REVIEW OF CUSTOMER SERVICES ACROSS THE COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Business Unit Leader, Customer Services and Communications
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Key Decision: No
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Customer Services and Service Delivery 23 January 2019

Purpose of Report

The purpose of the report is to:

a) provide an overview of the current level of customer service across the Council; and

b) set out the action plan and next steps to maintain and improve customer service across the Council

Recommendation

The Committee are recommended to note the proposed next steps for improvements of customer service.


Key Points

1. Levels of Customer Service should be measured across the Council, rather than solely in the Customer Services team

2. Compliments and complaints need to be properly understood and then used to embed best practice across the Council

Context

3. As we move towards more digital methods of communicating the number of calls into the Contact Centre is decreasing.

4. The new Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) has allowed easier technical redesign of business processes and integration with other systems. It is integrated with new waste services system built on the same software, Salesforce. The licencing and support costs are the same as the previous CRM. To date the new CRM has enabled:

   - productivity gains by enabling new ways of working;

   - faster responses to service requests between customers and contractors;

   - resilience, process transparency and scalability to processes reducing marginal costs; and

   - Improved data quality, eliminating double-entry and duplication of data.

5. Workflow efficiencies have delivered efficiency gains within the team and this has continued to improve response times and widen the range of services offered. Since the introduction of the new CRM and improvements to workflows the Customer Services team have been able to respond faster to customer calls while at the same time introducing new service lines to the contact centre. This has been achieved thanks to their close involvement in developing and testing the system and openness to adopting new ways of working. The team shares best practice among themselves to speed up adoption and coordinates responses to show and tell sessions to ensure the developers deliver what is required.

6. Figure 1. shows the decrease in average monthly calls as customers have moved to other means of resolving service requests. We have also used information form calls to reduce the need for service requests, for example through improved notifications of work. From 14/15 baseline call volumes have decreased by over 20,000 calls per annum. As reported to Scrutiny in 2018, this represents approximately a £51,200 efficiency gain for the customer services team in reduced calls. There are also efficiency gains within other parts of the Council where services have been moved to the contact centre and 'web to case' has been implemented.

Figure 1. Calls received by the Contact Centre 2016 to 2018
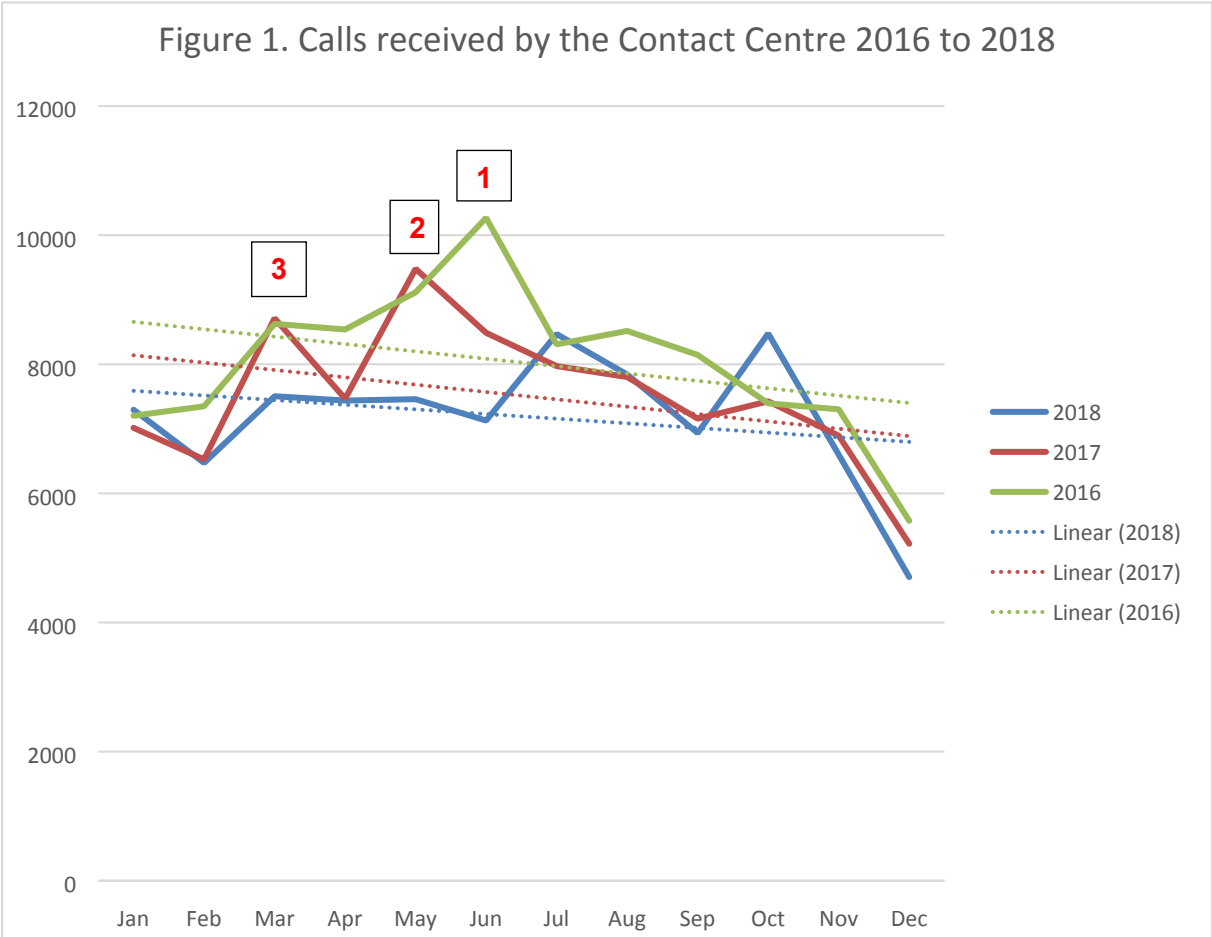
7. Remaining calls to the Council's Contact Centre tend to be complex and also peaks in calls associated with periodic activity are still experienced. In Figure 1. The peak '1' in 2016 was the General Election, peak '2' in 2017 was the EU Referendum. Peak 3 in 2017 was due to snow.

