

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 28TH JANUARY 2016, 6.30 PM

COMMITTEE ROOM 1, TOWN HALL, CHORLEY

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at the above meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was published.

| Agenda No | Item | |
|------------------|---|-------------------|
| 9 | FINAL MONITORING REPORT - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP (ADOPTION OF ESTATES) | (Pages 193 - 198) |
| | Report of the Director of Public Protection, Streetscene and Community (enclosed) | |
| 10 | FINAL REPORT - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP (SINGLE FRONT OFFICE) | (Pages 199 - 214) |
| | To consider the final report of the Single Front Office Review (enclosed) | |

GARY HALL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Electronic agendas sent to Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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| Report of | Meeting | Date |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Director of Public Protection, Streetscene and Community | Overview & Scrutiny Committee | 28 January 2016 |

MONITORING REPORT OF INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS: ADOPTION OF ESTATES REVIEW

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To update members on progress with the recommendations of the Task Group review into the Adoption of Estates.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That the report be noted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. Following the consideration of the task group's recommendations by the Executive Cabinet, all recommendations were agreed, and follow up reports on progress was made to this Committee in April 2014 and April 2015. At the meeting in April 2015, a further report was requested.
4. The report outlines progress that has been made. Members will be aware of adoptions that have been completed. Some of these will be full developments, for example, Fairview. Others will be elements on particular streets, for example Buckshaw and Gillibrand. However, a number of factors have resulted in progress not being made as anticipated against some recommendations; these are outlined in the report.

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| Confidential report Please bold as appropriate | Yes | No |
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| | | |
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| Key Decision? Please bold as appropriate | Yes | No |
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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Reason Please bold as appropriate | 1, a change in service provision that impacts upon the service revenue budget by £100,000 or more | 2, a contract worth £100,000 or more |
| | 3, a new or unprogrammed capital scheme of £100,000 or more | 4, Significant impact in environmental, social or physical terms in two or more wards |

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

5. To note progress following the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

6. None.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

7. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

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| Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all | | A strong local economy | |
| Clean, safe and healthy communities | | An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area | ✓ |

BACKGROUND

- 8. The final report of the Overview & Scrutiny Task Group considering the Adoption of Estates was presented to Executive Cabinet on 20 June 2013, and included fourteen recommendations. All of the recommendations were agreed by the Executive Cabinet in their response on 24 October 2013.
- 9. Progress has been made and this was reported to this committee 10 April 2014 and on 16 April 2015. Members welcomed the progress made to date, but noted that a number of estates that remained un-adopted and whilst the Committee accepted that this has improved with the introduction of the new dedicated post within the planning services team, members still considered that in order to obtain effective improvements there needed to be fundamental changes to planning conditions and the legal duty placed upon developers at national level.

PROGRESS REPORT

10.

