

Agenda Item	11.
Report No	CP/12/20

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Communities and Place

**Date:** 19 August 2020

**Report Title:** Approach to developing and improving customer and citizen contact and relationships

**Report By:** ECO Communities and Place

### **1. Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This paper outlines changes necessary to improve the Council's performance in relation to enquiries, complaints, Freedom of Information requests, Subject Access Requests, and MP/MSP contacts. It also sets out work underway to replace the Council's ICT system for managing customer relationships.
- 1.2 The paper outlines an ambitious plan to bring excellence to these types of customer contacts and as part of the Council's Recovery Plan.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note current volumes of customer contacts, enquiries, complaints and FOI requests. The service centre handles over 240,000 calls annually and 2019/20 records show services responded to 51,388 enquiries, 1725 complaints, 1840 FOI enquiries and subject access requests and 836 MSP/MP enquiries.
- ii. Note current under-performance in responding within timescales set as shown in Table 2 and the need for improvement.
- iii. Agree the approach to change and improvement as set out in section 6 of the report. This includes: reviewing the resourcing, cultural, process and systems changes needed with a view to:
  - a. making it easy for people to resolve enquires themselves using various internet and telephony methods;
  - b. where staff support is needed we resolve issues at the first point of contact wherever possible;
  - c. taking more care of people who need more support to access services;
  - d. dealing with written complaints and enquiries on time and courteously;
  - e. making it easier for Members to report constituent queries and track their progress;
  - f. valuing all contact as vital business intelligence. This will help us to understand how our operations need to respond and how we improve our communications and messaging. This means analysing the volume and nature of contacts and whether there are any patterns by place. This will help plan interventions; and
  - g. supporting staff to comply with timescales, help remove blockages and provide appropriate training, processes and systems.
- iv. Note the work underway to identify a suitable replacement for the current Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, with a business case in preparation and to be subject to normal governance arrangements.

### **3. Implications**

- 3.1 Resource. Work is underway to understand current resourcing issues and what needs to change to deliver a compliant service with capacity and capability to achieve statutory and internal targets. This includes staffing, training, systems and process changes and comparisons with high performing organisations. One resourcing change already agreed as part of moving to a new structure of 8 services is bringing together the small number of Customer Support Officers (CSOs) from across services to create a corporate team. This will help to build resilience, expand knowledge, and help tackle system blockages. A business case is being finalised and costed for the procurement of an upgraded Customer Relationship Management (CRM) ICT solution. Once complete it will follow the Council's governance process.
- 3.2 Legal. Creating a corporate team, setting out clear improvement actions and investing in new ICT will reduce the risk of the organisation failing to comply with regulatory and internal requirements and timescales for responses.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural). The improvements planned are part of the community engagement and ICT work streams within the Council's Recovery Plan. Technical solutions can help us to understand and flag the needs of our customers and citizens better, for example alerting call handlers to callers with particular needs so that we can respond better. We are aware that service points are used more often by older

people, people with disabilities and Council housing tenants. While service points remain closed as part of the response to covid, our telephony and on-line services are even more important. We will make links with the work underway on community support coordination to make sure we reach out to those people in most need of support. We are also exploring technical ICT solutions to help Members manage and track their constituent enquiries and to analyse and report on contacts by Ward. These new functions would be considered within the business case and would be dependent on resources available.

- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever. How we interact with customers and citizens has changed over time. Face to face, correspondence in hard copy, telephony and internet contacts all require different configurations of staffing, travel, buildings and technology. Different methods of contact have different implications for carbon emissions. This year the requirement for staff to work from home where possible and the closure of public caller buildings will provide learning for our approach. As we explore new ICT solutions we are keen to understand and report on the volumes of different types of contact better and to understand climate change implications better. Energy use and carbon emissions from buildings and travel are reported corporately.
- 3.5 Risk. Understanding the value of customer and citizen contact to help shape the business, respond well and improve performance reduces reputational and business risks. The new approach proposed will bring new and timely analysis of such contact and reduce these risks. Ensuring appropriate and timely responses to specific customer contacts are critical to comply with legislative and internal timescales. Replacing ICT will support the new approach strategically and for individual cases. These steps along with staff training will help mitigate risk at a time when we face significant budget challenges.
- 3.6 Gaelic. In line with the Council's commitment to give equal respect for Gaelic and English on the basis that Gaelic is an essential part of Highland life, there is a Gaelic greeting on the telephone lines coming in to Customer Services. We will include Gaelic as we review and develop forms and customer content as part of the implementation of the new Customer Relationship Management ICT system.