8. Liaising with services to identify potential call peaks allows Customer Services to plan for peak workloads and also ensure information is provided to Contact Centre staff and the Digital Team to ensure information is consistent for frequently asked questions. This allows the service to answer more calls at the first point of contact. This also ensures other work is scheduled outside of these periods.

9. Customer Service is not only the Contact Centre. Every single service area provides a level of customer service. Every time a customer interacts with the council, whether through a housing benefit claim or to notify of a change of circumstances they will expect a level of customer service. These figures are reported to the monthly BUL's meeting as part of the Performance Indicator pack.

10. The Council's Customer Service standards are available to all staff on the Wire. These outline the generic levels of Customer Service that sit outside of any specific service standards for individual services. In November 2018 a survey was conducted across the Council to gauge staff awareness of these standards.

Findings from Survey

11. The survey focused on areas including; telephone service, written customer responses, website content.

12. The key findings showed that there are some gaps in understanding, particularly concerning responsibility for website content and accessibility. Training and additional communications to staff are underway particularly in how to ensure content is accessible to all customers.

13. Staff are clear on the specific customer service standards for their service and regular monitoring and feedback has ensured these are met and issues addressed if performance drops.

Action Plan

14. The proposed action plan is as follows:

Action:	Method	Due by	Owner
Share standards more widely	Focus each month on one specific are of the standards by: • Email campaign • Staff newsletter • The Wire	20th of each month	Communications
Sharing of complaints and compliments to share bet practise	Monthly report to each HoS to be cascaded to all teams to embed best practise	20th of each month	Customer Services
Reward best practise	Make a Difference Award to be held each quarter to reward and embed	Each quarter	Communications

	best practise		
Review of progress	Report to Scrutiny Committee	Autumn 2019	Communications and Customer Service

Financial Implications

15. The work will be delivered through existing budgets.

Risk Management Implications

16. Risks to achieving response times are managed through the service planning process and reviewed as part of performance management.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

17. When making changes to services, those with 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act are given particular consideration. Wherever possible the Council aims to maintain choice in how a service can be accessed (i.e. by phone, face-to-face, or via the web) to provide maximum flexibility to the customer. Service changes are also subjected to customer impact assessments prior to their implementation.