OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - SINGLE FRONT OFFICE

THURSDAY, 17TH DECEMBER 2015, 6.00 PM
COMMITTEE ROOM 1, TOWN HALL, CHORLEY

AGENDA

APOLOGIES

Response of Leader of Preston City Council (enclosed)

GARY HALL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Electronic agendas sent to Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Single Front Office Councillor Alistair Morwood (Chair), and Councillors John Dalton, Mark Jarnell, Matthew Lynch, June Molyneaux, Mick Muncaster and Debra Platt.

Chorley Council

MINUTES OF	**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - SINGLE FRONT OFFICE**
MEETING DATE	**Thursday, 12 November 2015**
MEMBERS PRESENT:	Councillor Alistair Morwood (Chair), Councillor (Vice-Chair) and Councillors John Dalton, Matthew Lynch and June Molyneaux
OFFICERS:	Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Customer and Advice Services), Asim Khan (Head of Customer, ICT and Transactional Services), Helen Sutton (Customer Services Manager (Direct Services)), Alison Wilding (Customer Services Manager (Digital and Ancillary Services)), Robert Webster (Streetscene Manager) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)
APOLOGIES:	Councillor Mark Jarnell, Mick Muncaster and Debra Platt
OTHER MEMBERS:	None.

15.NW9   Minutes

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Single Front Office meeting held on 17 September 2015 be confirmed as a correct record for signing by the Chair.

15.NW10   Declarations of Any Interests

No declarations of any interests were received.

15.NW11   Use of MyAccount - Streetscene Operatives

Bob Webster, Streetscene and Parks Manager attended the meeting to talk to the group about his services experience of using the My Account system that was facilitated by the use of iPads across the team.

Streetscene started planning for the move for the teams to be able to use the new technology in 2013. The various schedule rounds were planned in detail and passed on to the IT team so that a programme of the scheduled workloads could be developed on the iPads for use by Streetscene. A total of 20 iPads were issued amongst the mobile teams along with three iphones for the barrow staff and five were individually assigned to the Area Co-ordinators and Managers.

The new technology was rolled out in April 2014 for the operational teams to use and in May 2015 all information contained within the system was made viewable to the public with feedback to date being positive.

In response to Members questions it was explained, that as with any new ways of working there have been some issues identified along the way that have been and continue to be resolved as the system develops. All staff receive continual training and confidence in the team has grown. The ICT team are extremely supportive and a dedicated member of the ICT team was afforded to the implementation and support of the project.

Following a recent internal audit inspection, the system is now being used to measure the team's performance. The data collected will help shape the future demand of the service and prioritise workloads maintenance schedules more effectively. The Streetscene team are also hoping to develop the use of the system further by developing its use for inspections for play areas, trees, car parking and memorial stones. The use of the iPads by the Streetscene team for the allocation and completion of tasks has been ground-breaking for the Council and is potentially a software package that could be marketed to others in the future.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

15.NW12   Sample Correspondence - Feedback

Members discussed in detail the sample correspondence that had been circulated ahead of the meeting.

It was explained that all the different letters used by the Council were currently being reviewed with the aim of producing documentation that was self-explanatory, easy to understand and provided the correct contact information. All the specialist areas had a dedicated golden number that was unique to the service in terms of enquiries but also displayed the automated pay line.

Members felt that some of the current documentation was too congested and not very well designed. However, it was explained that some letters, for example Council Tax and Business Rates, had to contain certain legislative information that was very prescriptive and not able to be changed. This was evidenced when viewing the correspondence that was not dictated by prescriptive text as the Council could dictate its own simplistic design.

Members agreed that there were 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 including Members letterheads and business cards.