#### 4. Background

- 4.1 With the new Council structure in place, the Customer Services function moved to the Communities and Place Service in April 2020. Within the function is the Registrars function, Service Centre, and Service Point Network. The function is led by Caroline Campbell as Head of Service (also responsible for fleet, logistics, and amenity services), supported by the Customer Services Delivery Manager, Jane Ross.
- 4.2 The new structure also brings together the service-based customer services officers (CSO) based in the former 4 Directorates; however due to lockdown the transition to a new corporate team has to be finalised. Their role is to support managers and other staff to respond to requests for information or complaints within the correct timescale.
- 4.3 Table 1 lists the type of contacts and the volumes received that require attention in specific services.

Table 1

Case Type	Volume 2019/20
Enquiries	51,388
Complaints	1,725*

FOI/SAR	1,840
MP/MSP	836

\*1243 stage 1 and 467 stage 2 complaints (complex).

These contacts account for 33% of all customer contacts (171,542) in 2019/20 recorded in CRM. This includes contacts made with the service centre and Service Points through telephony, email, face to face, web chat and on-line self-service. The Service Centre currently receives more than 240,000 calls per annum (241,939 in 2019/20) with a frontline staffing profile of 12.96 FTE. They resolve around 70,000 calls without the need to refer to services and are not recorded in CRM.

- 4.4 The Service CSOs were meeting quarterly as the corporate complaint handlers working group to proactively share leading practice and lessons learned to consistently achieve quality and timely responses across all Services within the Council. This has proved challenging and from a combination of:
- how we have resourced this function (capacity and training);
  - our lack of corporate review of the function;
  - our out-dated systems in use (including CRM); and
  - a lack of appreciation of the vital business intelligence from these types of contacts. This data has not been used strategically or preventatively. This is a missed opportunity for service planning and improvement. It is also not used in a way that supports Members in their role as community representatives or their role in scrutinising Council performance.
- 4.5 The working group reviewed benchmarking data from the Local Authority Complaints Handling Network (LACHN) against Highland Council complaints performance internally and within the context of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) requirements and associated guidance. It is clear we are not meeting targets for response time for frontline resolution and investigation complaints. We are also weak on learning from complaints and implementing changes as a result.
- 4.6 The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has established 8 performance indicators which are used by local authorities to monitor complaints and to benchmark their performance with other local authorities which are similar in scale and demography. The Council's performance and benchmarking data is set out in detail in the Annual Complaints Performance Report.

A separate annual Corporate Complaints Performance Report is presented to Audit and Scrutiny Committee. This report focuses on year on year comparison and Service performance.

Links to both reports are included at the end of the report.

- 4.7 Restructuring has provided the opportunity to bring the Service CSOs together as a team, to re-invent a corporate approach to the customer contacts handling procedures ensuring best practice is applied Council wide and to modernise our approach to customer contact. A corporate team also builds resilience.

## 5. Current Performance

- 5.1 Table 2 details the Council's performance in responding against time targets as at 30 July 2020

Table 2: Performance at 30 July 2020

	FOI Requests		MP/MSP Enquiries		Front Line Resolution		Complex Complaints	
	Total Open	Overdue	Total Open	Overdue	Total Open	Overdue	Total Open	Overdue
ECO: Communities and Place	12	4	7	4	14	9	3	2
ECO: Infrastructure and Environment	22	12	22	17	21	19	8	7
ECO: Property and Housing	13	-	15	6	7	6	8	3
ECO: Resources and Finance	27	17	6	5	4	3	1	1
ECO: Education & Learning	10	2	26	23	15	15	12	10
ECO: Health & Social Care	11	2	3	3	9	6	1	1
ECO: Performance & Governance	4	1	-	-	2	2	1	1
ECO: Transformation & Economy	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	106	38	79	58	72	60	34	25

5.2 When engaging with managers and staff about their attitudes to customer contacts, and what causes delays in responding common responses include:

- volume of contacts is significant, and staff resources stretched;
- the customer services element is not included in everyone's job description and not always viewed as the most important aspect of their work;
- a lack of understanding of the legislative requirements and the need to respond;
- it is too difficult, queries are complex, it is going to take too long to find all the information requested especially in relation to FOI;

- lack of knowledge about how to use the CRM system; and
- currently, managers are aware of the workload strain certain teams are under and responding to high levels of contacts is seen more as a burden rather than an opportunity to learn from complaints and comments. There are clearly resourcing, cultural and support issues to address.

