



## Report to Policy Committee

**Author/Lead Officer of Report:** Paul Taylor.  
Head of Customer Services

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**Report of:** Ajman Ali, Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services Directorate

**Report to:** Strategy and Resources Policy Committee

**Date of Decision:** 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**Subject:** Customer Services (Contact Centre) Improvement Plan Update

Type of Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken	Initial <input type="checkbox"/>	Full <input type="checkbox"/>
Insert EIA reference number and attach EIA	N/a	
Has appropriate consultation/engagement taken place?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-		
<p><i>“The (<b>report/appendix</b>) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (<b>insert relevant paragraph number</b>) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).”</i></p>		

### Purpose of Report:

Strategy and Resources Policy Committee is asked to note the content of this Improvement Plan update and to feed in comments and suggestions for further improvement.

**Recommendations:**

That Strategy and Resources Policy Committee:

- i) notes and comments upon the content of this Improvement Plan update and the progress being made in respect of ongoing improvement.
- ii) notes that a corporate customer services strategy is in the process of being developed

**Background Papers:**

None

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed.	Finance: Adrian Hart
		Legal: Patrick Chisholm
		Equalities & Consultation: Ed Sexton
		Climate: Kathryn Warrington
	<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>	
2	<b>SLB member who approved submission:</b>	Ajman Ali
3	<b>Committee Chair consulted:</b>	Cllr Tom Hunt
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	<b>Lead Officer Name:</b> Paul Taylor	<b>Job Title:</b> Head of Customer Services
	<b>Date: 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023</b>	

## **1. PROPOSAL**

- 1.1 At its meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2023 Full Council approved a resolution in respect of the Customer Services Improvement Plan, as follows:

*asks the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee to consider and report on a Customer Services Improvement Plan at the earliest opportunity.*

- 1.2 Appendix 1 sets out a progress update on the previously agreed Customer Services Improvement Plan which primarily focuses on the Sheffield City Council Contact Centre.
- 1.3 Commentary regarding performance, issues, and future plans is included within this appendix.

## **2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?**

- 2.1 There is currently an active discussion around the customer experience which citizens experience when contacting the Council, and the performance of the Contact Centre is a key determinant of the experience of our citizens when they contact the Council through this route. We are clear that many customers want to be able to carry out transactions online, and this would enable us to use the Contact Centre more for those people who can't or won't transact online and those with more difficult problems which they need to discuss. Full channel shift will take time and so some contingency measures may be needed in the meantime.
- 2.2 This update should therefore be considered in the context of work currently under way to agree a comprehensive corporate customer services strategy for Sheffield City Council, evidenced by a flexible and responsive customer service offer that meets customer needs. Work is ongoing for this strategy to sit within the priorities of the Future Sheffield programme with Business Change specialists allocated to it. A Project Scoping Mandate is currently being completed; the aspiration is to present the new corporate customer services strategy to Strategy and Resources Policy Committee in March 2024.
- 2.3 In terms of the Contact Centre operation, work continues in respect of finding ways to improve performance. A workshop was held on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023 exploring the operation of the Contact Centre and whether there are any further improvements that can be made. An action plan is being drawn up as a result of those discussions.
- 2.4 In terms of website development, the last 18 months have seen the migration of intranet and website on to a new web content management

platform – Drupal. Over 150 web forms have been improved, updated, and migrated onto the Council's Customer Relationship Management solution. SCC has partnered with a third party (Big Blue Door) for development support and hosting. The IT team are utilising a distribution of Drupal that has been, and is, designed and developed by a council collaborative. An audit of the council's digital landscape in relation to third party developed websites and applications has recently been completed. Web chat functionality and a new cookie compliance tool have been developed to ensure GDPR compliance and a microsite solution is currently being developed.