RESOLVED:
1.   **That all correspondence be reviewed in line with the comments above.**
2.   **Instructions on how to register on the My Account system be printed on the back of Council correspondence.**

15.NW13   Sundry Debtor Collection Rates

The Group received performance information on the authority's collection rates for sundry debtors to allow them to understand why measures were being taken to take payment for services before they were undertaken. All payments should be paid in 30 days, allowing 14 days before proactive recovery by the Council. This year's collection rates have been successful in comparison to last year and it would seem that the introduction of an extra step to collect the money on behalf of the authority, before recovery is passed on to the debt collection agency is proving dividends. A wide range of differing tactics are deployed by the team to recover any outstanding payments and as such it was difficult to quantify the cost of recovery.

The current formulae for calculating the percentage of outstanding Sundry Debtors for the Council was explained and Members received comparative recovery rates for the periods April to October for 2014 and 2015. The percentage recovery for debts over £5,000 in 2014 was quite low at 42.16%, however, it was explained that this included a figure of £2,258,747.00 for debts where recovery has been suspended as they were in dispute. In comparison figures for 2015 were greatly improved with 75.8% of debts over £5,000 recovered. Members were informed that the Council's target was always to try and recover 100% of outstanding payments.

The team talked about the importance of changing the way in which the Council collected its money. The payment of all services was currently being reviewed to look into ways of collecting payment before services are received. This was already in place for some Council services and the team were looking to expand this way of collection for different services across the Council.

Some services like Council Tax and Benefits have nationally set targets that have to be monitored and reported to Central Government.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

15.NW14   Customer Satisfaction Levels

The Group received information relating to customer satisfaction levels. 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 saw a reduction in levels. These levels 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? Members were provided with the detailed responses from September's 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.

Service related complaints are monitored and reported to Strategy Group each month together with escalated complaints which have entered the formal complaints procedure. A total of 116 service related complaints were received in September 2015. The number of avoidable complaints is now also monitored. A complaint is considered to be avoidable where it is about a situation within the Council's influence and the Group were provided with information of those complaints received in September

2015, with complaints identified as avoidable, 23 out of 116 (19.8%.highlighted as green. It was noted that waste complaints are monitored separately due to the impact on the Service Level Agreement in place with the contractor.

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 as been closed. Some account responses are from customers whose service request has not been completed although the job has been closed and they have received an email. In September, 33 customer responses out of 88 (37.5%) suggested that a service request had been closed although the job had not been completed and the Group discussed the reasons as to why this sometimes happens. This included service requests that were the responsibility of 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.

It was explained that a job was always reopened and reassigned upon request and monitored to ensure there was no persistent behaviour of job being closed too early by staff. If a pattern was identified, this action would be escalated to a more senior officer to deal with. Use of the My Account was still in its early infancy and use of the system would continue to be developed, reviewed and refined.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

15.NW15   Site Visit Update

The Group were informed that unfortunately neither Wyre Council nor Preston City Council had agreed to facilitate a visit from the Task Group to their Contact Centres at the request of officers.

It was agreed that this was potentially something that could be further pursued by members and it was AGREED for a letter on behalf of the Group to be sent to the Leader of Preston City Council.

RESOLVED – That the Chair, Councillor Alistair Morwood write to the Leader of Preston City Council on behalf of the Group.

15.NW16   Next Steps

It was agreed that a draft report would be presented to the next meeting in December that would capture all the work done to date within the Group and list any recommendations suggested to date.

The Group needed to make sure that the Group's terms of reference had been adhered to and that its main objectives had been met. Any information that had been missed would need to be presented to the last meeting in December.

Members were informed that the suggestion for the delivery of a Member Learning Session on the Single Front Office had already been acted upon and would be available for all Members to attend in February 2016.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

Chair   Date

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Overview and Scrutiny: Single Front Office

Telephony Review

Introduction

1. The current telephony has been in use since early 2008. The current Siemens contract expires on 31 March 2016 for both the corporate telephony and the Contact Centre software.

2. The limitations of the current telephony include cumbersome Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and voice message functionality. This makes 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 twelve months which restricts historical reporting.

3. Initial enquiries were made some months ago into Microsoft Skype for Business (formerly Lync). This is the same system used by Preston City Council. The contact centre software at Preston is a bolt on to the corporate telephony.