| Recommendation | Action |
|---|---|
| <p>Recommendation 1 - <i>That the Executive Cabinet asks Lancashire County Council to consider building on existing work with local planning authorities to put in place arrangements to ensure the consideration of road and highways adoption issues commences at the planning application stage of the planning process, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Designing developments to provide separate access routes for residential and construction traffic</i> • <i>Phased implementation of larger development</i> • <i>Laying out and constructing roads to adoptable standards</i> | <p>Completed. Lancashire County Council replied saying, road and adoption discussions already commence at the earliest possible stages of the planning process with due consideration given to the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction Management Plans are considered on a site-by-site basis with input from planning officers, to establish and condition the use of matters including agreed access routes, working times and control of nuisances such as noise/dust/mud. • Phased implementation of larger developments is already an integral part of the Section 38 agreements to encourage the developer to plan his construction/sales profiling in consultation with Council officers. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted advice is provided to residential developers throughout the development process about the need for adoptable highway layouts and construction methods and how these might be achieved. Adoption will not always be possible, for example where the developer chooses not to meet adoptable standards, or where the development relies on some basic features outside the limits of what will be safe to use or practical to maintain (for example substandard road widths or turning facilities). |
| <p>Recommendation 2 - <i>That the Executive Cabinet be asked to approve the use of a draft set of national planning conditions seeking pre-commencement on adoption matters, drawn up by the Department of Transport to be trialled by our planning service.</i></p> | <p>The Planning Service continues to use the modified condition modified the standard condition suggested by the Department of Transport (DoT) and this is being applied to new proposals. Lancashire County Council have now introduced the condition as a pilot in Central Lancashire, with a view to rolling out across the county in the future.</p> <p>Chorley Council and Lancashire County Council continue their involvement in the Department of Transport working group which seeks to make recommendations on changes to legislation, national policy and practice in relation to issues surrounding adoptions. The issues covered in the working group feature in various Government consultations that are ongoing.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 3 - <i>That the Executive Cabinet be requested to commission a study of the existing adoptions ‘caseload’ in the Borough, to provide a full picture of all completed and partially completed agreements, including Section 38’s and 106’s.</i></p> | <p>Chorley Council now have a comprehensive register of agreements in place. This lists all obligations, including S106 payments and assets that ‘could’ be adopted by Chorley Council. Progress has been made with Lancashire County Council to share information and priorities regarding their agreements. This is ongoing.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 4 - <i>That the Executive Cabinet request Lancashire County Council to consider adopting a more flexible approach to the setting of bonds with developers, that are required before a Section 38 Agreement is made to enable the level of bond to be set on a site-by-site basis that reflects the actual cost of completing the road concerned to the required state of adoption.</i></p> | <p>Completed. Lancashire County Council replied saying that the County Council already has a flexible approach to setting bonds as part of the Section 38 processes. They are established site-by-site basis, using a formula that accurately reflects the current costs of road construction and the scale of the highway areas to be offered for adoption on each site. Elements of the bonds are released before full completion of the roads subject to satisfactory completion of the necessary works at each stage of bond release. Our approach is</p> |

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| | <p>frequently benchmarked against other highway authorities around the country; at the current time it is significantly more flexible than many and it compares favourably on comparisons of cost to the developers.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 5 - <i>That the Executive Cabinet agrees to make representations to the National House Building Council (NHBC) urging it to encourage developers to recognise potential benefits to them of the introduction of a mandatory requirement relating to Section 38Agreements.</i></p> | <p>Completed. Response noted but no clear action confirmed by the NHBC.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation – 6 <i>That Lancashire County Council review their operational practices and resource to ensure a more timely response for developers to secure adoption.</i></p> | <p>Lancashire County Council replied to say that they have completed a review of its resources and operational practices relating to the highways aspects of new development, including adoption procedures. This has resulted in updated procedures being established across the County. Given the ongoing changes, we are keeping this under review.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 7 - <i>That both Chorley and Lancashire County Council consider developing a more co-ordinated approach to the process of adoption and that regular reports on the current status of adoptions across the borough be reported to the Neighbourhood Meetings of the Council.</i></p> | <p>This area of work is being reviewed by the Director for Public Protection, Streetscene and Community. Good progress was made initially, but a number of circumstances have resulted in the reporting of progress to Neighbourhood Meetings not happening. This will be revisited over the coming months.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 8 – <i>That Lancashire County Council considers the introduction of a pre- application service with associated costs that would not only generate additional income and focus service delivery but would also benefit the early identification of estates for adoption.</i></p> | <p>Lancashire County Council responded initially to say that there are no arrangements in place for the County Council to charge fees for pre-application highways and transport related advice. More recently, Lancashire County Council have informed us that they will no longer provide this service. We are making representations to ask for this decision to be reviewed.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 9 - <i>That a review be undertaken on a risk based approach for the adoption of open spaces, with Executive Cabinet also seeking an option to require developers to front load the provision of play and open spaces.</i></p> | <p>The Parks and Open Spaces officers have identified a number of high risk projects, mainly due to timescale and these are being worked through. Each application needs to be considered on its merits, so a policy of front loading the provision of play and open spaces is not always suitable. However, if there is a case for early delivery we would make it. We also pick up communication with prospective purchasers during our discussions.</p> |

