

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	10 February 2021
Subject:	Customer Service Transformation Update		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Reception Figures2. Yearly Figures for Calls Presented to Customer Services, Average Speed of Answer and Emails Responded to3. Telephony Progress 20204. Quality Monitoring Averages 20205. Report It Numbers 20206. Yearly Complaint and Compliment figures		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the success of Customer Service due to the transformation work.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that the contents of the report be noted.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 In 2018 Gloucester City council embarked on a project aimed at transforming the way the public interact with and access Council services with a view to ensuring the public were at the heart of our work.
- 3.2 It is recognised that advances in technology and changes in customer and resident behaviour mean different forms of service delivery organisation, customer expectations and requirements of service continue to change. However, the quality of service for customers should be consistent whenever, wherever and however they contact us.
- 3.3 The Customer Service Team have been working continuously with the Transformation Team to progress changes in our service, for the benefit of the customer.

- 3.4 Over the course of the last 2 years the following changes have been implemented which have seen an increase in accessibility for customers and service performance improvements.

Appointments

- 3.5 1 April 2019 saw the implementation of an appointment only system in the reception at HKP (the warehouses). The aim was to reduce attendance in person for queries which could be handled via email, online and telephony and focus appointment time on those who really needed to see us in person. This meant that many customers would no longer be required to travel to the reception area and if required, they would be able to have a pre-arranged appointment time, reducing the need to wait in a queue.
- 3.6 Between April and July 2019, we saw a large reduction in the number of appointments needed but also the wait time for any customers to be seen by an advisor. By July the average waiting time had reduced from March by 15m57s and the average serving time had increase by 5m34s as we dealt with more complex enquiries. (see Appendix 1)
- 3.7 Since 24 March 2020 no face to face appointments have been held for Customer Service due to Covid-19 and all customers have been supported via email or telephone. Customer feedback has not indicated that there has been any adverse impact on the customers.

Move to The Gateway

- 3.8 We opened the doors to our new reception, "The Gateway", based at 92-96 Westgate Street to the general public on 31 July 2019. The new reception area is welcoming, modern, clean and calm and offers a more central location to make it more convenient for people who need to visit the council. Guidance on the design of the reception area was sought from Nelson Trust to ensure it was a trauma informed space, Gloucester Deaf Association, Age UK and engagement with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.9 The Gateway houses the customer service centre and housing reception on the ground floor, while the telephone contact centres, including for Revenues and Benefits, utilises the 2nd floor, in addition to Shire Hall.
- 3.10 The move builds on the success of the introduced appointment system, which made it quicker and easier for residents to get help with council services, whilst dramatically reducing waiting times. The appointments allow for more time to be spent with vulnerable residents and those with complex issues. This supports the move to make Gloucester City Council a more digital council whilst still providing the support to residents who need it.
- 3.11 Since the start of the Covid- 19 pandemic in March 2020, we have introduced a freephone number to enable homeless individuals to contact the council when they are not able to visit in person. The new contact centre investment has enabled customers to contact the Council more easily and get a response, receive

information, be signposted to the right place or partner organisation or have their needs triaged without a requirement to attend at The Gateway.

NTT Arkadin Telephony System (record of calls for other UCC's)

- 3.12 On 29 January 2020 the new telephony system (NTT Arkadin) was implemented across Customer Services, Housing, Revenues, Benefits and Invoices. This system allows us to obtain accurate data for all incoming customer calls to the council. Through the implementation of the system we have been able to accurately see that call waiting times have reduced in 2020. (we must note that the Covid pandemic has played a role in this as we have been resourced to a higher level by not having The Gateway open). (see appendix 2)
- 3.13 The telephony system allows a greater visibility to all staff as to the call volumes and also enables better scheduling of resource around busier periods. This enables us to be more reactive and lower the average wait time for calls to be answered (as shown in appendix 3)

Here to Help Emails

- 3.14 Prior to 2020 the time taken to respond to emails was up to 7 days. We do not have any historic monitoring information in relation to this measure as it was not previously monitored. However, in 2020 we have been able to redistribute our resources to ensure that the majority of emails are handled within 2 working days.
- 3.15 Email contact is more accessible for those with hearing impairments and those for whom English is not a first language or with speech impairment. It is also available 24 hours a day so is more convenient.
- 3.16 In 2018 we handled 20083 emails (one month's data is not recorded). In 2019 this increased to 32754 and in 2020 it was 36325. The increase in email contact is to be expected as more people contact us via this medium rather than using telephone or face to face. In 2018 we were offered 74290 telephone calls compared to 71357 in 2020. (see appendix 2)

Call Quality and Service Monitoring

- 3.17 As a result of having the NTT Arkadin telephony system, we have been able to monitor call handling by our customer service officers. This supports increased training, coaching and customer satisfaction. The average call monitoring score for the team for 2020 is 91.07%. (see appendix 4)
- 3.18 Due to the changes in how we have provided customer service during the pandemic staff have confirmed that customer interaction has been more positive and there has been very little verbal abuse directed towards staff. Staff feel they are able to provide better service to customers and that greater home working has enabled staff to concentrate more which increases the quality and efficiency of their work. This has been shown in the reduction in wait times for calls to be answered and quicker email

responses. The suspension of face to face support has enabled resource to be re-allocated to call and email handling.

- 3.19 As a result of the new telephony system we have been able to report more accurately and reliably the data for customer services and therefore are able to provide more consistent and comprehensive reports. These are shared with the team, in order that they have better insight into the team performance, and with SMT.

