

Agenda Item No: 5

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny (Resources)

Date of Meeting: 25 November 2013

Report Title: Update on Contact Centre arrangements

Report By: Jane Hartnell
Head of Corporate Services

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with a detailed update on the Community Contact Centre (CCC).

Recommendation(s)

- 1. That Members acknowledge the steps being taken to address performance in the Community Contact Centre and make any suggestions they feel appropriate for the Contact Centre Improvement Board to consider.**

Reasons for Recommendations

The Community Contact Centre is a key HBC resource and is our 'shop front' for local people. It is the responsibility of the whole organisation to contribute to the achievement of a Customer First Council, and the success of the CCC will be a tangible outcome of this priority.

Introduction

1. The Council's new corporate contact centre was put in place to improve customer service and efficiency and release revenue savings, and became fully operational from October 2012. Following the transfer of responsibility for management of the Community Contact Centre (CCC) to Corporate Services in April 2013, and in the light of six months experience with almost all services transferred in, a full review of the operational and strategic issues associated with the Contact Centre was undertaken.
2. Significant performance issues were also highlighted when, in addition to the usually busy year-end period, the service was at times overwhelmed with significantly higher numbers of customers requiring assistance with queries about the new Council Tax Support Scheme; the new housing benefit changes, and the new housing allocation scheme in March, April and May 2013.
3. The CCC review was undertaken by officers from Corporate Services from April 2013 and received input from front line contact centre staff and service managers. The review considered issues raised by complainants and officers undertook direct observation of service delivery. During this time, health and safety reviews were also undertaken at the request of staff, and colleagues from Audit and Finance worked closely with CCC colleagues to review procedures such as cash handling and reconciliation of payments.
4. In addition to the internal reviews, the Council appointed i-three Analytics, (experts in advanced analytical skills and experience of complex project management, service improvement, and organisational culture change) to undertake work to assist with scoping and planning an improvement journey for the Contact Centre.
5. The work undertaken by i-three involved detailed analysis of the Contact Centre customer data, visioning workshops, interviews with Lead Members, senior managers and key individuals. The full i-three report has been circulated separately to Members as a supporting background document.
6. There has been a widespread commitment from colleagues across HBC to improve the quality of the customer experience from the first point of contact in the Community Contact Centre through to resolution. Progress has been made in many areas, but further effort and focus is required both within the CCC team and teams across HBC to ensure we are all putting Customers First.
7. Two key measures have already been put in place, i.e. the Council took the decision early on in the review process to separate out Tourist functions from the Community Contact Centre activity. This move recognised that the needs of visitors and tourists could be very different to other service users, and has had a positive impact on the queuing in the CCC. In addition, it was recognised in advance of the introduction of the new waste contract that the Contact Centre was not resourced to cope with significant levels of extra calls that were being experienced in other areas. A temporary waste contact centre was therefore established with colleagues from waste services and staff specially trained in waste issues available to support local people through the changes. This has been a resounding success.

Identification of Issues

8. The internal and independent reviews both concluded that the issues around CCC performance cannot be solved solely within the service itself. There are certainly issues to be addressed within the service, but, just as important is the need to improve team work between front line CCC officers, case officers and back-office processes to ensure that together we give customers a good experience from their initial contact through to resolution of their issue.
9. A Contact Centre Improvement Board has been set up to oversee implementation of the Improvement Project with regards to the issues within the service. The objectives of the project (set out in the Project Initiation Document) are as follows:
 - a. To improve the quality of customer service offered by the Community Contact Centre through a range of tactical short term actions (Stage 1), in particular:
 - Improved telephone call answering performance (and reducing the impact on the rest of HBC when capacity is exceeded)
 - Contact centre face to face queue management improved: including better preparation for and management of peaks in demand.
 - Staff training gaps addressed as a matter of urgency – (NB additional resources have been employed to assist with this).
 - Staff absence levels improved: work closely with staff to support a sustainable improvement.
 - Team development: build relations and enthuse the staff, refine management roles based on key strengths and management competency profiles.
 - Improved customer insight and customer focus, with a particular regard to equality considerations – i.e. understanding the needs of our customers and what they tell us
 - Implement necessary improvements identified by the programme of health and safety and financial process reviews.
 - Agreeing an approach for management of expectations and service demand
 - b. Improved communication, understanding and relationships between CCC and all service departments. (Stage 1)
 - c. Work with service departments to review processes to ensure that together we deliver a quality 'Customer First' experience, ensuring the shortest journey from initial contact to resolution. (Stage 2)
 - d. To identify appropriate service delivery mechanisms and level of resources required to operate the agreed CC model within the context of the (new) HBC Customer First Strategy. (Stage 2/3)
 - e. To deliver the shared vision for the future of the Community Contact Centre (created in visioning workshops by customers, managers, members and staff). (Stage 3)

10. A Contact Centre Improvement Project 'Work Package' is to be considered by the Project Board in late November, this will set out the further programme of improvement activities to be undertaken and will show the inter-dependencies and phasing of tasks required.
11. In addition to the work to address issues within the CCC, it has been agreed to undertake a number of Customer First & Efficiency Service Reviews during 2013/14. These reviews will focus on high profile, high volume and resource impacting services: i.e. Revenues, Housing and Benefits.
12. The Service reviews will include mapping customer journeys and experience, identifying avoidable contact opportunities, assessing the quality of literature and web-info supplied, process reviews to eliminate duplication or identify improvements, opportunities for fast-track processes where possible, reviewing when the input of specialist advisers is appropriate, inter-relationships with other services, potential for managing peaks/changes and resilience when sickness etc either in CC or service, and establishing levels of resources required. Opportunities and limitations of 'channel shift' to on-line, revision of procedures and processes, and service re-design where appropriate.

Progress to date and next steps

13. The attached report summarises the range of issues that have been addressed, gives a picture of current performance and the next steps.
14. In addition, I would like to take the opportunity to highlight to Members the contributions made by many officers to support their colleagues and work tirelessly to address the issues that cause us all concern.
15. Scrutiny Members comments and suggestions are welcomed.

Wards Affected

Ashdown, Baird, Braybrooke, Castle, Central St. Leonards, Conquest, Gensing, Hollington, Maze Hill, Old Hastings, Ore, Silverhill, St. Helens, Tressell, West St. Leonards, Wishing Tree

Area(s) Affected

Central Hastings, East Hastings, North St. Leonards, South St. Leonards

Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	No
Risk Management	No
Environmental Issues	No
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	No

Organisational Consequences
Local People's Views

Yes
Yes

Background Information

Reports from i-three Analytics: Situational Analysis and phones data September 2013.

Officer to Contact

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