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**To: Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1)**

**Date: 13 September 2017**

**Subject: Customer Services Briefing paper with action plan**

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**1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To provide an update to SB1 on Customer Services including feedback from the latest customer satisfaction survey and action plan.

**2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members of the Board are recommended to:
- a) Note the content of the briefing note.
  - b) Identify any recommendations for the Cabinet Member.

**3 Information/Background**

- 3.1 The Customer Journey Programme was introduced to bring together all customer facing activity into one service area. All customer contact was moved into Customer Services including 110 staff.

- 3.2 The newly formed team in Customer Service deals with enquiries relating to:

|                        |                      |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Housing benefit        | Council Tax          |
| Housing & homelessness | Electoral services   |
| Blue Badges            | Benefits advice line |
| Parking services       | Registrars           |
| Waste services         | Tip bookings         |
| Pest control           |                      |

- 3.3 Significant changes were made to ensure that the team was ready to move into the Customer Service Centre. These included:

- Aligning our opening hours to have more people available on the phone when our customers were wanting to make contact
- Improving our customer correspondence, simplifying the messages through the use of plain English in letters and emails
- Developed a new appointment booking system with built in email reminders for customers
- Introducing a triage function to answer simple enquiries rather than needing to make appointments
- Implemented a new phone platform, queue structure and incorporating emails which allows the service to make changes to the queue system and messages during peak times

- The introduction of a new Meet & Greet function to support customers in a face to face setting, recruiting against new behaviourally focussed job descriptions
  - A significantly improved physical environment from the previously disparate and dated accommodation – with a modern look and feel, spaces for private appointments and self service facilities.
- 3.4 The team moved into the Customer Service Centre in September and opened its doors to the public on 18 November 2015. Based in the heart of the city, the centre brought together telephone and face to face service delivery for the first time and saw a number of buildings/functions close including the banking facility and Spire House.
- 3.5 Focus was given to electronic means of communicating and transacting with the organisation:
- Kiosks for payments, supported initially through Meet & Greet most customers are now able to use this self-serve option without any assistance
  - A mobile friendly website with fresh content launched and is supported through processes ensuring that content is up to date and written in plain English.
  - We've introduced a new online payment system making it easier for customer to use
  - A customer account continues to be developed offering the opportunity to request services on-line. This platform along with other changes has seen an increase in self-service from less than 1% to 28%
- 3.6 A number of softer more culturally focussed changes have been introduced;
- Job descriptions have been changed and centred around the behavioural framework
  - Recruitment activity has been adjusted, all new recruits attend an assessment centre irrespective of grading. This has slowed down attrition with more team members choosing to progress through different roles in the service and Customer Services now being seen as a place where people want to work
- 3.7 Additional services were transferred into the Customer Service Centre as part of phase 2 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor meeting rooms were opened to provide services with space to meet with customers for safeguarding conferences and youth service teams.
- 3.8 In July 2016 Business Services was transferred and joined Customer Services to report into one Head of Service. Business Services provides administration support for the organisation. An initial savings target of £500k was assigned to Customer Services and an additional £1.8m saving target for 2017/18 has been set for Customer and Business Services. Of the total £2.3m savings £1.67m has been delivered with £0.63m remaining.
- 3.9 The organisational focus is on amalgamating the two areas under the banner of Customer Service with four high level aims:
- Happier customers
  - Always improving
  - Ready for a modern digital world
  - Building better services

#### **4 Customer Feedback**

- 4.1 Since opening the Customer Service Centre there has been a high satisfaction rating with face to face services.

A satisfaction survey undertaken during the first 2 weeks of opening showed from 83 customers there was a satisfaction rating of 4.42 out of 5, with 93% of responses being positive. The highest levels of satisfaction were with staff attitude and friendliness, look and feel, facilities and wait times.

- 4.2 We repeated the customer survey after 3 months of being open and found that the levels of customer satisfaction were slightly up at 4.45 out of 5, with 83% of positive responses but a

higher proportion of those being 'very satisfied'. There was a slight satisfaction decrease with wait times and staff knowledge.

- 4.3 At the 1 year anniversary of the centre opening we undertook a further satisfaction survey with customers, the survey was reduced to just one question which was *Overall, and taking everything into account, how would you rate your satisfaction with our Customer Service Centre?* 120 people responded giving a 4.28 out of 5 satisfaction rate with an 87% positive response. The highest levels of satisfaction were with excellent service and friendly staff, there was a slight decrease around waiting times.

