

Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1)
Cabinet Member for Strategic Resources and Finance

06 January 2016
18 January 2016

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources – Councillor Gannon

Director Approving Submission of the report:
Executive Director, Resources

Ward(s) affected:
All

Title:
Update on Customer Journey Programme and Customer Services performance

Is this a key decision?
No

Executive Summary:

This report provides an update to Cabinet Member and SB1 on the progress of the Customer Journey programme since the last update to SB1 in July 2015 and includes current performance data for Customer Services.

Since the last update in July 2015 the objective of consolidating customer reception/face to face services and telephony within the Customer Service Centre in Broadgate House has been achieved. We opened our new Customer Service Centre to staff in September and to the public on 18 November. This is a key milestone and marks a completely new way of delivering our services. Based in the heart of the city, the centre brings together telephone and face to face service delivery for the first time along with a meet & greet team are helping customers with their enquiries and supporting use of our new online services and self-service kiosks.

Recommendations:

The Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) are requested to:

- 1) Consider the report and forward any comments to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources is requested to:

1) Consider any comments raised by SB1 and endorse the progress made.

List of Appendices included:

None

Other useful background papers:

Customer Journey Vision and Strategy Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) 13 January 2014

Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources) 20 January 2014

Update on Customer Journey Programme and Customer Services performance Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) 1 July 2015

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

Yes – SB1 on 6 January 2016

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title:

Update on Customer Journey Programme and Customer Services performance

1. Context (or background)

1.1 Since the last update in July 2015 the objective of consolidating customer reception/face to face services and telephony within the Customer Service Centre in Broadgate House has been achieved. We opened our new Customer Service Centre to staff in September and to the public on 18 November. This is a key milestone and marks a completely new way of delivering our services. Based in the heart of the city, the centre brings together telephone and face to face service delivery for the first time along with a meet & greet team who are helping customers with their enquiries and supporting use of our new online services and self-service kiosks.

1.2 We're phasing in services in the coming months, so far we have been helping customers with enquiries for:

- Housing Benefits
- Council Tax
- Housing and Homelessness
- Payments
- Planning and Building Control enquiries
- School Admissions, free school meals and bus passes, and Blue Badges.

We are now working to migrate safeguarding and integrated youth services.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

2.1 This report is updating SB1 and Cabinet Member as requested on the progress of the programme and implementation of previously agreed policy decisions, along with service performance.

2.2 Opening the doors to the new centre is significant not only for our customers but also as a catalyst for the Council to modernise the way we work, helping us to deal with spending reductions and customer demand through accessing services differently. In a less than two years we will have made significant progress on a number of fronts compared with peer Councils in a similar timeframe including:

Making things simpler

- Consolidated multiple reception points into the new Customer Service Centre
- We have driven up self-service from less than 1% to 20% - a further increase from the 16% achieved for the last financial year and started to transform services using digital principles
- We've changed customer correspondence, simplifying the messages through the use of plain English in letters and e mails
- Begun to look fundamentally at why our customers contact us and how we can reduce avoidable contact and only ask for information once – starting with housing benefit and homelessness.

Using technology to help

- Introduced new payment kiosks, allowing our exchequer banking facility to close

- Launched a new mobile friendly website - 47% of customers accessing our website do so on a mobile/tablet
- Introduced self-service capability through MyAccount with over 14,000 users in the first eight months. Many Council Tax and Housing Benefit transactions can be done through My Account as well as reporting missed bins and arranging bulky waste collections, replacement bins and assisted collections
- Implemented a new modern telephone system with improved messaging and stability
- Built a new digital appointment booking system
- Launched a new online payment system that handles an average of 4,500 transactions a month.

Focussing on customers

- Moved 110 staff into customer services so we are now managing contact in a more consistent way from diverse services such as Adult Social Care, Blue Badges, Parking and Homelessness
- Introduced new recruitment procedures to focus on attracting team members who have great team working and customer service behaviours. As a result attrition has slowed down since the last report in July 2015
- Launched a customer services training programme to help to embed new skills and behaviours in our teams to provide a more consistent, quality Council brand.