Guiding principles

4. The new telephony needs to support the aspirations of the council's digital agenda and support service delivery on a day-to-day basis.

5. The current training programme is moving the Single Front Office away from a generic call-handling structure towards a 'specialist plus one' approach. The flexibility to distribute calls in line with this principle is imperative.

6. A further principle of the SFO is to make maximum use of available technology. The improvements afforded by an upgrade of the telephony will allow improvements in this area and associated efficiencies to be realised.

7. The functionality of any new telephony needs to allow increased flexibility and productivity.

VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) or Functionality of MSforB

8. 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 suitable mobile device.

9. As telephone numbers are virtual, this provides mobility and flexibility of location including the potential for home working and remote working.

10. The ability to check whether colleagues are online, offline or busy in a more integrated and intelligent way including quicker responses from the Instant Messaging facility.

11. VoIP allows for federated services which can facilitate use of Skype for business with external organisations using the same technology if required.

12. The voicemail facility is much improved, allowing voicemails to appear in a user's inbox as an email.

13. There is potential for integration with other applications such as email, social media, 'click to call' functionality on a website

14. VoIP also allows for more flexibility with conference calls and video conferencing.

Call routing

15. 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 SFO approach to individual advisor skill sets, i.e. specialist plus one.

16. Other important features required are:
    a) Customise messages for individual call queues
    b) 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 at queue or agent level
    c) Improved message recording and IVR options
    d) Web based call flow editor which easy and quick to configure

e) Web-based Interactive Voice Response software offering speech recognition

17. The potential for integration with other web-based applications and a web-based agent console

18. The potential for more intelligent use of email allowing the routing of emails directly to inboxes of suitably skilled agents based on content or to/from addresses

Web chat

19. The current web chat facility is no longer in use. It was not possible to prioritise the web chat contacts in any way. This meant that a customer could have a lengthy wait before their contact was responded to. Also, the functionality was not compliant with PSN requirements.

20. 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.

21. 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 and analytics

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

23. The ability to report on how customers are using the call flows within the IVR will allow us to tailor them to encourage and maximise the use of this facility.

Overview and Scrutiny: Single Front Office

Resources and Efficiencies

Introduction

1. The Single Front Office needs to develop in a way that is sustainable in the long term against a backdrop of reduced resources. It will need to be able to smooth processes and remove duplication and also effectively manage any increase in demand for services.
2. 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 are £175,000. Future savings are likely but this will depend on the level of further integration and consolidation of services and ultimately the success of the initial implementation phase.

Progress so far

3. Significant efficiencies and savings have been achieved by the Single Front Office project and work continues towards achieving further savings.
4. This includes information processing and reducing the duplicate handling of information, increasing digital take-up and improving overall performance and productivity.

Customer and Transactional Services - Budget Savings

5. The table shows a breakdown of the savings achieved for Customer and Transactional Services from 2012-2013.
6. The most significant savings have been made from staffing. Miscellaneous savings have come from areas such as stationery, publications, legal fees etc.

Customer Services (SFO)	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	TOTAL
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Staffing Savings	(32,080)		(175,000)		(80,750)	(287,830)
Other Savings						
Northgate (Mailroom Services)	(8,580)	(15,070)				(23,650)
Printing & Copying	(19,730)				(18,000)	(37,730)
Misc.	(2,500)	(3,000)	(5,900)	(14,730)		(26,130)
TOTAL BUDGET SAVINGS	(62,890)	(18,070)	(180,900)	(14,730)	(98,750)	(375,340)

ICT Services - Associated Savings

7. There have been some associated cost savings within ICT Services over the same period as detailed in the table below.

ICT Services	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	TOTAL
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Staffing Savings						0
Other Savings						
Telephony	(5,740)	(11,530)				(17,270)
Computer Equipment/Software	(11,340)	(3,500)	(2,260)		(30,700)	(47,800)
Consultants Fees					(15,000)	(15,000)
Misc.			(1,650)			(1,650)
TOTAL BUDGET SAVINGS	(17,080)	(15,030)	(3,910)	0	(45,700)	(81,720)