Online Services

Check Your Bin day

- 3.20 This was implemented 15 Nov 2019 and has enabled the officers to support customers to find this information from the website themselves, 24/7. Feedback from the team has been that this has supported a reduction of call as the adoption of this service had grown.

Report It

- 3.21 The online "Report It" system was launched 6 May 2020 which enables customers to report issues and enquiries for up to 30 processes online. The forms are consistent, ask for relevant and useful information and are accessible 24/7. This is part of an ongoing transformation of services which will broaden the range of ways and the times that residents, customers and service users can access Council services. Across all digital services that we can provide feedback for, 82% of users who completed the survey on these forms rated us 4 stars or above. This is for revenues & benefits single sign on, taxi licensing, ANPR and all Report It categories. (see appendix 5)
- 3.22 Work is underway to look at enabling these forms to integrate with back office systems (Amey) to allow the reports to be made directly, without the need to customer service intervention.

ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) Parking

- 3.23 The ANPR process was launched 18 Dec 2019 and supports customers wishing to register a blue badge for ANPR parking to gain free access to our ANPR car parks. The new service supports new registrations and changes of vehicle and is available 24/7, without the need for paper forms to be completed. This process is quick and easy.

Taxi Licensing

- 3.24 The customer service team and the Transformation team have worked with our licensing colleagues to implement online taxi licensing. The online system allows customers to apply for a new vehicle license, upload their documents and make a payment online. This reduces the need for paper forms, face to face verification and the time this takes for customers. This process is available 24/7.

Food Bank Vouchers

- 3.25 Digital access to food bank vouchers was introduced in March and has resulted in more people being able to access these and removed the requirement for customers to make specific journeys to collect them. Work is underway for an E-Referral system to be implemented this year which will make it even easier for residents to access food bank support.

Complaints and Compliments

- 3.26 On 30 July 2020 we implemented an online customer feedback survey. This was to obtain customer feedback on the service they have received through their interaction with the council, the way they contacted us and how they may contact us in the future and what improvements could be made. The council wish to hear what our customer are saying so we know what we are doing well or what we can improve on.
- 3.27 The survey link is provided to customers on all email interactions and also at the end of appropriate telephone calls. The response to this has been varied but we currently have an average satisfaction rate of 87% over the last 3 months. This is for all services across the council, not specifically for the customer service team. We have received back 325 responses between August and December 2020.
- 3.28 Since April 2020 customer services have received 150 compliments via online feedback and our CRM system (Focus). (98 from the online feedback and 52 on Focus).
- 3.29 Regarding complaints, the below data shows there is a reduction in complaints about the customer service department and an increase in compliments recorded on our CRM system (Focus).
- In 2018 customer service reported on the Focus system 72 complaints and 7 compliments.
 - In 2019 customer service reported on the Focus system 75 complaints and 16 compliments.
 - In 2020 customer service reported on the Focus System 45 complaints and 29 compliments.

(see appendix 6)

Since March 2020 the Council has received compliments from customers about the service they have received during the pandemic and we have not received complaints about the absence of face-to-face services.

4.0 Social Value Considerations

- 4.1 The purpose of the transformation work is to ensure that customers can contact the Council at the time, the place and in the way that they want to contact us. This creates efficiency for the customer and improves our interaction with them. It also means that those who can contact via digital methods and do not need to speak to someone allow our staff to focus on those who do need our attention.

- 4.2 The transformation programme continues to realise benefits which allow swifter, more efficient and effective services which in turn allow us to improve our broader services and interact with our customers in a more positive way.

5.0 Environmental Implications

- 5.1 Remote working has supported environmental changes as customers are no longer required to travel to see us if it is not required, enquiries are handled over the phone or via email.
- 5.2 Less travel to and from work due to home working has contributed to lower carbon emissions and helps achieve the Council's climate emergency ambitions and targets.
- 5.3 Through the use of digital interactions we have reduced printing costs, postal costs and the use of paper throughout the department.

6.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 6.1 No alternative options are made in this report, it is for information only.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 To update Cabinet on the success of Customer Service due to the transformation work.

8.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 8.1 The transformation of services at Gloucester City Council are ongoing. There are a number of processes still to be digitalised as part of the wider transformation programme.
- 8.2 A risk assessment has been drafted for the re-opening of The Gateway, post Covid-19, to ensure that the space is Covid secure for staff and customers. An intercom system is being installed at the front door for customers to use that will enable them to be signposted to support or arrive for any pre-booked appointments. Pre-booked appointment numbers for Customer Service and Housing will be limited initially, to maintain social distancing, and this will continue to be reviewed and a reconfiguration of the layout may be required to facilitate this. The lead time for reconfiguration is approximately 6 weeks.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 The report covers potential costs to re-configure the reception area at The Gateway to ensure Covid-19 secure compliance. The work is on hold until the outcome of the vaccine's is determined. If this work is required, there will be a budget implication of £7,000 to complete this work. There are no further financial implications as a result of this update report.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.)

10.0 Legal Implications

10.1 None

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation of this report.)

11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

11.1 There are no risks associated with this update report.

11.2 The City Council and the Customer Service Team take or create opportunities where possible to increase public reassurance, encourage responsible reporting of issues utilising our online processes and digital means in order to increase resident's support.

12.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:

12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for this report as it is giving an overview of work undertaken rather than proposing service changes.

12.2 Considerations are given when undertaking all process changes to ensure that we do not adversely impact on any group and that we are fostering good relations and promoting advancement of opportunities within the community.

13.0 Community Safety Implications

13.1 None

14.0 Staffing & Trade Union Implications

14.1 None

Background Documents: None