Teams across the Council have worked hard to help to make this happen and are committed to putting the Customer right at the heart of what we do.

2.3 Current service challenges

One of our biggest challenges continues to be balancing the resources available to deliver Council services, with the demand for those services. Through the Customer Journey programme, we will be working to reduce the numbers of telephone calls that we receive and in turn reduce wait times and abandonment rates.

As other services across the Council change to reflect the savings the Council needs to make – this can lead to an increase in calls as the service being delivered is not the service that customers have come to expect. Customer Services experiences higher demand if there are changes to underlying service delivery quality and frequency or policy. We're working closely with service areas to understand how we can mitigate and prepare for changes such as Council Tax Support and other welfare reforms, plus the impact of an ageing population and demands on our front door.

Increasingly we are working more closely with all teams across the Council, to improve business processes and to address the underlying reasons for demand, systems issues and efficiency of processes. We are focussing initially on some targeted work with housing benefit, registrars, waste, street services, homelessness and Adult Social Care. This work is on the basis of collaborative work with service teams, will involve customers where possible and is looking to identify root cause of demand so it can be tackled. We are using new approaches as part of this work including the use of Insight, design principles and learning from the Government Digital Service. We are also using the potential of technology deployment for our workforce as an opportunity to relook at the way we do things.

Since opening the Customer Service Centre there has been a high satisfaction rating with face to face services. To maintain this customer experience we need to balance resources across the demand for face to face and telephone services.

We expect that January, post-Christmas closure, and mid-March, when annual billing begins, will be busy and pose the usual challenges. We have ensured that extra colleagues will be on hand to manage queues if necessary. This gives the opportunity for us to ensure customers are aware of all the different ways of paying and requesting services. We continue to work to reduce the numbers of customers who are not paying by direct debit, online, through the automated telephone line or at their bank.

2.4 Service performance

2.4.1 Telephones:

In terms of telephony, we receive an average 45,000 calls a month, with the main volume areas being missed bins (Place services), council tax and housing benefits. For the reporting period July – November 2015 the average calls were 42,000 a month. It is too early to conclude whether the reduction is due to new online services. Once we have the full data for 2015/16 we will be able to present conclusions and be able to compare data across channels and across comparable periods of time.

With the successful change to the telephony platform we have taken the opportunity to simplify the front end push button menu for services. There were a significant number of options previously that were complex, took some time to navigate and were hosted on a stand-alone platform. In simplifying things customers get to speak to the right person more quickly and are less likely to have to be passed between departments. The new telephone system has reduced maximum wait times overall and we are in the process of further refining our data reporting so that we can use this for management purposes. The new telephone system was a major undertaking and has been implemented smoothly with no disruption to operational services.

Average wait times (July – November 2015) are 7.5 minutes across all services which is an improvement on the previous 6 months (9 minutes). Since the last meeting in July the highest wait times at peak times have come down significantly for Council tax from 30 minutes to 5 minutes in November. At peak times the highest wait times are for Housing Benefits. Peak times for this service are between 12.15pm and 3.45pm. Average wait times at peak times for all services are 45 minutes for the last 6 months, which is comparable with the previous 6 months, but the trend is for reduced peak waiting times since the new telephone system was introduced in October. This is despite the resource constraints that the service is operating within.

Since the July meeting there has been no significant change in the average abandonment rate which is c28% for November 2015. This masks a significant decrease in the abandonment rate for council tax. There has been little change in existing services and an increase for Housing Benefits. This increase is due to increased call volume and changes to the automated messaging system on the basis of customer feedback which has increased call lengths, but improved query resolution. The opening of the Customer Service Centre poses some challenges for us in balancing the wait times across face to face and telephone.

2.4.2 Online and emails:

During the first seven months of operation there have been 14,000 service requests through My Account, many of these requests resolve the customer's query. Over 21,500

residents have created an Account. A number of residents will already pay their council tax by direct debit and receive their bills via email and therefore will rarely need to access current services available via My Account, but may do as we further increase our self-service offer.