Future changes

8. Additional efficiencies will come from continued progress in a number of areas. There will be further opportunities to extend the successful service delivery model as seen in the Single Front Office where productivity continues to increase. These include:

    a. **Further consolidation of services to the SFO enabling further end-to-end delivery:**
        This will allow the principles that have guided the successful service delivery model in the SFO to be applied to additional service areas. Those functions that involve high levels of customer contact can benefit from the principles that have driven the success in the SFO such as strong performance management and reducing duplication in work processes.

    b. **Continued streamlining of processes and ensuring the maximum use of technology available**:
        Changes to the planning support service are being implemented as part of the SFO Planning Business Support project which will lead to improvements in business processes and more efficient handling of information.

    c. **Continued migration to digital services and channel shift:**
        Many services in the front office can be requested digitally and some are capable of end-to-end electronic delivery such as railcard applications and waste service requests. There is still extensive scope for the realising of further efficiencies in this area. Where services are available electronically, customers can be encouraged to access them using the online channel using financial incentives or even by removing alternative options.

    d. **Further enhancements of digital services and improvements:**
        Online forms are being developed in the large service areas of council tax and this will help to streamline processes and reduce duplication. My Account take-up is increasing and the software is being continuously reviewed and changes made in line with customer feedback and operational demands. The insight gained from the digital data collected will allow better profiling of services based on demand, eg. streetscene

    e. **Commercial agreements for line of business applications:**
        There are a number of service contracts due to expire in 2016, namely the Capita (Revenues and Benefits software) contract, IDOX (Licensing and Planning software), Siemens telephony contract and the Mail services contract. Work is underway looking at a number of procurement options. In relation to the Capita software, new modules have been implemented and work is still being undertaken to ensure that best use is being made of options already included in the contract eg. the housing benefit Appeals module is being tested.

    f. **Consolidation of management costs**
        As the changes to the delivery of the service are made there will be opportunities to reduce and consolidate management costs across the service.

    g. **Changes in policy which support digital aspirations**
        Agreement has been established to some policy changes which will increase efficiency across the council. These include payment up front for services and the extension of off-site printing. Further changes will be supported by working smarter initiatives and changes to support digital behaviour.

    h. **External factors**
        There a number of changes imminent in terms of welfare reform. The most significant of these is the roll-out of Universal Credit beginning in 2016 and completing by 2021. There will be an impact upon the subsidy paid to the council for the administering of housing benefit. There may also be changes to court costs in respect of the recovery of council tax and business rates.

Chorley
Council

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

December 2015

CONTENTS PAGE

PREFACE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

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 approach already being undertaken by the authority, but 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, manage 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 governments 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 andproductivity 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:

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.

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

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

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 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.

That the Council looks at ways to improve the process of customer call backs across the authority.

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 mirror the workings of private industries in relation to how it communicated with its residents. 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 was considered too slow for this authority so Chorley opted out of the partnership and instead deployed Microsoft Dynamics.

The original Contact Centre initially offered a small basket of services that has been added to year by year and now have 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 a 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
- 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. Thereby 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 generic team of officers where staff would be skilled in all 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 providing 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

(TO BE COMPLETED)

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 efficient 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 store, process and access 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 were concerns that the icons[9]

presently appeared too small when trying to access services online via use of a smart phone. However, officers were confident that making improvements to the design and size of the icons 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, implementation of and migration of accessible services online.

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

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. Members commented on how impressed they were by the Contact Centre staff, their professionalism, breath 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, we 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 thusand 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.

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 were 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 was 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 as been closed. In September, 33 customer responses out of 88 (37.5%) suggested that a service request had been closed although the job had not been completed and the Group discussed the reasons as to why this sometimes happens. This included service requests that were the responsibility of 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.

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 across the authority.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

<u>Evidence</u>

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.

<u>Witnesses</u>

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

<u>Terms of reference</u>

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.

CONCLUSION

By virtue of paragraph(s) 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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