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| <p>Recommendation 10 - <i>That the Executive Cabinet considers putting into place arrangements for the development of a map based system to be accessed on or via the Council's website to show information about the status of the roads in the borough for use by the community. For example, an area specifically relating to "would you like to live in Chorley" be developed that could potentially be linked to the County's website. Individual roads would be tagged according to status and actively used by Contact Chorley for the provision of information to residents.</i></p> | <p>The Council's web site offers map based information on adoptions, as does Lancashire County Council's information on adoptions is also now reported on our own website.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 11 - <i>That a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) about the adoption of estates be published on the Council's website</i></p> | <p>A preliminary list of FAQ's has been compiled. They have not been published, to date. This is in the work programme.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 12 - <i>That Chorley Council considers a pilot for the introduction of Development and or Site Exit meetings with developers, to identify new sites coming on stream.</i></p> | <p>We have become increasingly proactive with developers to both get a feel for new sites coming forwards, this is done from a planning perspective, but also an economic development angle. The concept of site exit meetings is being used for Buckshaw and Gillibrand.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 13 - <i>That the Executive Cabinet agrees to make representations to the Law Society and the Council for Licensed Conveyancers urging them to consider whether conveyancers provide clients with sufficient information about the estate adoptions process and how they will be affected by the status of roads serving a property.</i></p> | <p>Completed. Representations have been made and they are going to review Policy and produce a Practice Note. We are not aware that this has been completed. We have recently asked for a progress report.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 14 - <i>That developers be encouraged to nominate a dedicated officer that would work proactively with officers of both borough and county Councils on the adoption processes and be asked to consider reviewing their complaints procedures to improve relations with residents on their developments.</i></p> | <p>The identification of a dedicated officer is now picked up earlier in the process than was previously the case. With larger developers we tend to use the single point of contact for multiple sites. This is working much better than prior to the Inquiry.</p> |

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

11. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

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| Finance | | Customer Services | |
| Human Resources | | Equality and Diversity | |
| Legal | | Integrated Impact Assessment required? | |
| No significant implications in this area | ✓ | Policy and Communications | |

COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

12. None.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

13. No Comment.

JAMIE CARSON

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROTECTION, STREETSCENE AND COMMUNITY

| Background Papers | | | |
|---|--------------------|-------------|---|
| Document | Date | File | Place of Inspection |
| Executive Cabinet: Response to Recommendations, 24 October 2014 [13.EC.98] | 24 October 2013*** | | Council Website: https://democracy.chorley.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=3472&Ver=4 Council Intranet: http://cbc-us-mod/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=3472&Ver=4 |
| Overview & Scrutiny Committee: 10 April 2014. [14.OS.82] | 10 April 2014 | | Council Website: https://democracy.chorley.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=117&MId=3503&Ver=4 Council Intranet: http://cbc-us-mod/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=117&MId=3503 |

| Report Author | Ext | Date | Doc ID |
|----------------------|------------|-------------|---------------|
| Jamie Carson | 5815 | 20/01/16 | |

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Single Front Office

December 2015



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PREFACE

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested the review to be undertaken following the decision by the Council for the creation of a Single Front Office. As the Council needs to ensure that it is able to respond to continued changes and challenges in delivering high quality services against a backdrop of drastically reduced resources and increased demand, the creation of a single front office has become crucial. The proposals would build on the Council's Customer Access Strategy already being implemented by the authority that would lead to significant changes in staffing arrangements and service delivery.

The drivers for the implementation of the Single Front Office are:

- to ensure that the Council has a business model that ensures the best possible customer experience,
- is sustainable in the long term and is able to fully exploit opportunities such as shared services with other councils,
- manages demand effectively by making best use of its intelligence and where possible intervening early to reduce customer demand and manage peaks and troughs,
- smoothing processes to improve productivity to provide opportunities for efficiencies and income generation.

The delivery of the Single Front Office is also timely because of wider changes that are taking place currently that impact on the revenue and benefits service as a result of the Government's welfare reform programme.

I would like to thank the Task Group Members for their deliberations, both Members and officers who made a contribution to this report. Our findings have proved invaluable and enabled us to produce a set of recommendations that we feel will enhance and support current arrangements and future initiatives as the concept of the Single Front Office is embedded into the Council's delivery of its services.



Councillor Alistair Morwood – Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group undertook a scrutiny inquiry to review the implementation of the Single Front Office.

Objectives:

1. To ensure that the implementation of the Single Front Office is successful and meets all the principle objectives of the project.
2. To ensure that the customer experience and response times are meeting targets and productivity and performance continues to improve.
3. Maximising the use of technology to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.

Desired Outcomes

1. To promote and increase the use of the Council's digital self-service and online services for Members, Officers and Residents.
2. To provide the best efficient and effective customer service experience for the residents of Chorley within the current financial resources for the service.
3. That customer satisfaction of interaction with the Single Front Office remains of a high standard.

