

3 February 2015		ITEM: 9
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Customer Services/Channel Shift		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not applicable	
Report of: Richard Parkin (Head of Housing – Community and Needs)		
Accountable Head of Service: Richard Parkin (Head of Housing – Community and Needs)		
Accountable Director: Barbara Brownlee (Director of Housing and Commercial Services)		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

The committee has requested a report regarding the Channel Shift agenda in the Council and also Customer Service. This report provides a summary of a number of streams with more detail within the appendices. The report covers the work of numerous boards and departments (Digital Board, Transformation Board, and Commercial Services) and brings together a summary of work progressing to move towards a Digital Council.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the committee notes the report.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This is a wide spanning report that will cover, in summary, three main topics:
- The Council’s Channel Shift agenda and “Digital by Design”.
 - The current performance of the Customer Service Centre
 - The Council’s new telephony system and the phased implementation

Channel Shift

- 2.2 The Council’s overall approach for Customer Service going forward is to move to a service delivery model of “digital by design”. This in practice means that where services can be delivered online (or through other digital methods such as mobile phone apps) and where it is practical for residents to be able to do

this, then the Council will in the first instance try to meet service requests through an online platform and self-service.

2.3 This method builds on the proposed national service standard of “digital by default” and adds in flexibility to offer other access channels in the first instance for vulnerable residents who may be put off or unable to access services online. This allows a method of service deliver that both improve service and reduces cost for the majority of transaction, however does not exclude customers from access to services.

2.4 The Thurrock Online Business Case highlights the estimated difference for Thurrock in the cost of individual access channels, below; the cost of moving phone calls, or face to face, onto online channels can lead to large cost savings.

Face to Face	Post	Tel- Back Office	Email	Contact Centre	Online
£8.62	£5.20	£3.00	£3.00	£2.15	£0.20

2.5 To prompt this change in behaviour and channel shift the Council launched a new website in October 2013 to offer easy access to information and increase the range of online transaction through the self-service portal “my account”

2.6 “My Account” is a personalised service portal for each individual user which gives access to the online services specific to the needs of the resident.

2.7 Some of the current services available online are:

- “Report it” – Environment Service Reporting such as dumped waste
- Housing Benefits – New Housing Benefit Claims and Change of Circumstances
- Council Tax – Create an account, report change of address, set up direct debits, apply for discounts, and manage council tax account.
- Pay Services – Pay Housing Rent and other money owed the Council
- School Admissions
- Housing Registrations
- A full list is available in Appendix 1

Some of these services were available prior to the launch of My Account and the new website, such as School Admissions and Housing Registrations.

2.8 The services which are due to be available over the next year are:

- Bulky Waste – Booking and paying for Bulky Waste collections.
- Licensing – Applying and paying for licenses such as taxi or premises licences.

- Registrars – Book appointment with registrars for marriage, death, birth etc
- 2.9 Further planned phases for online service will allow for information and advice given for Adult Social Care and also an initial assessment of needs. Work is also underway to identify additional services that can be made available online and to consider options for increasing channel migration.
- 2.10 Channel shift is being prompted by an Online Enabler Plan which looks at changing behaviours both internally to the Council and externally for residents to ensure they are using the most appropriate and cost effective channel for their needs. This plan includes restriction of certain access points, such as the reduction of advertised email addresses or telephone numbers, marketing campaigns and training for council employees. Currently the council has not taken the approach of “forcing” a channel shift as many local authorities have, however they have taken an approach of “influence” and “behaviour change” to prompt residents to use online services. As greater costs savings become needed the Council might need to make the decisions to close certain access channels and force a behaviour change leading to cost savings.
- 2.11 Channel shift and Thurrock Online have seen some early success with their new service offers, detailed below (Oct 2013 to date):
- 3300+ reports online for Environmental Services
 - 881 benefits registrations
 - 100% New benefit applications online
 - 11,680 people registered for “MyAccount”
 - 110% increase in Transaction (Sep-Nov)
 - 1660+ Council tax registrations
- 2.12 The key challenge now for the channel shift agenda is to build on these successes and be able to move more residents to online services; an example of this being in November 2014 Environmental Services still receiving 2,878 calls, many of which could have been completed online. Until online services reach a critical mass it is difficult to release headcount from phone face to face and telephone services which will lead to a saving for the Council.

Customer Services

- 2.13 Thurrock Council, through its strategic partnership with Serco, runs a contact centre service 365 days per year, 24 hours per day. This service is broken down between “In-Hours” (08.00 – 18.00 Monday to Friday) and “Out of Hours” (18.00 to 08.00 Monday to Friday and Friday 18.00 to Monday 08.00, covering the weekend)
- 2.14 The “In-Hours” service is run through a dedicated customer services centre in the Civic Building employing some 35 full time equivalents over full and part time contracts covering around 25 different services.

