

Agenda Item No:	6	
Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny	
Date:	17 October 2016	
Report Title:	Customer Services CSR Update	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

- To update the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on proposals to reduce Telephone Contact Centre opening hours from 1 April 2017 as part of the Council's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) process.

2 Key issues

- Council at its meeting on 21 May 2015 took the decision to undertake a CSR of all its services in order to determine how it can deliver £2 million of savings over the next four years to meet a projected funding shortfall as a result of changes to the Local Government funding regime.
- Residents were consulted and asked to determine which services they would find most acceptable to be reduced.
- Members held workshops in November to determine what projects should be taken forward to make up the savings above.

3 Recommendations

- Members are asked to note the progress of the proposal to date.
- Members are asked to provide an overview of any resultant matters, so that they can be incorporated in the report to be presented to Cabinet on 24 November 2016, where the final decision to approve the proposals will be considered.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	This item is included in the Forward Plan
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Chris Seaton – Portfolio Holder for Finance
Report Originator(s)	Geoff Kent – Head of Customer Services
Contact Officer(s)	Rob Bridge - Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer Geoff Kent – Head of Customer Services
Background Paper(s)	None

Report:

1 Background / introduction

- 1.1 The Council's CSR exercise identified a number of projects to move forward, that together would meet the Council's target of saving £2 million in the next four years.
- 1.2 Following the All Member sessions regarding CSR last year, Members asked Officers to move forward a number of CSR projects, of which this is one.
- 1.3 The Council has a corporate Telephone Contact Centre (TCC) that handles all incoming phone-calls to 01354-654321. 78,044 telephone calls were answered in 2015-16 (see paragraph 4.4 of this report for historical data).
- 1.4 The TCC is currently open Mondays to Fridays 9am to 5pm and Saturdays from 9am to noon (a total of 43 hours each week).
- 1.5 Service performance standards are for 70% of calls to be answered within 20 seconds (the average for 2016-17 was 67.5%) and for 90% of calls to be handled (the average in 2016-17 was 12.8%).
- 1.6 By reducing TCC opening hours to 35 per week to be open Mondays to Fridays 9am to 4pm and reducing the call answering standard from 70% of calls being answered within 20 seconds now, to a proposed standard of answering 50% of calls within 20 seconds, it is possible to make savings of £123,000 per year.
- 1.7 It is proposed that these changes take effect from 1 April 2017, realising a full years saving in 2017-18 and subsequent years.
- 1.8 In addition, these proposals are a continuation of the Council's Channel Shift Strategy (approved by Cabinet on 23 July 2015) that seeks to maximise the number of customers who transact with the Council online. This will ensure efficient access to services via the Council's website enabling us to provide excellent customer service, reduce costs and enable face to face and telephone access channels to be utilised by our more vulnerable customers. Please see section 5 of this report for further information about Channel Shift.

2 Feedback from CSR residents' consultation

- 2.1 A consultation survey was sent to all 44,000 households in Fenland. Residents were asked to look at a list of 19 Council services and select a minimum of 6 of these that it would be most acceptable for costs to be reduced.

- 2.2 “Helping people to access Council Services” was residents’ seventh most popular choice with regards the areas in which they thought savings could be made.
- 2.3 Residents had differing views; some viewed the Shops, Hubs and Contact Centre to be a waste of money and suggested that they were closed, especially as they could self-serve online.
- 2.4 Other respondents however found the support offered very helpful, especially as they are unable to access information online and often needed help to understand it. It was suggested that days and opening times of shops and the contact centre could be reviewed.
- 2.5 Note that these proposals are reducing the number of hours that a telephone help and advice service for Council services is offered; the current Hub and Shop opening hours for face to face customer service remain as they are now, meaning that customers still have choice as to the way that they contact us, as well as having access to information at all times through our website.
- 2.6 In addition, many residents thought that allowing people to access services online would get good results (provided it was easy to use) as it would allow residents to conveniently self-serve, reducing the amount of administration required. In an increasingly digital age, it would also enable people to access information and become better informed about available services.

