

**MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - SINGLE FRONT OFFICE**

**MEETING DATE** Thursday, 17 September 2015

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor Alistair Morwood (Chair), Councillors Mark Jarnell, Matthew Lynch and Mick Muncaster

**OFFICERS:** Asim Khan (Head of Customer, ICT and Transactional Services), Helen Sutton and Alison Wilding (Customer Services Managers) and Carol Russell (Democratic Services Manager).

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor John Dalton and June Molyneaux

**15.NW4 Minutes**

**AGREED:** that the minutes of the last meeting of the Task Group, held on 10 August 2015 be approved as a correct record.

**15.NW5 Declarations of Any Interests**

No declarations of interest were declared.

**15.NW6 Contact Centre - Members Feedback**

Further to a decision at the first meeting of the Task Group, most Members of the Group had since undertaken shadowing of Contact Centre staff and a summary note of their experiences and the information presented, was circulated.

The note detailed the core infrastructure which had been put in place for the organisation's contact with the public and the huge investment there had been towards engaging digitally with residents.

Members were shown a prototype of the Council's new website which was based around large key icons, and would be more user friendly and geared around smart technology. Google analytics showed which Council services residents were most frequently trying to access.

Members received a demonstration of MyAccount from receiving a request from a customer; through to the information officers received including any relevant history; the processes adopted; notes added by case officers; through to service delivery and the notification to the customer of the completed job. Officers out and about received information on iPads so that if they were in the vicinity, relevant local jobs could be assessed or completed.

The session had also included an update on e-billing which so far had around 2,500 customers (not 9,000 as stated in the report).

Members commented on how impressed they were by 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 members of the public. In response to a query about staff breaks, Asim reported that staff were rotated with different duties; there was no set breaks – it was down to individuals who are encouraged and supported to take regular breaks. Staff were multi-disciplined and training was provided and with experience, they became extremely knowledgeable and able to deal with complex issues and difficult customers.

Members questioned the completeness of the assets list on MyAccount and how the public could add to that information.

Members asked about using the tri-age system of calls and whether someone with two queries could go to pay their Council Tax first for example, and then ask about a refuse collection query by opting to transfer to a customer officer. This wasn't currently an option but technology was developing. The current phone system was hosted externally which had limitations but improvements were always being investigated.

Members queried the use of account numbers so that all queries could be linked back to a unique number for that resident. This wasn't currently an option. They did publicise the relevant contact telephone number on all correspondence.

Contact centre staff were generally proactive in registering residents to MyAccount when they phoned in. They would then be emailed with a link when they first accessed it. There were currently 9000 registered users for MyAccount and at some point, applications to register for MyAccount would be saturated and would taper off. Council tax and benefit enquiries were still the highest face to face contacts.

In relation to customer satisfaction, Asim advised that they had looked at different approaches and ways of measuring satisfaction levels and even where the customer experience was good, if the follow up action didn't take place within a reasonable time, their experience was still rated poor. Therefore they had decided to focus on customer satisfaction across the service from end to end and this was measured corporately. Historic service satisfaction data is available which demonstrated high levels of satisfaction and awards.

#### **AGREED ACTIONS:**

- 1. Members suggested that it would be useful to speak to a member of the Streetscene team on use of the system from their perspective using iPads and it was agreed Bob Webster, Streetscene and Parks Manager and Jo Oliver, Streetscene and Leisure Services Manager should be invited to attend the next meeting.**
- 2. A Member Learning Session on back office systems would be advantageous for all Councillors and should be arranged as soon as there was an available date in the calendar/Member training programme.**

- 3. The Working Group asked to see some sample correspondence which would be issued by the Contact Centre staff. These could be emailed out rather than being considered at the next meeting.**

#### **15.NW7 Performance and Productivity**

Members considered performance and productivity information in a report produced by the Head of Customer, ICT and Transactional Services). The report showed comparative information for the period April to August in both 2014 and 2015. It provided an overview of performance and Members were invited to request any further detail. The information provided included:

- Statistics for a range of key performance indicators which are routinely collected eg volume of calls received; call abandonment rates; average waiting times; and number of complaints received.
- Information on housing benefit productivity, in terms of processing new claims and change events.
- An analysis of abandoned calls in June 2015 including calls volume and average waiting times across 13 service areas.
- Information on revenue and benefits performance including volume of calls and collection rates for council tax; business rates; sundry debtors etc.

Members queried the collection rates on sundry debts and Asim reported that an automated payments system was being looked at for certain services and a new booking system to process payments up front for some services such as the Lancastrian to speed up collection rates in line with the Council's debt management policy. Also the figures were skewed by the size of some invoices and the period of the quarter in which they were issued. Splitting these into those below and above £5,000 would provide a more accurate picture.

#### **AGREED ACTIONS:**

**The Head of Customer, ICT and Transactional Services to discuss with accountancy services, the feasibility of producing collection rate information for sundry debtors in categories of below £5000, and above £5000.**

#### **15.NW8 Scoping of the Review**

Members considered a draft scoping document for the scrutiny review of the Single Front Office which was based on discussions held at the first Task Group meeting.

Members were in agreement with the suggested objectives, desired outcomes and terms of reference and agreed they wanted to focus on current provision and current plans rather than any service planning beyond then.

#### **AGREED ACTIONS:**

**The scoping document was agreed with the following additional provisions:**

- 1. A representative from Wyre BC should be invited to the next meeting to talk about best practice for processing benefit claims as their record in that area was excellent.**

- 2. That Members visit Preston City Council to view their call centre telephony technology which included software that could be bolted onto existing Microsoft Business Applications and that this should take place before the next meeting of the Task Group on 29 October.**
- 3. In response to comments about the need for an upgrade in current Council IT systems, Asim reported that 5 years on, the Council was already looking at a refresh of existing systems and that they may choose to do this in partnership with another organisation rather than hosting it ourselves. It was agreed that undertaking an options review should be included in the Task Group recommendations.**
- 4. In terms of a customer survey, the Head of Customer, ICT and Transactional Services would bring corporate and historic data and any MyAccount responses, to a future meeting to provide evidence of satisfaction levels and also a snapshot of complaints.**

Chair

Date