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| Report to: | **Overview & Scrutiny** |
| Date: | **16 March 2023** |
| Title: | **Customer Access Strategy & Contact Centre Update** |
| **Portfolio Area:** | **Council Services  - Cllr Hopwood** |

Wards Affected:     **All**

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urgent Decision: | **N** | Approval and clearance obtained: | | **Y / N** |

Date next steps can be taken:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
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**Recommendations:**

1. Note the approach and actions to implement the Customer Access Strategy set out in section 3.

2. Note the actions taken to improve the Contact Centre performance set out in section 4 and detailed in Appendix A.

**1. Executive summary**

1.1 Within the Council's Better Lives for All strategy "Delivering Quality Council Services" is a key theme. The strategy states that the Council will:

    i. Become a 'Digital First' Council

    ii. Use new technologies to deliver tangible service improvements to residents and deliver efficiencies for the organisation

    iii. Support those residents in most need to get access to the services they need

1.2 It is important that we make contacting our Council as easy as possible, with clearly defined access options and in the most efficient way, whilst supporting those who cannot access our services online.

1.3 Increasing the consistency and standardisation of customer interactions is an important part of improving response times, overall efficiency, and service levels to deliver a better service

## 2. Background

2.1 The Council always looked to fine tune and adapt access routes based on ever changing customer demand. The Customer Access Strategy take a more strategic view to take advantage of new technology to guide customer behaviour down more efficient and more effective routes.

2.2 The Council operates with a very small Contact Centre compared to our demand. Other Council have around 20% more staff compared to the volume of calls received. This requires a focus on increasing productivity and guiding customer behaviour to maintain acceptable levels of performance but it also reduces resilience at peak times. This makes performance more variable.

2.3 New technology offers new ways to interact, which used correctly delivers capacity to support those where more targeted support is needed as well as smoothly the peak demand and allowing us to manage our capacity better.

2.4 Investment in key technology over the past 3 months forms part of the strategy to remove low level work and focus more time on customer service and adding value and benefit for our customers.

## 3. Customer Access Strategy - Update

3.1 We are now live with three new access routes for customers; Facebook Messenger chats managed through Liberty Converse (with bots set up for out of hours responses), Home visits can be organised through the Contact Centre for complex or higher need cases, and the booking of face to face appointments is now available.

3.2 Capital funding bid for the new unmanned 'foyer' has been approved and long lead time materials already ordered. Building commencing as soon as contractors are available.

3.3 A new voice recognition switchboard is being implemented to speed up customer transit through the telephony system. This will be tested internally first before being released to the public. It enables quicker routing to the person, line or team for the customer and where appropriate will utilise active channel shift to encourage filling in of webforms or voice forms.

3.4 Work is continuing based on team availability for two high volume areas of the Council to increase online submissions and channel shift, EH & Licensing & Revenue & Benefits. 6 high volume processes for EH are already live. The use of Robots to reduce data entry will be starting in Q1 23/24.

3.5 In the last report the **Outcomes** we set to achieve by the end of 2024 were:

1. Our customers are satisfied with our online services and would recommend a friend to use them
2. All customer facing forms are available on our website
3. Our website and forms can be accessed on any device
4. All digital services will look and feel consistent as one South Hams service to the customer
5. Services are accessible digitally 24/7
6. By the end of March 2024, 80% of interactions with residents are via our online channels

3.6 To date:

1. Online feedback shows an improving score of 4.34 out of 5 Stars
2. New projects started, to move a large number of Environmental Health and Licensing forms online.
3. Mobile & tablet testing for all forms and refreshed web content being built.
4. Liberty Create working group created to improve webform visuals and customise views for individual councils
5. Webforms already available but new options including messenger chat bots give additional out of hours options.
6. Online interactions already at 80% with additional projects and directed channel shift options still in progress that will boost the numbers even more.

## 4 Contact Centre - Update

4.1 Appendix A contains details of performance, the actions already undertaken, and the actions that are planned over the coming months.

4.2 We are entering the busiest time of the year for calls but by utilising the flexibility of our call software and drawing in additional support from service areas we are hoping to manage the additional demand with less of an impact on wait times this year.

4.3 Three recent secondments to other parts of the organisation have reduced capacity in the Contact Centre which has affected performance slightly. This is around 20% of total capacity so has an impact on call performance. Recruitment is underway targeted at providing more support during our busiest times.

4.4 The contact centre, in addition to calls, now answer webchats, emails and general enquiry processes. Further work has been done to increase the range of processes they can answer and will shortly be implemented. This utilises the Contact Centre capacity whenever there is a drop in call demand and increases their productivity, whilst speeding up the response time for the customer. Complex enquiries can still be forwarded to the business support teams where necessary.

4.5 The reception area at Follaton House is being reconfigured to offer an improved service to customers and improved facilities for our tenants; workstations to submit webforms, video phones, intercom for our tenants and an inside waiting area, public toilets, bookable meeting room for face to face customer interaction. Excluding deliveries and attempts to contact our tenants, the outside telephone that receives calls from visitors to Follaton House now receives less than 1 call a day.

4.6 Work has commenced on the voice switchboard to free up Contact centre resource. Preliminary work on identifying Council and non-Council options, alternative phrases, and officer routing is well underway. Voice recognition training and testing will occur internally before making it public facing.

4.7 Where appropriate, standard dialogues will sit behind the voice routing giving customers options for webform links to be sent directly to their phone for active channel shift, or filling in some simple forms by voice.

4.8 Training to build after-call customer surveys to track live satisfaction and highlight training and improvement opportunities has taken place. This mirrors the approach taken with webforms and delivers an up to date and more rounded picture of customer feedback.

4.9 Capital bid has been approved to purchase an improved payment compliance package which will reduce call payment times, provide additional support for the customer, and reduce risk of unsecure payments. This will be considered with other telephony improvements to improve uptime and availability.

## 5 Recommendations

5.1 Note the approach and actions to implement the Customer Access Strategy set out in section 3.

5.2 Note the actions taken to improve the Contact Centre performance set out in Section 4 and detailed in Appendix A.

## 6 Implications

| Implications | Relevant to proposals Y/N | Details and proposed measures to address |
|---|---|---|
| Legal/Governance | N | N/A |
| Financial implications to include reference to value for money | N | All improvements managed through existing budgets |
| Risk | N | |
| Supporting Corporate Strategy | Y | |
| Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact | N | |
| Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications | | |
| Equality and Diversity | N | |
| Safeguarding | N | |
| Community Safety, Crime and Disorder | N | |
| Health, Safety and Wellbeing | N | |
| Other implications | N | |

**Supporting Information**
**Appendices: Appendix A – Contact Centre Improvement Actions**
**Background Papers: None**

**Approval and clearance of report**