

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 27th February 2018

Portfolio: Leader of the Council

Subject: Customer Service Programme Annual Report

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To note the progress of the Customer Service Programme between November 2016 and January 2018.

Report:

1. At a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 April 2017, the Committee agreed to establish a Transformation Task and Finish Panel to analyse how Transformation, including the Customer Service Programme should be scrutinised. Following three meetings of the Panel, Overview and Scrutiny agreed on 31st October 2017 that the Committee should receive an annual update of the Customer Service programme (item 33, resolution 10).
2. Consequently items relating to Customer Service that had been on the forward plan for Governance and Resources Select Committees in this financial year (Complaints and Telephony statistics) have been combined into this single report covering activity from November 2016 to January 2018.

Establishment of the Customer Service Programme

3. Following the commencement of the Head of Customer Service role, the Customer Service Programme was redesigned to focus on 4 key projects:
 - Civic Offices Reception,
 - Corporate Contact Centre (CCC),
 - Systems and Digital Development,
 - Customer Satisfaction;
4. The delivery of these projects is overseen by the Customer Programme Board (CPB) which reports to the Transformation Programme Board and is chaired by the Head of Customer Service. The CPB meets monthly to review progress and discuss any issues.
5. The Head of Customer Service has also taken over the chairmanship of the Website Development Board to deliver improvements to the main EFDC website.

17/18 Activity and Key Achievements

Civic Offices Reception

6. The Civic Offices Reception project has delivered a high level design and costing for refurbishment which was agreed in principle by Cabinet in March 17 (C-067-2016/17). The project is aligned to the overall Accommodation Review and consequently follows the timelines set out in that scheme of work; the CPB is now waiting for further details on how listing the building may impact on these designs before progressing further.

Corporate Contact Centre (CCC)

7. The EFDC Complaints policy was reviewed and a new policy agreed in January 2017 with the removal of Step 3; the impact of the changes is discussed later in this report.

8. Phase 1 of the CCC commenced at the end of February 2017 and brought together the Neighbourhoods Contact Centre and the Switchboard, whilst re-aligning and redesigning processes to separate customer activity from business support or technical functions. There has been a significant amount of changes to working practices, cross-training, knowledge sharing and cultural change required across the two former teams to deliver a unified service for our customers, and was subsequently followed by a formal restructure.

9. Phase 1 also delivered new job descriptions that are reflective of the future direction of the organisation and the forthcoming Common Operating Model. These job descriptions and structure form the design of the Customer Service function and will be replicated and expanded as the team grows. Managing vacancies also enabled the project to deliver all staffing changes within the existing budgetary envelope, whilst providing the necessary FTE required at an appropriate grade to meet demand and deliver an uplifted service.

10. Since the 1st November, these teams have been formally merged and customers ringing either of the old published numbers are now seamlessly directed into the CCC, with an increased number of agents available to resolve enquiries without the need to transfer into the back office. The changes have reduced the abandoned call percentage by 3% since implementation (see paragraph 29). The CCC currently takes on average approximately 9000 calls a month in addition to managing customer facing e-mail inboxes and triaging all corporate complaints. Practices such as the internal use of the Switchboard by officers to make transfers have ended, releasing an estimated 100 hours a year when the CCC is now available to customers.

11. Phase 2 began in January 2018, with the transfer of the main reception desk staff at the Civic Offices into Customer Services' line management, bringing face to face and telephony services together for the first time. Similar to Phase 2, all members of staff will undertake cross training and knowledge transfers prior to a formal change of roles and responsibilities later in the year. Preparatory work is also beginning with the next area of the business to be included in the programme, Development Management, to scope out the parameters of work.

Systems and Digital Development

12. The programme follows a principle of 'digital by design' rather than forcing channel shift. The aim is to signpost towards intuitive and integrated self-service options that customers will prefer to use whilst maintaining traditional access channels. The project has close interdependencies with the Technology Strategy and acts as a facilitator to ensure that self-service tools are delivered and follow the design principles set out by the Website Development Board.

13. All 26 existing online forms have been refreshed during 2017; examples include the complaints form, requests for larger bins, reporting dangerous structures to Building Control and inviting the Council Chairman to events. Work now continues on developing a range of self-service forms for our customers, particularly focused on applications and the reporting of issues to EFDC.

14. An essential part of the success of the programme is the delivery of a Customer Relationship Management system (CRM). This acts as a layer above internal systems to enable officers to access information, process requests and respond to customer enquiries without being trained in all systems. It also integrates to reduce the double handling of data, creates a single customer record and provides a knowledge base. This is a complex piece of work delivered through the Technology Strategy and is being developed in tandem with the growth of the CCC and introduction of self-service over the lifetime of the programme.