Task Group Membership

Councillor Alistair Morwood (Chair)

Councillor John Dalton

Councillor Mark Jarnell

Councillor Matthew Lynch

Councillor June Molyneaux

Councillor Mick Muncaster

Councillor Debra Platt

Officer Support:

Lead Officers

Lesley-Ann Fenton Director Customer and Advice Service

Asim Khan – Head of Customer and ICT Services

Helen Sutton – Customer Services Manager (Direct Services)

Alison Wilding – Customer Services Manager (Ancillary and Digital Services)

Democratic Services

Dianne Scambler Democratic and Member Services Officer

Meetings

The meeting papers of the Group can be found on the Council's website: www.chorley.gov.uk/scrutiny.

Contribution of Evidence

The Task Group would like to thank all those who have provided evidence and contributed to the Inquiry.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Cabinet is asked to consider the following recommendations:

1. **Member Learning Session to be delivered to all Members of the Council on the Single Front Office to help Councillors understand what the Council are trying to achieve and the reasons why.**
2. **The implementation of the Single Front Office, agreed by Executive Cabinet and finalised in March although only part way through has already demonstrated improved efficiencies and has had an impact on productivity. The Group endorse the current approach being taken by the authority and support its expansion in other service areas.**
3. **That the Group supports the continued development, implementation of and migration of accessible services online.**
4. **That the Council continues to engage with those residents who need additional support to access services online.**
5. **That online tutorials are made available for residents to help them make effective use of the My Account system.**
6. **That dialogue on the My Account system be improved at the necessary stages to provide better information to residents regarding assurances on the status of jobs and the transfer of requests to other partner organisations.**
7. **That the process for requesting the addition of an asset to the Council's Asset Register be better promoted to residents using the My Account system.**
8. **That My Account training to be made available to Parish Councils.**
9. **That an option be considered on the My Account system that will allow customers to enter service request details when that specific option is not available to select.**
10. **That a Suggestion Box be considered on the My account system that will allow customers to feedback and promote ownership of the system by the residents of the borough.**
11. **That the Task Group supports the Council's review of all its correspondence with the aim of improving this method of communication to its residents and details of how to register on the My Account system be incorporated into its design.**
12. **That the Council looks at ways to improve the process of customer call backs across the authority.**

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

Evidence

The group considered a number of reports that included:

Statistics on a range of key performance indicators that are routinely collected on the volume of calls received, call abandonment rates, average waiting times and number of complaints received.

Information on housing benefits productivity in terms of processing new claims and change events.

Analysis of abandoned calls in June 2015 including calls volume and average waiting calls across 13 service areas.

Performance information on Revenue and Benefits including volume of calls and collection rates for Council Tax, Business Rates and Sundry Debtors.

Witnesses

The group consulted with officers on their use of the My account system and shadowed staff at the Council's Contact Centre.

Terms of reference

1. Understanding current provision and what the Council is aiming to achieve by implementing the Single Front Office.
2. Reviewing the productivity and performance information of the service.
3. Investigating areas of best practice amongst other Local Authorities Customer Service delivery and identifying any areas for improvement.
4. Looking at current budget resources and identified savings for the service.
5. Understanding online service provision.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

EVOLUTION OF THE CONTACT CENTRE

At the start of the review, we received a high level overview of how the concept of the Single Front Office had evolved since its inception in 2001/02. It was around this time that there was a general trend across public sector services to look at the workings of the private sector in relation to how it managed relationships with its customers. Technology played a key part in this, gathering customer insight to proactively deliver services. The Council's Customer Access Strategy was developed which culminated in a variety of changes being made.

The development of the new customer services model consolidated all reception areas across the Council along with the different methods that the public uses to access its services to provide a holistic approach and overview with one central access point. The Council was able to use its intelligence data across all of the authority to tailor its services more effectively for the customer and give a more enhanced experience at first contact.

The biggest physical change to this new way of working was face to face contact with the customer. In order to facilitate the whole of the Council's services being able to be accessed at one point in a newly created Contact Centre, the ground floor of the Civic Offices at Union Street was remodelled and supported by a Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) that provided the infrastructure behind the front facing services. In 2003, the Council along with several other district councils, entered into a contract with the Lancashire Shared Contact Centre. However, progress of the implementation of the CRM infrastructure by the County Council had technical issues and delays so Chorley opted out of the partnership and instead implemented Microsoft Dynamics.