- 2.15 The “Out of Hours” service is run by Careline and handles emergency calls for services in the evenings or weekends and public holidays. These emergency calls tend to be for Housing Repairs or Adult Social Care. Calls that are non-emergencies are asked to call back to the “In-Hours service”
- 2.16 The main agreed service level for the Contact Centre is to answer 50% of calls within 20 seconds and to abandon no more than 12% of calls offered to the Contact Centre.
- 2.17 Originally the service level was higher than this (80% in 20 second and =<5% of calls abandoned) however in July 2010 the Council made a decision to release savings from the Contact Centre and reduced the service levels to the ones highlights in 2.16. This led to a saving of 3.4 FTE. It is recognised that the current service level would be below the industry standard.
- 2.18 The chart below shows the current performance for the Contact Centre:

		Apr-14	May-14	Jun-14	Jul-14	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Nov-14
Service Level	50%	51.08%	46.44%	51.33%	56.17%	51.71%	51.02%	51.50%	56.10%
Abandoned Calls	12%	9.12%	16.45%	14.82%	10.74%	9.50%	8.26%	8.51%	5.71%

Although there were some initial difficulties earlier in 2014/15, the Contact Centre has consistently achieved its agreed targets for the rest of the year.

- 2.19 The Contact Centre received a variable number of calls due to seasonality and other factors; this can change the calls received day to day and month to month, however on average over the previous three years call volumes have been relatively stable as highlighted below:

	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013 - 2014
Calls Offered	489,071	449,687	470,716

- 2.20 For 2013 – 14 the highest call volumes were received by the below departments:

Team	Offered
Switchboard	97,006
Council Tax	75,226
Benefits	67,283
Rents	38,536
Environment Srv	37,230

The data for November 2014 show that this is still the general trend for calls received. The challenge moving forward will be to channel shift many of these calls onto online transactions and other automated services.

2.21 Serco also run face to face services on behalf of Thurrock Council across the Civic Centre and some external sites. The main service performance indicator is an average wait time of <= 10:00 minutes from when customers take a ticket on entering the Civic Centre until the time they are seen by a Customer Service Advisor. Performance on this is once again within the required targets (first two months reporting issues):

		Apr-14	May-14	Jun-14	Jul-14	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Nov-14
Average Wait Time	<=10:00			09:58	09:42	09:42	09:28	09:38	07:39

2.22 One of the other key indicators tracked by Serco and the Council is with regards to customer satisfaction. For telephone calls this is tracked through an impartial “on-phone” questionnaire, then the operative transfer the customer to after the call. Face to face this satisfaction is gathered through an exit survey. The current performance is below:

		Apr-14	May-14	Jun-14	Jul-14	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Nov-14
Telephone	>=85%	97.44%	96.32%	97.18%	97.40%	93.58%	97.59%	96.61%	97.69%
Face to Face	>-80%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

2.23 From April to September 2014 the Contact Centre received 34 Concerns and 7 Complaints. On an average of between 35,000 and 40,000 call per month this shows very little complaint with regards to the contact centre services. Only two of these complaints were upheld.

2.24 As can be seen by the above information, the Customer Service for the Council is within the targeted performance as set by the Council for the service that it can “afford”.

2.25 Over the next year the Council will be working with its partner Serco to redefine the outcomes it needs from its Customer Service channels, moving more to promoting online services and channel shift and being able to reduce traditional contact methods such as face to face and contact centre.

New Telephony

2.26 In December 2013 the Council stated a comprehensive upgrade of its internal telephony systems due to the system at the time being obsolete, at full capacity and not able to allow for the new hot desking approach in the Civic Centre and external sites.

2.27 The new systems allow any staff member to sit at any desk on any floor in the civic and log into the phone and computer at the desk allowing access to work and resources.

2.28 The telephone upgrade stated with the Housing Department in December 2014 but since then other services have been upgraded to the new system (Public Protection, Planning, Members Area, 4th Floor Hub and Children’s Services). The remaining services are due to be upgraded by March 2015.

- 2.29 Further phases of the telephony roll out will be to allow officers to send instant messages across the telephony system and see if people are free at their desks or in meetings. A final phase is planned to allow for live sharing of documents and files.
- 2.30 The first phase of the telephony roll out linked the telephone to the computer on each individual desk, meaning that as a user logs into the desktop, their phone is also automatically logged on. Housing, due to being an early adopter of the telephony upgrade, do not currently have this functionality and users need to remember to log their phones on manually.
- 2.31 Recent anecdotal feedback has claimed that members are having difficulty reaching the Housing department and this could be part of the explanation. Housing now have a comprehensive telephony plan being developed which should be in place by 26th January 2015 and will hopefully address some of the issues around contact.
- 2.32 Unfortunately the new telephony system does not have any specified reports which will show the number of calls offered and answered (as with the Contact Centre). This is a potential future improvement that will allow services to track both front office contact via the Contact Centre and back office contact directly into the services.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The above commentary gives a background of the approach that the Council is taking with regards to channel shift and customer services.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 This report is for noting at the request of the committee.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 NA

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 There is no impact corporately as a result of this report.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jo Beard**
Finance Officer - Housing

The channel shift approach has the opportunity to release savings for the Council which will tie into the transformation agenda moving forward.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Deputy Head of Legal & Deputy Monitoring Officer

There are no legal implications for this report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

Through channel shift the council will need to ensure that “Digital by Design” services do not exclude vulnerable customers from accessing Council Services. This will be achieved through completing a Community and Equality Impact Assessment.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council’s website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- NA

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Services Online

Report Author:

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Housing