Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Single Front Office

Thursday, 17 December 2015

Present: Councillor Alistair Morwood (Chair), Councillors John Dalton, Mark Jarnell, Matthew Lynch, June Molyneaux and Debra Platt

Also in attendance
Officer: Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Customer and Advice Services), Helen Sutton (Customer Services Manager (Direct Services)), Alison Wilding (Customer Services Manager (Digital and Ancillary Services)) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

15.NW17   MINUTES

> **RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Single Front Office meeting held on 12 November 2015 be confirmed as a correct record for signing by the Chair.**

15.NW18   DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of any interests.

15.NW19   SINGLE FRONT OFFICE TELEPHONY REVIEW

The current telephony has been in use since early 2008 and the Siemens contract expires on 31 March 2016 for both the corporate telephony and Contact Centre software. The limitations of the current telephony included cumbersome Interactive Voice Response (IVR) 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 stored for 12 moths which restricts historical reporting. Initial enquiries had been made some month ago into Microsoft Skype for Business (formerly Lync). This is the same system used by Preston City Council and is a bolt on to the existing corporate telephony system. This system will allow for a holistic view of dealing with all communications to the Council.

Any new telephony needs to support the aspirations of the Council's digital agenda and be able to effectively support its service delivery on a day-to-day basis. The current training programme is moving the Single Front Office away from a generic call-handling structure so it is imperative for any new system 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.

Delivery of voice communications over the internet provides a number of operational benefits; VoIP allows users to make telephone calls from a desktop computer or a suitable mobile device. As the telephone numbers are virtual, this would provide greater mobility and flexibility of location,

widening the potential for home and lone working. The ability to check whether colleagues are online, offline or busy in a more integrated and intelligent way, will also enable much quicker responses from the Instant Messaging facility.

The voicemail facility is much improved, allowing voicemails to appear in a user's inbox as an email and there is potential for integration with other applications such as email, social media, 'click to call' functionality on a website. VoiP also allows for more flexibility with conference calls and video conferencing.

Contact Centre telephony allows for intelligent call routing to be configured allowing for the most experienced available advisor to receive the next call in the queue. The call routing needs to facilitate the single Front Office approach to individual advisor skill sets, i.e. specialist plus one. The potential for integration with other web-based applications and web-based agent console and for more intelligence use of email allowing the routing of emails directly to inboxes of suitably skilled agents based on content or to/from addresses.

Other important features required are:
- Customised messages for individual call queues
- Call recording which is Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCIDSS) compliant and can be configured for all a percentage, on demand or none with an override queue or agent level.
- Improved message recording and IVR options
- Web based call flow editor which are easy and quick to configure
- Web-based Interactive Response software offering speech recognition

The current web chat facility is no longer in use. It was not possible to prioritise the web chat content in any way. The web chat facility needs to be easy to configure and integrate with the Council's own website and should match the look and feel of the website. Skills based chat routing should be available so that enquiries can be directed to the most experienced available advisor and options to save web chat transcripts.

Reporting facilities need to include both real-time and historical data for agents, call queues, incoming number and an intelligent dashboard facility with proactive alerts and notifications when pre-defined criteria are met, allowing the Council to take action before there is a problem.

The authority has a private access network that is available to them and has a two trunk approach aimed at building in resilience by having separate Town Hall and Union. This would help to dissipate disruption when implementing the new system as existing infrastructure will stay in place whilst rolling out the new system and would remain until the Council were confident to switch it off. The system has to be upgraded and the necessary improvement and investment has been identified to ensure that there is a robust infrastructure in place to support the concept of the Single Front Office.

Members discussed current quality issues in relation to voice activated systems and its impact on customer satisfaction. Although they would welcome any new system that would improve upon this service, they urged the Council to conduct thorough tests to ensure better quality of the VoIP system.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

15.NW20   SINGLE FRONT OFFICE RESOURCES AND EFFICIENCIES

The Single Front Office is developing in a way that is sustainable in the long term against a backdrop of reduced resources. It aims to smooth processes and remove duplication and effectively manage any increase in demand for services.

The consolidation of processes to the front office has enabled a reduction in management costs, and in the longer term will support reductions in support services. The staffing savings achieved through the initial change were £175,000. Future savings are expected but will depend on the level of further integration and consolidation of services and success of the initial implementation phase which is currently underway.

Members were shown a breakdown of all the savings achieved for Customer and Transactional Services from 2012 – 2013. The savings totalled £375,340 with the most significant savings being achieved through staffing changes. There have also been some associated cost savings with the ICT services over the same period that totalled £81,720.

Additional efficiencies will come from continued progress in a number of areas that included:
- Further consolidation of services to the Single Front Office
- Continued streamlining of processes and ensuring maximum use of available technology
- Continued migration to digital services and channel shift
- Further enhancements of digital services and improvements
- Commercial agreements for line of business applications
- Consolidation of management costs
- Changes in policy which support digital aspirations
- External factors, such as the rollout of Universal Credit beginning in 2016

Members have supported the shift implementation of iPads and have embraced the changes needed so far to keep abreast of changes and upgrades to equipment.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

15.NW21   DRAFT FINAL REPORT OF THE SINGLE FRONT OFFICE REVIEW

The Group considered a draft Final Report summarising their findings to date and agreed a number of recommendations that had been identified throughout the review of the Single Front Office of the authority.

Following the groups discussions at this meeting the report would be amended to reflect the findings in relation to the new telephony proposals and identified savings. Some other minor changes would also be made regarding wording and tweaking of recommendations.

The Chair, Councillor Alistair Morwood concluded that the review had been extremely interesting and had helped members of the Task Group gain a valuable insight into the work of the Single Front Office and the Councils aspirations for the future. He thanked the work of the Group including the officers that had inputted into the review.

RESOLVED – That the final report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on the single Front Office would be completed to include the additional text and recommendations agreed at this meeting and submitted to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 January 2016.

15.NW22   EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

To exclude the press and public for the following items of business on the ground that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

15.NW23   PRESTON CITY COUNCIL RESPONSE LETTER

The Group considered the response that had been sent by the Leader of Preston City Council to the Group's request to visit the authority's contact centre. Although the members had been unable to attend, Councillor Rankin had provided some information in response to the questions that were raised that had proved helpful to our findings and provided a valuable insight into some of the functionality that the authority were proposing to implement in the near future.

RESOLVED – That the information contained within the letter be noted.

Chair