## **5 The next chapter of change**

- 5.1 Face to face and digital access were our initial focus and there remains a need to ensure that these channels continue to serve our customers well. We have more recently refocussed our work on our telephone offer under the scrutiny and leadership of Cllr John Mutton. Increasing capture rates across two service areas; Council Tax and Contact Centre (currently at 63% and 74% respectively) and ensuring that customer satisfaction levels with this channel are comparable with other channels. Despite a £500k reduction in funding for customer services (equating to 13% of the salary budget) we have improved contact centre wait times significantly from what they were historically. The contact centre action plan can be seen in Appendix 1.
- 5.2 Fundamental to the service aims is the creation of an Improvement and Development function. The function will lead in a number of areas:
- Seeking the views of customers on the service that they have received and using their feedback to inform changes and to highlight areas where we/team members might be performing well
  - Undertaking a quality assurance role through mystery shopping and the evaluation of service delivery. The findings of this will be used to inform training, development and performance management in the service
  - Deliver coaching and training within the service
  - Work across services to support improvement that might prevent the need for customer contact
- 5.3 In April 2017 we started to create the Improvement and Development team through the recruitment of a Customer Service Manager. A Customer Experience Manager joined the team in July recruitment is underway for 4 Customer Service Coaches.
- 5.4 Work has started with services to make improvements and prepare for the changes driven by Friargate and other moves.
- 5.5 Workshops are underway with the team to share the operating model and gathering suggestions and feedback on changes required to make service delivery improvements.

## **6 Current Customer Satisfaction Survey**

- 6.1 Discussions around the improvement plan highlighted the need again to review the current customer experience to understand whether there had been any shift from the early position after opening.
- 6.2 The results of this activity which covered both telephone and face to face engagement are available in APPENDIX 2. The results are positive overall but they do present themes to focus our improvement activity; for telephones the priority remains improving call wait times and for Face to Face the primary focus is on investigating ncreased kiosk availability.

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| <b>Contact Centre Action Plan</b>   |  |                             |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| <p>This action plan has been drafted to address the three identified priorities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. The quality and consistency of customer service</b></li> <li><b>2. Call wait times in the contact centre</b></li> <li><b>3. Effectively deal with calls direct to councillors</b></li> </ol> <p>This will be reviewed regularly through informal cabinet member meetings to evaluate progress, find further solutions to ensure continued improvement and potential options should policy decisions be required</p> |  |                             |
| <p><b>The quality and consistency of customer service and quality of the teams we have in place</b><br/> <i>Addressing variable staff performance through a comprehensive training/induction programme and performance management to raise and standardise levels of performance.</i></p>   |  |                             |
| Change/improvement activity   | Update   | Status                      |
| Team members to be clear of the appropriate approach to:<br>a-engaging with customers<br>b-how to deal with handling cash where a customer is unable to manage the transaction themselves   | All team members have been briefed and alternative approaches to risk management have been agreed for situations where team members are required to handle cash on behalf of customers   | Complete                    |
| Appraisals to be used to reinforce behaviour framework expectations with specific focus on customer service provision   | Messages have been agreed and appraisals under way   | Complete                    |
| Induction training to be reviewed and standardised package to include performance focus and attention to behaviour framework  | This will be undertaken by the Improvement & Development team once roles are recruited to  | December 2017               |
| <p><b>Call wait times in the contact centre</b><br/> <i>Getting a better understanding of staffing levels across teams and whether there is any ability to move people around. Understanding peaks and troughs and exploring whether we could organise differently to have positive impact. To include consideration of whether there is any evidence of better take up of online services at the weekend to reduce telephone contacts.</i></p>   |  |                             |
| Change/improvement activity   | Update   | Status                      |
| Work with finance colleagues to identify whether funding can be found to bring in additional team members   | Changes to financial profile has released 3 FTE worth of time that we can recruit to. We have identified temporary funding for two additional posts however this can only be funded until the end of this financial year making recruitment challenging – this | Complete but to be reviewed |

