

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**
DATE: **THURSDAY, 11 JUNE 2015**
REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER (COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE)**
SUBJECT: **CUSTOMER SERVICES AND CALL HANDLING UPDATE**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on the progress made towards the changes to the way telephone calls are received via 01352 752121 (Switchboard).

2.00 BACKGROUND

The budget planning proposals identified a significant saving through introducing a new way of handling telephone calls to the main switchboard. Contact centre telephony software was introduced to the main switchboard on Wednesday 22 April, 2015.

Customers dialling 752121 receive an automated welcome greeting and they are asked to select English or Welsh. Once language preference has been determined, customers are presented with a series of menu options i.e. for Waste, Recycling and Highways press 1, for Council Housing including repairs and rent enquiries press 2, for Council Tax or Benefits press 3 and for all other service press 4.

Calls to 'option 4' are diverted to the existing Switchboard team (2.8 FTE); the team is also responsible for providing a main reception service for County Hall, Mold. With effect from 1 September the intention is to divert callers selecting option 4 to the existing contact centre teams in Streetscene, Housing and Revs & Benefits.

Prior to the implementation of contact centre software, all calls to 752121 were answered by the Switchboard team and on average the team received 4,287 calls per week (average 857 per day).

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

Current position

Call volumes to the Switchboard team (option 4) have reduced to an average of 2,385 per week (477 daily); this means the new automated service has already resulted in 44% of customers self-serving i.e. customers are selecting options 1-3 and being diverted to their chosen service. Those customers choosing option 4 wait an average of 14

seconds for their call to be answered; 100% of all calls to option 4 are answered within the corporate target of 30 seconds.

It should be noted that approximately 10% of calls to Switchboard are internal and the intention is to cease calls to zero shortly (Customer Services is currently exploring options to improve the facility to search on phone book).

Issues/risks

Over the four weeks in which the new arrangements have been in place, Customer Services has received no formal complaints.

The Switchboard team are offering direct dial numbers to all customers for their convenience in the future; a small portion of customers object to taking direct dial numbers and indicate their preference to contact Switchboard.

There is evidence that despite providing clear guidance at the start of the call-menu process e.g. for Waste, Recycling and Highways press 1, some customers continue to come through to Switchboard and do not self-serve using the options available.

Improvements have been made in connection with Welsh language call handling by increasing the number of available Welsh speaking employees. This has been achieved simply by grouping Welsh speakers in to one skill-set thus increasing the number of people available to deal with Welsh language enquiries across Streetscene, Revenues & Benefits and Housing.

Customer Services continues to work towards the closure of the Switchboard team on 31 August, 2015. After this time, all calls to 'option 4' will be diverted across Streetscene, Revenues & Benefits and Housing contact centres.

Given the evidence that some customers are either ignoring, or do not understand the current call-menu options, a review will be undertaken of the contact centre script and where necessary revisions will be made to the automated messages.

It is expected that the impact on telephone calls to contact centres will be an additional 130 calls per day although some of these calls will be for that specific service. A switchboard call generally takes between 20 and 30 seconds so the actual impact on time will be minimal. However to manage any perceived risk contact centre licences currently used by Switchboard will be retained 12 months within the Customer Services team. This could extend the transitional arrangements if needed and help ease any pressure on contact centres.

As phase two of the change comes in to effect on 1 September, a further choice will be introduced to enhance the automated service for customers i.e. if you know the extension number – dial it now. This

facility will lessen the impact of the change on the wider contact centre service areas.

A series of awareness sessions will be delivered to all contact centre employees to prepare them for 1 September when general enquiries to 752121 will be directed to them. Additionally, a series of training will be scheduled for Welsh speakers to provide them with the knowledge and resources to competently manage calls from outside of their 'normal' service area.

Some Members are regular users of the switchboard and it has been agreed that the Members Services team will act as a point of contact for Members as an alternative to dialling 752121.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to note the content of the report.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Changes to the way telephone calls to 01352 752121 are answered will result in savings that contribute to the overall budget for 15/16 of £100,000 and a further £64,000 in 16/17.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

None

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

None

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

There is no equalities impact as customers will continue to be able to speak to someone when calling 752121.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

An application for voluntary redundancy has been received from one member of the switchboard team and the remaining 2 staff (1.4 fte) will be considered for alternative employment with the council in accordance with the redundancy policy.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

None

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

Budget planning process for 15/16

12.00 APPENDICES

None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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