- 2.5 Future plans include the launch of two new microsities – Lifelong learning and Skills and Fostering. The IT team plan to bring news into the council website, decommissioning the Newsroom site before the end of the financial year. The team is also investigating directory functionality – to create location-based listings. In addition, work is currently under way with Entec Si to undertake two pieces of work to ensure our digital services meet the needs of our staff and customers.
- 2.6 The intention is to create a strategy and programme of transformation which delivers a step change in the delivery of services, customer digital experience and the use of enabling technologies within the council. This will encompass the full scope of digital customer engagement and the foundational infrastructure, systems and data which underpin how the Council operates and provides services to its customers.
- 2.7 Embracing digital technology within SCC will allow the council to significantly improve efficiency and in doing so, free staff from undertaking manual process driven tasks and allow them to focus on delivering much greater value to the council's customers/residents. The high-level approach to this change will encompass two stages as follows:
  - Stage 1: Discovery & Baselineing to establish the baseline for change but with a focus on the voice of the customer and a view to the future.
  - Stage 2: Digital & ICT Strategy & Business Case using the findings from Stage 1 to evidence the change and state the ambition, direction and investment required.
- 2.8 Finally, the IT team are also exploring opportunities to automate services using low code application development tools and creating a policy and standards for the use of artificial intelligence to streamline some of our interactions with customers.

### **3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?**

- 3.1 There is a constant and active level of consultation within the Council in respect of Contact Centre performance and challenges. Customer Services works on behalf of a number of partner services and we seek to involve those services in discussions around improvements as we seek to improve the customer experience of callers to the Contact Centre.
- 3.2 A key focus of the new customer strategy will be to ensure that we better hear the voices of our communities in respect of the level of customer service which they receive and about how they think that this can be improved.

### **4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION**

#### **4.1 Equality Implications**

- 4.1.1 Equality implications are a key driver in Customer Services departments' improvement plans and will also be a key element in the evolving Customer Experience Strategy. Customer Services department is the lead on SCC's translation and interpretation contract. The SCC Feedback and Complaints team also sits within Customer Services department and we are very aware that complaints are a key mechanism in determining the equality and accessibility of our service offer.
- 4.1.2 We are clear that equality implications need to be considered as part of our work to increase channel shift and the need to ensure staff are available to those customers who prefer to speak to someone. The next update will include a summary of demographic information about our customers. This should help to add context and depth to the performance measures.

#### **4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications**

- 4.2.1 Customer Services' financial performance, in terms of adherence to budget, is strong. However, we are aware that some short-term measures which may be necessary, such as the recruitment of additional staff, could carry some financial risk. The service is clear that investment in the development of effective technological innovations will have a cost, but that these may lead to savings in the medium to long-term whilst also benefitting our customers.

#### **4.3 Legal Implications**

- 4.3.1 There are no specific legal implications arising out of this report. It is however important to say that a Local Authority needs to be able to communicate efficiently with people, including those to whom a duty is owed. Examples of that in relation to Customer Services' work would include the work of the Register Office and processing of blue badges. Improving the quality of communication generally would reduce the risk

of failures to comply with requirements through missed opportunities to share information earlier and more effectively.

#### 4.4 Climate Implications

- 4.4.1 Our commitment to improving the ability for people to carry out transactions online may have positive benefits for the environment, particularly where these can provide an alternative to people coming into offices. Customer Services Senior Management Team remain alert to any improvements which can lessen ours and our customers' carbon footprint.

#### 4.5 Other Implications

- 4.5.1 None identified.

### **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 Customer Services management are constantly developing and testing alternative approaches in seeking to improve our performance and the services we provide to our citizens. This is exemplified by the recent Contact Centre Improvement Workshop which will result in an action plan which highlights some potential alternative approaches.

### **6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 Customer Services continually seeks to be fully transparent about our performance and whether and how this is improving. This paper provides the opportunity for Strategy and Resources Policy Committee members to contribute their thoughts and ideas as we work to develop further plans to ensure continuous improvement of the service offered by the Customer Services Contact Centre.