5.3 There are also system issues to address. Our current CRM system is not used to drive improvement. Reporting functionality is poor and this limits the analysis required to make positive changes to customer service delivery. Work is underway to replace the CRM system with a better ICT solution is described below.

5.4 In February 2020 a Level 2 Intervention was raised against the Council by the Scottish Information Commissioner because of poor compliance with the access to information legislation. An improvement plan is in place and it includes training, improved monitoring and reporting of responses.

## 6. The Future

6.1 Our ambition is to change the focus to see customer and citizen contact as central to how we connect with our communities. This means:

- making it easy for people to resolve their enquires themselves using various internet and telephony methods;
- where staff support is needed we resolve issues at the first point of contact wherever possible;
- we take more care of people who need more support to access services;
- we deal with written complaints and enquiries on time and courteously;
- we make it easier for Members to report constituent queries and track their progress;
- we value all contact as vital business intelligence. This will help us to understand how our operations need to respond and how we improve our communications and messaging. This means analysing the volume and nature of contacts and whether there are any patterns by place. This will help plan interventions; and
- we support staff to comply with timescales, help remove blockages and provide appropriate training, processes and systems.

If we do this we will support the other engagement work underway to involve communities in recovery, listening and problem solving together and supporting community bodies to do more locally.

6.2 As an organisation we must agree what a high performing resolution and improvement function looks like and plan a route map to achieve this. To do this we will:

- identify Councils that have made improvements in their performance and learn how they did this. We want to find out who is best in class not only in complaints and FOI responses but also in modernising customer/citizen contact, being respectful of their experience and voice and providing better support to those with greater need to access services;
- identify the ICT solutions in use and procure a preferred solution within resources available and with appropriate governance;
- use performance data from Regulator sites and benchmark groups;
- review feedback from Citizens Panel responses on complaints and the Council's Annual Complaints report; and

- continue to participate in national groups.

6.3 Driving our approach will be:

- our values of being Ambitious, Sustainable and Connected and from our covid experience, Caring;
- the importance of leadership and positive cultural changes;
- empowering Customer Services Officers and developing all our staff; and
- valuing business intelligence with improved monitoring, analysis and reporting to improve our performance.

6.4 In February 2020 the SPSO issued a revision to the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) for all local authorities to imbed and implement by no later than April 2021. We will use this as part of our approach.

6.5 The updated MCHP includes five parts:

Part 1: Overview and structure.

Part 2: When to use the procedure. Guidance on identifying what is and what is not a complaint, handling complex or unusual complaint circumstances, the interaction of complaints and other processes, and what to do if the MCHP does not apply.

Part 3: The complaints handling process. Guidance on handling a complaint through stages 1 and 2, and dealing with post-closure contact.

Part 4: Governance of the procedure. Staff roles and responsibilities and guidance on recording, reporting, publicising and learning from complaints.

Part 5: Customer-facing guide. Information for customers on how we handle complaints.

Compliance with the revised MCHP will be monitored by the SPSO through their investigation, and improvement and standards work.

The new team will be pivotal in the implementation of the revised model across the Council to drive a corporate approach.

## **7. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) 2020**

7.1 The contract for the CRM system is coming to an end this year. It is widely acknowledged that the current system is not fit for purpose, nor for how the Council wants to operate going forward. The Council is looking to deliver more digitally including capability for citizens to be able to self-manage services where possible. This is an action in the Council's Recovery Plan, led by the ECO Finance and Resources.

7.2 A project had started prior to lockdown to implement a new system. This is now being restarted. We will revise the requirements of the system based on what we have learned during lock down. This includes the learning from providing and coordinating humanitarian assistance. We need to move from a system that handles calls and recorded complaints to a system that captures the range of contact, helps us understand needs better to improve our relationships and plan services. We want to move the focus from complaints to that of resolution, and to use the CRM system to drive service improvements.

7.3 We learned a great deal about our citizens and how we were able to deliver existing and new services during this time. Utilising the rich data collected during COVID19 can help shape the support we could provide to our more vulnerable citizens ensuring

Council services are accessible to all when they need them and how they can be preventative.