Customer Satisfaction

15. In March 2017, the programme commissioned an external telephone customer satisfaction survey to establish a baseline of satisfaction prior to any structural changes. 500 district residents took part and key findings have included;

16. For questions that can be benchmarked against national polls, EFDC scores consistently higher, for example, agreement that EFDC provides 'value for money' scored 7% higher than the national average.

The most common service a customer contacts EFDC about is bin collection and recycling (22%), planning is second with 17%.

62% of customers last contacted EFDC by phone, only 9% used the website.

When asked if it was easy to find the right information to resolve an enquiry on the website, only 58% agreed, significantly lower than other channels.

17. A quick response time to resolve an enquiry came out as the most important thing in a good customer experience. Whilst 80% believe that we are polite, friendly and helpful, currently 23% of customers feel we are slow to respond.

18. An annual repeat of the survey to track how customer satisfaction is changing over the lifetime of the programme will become part of business as usual for the CCC going forward. Work is also underway to scope how regular low level customer feedback can be collected routinely and used to deliver service improvements.

Website Development Board and EFDC Website

19. The Website Development Board has spent considerable time looking at usage patterns of the EFDC website in preparation for a full re-design in 2018. In particular this has highlighted that:

- access through mobile devices and tablets now accounts for 48% of all visits (20% increase since 2013)
- 30 individual pages, representing 4.4% of the total, account for half of page views
- Data from multiple reports gives a consistent picture of the services most used by customers; Planning and Building, Contact EFDC, Payment Services, Job Vacancies, Waste Collection Dates and Council Tax

20. Consequently in August 2017 Management Board agreed a new set of design principles for any future website development, focusing on the following key areas;

Its purpose is to provide easy access to products and services and promote self service
 Information provision follows journeys based on known customer enquiries
 Given the continued rise of access through mobile devices, we will design with mobile first in mind
 We will use plain English, customer focused language without reference to departmental functions, teams, jargon or acronyms

21. The current website has approximately 3800 pages and a new structure to reduce the number of permanent pages to around 350 is being designed. The content of these pages will be managed exclusively by the corporate PR team and greater use will be made of our news facility in the wider organisation to notify customers of changes, updates and new initiatives. The intended style will follow the trend in local government towards a 'gov.uk' approach and will be tested by customers throughout. It is anticipated that a soft launch of the new site will happen during summer 2018.

Complaints and Ombudsman

22. Breakdown of complaints to date in 17/18;

	Number of Stage 1 Complaints	Average time to respond	Number of Stage 2 Complaints
Resources	9	7.5 days	3
Neighbourhoods	3	5 days	0
Communities	81	10 days	7
Governance	20	11.7 days	13
EFDC Total	113	8.6 days	23

Whilst the complaints policy states that EFDC have 10 days to respond to a Stage 1 complaint, going forward the time to respond will be actively monitored and a target set to improve our response times for complaints, given its priority for our customers.

Removal of Step 3

23. Prior to the cessation of Step 3 in the complaints policy in January 2017 (suspended on 3rd October 17 pending a review), the outcomes for Step 3 cases were as follows;

	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
16/17	2	1	12
15/16	2	7	11

The majority of Step 3 investigations then went on to become Ombudsman cases, suggesting that this stage in the process did not deliver significant value to customers in resolving their complaints. Removing Step 3 has not resulted in an increase to Ombudsman cases during 17/18.

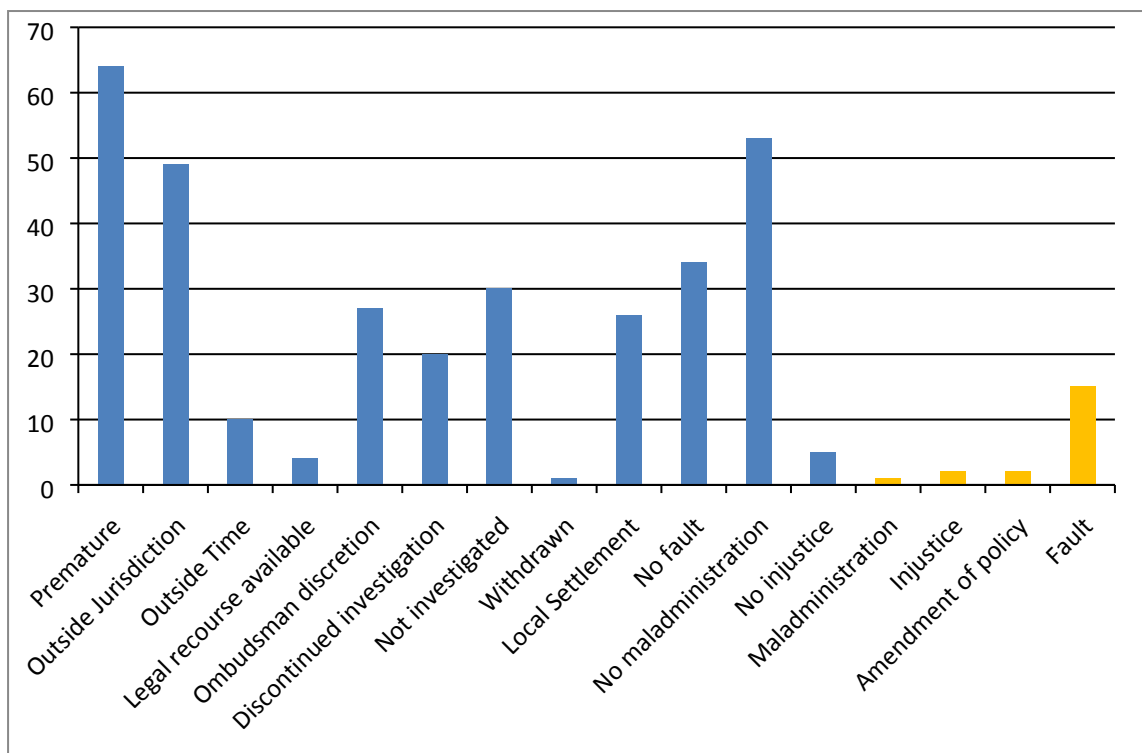
Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