The original Contact Centre initially offered a small basket of services that has been added to year by year and now has a great wealth of services, accessible at the first point of call. The Council has achieved significant savings through the changes that have been made, whilst improving and maintaining good performance in service delivery. The ICT and Customer Services were combined in 2010, with its key driver being to promote greater digital engagement with citizens that is still paramount today.

Over the years there has been a significant increase of digital take up by residents to access services and make payments and the service is striving to build on this by ensuring that people have access to the right technologies and have the confidence to access services online. This has been heavily resourced to ensure future success.

The Council is undertaking a review of the policies and processes associated with the service to ensure that they are fit for purpose going forwards and a number of these are currently out for consultation in the public domain. The authority has also invested heavily in the training, development and knowledge of staff to establish greater flexibility across the teams whilst improving upon performance and productivity.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SINGLE FRONT OFFICE

The Single Front Office project was set up following approval by the Executive in January 2014 and Executive Member Decision in March, the same year. The project aims to create a Single Front Office, where services are delivered, end to end, as far as possible at the first point of contact and has included:

- A staffing review and restructure of revenue and benefits, customer and transactional services and planning business support
- An intensive training and mentoring programme
- Building works to extend the customer service provision
- Business improvements
- A review of process, policies and procedures

A significant milestone was the development of the new Customer Service Centre based at the Union Street site. Following the service restructure, completion of building works and an intensive period of training and mentoring the new Customer service Centre became operational on 1 October 2014 and the number of customers seen has steadily increased over this period.

The Head of Customer and ICT Services currently manages a team consisting of two Customer Services Managers, five Customer Services Team Leaders, and 36.29 FTE Customer Services Officers, and 10.3FTE Support and other specified officers. The Single Front Offices now deals with 15 service areas that includes, Council Tax, Housing Benefits, Business Rates, Website editing, Sundry Debtors and Parking. Licensing, Land Charges, Get Up and Go, Planning Support, Travel Passes and Select Move, Electoral Registration, Bereavement Services, Waste management, Grounds and Streetscene.

There have been many challenges throughout the delivery of the Single Front Office, not least a new way of working that is a significant change for the service. The opening of the Customer Contact Service has seen a cultural change for many of the staff involved. Dealing with customer requests end to end has presented staff with a completely new way of working and it is to this end that a great deal of consideration has gone into ensuring staff are equipped to work with confidence in the new centre, including the provision of training and mentoring, access to experienced staff at all times, manager and team leader support and acceleration of training for additional staff.

The training and mentoring process has meant that the performance of some service areas dipped during the first year of implementation. However, as the programme of change continues to roll-out performance is exceeding target and is performing better than in previous years, demonstrating that the changes made has improved the service to customers.

The authority has concentrated on providing a Council Tax and benefits service where requests are completed and issues resolved as far as possible at the first interaction

with the implementation of a triage service that ensures that customers are directed to the Customer Service Centre appropriately. Same day processing represents a significant proportion of the Customer Services Centre decisions. However, achieving this for all requests is largely dependent on customers providing all necessary information at the first point of contact and changes in customer behaviour will play a significant role in meeting this challenge.

It was initially envisaged that the service would in the main comprise a fully generic team of officers where staff would be skilled in all specialist areas. However, from operational experience, feedback from staff and knowledge gained during the first year of the Single Front Office project, the Executive Cabinet in August 2015 agreed proposals to change the emphasis whilst ensuring we continue to provide resilience in the core specialist services of the Single Front Office. Consequently, the training and mentoring programme was revised to enable staff to be offered the opportunity to train in a number of generic skills plus a specialist area.

The migration of processes to the front office has enabled an immediate reduction in management costs, and significant savings of £175,000 have already been achieved through these immediate changes.

It is anticipated that full implementation of the single front office will take up to two years, fully integrating the front office into a single team, securing further savings through process improvements, reducing duplication with the back office and improving productivity and other external changes.

Recommendations:

Member Learning Session to be delivered to all Members of the Council on the Single Front Office to help Councillors understand what the Council are trying to achieve and the reasons why.