3 Customer Impact

- 3.1 The Equality Act 2010 reminded all public authorities of their duty to have ‘due regard’ to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- 3.2 Authorities must consider the needs of “protected groups” when making policy decisions, and undertake a Customer Impact Assessment (CIA) to understand the effect of such decisions upon such groups. In doing this, we are required to take the appropriate actions when making changes that may impact negatively on these groups.
- 3.3 As part of the final decision regarding the approval of the TCC opening hours changes, Cabinet will consider a full CIA at its meeting in November 2016. The table overleaf shows the initial CIA:-

Customer attribute	Impact	Effects	Mitigating action
Race	Neutral		
Sex	Neutral		
Gender reassignment	Neutral		
Age	Neutral		
Sexual orientation	Neutral		
Religion /belief	Neutral		
Pregnancy /maternity	Neutral		
Marriage /civil partnership	Neutral		
Human rights	Neutral		
Disability	Neutral		
Socio economic	May adversely impact	Customers experiencing Council Tax payment difficulties may have less opportunity to contact us to seek advice and make payment arrangements	Promote revised opening hours to reassure customers that help is still available by phone and face to face for at least 35 hours each week

- 3.4 The initial CIA highlights possible adverse effects for customers who may need help and advice with regards payment difficulties. For customers wishing to contact us on a Saturday, we will continue to offer a face to face service in our Hubs and Shops.
- 3.5 Less than 10% of telephone calls made to 654321 are made between 4pm and 5pm on a weekday. The March and Wisbech Fenland @ your Service Shops are already closed between these times and we have not experienced any increase in customer complaints or deterioration of service quality as a result.
- 3.6 It is therefore believed that customers will use on-line access to our services or contact us the following weekday morning if they need help with queries where they would have contacted us between 4pm and 5pm on weekdays.

4 Call volumes

- 4.1 In proposing the reduction in opening hours we examined trends and also the distribution of calls throughout our normal opening hours as they are now.
- 4.2 Mondays to Fridays, the quietest time of the day is between 4pm and 5pm, as evidenced by the distribution of calls for the last year (October 2015 to September 2016 inclusive) by hour:-

<u>Time</u>	<u>Calls</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
9am - 10am	12,185	16%
10am - 11am	11,076	15%
11am - noon	10,846	15%
noon - 1pm	9,059	12%
1pm - 2pm	8,439	11%
2pm - 3pm	8,626	12%
3pm - 4pm	7,937	11%
4pm - 5pm	6,631	9%
Totals	74,799	100%

- 4.3 By comparison for the same period as above, a very low number of calls are taken on Saturday mornings; some 27 per week on average:-

<u>Time</u>	<u>Calls</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
9am - 10am	470	33%
10am - 11am	490	35%
11am - noon	450	32%
Totals	1,410	100%

- 4.4 There has also been a marked decline in the number of telephone calls received by the TCC. The table below shows the numbers of calls handled each full year since the TCC opened at the end of 2004:-

<u>Year</u>	<u>Calls</u>	<u>Change +-</u>	<u>Change %</u>
2005-06	146,727		
2006-07	151,594	4,867	3%
2007-08	134,131	-17,463	-12%
2008-09	115,919	-18,212	-14%
2009-10	112,001	-3,918	-3%
2010-11	105,456	-6,545	-6%
2011-12	92,716	-12,740	-12%
2012-13	90,114	-2,602	-3%
2013-14	89,048	-1,066	-1%
2014-15	87,891	-1,157	-1%
2015-16	78,044	-9,847	-11%

5 Channel Shift

- 5.1 Our Channel Shift strategy is central to these proposals. Approved by Cabinet in July 2015, this sets out to make an improved and transactional website at www.fenland.gov.uk the key to future service delivery.
- 5.2 Our website has been refreshed to improve information and navigation and further development is planned to make it more transactional as opposed to simply informational. A wider range of intelligent electronic forms have now been rolled out, grouped under the headings of Apply for it – Pay for it – Report it.
- 5.3 In addition, the website has been updated to be fully responsive to mobile devices, meaning that customers will find the website easy to use on whatever device they use; from desktop PC to smartphone.
- 5.4 At the same time, we have moved to an “assisted digital” model of face to face customer service at our Fenland @ your Service Hubs and Shops. This model changed the previous offer, with effect from 1 January 2016; from face to face personal assistance (with staff and customers sat across desks with each-other) to a primarily self-service model where customers generally help themselves to information, assisted by staff.
- 5.5 Customer satisfaction levels have remained very high at 95%; a credit to the Customer Services team.

6 The process of change

- 6.1 In order to realise the savings from these proposals, a reduction in staffing of 4 full-time equivalent posts (FTE) is required.
- 6.2 Consultation has been carried out with the staff affected. 1-2-1 meetings are now being held with team members to understand which team members are able to reduce their hours. At the same time, there are some vacancies in the team, meaning that the number of permanent full-time staff is required to be reduced by 2.56 FTE.
- 6.3 The next steps are to seek approval from Cabinet for the changes in November 2016, followed by Staff Committee (which will be asked to approve a reduction in staffing) in December 2016. The changes in staffing will take effect from a1 April 2017.