

## **Cabinet**

**19 November 2014**

### **Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Customer First Task and Finish Group Review**



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## **Report of Corporate Management Team**

### **Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive**

### **Councillor Brian Stephens, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships**

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#### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To present to Cabinet the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee Customer First Task and Finish Group report.

#### **Background**

- 2 At the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 September 2013, during consideration of the Performance Management Report for Quarter 1 2013/14, reference was made to performance in respect of Customer Services including telephone answering and e-mail transactions. At that time, members were informed of the on-going work being undertaken in respect of the revised Customer First Strategy for the Council. The Committee agreed to establish a small task and finish group to provide policy development support to the refresh of the Council's Customer First Strategy.
- 3 Evidence was gathered over a series of 6 Task and Finish Group meetings culminating in a presentation to the group on 24 September 2014 which highlighted key findings from the review and at which members of the group agreed a series of recommendations.
- 4 Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the review report at a special meeting held on 17 October 2014.
- 5 A copy of the review report is attached at Appendix 2 for members' comments.

#### **Service Grouping Response**

- 6 Neighbourhood services would like to thank members for their participation in this task and finish group and the production of this very thorough and detailed report. The process and the finished report is a welcome contribution to the work of officers on these issues as well as, it is hoped, being useful for members, the committee and ultimately cabinet.

- 7 The task and finish group has covered a wide area of work in this important aspect of the council's business and in the course of the review has worked through a vast array of data, analysis and information. This represents both the size of the task and the issues covered in a large authority as well as the enthusiasm of the officers involved to deliver improvements and share their world.
- 8 In terms of a service response, we recognise that we are on a journey of continuous improvement in this area and for our input to the review we have tried to present members with a snapshot of where we are on that journey at the current time, along with a recognition of where we have been, but mostly – through the development of the revised customer first strategy – a picture of where we would like to be and how we might get there, and these are all fairly and accurately observed in the final report.
- 9 It is gratifying for officers to have the task and finish group recognise the progress that has been made to date through the existing strategy. The integration and virtualisation of contact centres, the improvements to our Customer Access Points and the increased level of staff training are highlights among a range of improvements that have already been delivered.
- 10 On the operational side the improvements in call waiting times and response rates has been significant over the last two years, and will be most notable for those members who recall the difficulties around the backlog associated with the introduction of the revenues and benefits system in 2012 – which was a particularly difficult time – but which also provided some excellent learning for the team.
- 11 In terms of future developments the report recognises that there is more to do in the area and those challenges are identified.
- 12 We need to ensure that customers can contact us as easily as possible at a time and in a manner that is both convenient for them and also economically viable for us. The significant changes in this area are around the growing use of internet and electronic means, and in particular the growing use of social media, which is quickly becoming the most popular method of communication for a growing section of our customers. The council needs to recognise and respond to this from a customer service perspective.
- 13 We also need to be more joined up in our public face, and make it simple for customers to contact who they need to in the organisation, for example by reducing the dizzying array of phone numbers and e-mail addresses that we advertise. We need to make the customers' journey between first point of contact and service delivery as smooth and seamless as possible.
- 14 And we need to improve how we deal with feedback from customers and service users, as this is an important source of information that is currently underused.

- 15 The recommendations in the report are fair and balanced with achievable objectives and from a service perspective represent a number of areas of ongoing work.
- 16 Since the review was carried out we have already made progress on a number of the issues raised:-
- We have reduced the number of telephone numbers advertised and introduced professional ACD call handling systems in areas that need it.
  - We are currently developing revised service standards and a new customer charter to sit alongside the strategy and that reflects both where we are now and where we want to be.
  - The roll out of broadband through the Digital Durham programme continues as does the work to deliver the CAP review approved by Cabinet in January of this year.
  - Finally and perhaps the most visible improvement since the review is the launch of the new website which provides a new clean, fresh and uncluttered platform for the provision of information and more importantly for customer transaction.
- 17 The service will be pleased to return to the Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis to update member on progress against the delivery of the new strategy, with a suggested, a milestone review after a period of six months.

### **Recommendation**

- 18 Cabinet is asked to note the report and recommendations and formulate a response within the six month period identified in the report for the systematic review of recommendations.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance – N/A**

**Staffing – N/A**

**Risk – N/A**

**Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty –** The review report takes into consideration Equality and Diversity, an Equality Impact Assessment having been undertaken.

**Accommodation – N/A**

**Crime and Disorder – N/A**

**Human Rights – N/A**

**Consultation – N/A**

**Procurement – N/A**

**Disability Issues – N/A**

**Legal Implications – N/A**