7.4 The scope of the project includes:

- managing customer relationships rather than cases, providing a holistic view of the services that are delivered to people and places;
- interfacing seamlessly with all our customer contact channels and the technology associated with those including the contact centre system, online forms and social media and interfacing with a range of business systems;
- supporting the needs of customers as well as the technological requirements (User Interface, reliability, number of licences);
- scope to provide new and additional functionality for a customer portal and member portal; and
- a system that is established, reliable and stable and can evidentially support capability to deliver.

7.5 The benefits we expect from a new system include:

- improved efficiency of our channel management (types of contact);
  - deployment of customer portal - proactive presentation of customer information;
  - supports wider range of contact – e.g. social media;
  - single view of customer and increased management information;
  - business analysis for service delivery and intervention; and
  - Consistent, current and accurate data with dynamic updates.
- increased citizen satisfaction;
  - information available 24/7; and
  - tell us once.
- increased staff satisfaction;
  - reliable system;
  - reduction in double handling;
  - reduction in repetitive customer contact; and
  - more effective dangerous/potentially dangerous incidents recording and sharing.

7.6 An early task for implementing a new CRM will be the migration of data from the Helping Hands database, designed specifically for Councils to use during the pandemic to support humanitarian assistance, as stated at paragraph 7.2 above.

## **8. Team Structure**

8.1 To deliver a more robust service, the service-based officers that previously worked in the four different services will come together as one team. There are 5 x FTE CSO, and a head count of 7.

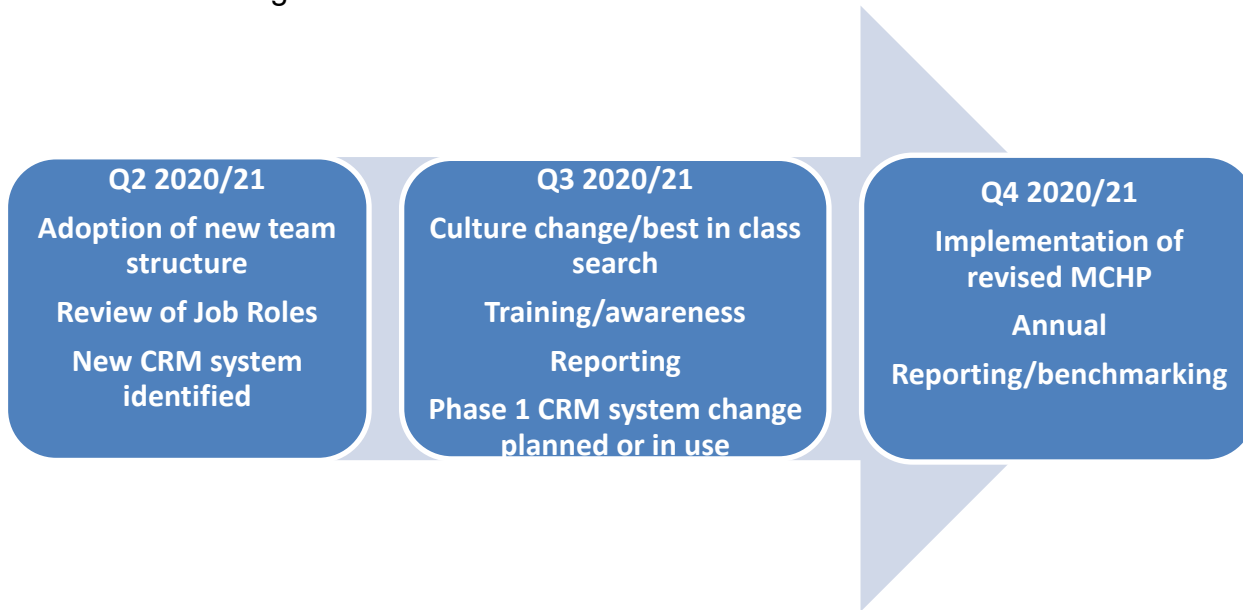
8.2 Team leadership needs to be reviewed and resourced and proposals are being developed as part of the new service structure.

## **9. Timescale**



9.1 Pace is needed to bring change and improvement, reduce the risk of regulator intervention and reputational damage due to the perception of our performance by those who contact us. We have set our ambitious timetable as below, diagram 1.

9.2 Timetable for change



Designation: Head of Performance and Resources

Date: 11 August 2020

Author: Caroline Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources.

Background Papers:

Annual Complaints Performance Report -  
<http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/12765/>

Corporate Complaints Process -  
[https://www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/4134/audit\\_and\\_scrutiny\\_committee](https://www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/4134/audit_and_scrutiny_committee)  
Item 10 on this link