

REPORT ON CORPORATE CUSTOMER SERVICES

Corporate Services CAC – 31 August 2016

1.0 Background and Context

This report follows on from approval by Cabinet for the Customer Contact Strategy in July 2014 and subsequent New Customer Services Model report approved by Exec Board in June 2015. As part of the Commissioning work stream of *Sustainable Swansea – Fit for the Future* a strategic review was undertaken of Corporate Services during 2015. The recommendations from the Business Support Commissioning Review were approved by Cabinet on 15 October 2015. At the heart of this was a mandate for a new whole Council operating model for business support which includes customer contact, both internal and external.

2.0 Journey so far in Customer Services

The authority's vision was to:

- To improve customer experience.
- To achieve a fundamental shift in customer contact to digital self- service channels.
- To consolidate current customer contact.
- To use customer insight to improve services and achieve the other aims.

With the key principles being:

- Operating as a single customer service organisation, not a number of separate customer services businesses.
- Bringing current customer contact resources under a single management structure.
- Adopting the principle of digital by default and transfer, wherever possible, customer contact from face to face and telephone to digital channels.
- Making every contact count to reduce or minimise demand and change resident behaviour.

The new Customer Service Manager was appointed on 1st August 2015 and Corporate Customer Services went live on 1st October 2015. Phase 1 brought together five areas of the organisation, as below, into one new service across three sites:

- Contact Swansea
- Switchboard
- Environmental Services
- Housing Repairs
- Blue Badges

In November 2015, contact for the Highways service also migrated into Customer Services. All telephony teams were relocated and amalgamated into one site in the Civic Centre in January 2016 and the multi skilling of advisors commenced. In order not to lose the knowledge and experience gained over many years, each advisor has a 'primary' skill and 'secondary' skill so that they can assist each other during periods of high demand, sickness absence and annual leave. The teams were also taken through a restructure and Management of Change between March 2016 and May 2016 in order to align job roles, terms and conditions, new ways of working and achieve an efficiency target of £235,000 through a reduction in headcount of 11FTE.

During our first year we have answered 526,642 calls and served 40,615 customers at the Contact Centre face to face with only 7 Corporate Complaints received in total across both channels since the service was created. A Welsh language Line was introduced in April 2016 and constant review of our website and increasing the ability to report or request services online is starting to pay dividends, encouraging our residents to contact us **'digitally by choice'**. Over the last 12 months our Switchboard Service has received approximately 3000 fewer calls and our Environment Service nearly 4000 fewer calls over the same period. Good examples of recent channel shift from face to face and over the phone to digital that have been well received by residents are the ability to place a bulky waste request online and the 'virtual' resident parking permit, where residents can apply online and are instantly covered, similar to the new car tax system introduced by the Department of Transport some years ago.

Our face to face Contact Swansea visitor numbers this financial year so far have reduced by 26% with 93% of those customers who required a ticket for a more in depth enquiry being seen within 15 minutes of arrival an improvement on the 86% during the same period the previous year and with fewer staff.

At the moment, access times to council services across the council is very varied and confusing and frustrating for our residents if they can't get a response to their query so next year we will be working with services to standardise and promote clear access times across all services which will be Mon-Thurs 08:30-17:00 and 08:30-16:30 on a Friday.

Customer Services are continually looking at new ways of working and technology to reduce and manage demand more appropriately. Automated telephony was initially introduced in the Authority in 2014 and we are currently procuring 'voice recognition' so that those residents who are happy to use these methods of contact can do so, however, this will be in **'addition to, rather than instead of'** and will eventually enable our residents to report or request a service not only through our website but also over the telephone 24/7, 365 days a year. Naturally, if they would prefer to use traditional methods then they will still be available during our normal Council opening times.

We are also in the process of building an 'in house' Corporate Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which will provide us with more control and flexibility to develop the product to meet our needs and vision of working towards a 'single customer record' across the Authority.

3.0 Proposed areas for migration in Phase 2

The customer contact identified for consideration in Phase 2 (Sept 2016-Dec 2016) of the Contact Strategy as previously approved by Cabinet are:

- Registrars
- Street Lighting
- Parks/Leisure
- Parking Services
- District Housing Offices
- Tenancy Support Unit
- Housing Options
- Housing Rents

A proposal for approval to commence discussions with these services will be submitted to Corporate Management Team in September with a view to replicating the same/similar implementation to Phase 1.

4.0 Customer contact in other parts of the Council

This report sets out in sections 2 and 3 those areas that come under Corporate Customer Services, however, there are many other areas across the council that deal with customer contact – eg, social services, planning, education etc.

Although there is a council standard known as the Swansea Standard that sets out best practice in relation to how all staff should deal with customers, it is the responsibility of individual managers to ensure their staff meet customer needs.

The recent introduction of the Welsh Language Standards has brought extra demands in terms of dealing with customers in Welsh and all external calls should now be answered bilingually.

Although no study has been carried out, it is likely that services will have different arrangements in terms of answering the phone, replying to emails and even issues such as email signatures.

There is a need to bring some consistency across the entire council, whilst recognising that some services will have different demands and requirements.