24. Looking retrospectively, EFDC received 48 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) cases in 16/17, representing a large increase on 15/16. This occurred prior to the change in complaints policy and the number of cases upheld (six) reflected usual figures. This is not a continuing trend into 17/18 where there have been 19 cases so far which is in line with expectations. Positively, a high proportion of referred cases do not progress into full investigation but are closed after an

initial assessment (40% of cases in 16/17 and 65% to date in 17/18), most often due to a lack of evidence suggesting fault or rose out of time/jurisdiction.

25. Planning and housing allocations represent the highest areas of contact with the Ombudsman and this trend is unchanging. Planning cases often relate to enforcement issues, and housing cases most often dispute the banding given on the register. In both areas, this reflects a disagreement with an outcome rather than a failure of the service or complaints policy.

26. The graph below illustrates the outcome of the all cases 2001-17. As a case may have multiple outcomes, the totals below are significantly higher than the number of cases. In 2011 the LGO changed definitions and 'Ombudsman discretion' was reclassified as 'Not investigated' or 'Discontinued investigation'.



27. EFDC receives minimal cases from the Housing Ombudsman as most of our remit is covered by the LGO. In both 16/17 and 17/18 (to date) two cases have been raised.

Telephony Statistics

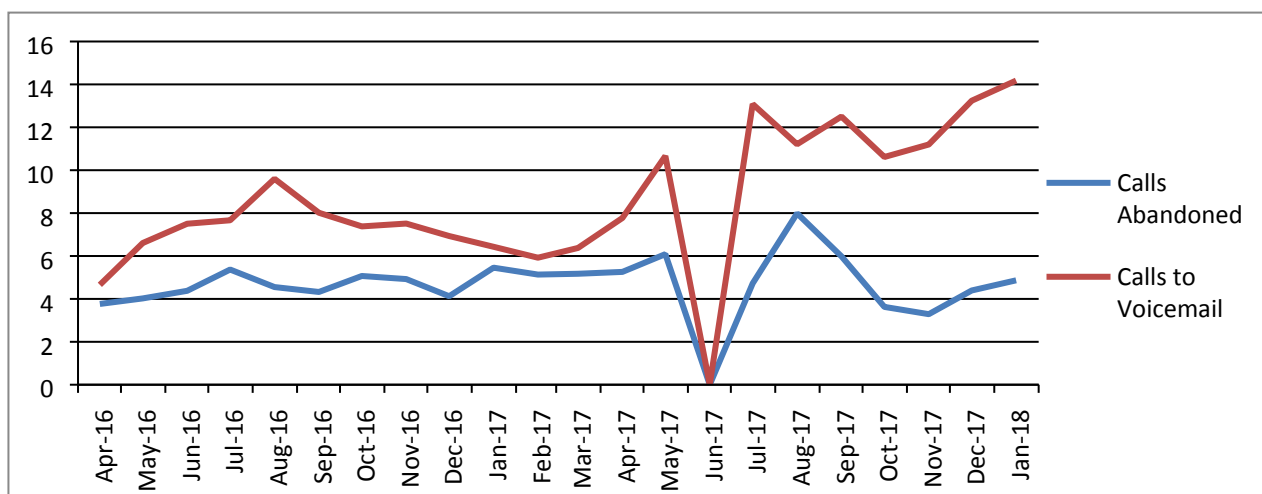
28. There is no data available for reporting purposes in June 2017 due to long term sickness within the ICT function in this month.

