

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 has 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