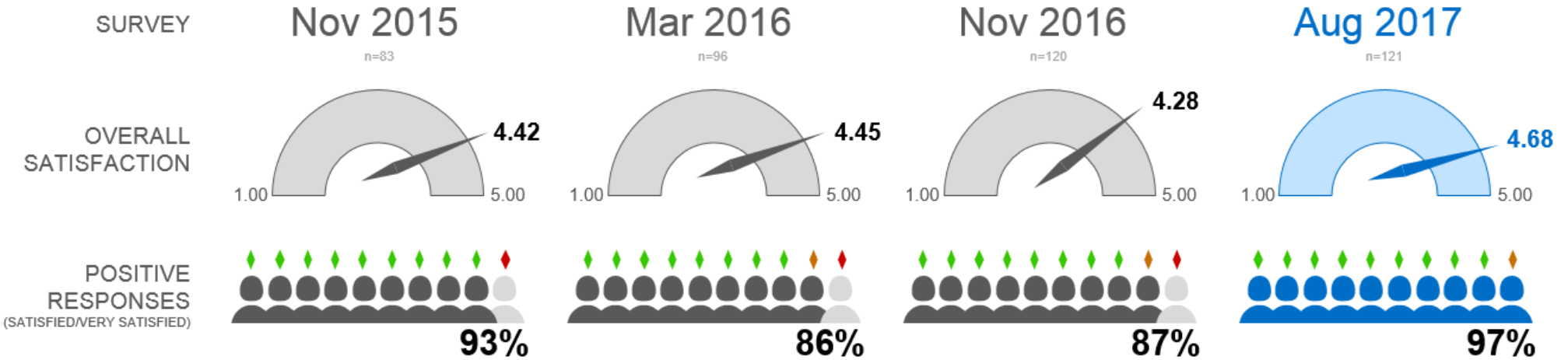
|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   | position will need to be considered again a future point once we see impact on performance.  |  |
| Identify key peaks/troughs in wait times to understand how best to utilise additional posts across services and times | Work complete and eight part-time posts have been identified that would use the available hours to address times of peak traffic and wait times. We usually recruit to full time posts, so utilising part-time resource is a change to address the challenges at peak time.  | Complete   |
| Recruit to all existing vacancies   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All full time vacancies in the contact centre have been filled</li> <li>• There remains one full time vacancy in Council Tax and two individuals will commence the five week training for the service in September</li> <li>• There are 3 remaining part time vacancies to recruit to, whilst we have had a high level of applicants for these vacancies</li> <li>• Further recruitment activity is planned for the coming weeks, we are exploring having an open application on Talentlink to enable vacancies to be filled more quickly and are currently exploring an open day approach</li> </ul> | In progress  |
| Review approach to training team members.   | Currently all general enquiry contact centre team members are trained on all services which means that simple and complex contacts wait in the same queue. We have subsequently adjusted queue priorities and started to train new people on simple services only. This is seeing an improvement overall in performance and is something that we will proactively monitor as new recruits continue to join   | Complete – ongoing monitoring                        |
| Employ temporary people for a period to stabilise the centre  | Temporary resource has been utilised for periods of high traffic and we are in the process of introducing a couple of posts to support census enquiries and in readiness for changes to waste collections. Ongoing close monitoring of temporary positions is necessary as the calibre is extremely variable   | In progress  |
| Work with the team to identify ways to reduce repeat contact in turn managing wait times etc.                         | Initiative undertaken to reduce e-mails to lowest levels possible to supported the removal of duplicate requests and telephone chasing demand<br>We prioritise call traffic in the morning ahead of e-mail and E-form requests, minimises the level of repeat contact seen later   | Complete<br>Approach embedded need to maintain focus |

|  |   |                                |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
|  | in the day. E-mail traffic is picked up in the afternoon and a manager allocated to monitoring performance and move of people between telephone and other contact   |                                |
| Meet & Greet colleagues to be trained in managing E-forms and E-mail traffic to support contact centre colleagues  | Meet & Greet now have systems access and are all able to undertake basic enquiry types. Training is being rolled out, original completion date end August has slipped slightly due to annual leave commitments but will have been finalised by mid/end Sept   | In progress – by end September |
| Interrogate systems reporting to understand if date/time stamp information can be obtained to understand self-serve hit times and whether this correlates with when the contact centre is closed (evenings and weekends) to be able to assess likely impact of pilot hours changes to inform Cabinet Member of options | It was anticipated that this would be completed by end August however there is slight slippage in bringing the data into a single view  | In progress – by mid Sept      |
| <p><b>How we can more effectively deal with calls direct to councillors – in the light of the switchboard changes</b><br/> <i>To explore options for ensuring the public are able to make quick and easy direct telephone contact with councillors.</i></p>  |   |                                |
| <b>Change/improvement activity</b>   | <b>Update</b>   | <b>Status</b>                  |
| We are exploring options for ensuring the public are able to make quick and easy direct telephone contact with councillors.  | <p>The contact centre has people trained in different services which then form different skill sets. Some skill sets now have calls for members prioritised meaning that they are answered ahead of some basic contacts.</p> <p>We have looked into the possibility of a separate menu option in the contact centre for callers to choose if they wish to speak with a councillor. This would likely generate contact that could be best supported through improving wait times and speaking with a competent/trained advisor and is not viable</p> <p>Once call capture rate improve we will explore whether an alternative approach is required, we have agreed that this next phase will be to consider e-mailing contact information through to elected members</p> | In progress                    |

# What we did

- We have been regularly surveying the satisfaction of users to the Council's contact centre at Broadgate House.
- We surveyed them – face-to-face and by telephone – in November/December 2015, March 2016, November 2016, and most recently, in August 2017.
- In August 2017, we surveyed 122 people: 99 people face-to-face (following an interaction/transaction at the contact centre), and 23 people by telephone (following a call to the contact centre).