The implementation of the Single Front Office, agreed by Executive Cabinet and finalised in March although only part way through has already demonstrated improved efficiencies and has had an impact on productivity. The Group endorse the current approach being taken by the authority and support its expansion in other service areas.

TELEPHONY TECHNOLOGY

The Council's current telephony system has been in use since early 2008 and the contract is due to be reviewed. Current limitations include its cumbersome interactive and voice message functionality, making it difficult to respond quickly to control call demand or unexpected events which impact upon incoming call volumes. The reporting software is inflexible and call data is only able to be stored for 12 months which restricts historical reporting.

Initial enquiries have been made by the Council into Skype for Business (formerly Lync) as part of its Microsoft stack of applications. This is the same system that has just been purchased by Preston City Council allowing a unified approach for the authority of all its communications within the Council. A bolt on application enables the same technology to be used for managing the call centre system.

Preston City Council informed us that they had switched their Contact Centre call management software last summer following a corporate move to VOIP (Voice Over Interactive Protocol – Lync) earlier in the year. This allows for calls for specific services to be routed to an individual or group, the provision of relevant reports and the recording of calls for training purposes and for Supervisors to listen into calls either silently or actively.

They had also just gone live with an Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) based system that allows Council Tax customers to have access to Council Tax on a 24/7 basis, allowing them to make payments, establish a Direct Debit and leave information for a change of circumstances. The system allows callers to be connected with a Customer Services Advisor or any data left by customers sent straight to the Council Tax back office, thereby bypassing the Call Centre. Recent data had seen a reduction in their Council Tax related workload of around 25% since the system was introduced.

Any new telephony system at Chorley needs to support the aspirations of the authority's digital agenda and be able to effectively support its service delivery on a day-to-day basis. Current training programmes are moving the single Front Office away from a static call-handling structure so any new system has to have the flexibility to distribute calls in line with this principle. The Single Front Office must make maximum use of all available technology and any improvements afforded by an upgrade of the telephony will allow improvements in this area and enable associated efficiencies to be realised.

DIGITAL ACCESS TO SERVICES

The implementation of the Digital Strategy is paramount to the success of the Single Front Office. The changes required to achieve the Council's vision will have huge implications for the way in which the authority delivers its services. The digital strategy will ensure that customers are able to and prefer to access services and information easily online and to ensure the commitment and engagement of staff and members to enable the changes to take place. Changes in the organisation's approach to the way it delivers services will lead to corresponding changes in customer behaviour. Therefore it is important that the organisation can support and maintain these changes with the cultural change and the technology required.

Reductions in local government financing have meant that services needed to be delivered in a more efficient way and working practices needed to be streamlined in order to reduce costs. Significant investment has already been made in technology and the Council needs to make the most effective use of the digital opportunities available. Customer expectations have altered over the past two decades with the development of the internet. Increasingly, customers are expecting to be able to request services and obtain information online at times and in places that suit them.

The strategy sets out the objectives and outcomes which will be delivered in order to ensure that customers are able to and are encouraged to access services easily online whilst supporting those who cannot do so. Digital channels have to be fit for purpose and easy to use. Access is required and the skills to use them. These services need to

be reliable in order to build loyalty and confidence amongst users. Action is needed to raise awareness of the online services available and how to access them will increase take-up and help to realise inefficiencies. To this end, the Council are delivering a range of training sessions across the borough that are available for all residents to attend. It is hoped that this will assist in the customer channel migration towards online services and will help to support and encourage its take up by those residents who can sometimes feel overwhelmed or left feeling disadvantaged.

The way in which the authority manages information is also changing rapidly and the objectives in the digital strategy will help to realise the benefits of the changes. This strategy will make digital services the services of choice, enabling the Council to redesign its services to better respond to its customer need.

THE COUNCILS WEBSITE – chorley.gov.uk

The Council has undertaken a huge investment to underpin one of the authority's key aspirations to engage with its residents and we were shown a prototype of the Council's refreshed website that was subsequently launched during the review. The homepage of the website, which was currently made up of articles and advertisements, would lose its banner format and be replaced with large icons for the top key services that residents are being encouraged to access online, making it more interactive, user friendly and being geared around smart technology use.

