bins should be put out by 7 a.m.

19th September, 2011

As requested, the Head of ICT attended the meeting to discuss with the Group how IT systems might be improved so that customers received a better service. The Group reiterated its main concern that customers (and particularly Councillors) were not being informed of the progress of their complaints/requests.

The Group learned that the Customer Management Review would provide long-term IT solutions, but that in the meantime, work on the following was already being done aimed at improvements in the short-term:-

- use of text messaging
- Members' casework tool (a Member Group was involved in this)
- Smartphone apps
- improvements to CRM software
- using the CRM and the data it produces, in a better, smarter way

The Group acknowledged that IT improvements alone would not solve all problems: improvements were also needed to current processes.

The Group agreed that officers should take the following further action aimed at achieving short-term improvements:

a) identify how the new business support service could be used to inform the Contact Centre more quickly that jobs had been completed.

b) consider providing managers in Waste Management with blackberries which, amongst other things, would enable them to be made aware more quickly of issues generating high levels of complaints.

c) investigate how all complaints/requests received via Members might be identified.

The Group was informed that its earlier suggestion that customers should be given a leaflet when a replacement bin had been delivered had now been implemented.

6th October, 2011

It was originally intended that this meeting would consider the Members' enquiries process. However, given that this process is inextricably linked to some of the wider issues raised previously by the Group, it instead discussed and agreed to support the following actions proposed by officers for progressing these issues:

a) an end-to-end review of the process for dealing with complaints/requests about potholes and bin collections, aimed at making medium-term and long-term improvements. This would identify how customers/Members make contact with the

Council. Currently Members do not always register complaints/requests via the Contact Centre, which makes it difficult to follow up their progress and outcomes.

b)   how the City Services Business Services Centre could be used to address the issue of closing down service requests (and particularly clearing the backlog).

c)   how the Members' Casework Tool (which was being developed by a Member working group) and the CRM could fit together

d)   how the CRM and IT solutions could meet customer/Member needs

However, the Group agreed these actions only on the understanding that the following points were included:

i)   in relation to a) above, any proposals for improving the complaints/requests process must be capable of being applied to all services, not just potholes and bin collections.

ii)   in relation to b) above, the current backlog must be given top priority and cleared as a matter of urgency.

iii)   there must be service standards built into the future complaints/requests process, including target response times.

The Group also supported a further officer proposal to recommend the purchase of a "bolt-on" for the Council's website, which would make it more accessible for customers using smart phones and which would eventually allow customers to report issues/problems more easily, at a cost of approximately £294 per month.

In addition, the Group noted that officers intended to carry out a review of the Members' Enquiries process, aimed at improving/streamlining it. Currently Members do not always channel their enquiries through the Contact Centre and the aims of the review would be: to encourage Members to work in a consistent way; to log casework queries accurately via the Contact Centre; to ensure that Members are responded to in a more timely fashion; and to reduce avoidable contact.

15th November, 2011

The Group considered a draft of its final report and decided that timescales should be included in its recommendations relating to the Customer Management abc review. It also decided to add a recommendation in relation to the future monitoring of its recommendations.

In addition, the Group discussed a suggestion from a Member that a mobile phone application might be a better solution for improving customer access than a "bolt on" for the Council's website. The Group was informed that the "bolt on" was in effect a new approach to providing access to websites from mobile phones and was perhaps preferable as it meant that services would be accessible via all smartphones rather than just the single one the app was designed for (i.e. an app designed for Apple smartphones cannot be accessed on other smartphone such as those running "Android" or Blackberry devices). So, for example, an app for iPhones which allowed customers to report a pot-hole or graffiti would only work on an iPhone or other Apple device and separate apps would then have to be written for other types of smartphones at additional cost. The proposed approach of a "bolt on" would also be more comprehensive than a mobile

phone application, both in providing more direct access to Council services (which will in time link to the CRM system) and in its use by a wider range of smart phones. However, this was a new concept and the timescale for initial implementation was unclear at present.

The Group considered information about the mobile phone application arrangements at Leicester City Council website, which demonstrated that it relied on e-mailing information to Council officers rather than providing a direct link to a CRM system. This meant that a member of staff at the Council had to manually enter the data received by email into their CRM or back-office system.

The Group decided to make an additional recommendation in relation to this issue.

(**note:** Since this Task and Finish Group meeting, discussions have taken place between ICT staff and Jadu (the provider of the Council's current website software – who could also provide the "bolt on") and a meeting has been arranged for early December to determine timescales and costs.)

4. Conclusion

The main concern of the Task and Finish Group was the lack of communication between the back offices and the Contact Centre about the progress/completion of complaints/requests, which meant that, in turn, customers/Members could not be informed.

This could be addressed in the short/medium term by improving current reporting processes and in the longer-term by enhanced IT, work on which was included in the scope of the Customer Management abc review.

The Group also considered that the purchase of a "bolt on" to the Council's website (or failing that a mobile phone application) would help the general public and Members to report problems more quickly and easily.

The Group acknowledged that there was still much work to be done to achieve the improvements needed, but considered that by giving a steer to officers on the way forward, and being clear about what it expected to be done, its task was now completed.

APPENDIX
Scoping Document – Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

Title of Review topic	
Customer Management	
Objectives	
What does the Board/Task and Finish Group hope to achieve by considering the topic?	*1. Improvements to the customer experience, both for the public and elected members* *2. Improved feedback loop* *3. Elected members are more aware of the process for members contact*
What will be the indicators of success?	• *Fewer avoidable contacts by customers* • *Fewer follow up enquiries from elected members* • *Clear process for member contact*
When will the review be evaluated?	• *12 months after recommendations presented*
Scope	
What will be included in the scope of the review?	• *Two high volume services – bin collection and pot holes* • *Member enquiry management*
What will be excluded?	• *Members' casework management tool*
Methodology	
How will the review be carried out? e.g. surveys, site visits, select committees etc.	• *Visits to the Contact Centre* • *Meetings with managers*
Who will need to be involved? e.g. service providers, service users, partners, experts etc.	• *Contact Centre Managers/staff* • *Meetings with Managers/Directors of services within the scope i.e. appropriate back office managers and staff*
Timescales	
Anticipated number of meetings	*4/5*
Anticipated reporting date	*Scruco – November* *Transformation Programme Delivery Board - tba*
List any key dates/events which might impact on the timescales of the review	
Equality and Diversity	
Does the review have any potential implications for Equality and Diversity?	*Access to Council Services will have implications for equality and diversity*