29. EFDC experienced significant stability issues with the telephony system over the summer, including the external loss of the network on two occasions which had an impact on performance in August and early September. Considerable effort has been made by the external supplier, ICT and Customer Services to stabilise the system which has been secured, and additional continuity processes put in place to mitigate any risks.

30. Monitoring for the period April 17 to Jan 18;

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Calls Accepted	24433	29407	0	26652	18751	25316	33025	31898	18392	30512
Calls Abandoned	1285	1790	0	1259	1498	1515	1198	1049	808	1485
Calls Abandoned %	5.26	6.09	0	4.72	7.99	5.98	3.63	3.29	4.39	4.87
Calls to Voicemail	1899	3135	0	3487	2102	3165	3506	3572	2435	4326
Calls to Voicemail %	7.77	10.66	0	13.08	11.21	12.50	10.62	11.20	13.24	14.18

31. Trends in abandoned calls or calls sent to voicemail April 16 – Jan 18 (%);



Corporate Contact Centre Statistics

32. The implementation of a Corporate Contact Centre in November has had a positive impact on abandoned call rates within the service;

	April 17	May 17	Jun e 17	July 17	Aug 17	Sept 17	Oct 17*	Nov 17	Dec 17	Jan 18
<u>Switchboard</u>			N/A							
Answered	613 4	725 1		693 9	622 6	649 5	320 3			
Abandoned	200	297		402	401	189	126			
<u>Neighbourhoods</u>			N/A							
Answered	247 3	294 3		235 3	241 5	322 3	603 3			
Abandoned	20	46		34	29	114	329			
<u>Corporate Contact Centre</u>										
Answered								962 0	629 1	1061 4

Abandoned								192	69	133
Total abandoned (%)	3%	3%	N/A	5%	5%	3%	5%	2%	1%	1%

*The two teams first started to merge during October prior to full launch on the 1st November.

33. The service will focus on resolving customer enquiries at the first point of contact. This can be measured using a tool called 'wrap-codes' which requires officers to categorise the outcome of every call before accepting another. The CCC is currently trialling its use and below is an example of a sample report using data from across December 2017;

	Transferred to County Council	Internal Transfer	Enquiry Resolved	Signposted to self-service	Referred to Third Party	Customer to Follow Up	Local Plan Enquiry
Total	80	2022	1221	2	803	7	44

Customer Service Programme 18/19 Key Activity

34. Civic Office reception staff will undertake training and development, prior to structural changes and new job descriptions implemented during Q2.

35. The CCC project will be working in conjunction with the new Business Support Manager in Development Management to undertake process mapping for all existing processes and redesign them to bring together customer and support aspects of the service. The project will also look at opportunities to bring the Planning and main reception together in advance of any refurbishment.

36. Across the CCC and Systems and Digital Development projects, the CRM will be built to manage complaints, Ombudsman cases and incoming e-mails into the major customer facing inboxes, giving the ability to report on and explore the root causes of customer enquiries.

37. Systems and Digital Development will continue to implement a rolling programme of self-service tools; key priorities include delivering 'Near Me' mapping functionality and a single 'Report It' form.

38. An iterative process of test and design for the new corporate website will continue in the first half of 2018. It is anticipated that a soft launch of the new website will happen in the summer period.

39. Whilst the Reception project is dependent on the wider Accommodation Review, it is anticipated that a final design, cost and decant plan for the space will be achieved during 18/19.

40. The annual external customer satisfaction survey will be undertaken in June after the election cycle. A method of collecting customer feedback on more regular basis (at the point of contact) will also be scoped and implemented across all customer facing channels managed by the CCC.

41. The CCC will begin to measure first point of contact resolution from April 2018 as part of the new Corporate Plan KPI's.

Resource Implications:

The Customer Service Programme requires resource from across the organisation, with particular focus support service expertise such as HR, business support and ICT as well the input of the service area currently in scope of the programme. This workforce planning is co-ordinated through the Transformation Programme Management Office. The Customer Service management team are now in post as dedicated resource to support both the programme and business as usual.

Legal and Governance Implications:

There no Legal or Governance implications from this report.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The Systems and Digital Development project promotes the use of digital solutions to reduce the amount of paper used to provide services to customers, e.g. paper based forms now made available for completion through the website.

Consultation Undertaken:

The high level results of the customer satisfaction survey are presented. This survey will be undertaken on an annual basis, and an ongoing method of collating feedback from customers to deliver service improvement will be implemented in 18/19.

Proposals for the website will be consulted on with customers as part of its development.

Background Papers:

Customer Satisfaction Survey results.

Risk Management:

The Customer Service Programme has a number of programme and project level risks that are monitored through the corporate performance and risk management software, Pentana. The Customer Programme Board reviews all of its risks and controls on a quarterly basis and escalates any of particular concern to the Transformation Programme Board.