There is to be a planned migration of online services that residents will be able to access readily on the homepage. The Council currently uses google analytics to monitor what services residents are trying to access on its website and it is this that informs the services that are promoted on the homepage. There had been concerns that the icons appeared too small when trying to access services online via use of a smart phone. However, improvements were made whilst this review was being undertaken and Members commented on how impressed they were with the improved design and size of the icons and considered that this would help to promote greater use of this media.

Members noted the digital changes contained within the Council's Digital Strategy and agreed to support the Council in its continuation to increase access to more services online.

Recommendation:

That the Group supports the continued development, investment and migration of accessible services online.

That the Council continues to engage with those residents who need additional support to access services online.

That online tutorials are made available for residents to help them make effective use of the My Account system.

MY ACCOUNT

Members of the Group undertook shadowing of Contact Centre staff which provided an invaluable insight into the technology that supports the Single Front Office. Members₁₁

commented on how impressed they were by the Contact Centre staff, their professionalism, breadth of knowledge, the consistency of advice they gave, and their ability to get to the crux of a complaint or problem quickly with customers. Staff are multi-disciplined and with the provision of training and experience, they have become extremely knowledgeable and are able to deal with complex issues and difficult customers.

A demonstration of the My Account system allowed Members to experience at first hand a call to the Council through to completion. Residents can access the My Account system in two ways, either by calling the Contact Centre directly and having the details entered up on to the system by staff or by accessing the service directly online. All calls are treated in the same way to ensure that they are dealt with in a consistent manner.

At the initial log in stage, a case history of every contact that the resident has reported retrospectively is provided with details on progress made against each one. Notes are added by officers under the case details. The system automatically defaults to the area in which the resident lives so the options available are tailored to the area. Presently, officers in the Contact Centre have a wider range of service icons to click on at this stage of the process but with the planned improvements to the website this will also be available to residents to improve their experience of using the system.

Using the example of a litter bin that needed to be emptied, Members were given a demonstration of the step by step approach taken to resolve the issue. Once the option to empty a bin is selected, a plan of the area is displayed and the user is able to identify the exact location by clicking on the relevant bin icon. The maintenance schedule for that asset is then displayed and if the bin is scheduled to be emptied, the report ends there and is signed off as completed. If the bin is not due to be emptied, the request is directed to the appropriate team for action.

Members felt that this was something that could be improved upon as it was important to ascertain if maintenance schedules needed changing to meet demand and were concerned that some jobs could be closed off to quickly. Assurances were given that any information received in this way was monitored so that maintenance schedules could be amended accordingly to better meet demand and improve the service. The Group considered that this could be better reflected to the customer and asked for improved communication to residents at this point.

At the start of the project, the Council individually uploaded and flagged several thousand assets so that they could be analysed and identified by residents on the My Account system. Any Councillor or member of the public can ask for an asset to be added to the register by making a request through the General Enquiries tab. This is then picked up by the Council's GIS team for tagging. In addition, all Streetscene Operatives had received training on how to update the Authority's asset records.

All job requests are forwarded to the appropriate Team Leader who will in turn allocate to the appropriate team. All requests also appear at a central point that the whole service has access to. Each member of the teams have been allocated with and trained in the use of an iPad, which they use to receive all allocated tasks. Once completed, the officer will amend its status and provide details of how this has been achieved. The

system then generates an email updating on progress made to the My Account user if provided by the customer. This makes the system more transparent and in turn promotes greater efficiency and use of the system.

The Group also received a demonstration on the internal system for managing calls in the back office and the My Work element of the system that officers use to action all requests. We also received feedback from officers using the system and informed of the changes made to improve the system for both officers and residents use. Possible improvements to the service were discussed that included, better detailed information on action taken for those jobs that are the responsibility of other partner organisations for example, tree cutting or highways, and for those customers who try to report jobs that have already been previously reported and action is in progress.

Recommendations:

That dialogue on the My Account system be improved at the necessary stages to provide better information to residents regarding assurances on the status of jobs and the transfer of requests to other partner organisations.

That the process for requesting the addition of an asset to the Council's Asset Register be better promoted to residents using the My Account system.

That My Account training to be made available to Parish Councils.

That an option be considered on the My Account system that will allow customers to enter service request details when that specific option is not available to select.

That a Suggestion Box be considered on the My Account system that will allow customers to feedback and promote ownership of the system by the residents of the borough.

