

Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 28 January 2019

Attendance

Members of the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Paula Brookfield (Chair)
Cllr Ian Brookfield
Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre

In Attendance

Cllr Louise Miles

Cabinet Member for Resources

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
Lisa Taylor

Scrutiny Officer
Head of Customer Services

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
There were apologies received from the following:

Cllr Jane Stevenson
Cllr Payal Bedi-Chada
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest recorded.
- 3 **Customer Services Journey - Presentation**
Lisa Taylor, Head of Customer Services, introduced the presentation on performance of the customer service team that was discussed at the panel meeting on 28 November 2018. The Head of Customer Services gave details of the performance data for the period June to December 2018 to give context to the issues of concern previously discussed; and the factors that contributed to the increased number of calls received.

The Head of Customer Services outlined the changes introduced to respond to the concerns raised by Councillors at the meeting about the performance of the service and the next steps in the process to deliver improved customer services to the public.

The Head of Customer Services advised that as part of the Customer Service Business Improvement Programme there was a target set to reduce operating revenue costs for Customer Services by £1 million which will present a challenge to the service. The budget re-profiling proposal will be subject to approval by Cabinet.

The Head of Customer Services advised that increased number of calls to the contact centre was mainly due to changes in the bin collection service.

Cllr Martin Waite commented that an evaluation of the waste management plan will be considered at the next meeting of Vibrant and Sustainable City Panel on 12 February 2019. The changes to waste bin collection will be considered as part of this discussion and in particular the information given to the public about the changes. The Head of Customer Services commented that meetings have already been held with colleagues in the waste management service to discuss the issues highlighted and regular ongoing meetings are arranged.

The Task and Finish Group discussed the importance of repeating the message about changes to the service and not rely on a single leaflet drop.

The Task and Finish Group discussed the analysis of calls received related changes to the waste collection service and council tax and requested information on the median and the mode figures to better understand the performance of the service during the period. The Head of Customer Services agreed to provide the information on customer call data with the information requested as part of future performance reporting.

The Head of Customer Services commented that the volume of calls and emails received have been generally consistent during the period and the trend was showing a reduction during the last few months. The Head of Customer Services added the call abandonment rate was showing a downward trend for period October to December 2018.

The Head of Customer Services commented that the call back process had been stopped from early December 2018 which has had a positive impact on call handling capacity in the customer services team.

The Head of Customer Services commented on the performance targets for answering calls and responding to emails and that they may vary depending on the agreement with the service area. The task and finish group commented on problems experienced when reporting issues to the customer services contact centre. The Head of Customer Services advised that changes had been made to the automated telephone response options to reduce call waiting times. The change was made to deal with majority of calls at the time which mainly related to the changes to the waste collection service and the rollout of the purple garden waste bins.

The Head of Customer Services commented on the need for the service to be more responsive and quicker in resolving the source of an unexpected increase in call volume numbers to the contact centre.

The task and finish group commented on the technological difficulties with the telephone system which meant that some members of the customer services team were not aware of the number of calls waiting.

The Head of Customer Services advised that a meeting was arranged with the telephone system providers to look at options for improving the customer services offer to the public.

The Task and Finish Group discussed concerns about sections of public who either don't have access to the internet or not confident about using online payment options. Cllr Louise Miles, Cabinet Member for Resources, reassured the group of the previous commitment that the Council will not to move to digital by default and the public will continue to have the choice to make payments for services by cash or cheque, if required.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged the concern among some residents about paying bills online and the need to continue to offer reassurance.

The Head of Customer Services outlined the list of completed and planned actions to deliver the improved performance in the customer services in relation to answering and resolving customer enquiries. The Head of Customer Services invited panel members to see a demonstration of the rapid development platform and the new website. The Head of Customer Services advised the panel of the benefits of the system in helping to deal with numerous calls related to same incident by giving information to the customer adviser which has already been reported.

The panel queried previous assurances given about the new functionality as a result of investment in customer services systems, which had not delivered the necessary improvements in reducing call numbers and call waiting times. The Head of Customer Services accepted that the system had not produced all of the benefits that had been expected but offered a reassurance to the panel that the new approach will be to give the panel a frank assessment of the performance challenges facing the service. In addition, the Head of Customer Services would provide regular updates on progress towards agreed achieving agreed improvement targets.

The panel commented on the importance of getting confirmations that agreed actions have taken place, for example, informing a resident who reported fly tipping that it has been removed or given a date when it will be done to reduce possible follow up calls.

The Head of Customer Services commented on the features of the system and other planned work such as the review of Knowledge Based Articles to provide a quicker and responsive service to the public. The panel commented on the importance of getting the right people with the necessary skills taking calls. The Head of Customer commented on the work being done to give Councillors access to real time data on the performance of the service in dealing with contacts from the public and the focus on getting enquiries resolved quickly. This work will be supported by efforts to work closely with service areas and feedback incidents which had led to high volume calls to the customer services.

The panel requested a report on progress in June 2019 against key performance measures and the extra information requested.

The panel thanked the Head of Customer Services and welcomed the report and presentation on plans for improving the customer services response.

The panel agreed to add the issue as a standing item on the agenda with the option for the Head of Customer Services to attend if necessary to give an update on progress of the issue listed on the next steps programme.

Resolved:

1. The Head of Customer Services to present a report on progress in 12 June 2019 against key performance measures and the extra information requested.
2. The Head of Customer Services to arrange a demonstration for the panel of the new customer services rapid development platform and website.
3. The Head of Customer Services to have a standing item on the agenda to attend a meeting of the panel to report progress or raise issues of concern.