

**STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
17 JANUARY 2013**

Customer Service Centre Update on Activity & Performance

Report by Deputy Director for Oxfordshire Customer Services

Introduction and overview

1. Cabinet considered the Council's Quarter 1 performance against the Corporate Plan and as a result, asked that the Strategy and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee be offered an update on the performance of the Customer Service Centre.
2. It would be fair to say that the Customer Service Centre (CSC) has been through very challenging times over the last 6 months in particular, in absorbing 5 new services in Quarter 1. In retrospect, it would have been better to have staggered the implementation over a longer period of time rather than all going live simultaneously on 1st April.
3. The impact on the Centre and on staff was significant in Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 as indicated by actual performance against overall Key Performance Indicators.
4. The Council experienced higher than expected staff turnover in the Customer Service Centre through to August 2012. This was due to high pressure on staff in key service areas during the period and the fact that, for a number of staff, the training and multi-skilling provided within our Customer Service Centre gives them a good advantage in the jobs market. We are clear that maintaining staffing at the correct level is critical to the success of the centre and the experience of our customers.
5. Likewise, in Quarter 2 and now Quarter 3, we are looking to review and rebuild some processes and service levels for new services areas, to improve

customer experience further. In particular, there is a need to revisit and review the current range of hand-offs and operational continuity between the CSC and the external service areas in the light of experience.

Customer Service Centre: Corrective actions taken September 2012 onwards

6. A number of corrective actions have been taken since September 2012. The priority has been to stabilise the Centre operation and to restore staffing levels to agreed establishment.
7. In summary, the key actions were as follows:
 - Savings identified for 2012/13 for the Customer Service Centre were based largely on staff reductions - the Centre now has an agreed staffing establishment that has to be maintained if frontline service is to be protected
 - High period of recruitment and retention activity has taken place to ensure staffing levels are brought in line with agreed CSC Establishment levels has taken place
 - An experienced Interim Operations Manager is now in place to run the Centre and to ensure that further developments are not at the expense of frontline customer service
 - Additional training resource has been brought in and a new programme is in place to improve multi-skilling further but also to give added focus to call-handling skills and consideration is being given to staff retention schemes
 - Changes to the way we deliver training / learning for Customer Service Advisors has been introduced. We are now delivering training to all new starts through a 'graduation bay' model. New starters are trained within a single environment with support from a trainer and a senior customer service assistant from the services in which they will operate
 - A short term bank of 7 temporary advisers has been established to enable the release of centre staff for additional training and to allow

time and space for immediate process improvements to be fully implemented

- Internal procedure has been strengthened to ensure rapid escalation of issues and improvement opportunities via team leaders to the Operations Manager
- First phase of activity to develop a complete leadership support function within the CSC providing mutual management/supervisory support and clear escalation routes for customer service advisors has been initiated.

8. Furthermore, a range of specific service improvements have been implemented, these include:

- Launched “Support-finder”, an online “one stop shop” for people with personal care budgets and for care providers. Accessible via the Council’s website. www.supportfinder.oxfordshire.gov.uk
- Improvements to contact handling for Highways calls , quality and coordination
- Improvements to contact handling for concessionary fares
- A new on-line facility for concessionary fares applications has been launched (Dec 2012), accessible via the Council’s website. We are the first of 2 shire counties to do this

9. Member engagement has also been improved to help boost the Centre staff awareness and motivation :

- Members of all political parties have visited the Centre since September and we would strongly welcome further visits. These have a very positive effect on staff morale and can be really effective in highlighting real local citizen experience and helping to shape our cycle of continuous improvement.

10. As a result of these improvements, the Centre was then able to consider taking on additional services:

- From 1st November, the parent contact for School Admissions was brought within the Centre. This service has been delivered to a very high standard with excellent results. In this period, there were

approximately 1800 calls – and less than 1% of these were ‘unanswered’

Customer Service Centre: Business improvement activity - the next steps (January 2013 – September 2013)

11. Having stabilised the CSC, a number of additional improvement activities are now progressing. These are follows:
 - Changes to recruitment and retention policy to ensure flexible staffing to meet seasonal variations for specific service areas
 - Complete service level agreement and key performance indicator review for all services commissioned and operated via the CSC and the finance arrangements underpinning them
 - Working to improve real business intelligence and a monthly reporting dashboard for the CSC as a whole
 - Learning & Development methodology to place additional focus on “Quality standards” at team and individual level by simplifying process improvements with customer need first
 - Improvements to on-line payments facility for external customers
 - Improvements to Blue Badge operations through end to end review of the current process and remodelling to reduce time taken and improve customer satisfaction
 - Improvements to Dial-a Ride; scheduling routes and allocating journeys. Essentially changing the use of resource within existing budget to improve performance and customer satisfaction. Early trials look positive and encouraging
 - On line process for replacement of lost concessionary bus passes
 - Improvements to on-line reporting and case management for Highways issues

12. These improvement activities are all expected to complete by September 2013.

RECOMMENDATION

13. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to**

- (a) Note the Customer Service Centre progress to date
- (b) Note the positive performance trends
- (c) Receive regular updates on future performance of the Customer Service Centre

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