Applying for an assisted collection, reporting a missed bin and applying for a bulky waste collection have gone live since the last update to SB1. Further services in design and testing phases will further increase the uptake of online services. There is a survey in place to capture customer feedback and a process to act and iteratively improve our online services based on this.

As at 4th December we had fewer than 200 emails to action with the oldest only being 4 days old. This is a significant improvement from the position in July 2015. As further services are added to My Account this will speed up replacing e mail requests with more structured forms, this will also speed up resolving the request made.

2.4.3 Face to face:

During the first two weeks the Customer Service Centre has supported 3771 people to deal with their enquiry face to face. The majority of visits are to provide documents to process a Housing Benefit claim or to ask quick questions about Council tax and/or Housing Benefit. Many customers are using our new self service facilities.

We have been asking customers for feedback about the new Customer Service Centre. The average satisfaction rate is 4.42 out of 5. Customer satisfaction has remained consistent across both opening week and into the start of December. Highest satisfaction levels are with staff attitude & friendliness, look & feel, facilities and wait times. This is fantastic feedback for the teams. We are working with the Insight team to develop a Voice of the Customer Strategy to ensure that we receive customer feedback across face to face, telephone and online services.

2.4.4 Complaints:

Our complaint levels are equivalent to less than 1% of the contacts received. Complaint levels are not atypical of levels over the last few years in customer services. Of the complaints received that relate directly to customer services rather than another service area, the majority are about call wait times. However, customers are generally satisfied with the service they receive when they speak to an advisor.

2.5 Customer Journey Phase 2

Phase 1 has delivered:

- A Customer Service Centre within the approved capital budget.
- An operations manual, technology (handhelds, phones, payment kiosks, appointment booking system) and training programme for Customer Services to make best use of the new centre.
- £0.5m of ongoing revenue savings.
- A new website with resident account functionality and refreshed payment facility. Revenues and Benefits and Waste services can now be accessed online.

Phase 2 will focus on:

- Reviewing high volumes of face to face activity and understand potential to shift to self-service and redesign to reduce failure demand and unavoidable contact. We have started this with a project on document scanning in partnership with Futuregov.

- Review existing online services and improve based on customer feedback and experience.
- To work with RAS, YOS and Safeguarding to make use of Floor 2 Conference Suite.
- To work with Customer Services to improve service delivery across all face to face and phone services. To include a Quality Assurance Framework and Voice of the Customer Strategy.
- To continue to measure and achieve the Channel shift targets as set out on the Council Plan.

This activity will be in conjunction with wider work across services to design and build digital services with a customer focus. This work will enable Directorates to establish plans to enabled delivery of remaining savings targets within the MTFS.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

3.1 Not applicable

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

4.1 Not applicable.

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 Financial implications

The programme has achieved the agreed savings target of £0.5m revenue savings towards the Kickstart/Customer Journey MTFS target.

5.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications of this report.

6. Other implications

Any other specific implications

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

Customer Journey is an essential part of the Council's corporate plan and the priority to be Locally Committed. The programme means the Council using its assets more effectively and reducing operating costs.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

The programme continues to maintain a risk register that is used to take action as required and shared with SMB and the Cabinet Member regularly. This report covers a number of the risks that are regularly reviewed within the programme including telephony and face to face demand, programme resourcing, technological change, channel shift, demand management and savings delivery.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

No direct impacts arising from this report. The Customer Journey itself has impacts across the whole organisation with changes to the Council's customer facing property, new ICT systems and changes to the way that Council staff work with and for customers.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

As the programme develops we continue to work closely with customers to ensure that the programme assesses the impact of any changes on customers, in particular the need to ensure we address any barriers to self-service that some customers may have. Our access channels will be accessible in the broadest sense and we regularly review and update the EIA.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

The new Customer Service Centre has been refurbished with sustainability built into the design.

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

The Customer Journey programme provides opportunities for joining up information provision across partner organisations on-line and sharing customer insight. This includes strategies for digitalising services and reducing demand. There may also be the opportunity to co-locate face to face services with other partners to deliver and improve service for customers.

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