E.CITIZEN (ONLINE REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICES)

The service is being further developed by implementing a range of online options for some services to help drive down costs and provide greater efficiencies. A dashboard allows the customer to make various requests online that include a change of address, the setting up of a direct debit or to search for details like payment history. Landlords can access their tenant Housing Benefit information on the website via e.citizen..

The Authority is also reviewing the Councils sundry debtor processes to find the best ways of simplifying the process and reducing the outstanding debt. A set of new proposals have broadly been agreed that include, payments in advance or by Direct Debit where possible and the consideration of incentives to pay in advance. The Council will also implement the mandatory collection of the debtors' details, such as full name, email address and contact telephone number and where appropriate the collection of a purchase order number.

CORRESPONDENCE

Although the Council's aim was to contact its residents through use of digital means, there are still some instances where residents need to be contacted via letter or by invoice. The Group considered in detail a sample of the correspondence that the Council used to communicate with its residents and made suggestions where deemed appropriate.

All correspondence used by the authority was currently being reviewed with the aim of producing documentation that was self-explanatory, simplistic in design, easy to understand and provided the correct contact information. This was sometimes impacted upon by those letters or invoices that have to contain certain legislative information that is very prescriptive and unable to be changed, for example Council Tax and Business Rates bills. All specialist areas had a dedicated golden number that was unique to the service in terms of enquiries but all correspondence also displayed the automated pay line.

Members agreed that there are some good aspects to the current correspondence but felt that there could be greater uniformity, instructions could be made simpler and that there should be a more cohesive simplistic design approach for all correspondence.

Recommendations:

That the Task Group supports the Council's review of all its correspondence with the aim of improving this method of communication to its residents and details of how to register on the My Account system be incorporated into its design.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Information relating to customer satisfaction levels was received. Prior to 1 April 2012 only customers telephoning the contact centre were surveyed and satisfaction levels were consistently over 93%. Customers were asked about their experience with the Contact Centre which did not really reflect the way the service request was handled overall and a more corporate approach was therefore adopted.

This new way of measuring satisfaction has been undertaken since April 2012 and the Council has seen reduction in satisfaction levels. These levels however, have started to gradually increase over time and at the end of September 2015, the % of customers satisfied with the way they were treated by the Council was at 77.7%. The current survey asks respondents. 'What do you think we could have done better? And the group were provided with the detailed responses from the September survey. Where a reason for dissatisfaction was given, in 90% of cases this was because of a lack of response to or follow-up of the service request.

All service related complaints are monitored and reported to Strategy Group each month together with escalated complaints which have entered the formal complaints

procedure. Customers using My Account are able to view information about the status of their service requests and add notes if they wish. Customer comments may be received to update or cancel a service request or to express thanks for a job done well.

The My Account system sends an email to a customer when a service request is resolved advising them that a job has been closed. In September, 33 customer responses out of 88 (37.5%) suggested that a service request had been closed prematurely meaning the job had not been completed. The Group discussed the reasons as to why this sometimes happens. This included service requests that were the responsibility of other organisations outside the Council's control i.e. Lancashire County Council and measures had recently taken place to include the relevant contact numbers for the County Council in the detail updated by staff.

Members felt that the wording of the email sent when a job was closed off needed to be improved upon so that people could actually state reasons why they were satisfied or not. This would also help the Council to improve services more quickly.

Service requests can be reopened and reassigned upon request and would be monitored to ensure there was no persistent behaviour of jobs being closed too early by staff. If a pattern was identified, this action would be escalated to a more senior officer to deal with. It was however, important to note, that Use of the My Account was still in its early infancy and would continue to be developed, reviewed and refined as time goes by.

It was acknowledged that customer complaint levels are low and that in the main, complaints were generally generated by staff outside of the Contact Centre, which could be improved to provide updates for customers on progress made, action taken or jobs closed prematurely. The group thought the Council needed to look at further ways of improving this behaviour outside of the Single Front Office.

Recommendations:

That the Council looks at ways to improve the process of customer call backs by officers outside of the Contact Centre across the authority.

CONCLUSION

The Group were impressed by the work that the Council is currently undertaking to promote greater efficiencies against the backdrop of ever decreasing resources and commended the implementation of the Single Front Office. There were lots of examples of good working practices across the service and Members endorse future development. All the Councillors that took part in this review have learned a great deal about the work of the service and fully support the aims that the Council are trying to achieve.

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