# Headlines














## KEY MESSAGES

Satisfaction is up – residents using the contact centre surveyed (face to face and telephone) are more satisfied with the customer service centre than before – with an overall satisfaction score of 4.68 (the highest score yet) and an overall positive response of 97%.



# Other influencing factors

|              |  Survey |  Location |  Accessible |  Navigate |  Facilities |  Look & feel |  Staff attitude / friendliness |  Staff knowledge / helpfulness |  Information |  Waiting time |  Resolution |
|--------------|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| Nov-Dec 2015 |  | 4.48   | 4.51   | 4.43   | 4.65   | 4.67  | 4.68  | 4.63  | 4.36  | 4.65   | 4.45   |
| Mar 2016     |  | 4.60 ↑   | 4.70 ↑   | 4.66 ↑   | 4.64 ↓   | 4.69 ↓  | 4.73 ↑  | 4.55 ↓  | 4.51 ↑  | 4.52 ↓   | 4.43 ↓   |
| Aug 2017     |  | 4.68 ↑   | 4.71 ↑   | 4.57 ↓   | 4.41 ↓   | 4.44 ↓  | 4.81 ↑  | 4.76 ↑  | 4.41 ↓  | 4.60 ↑   | 4.40 ↓   |

## OBSERVATIONS

As people become more familiar with the contact centre, scores (out of five) for location and accessibility has improved; the scores for how easy they can find their way around the centre has remained consistent; while the scores for facilities and look-and-feel has fallen slightly.

People report high -and increasing- levels of satisfaction with the staff, with staff attitude and friendliness, as well as knowledge and helpfulness seeing an increase; and increased happiness with waiting times. Indeed, 97% of 120 people surveyed reported being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the waiting times.

Scores for available information or with resolution to their issue are lower, however, the vast majority still report being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” – at 79% and 82% respectively.

# What people like & can be improved

## WHAT SURVEY RESPONDENTS LIKED

| Reason              | count |
|---------------------|-------|
| helpful             | 23    |
| friendly            | 9     |
| nice/pleasant/good  | 7     |
| quick               | 6     |
| staff               | 6     |
| polite              | 5     |
| informative         | 4     |
| smiles              | 3     |
| brilliant/excellent | 3     |
| reassurance         | 1     |
| convenient          | 1     |
| service             | 1     |
| valued              | 1     |
| positive            | 1     |
| easy-to-use         | 1     |
| quiet               | 1     |
| happy               | 1     |
| security            | 1     |
| calm                | 1     |
| knowledge           | 1     |
| everything          | 1     |
| patient             | 1     |
| listened to         | 1     |
| accessible          | 1     |
| lovely              | 1     |

Respondents are most satisfied with:

1. the helpful, friendly and polite service they receive;
2. the speed in which their enquiry is dealt with; and
3. the convenience of the service.

*“smiley staff...  
...makes a massive  
difference... they  
know what they  
are talking about”*

## WHAT SURVEY RESPONDENTS SAID WE COULD IMPROVE

| Reason          | count |
|-----------------|-------|
| nothing         | 22    |
| staff           | 6     |
| space           | 4     |
| paypoints       | 3     |
| drinks          | 3     |
| confusing       | 2     |
| speed           | 2     |
| hours           | 2     |
| machines        | 2     |
| non-response    | 2     |
| layout          | 1     |
| triage          | 1     |
| more machines   | 1     |
| chairs          | 1     |
| noise           | 1     |
| children's area | 1     |
| feel            | 1     |
| inconsistency   | 1     |
| training        | 1     |
| phone           | 1     |
| reception       | 1     |
| signposting     | 1     |

Respondents would like to see improvements to:

1. number of staff available to help them with their query and/or to use the machines;
2. provision of water and/or tea/coffee on-site;
3. provision of more space and pay point machines; and
4. consistency in staff response / knowledge.

*“local paypoint  
machines in  
local shops... more  
help for people who  
can't use technology”*

# Summary

- Users surveyed report very high levels of satisfaction with the contact centre.
- Ratings (out of five) are consistently above 4.5; while satisfaction is consistently above 80% including many who report being “very satisfied”.
- People appreciate the friendliness, helpfulness and speed of the service and appreciate face-to-face support and assurance.