

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board - 15th March, 2023

Report Title

Local Government Association Customer Services Peer Challenge

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Judith Badger, Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The Council commissioned a Local Government Association Customer Services Peer Challenge which took place 7th to 9th June 2022.

This report provides a summary of the recommendations arising from the Peer Challenge and sets out the next steps in taking the recommendations forward.

Recommendations

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board are requested to note and comment on the report.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, LGA Customer Services Peer Challenge, 7 – 9 June 2022, Feedback Report
- Appendix 2 List of projects and their status required to deliver the recommendations of the LGA report

Background Papers

No background papers

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Local Government Customer Services Peer Challenge

1. Background

1.1 The Council's Customer Services team support customers to access services through a single digital process regardless of the access channel they choose:

- Online through the Council's main website or one of 38 Micro Sites.
- By telephone to the Corporate Contact Centre – which is operational 24 hours a day, every day of the year.
- Face to Face.

1.2 Website

In 2017 the Council's website offer was generally poor with very few transactional services available for customers and low-quality content which led to incomplete and unsuccessful searches. The website also included thousands of references across its pages to Council phone numbers which in turn encouraged and diverted customers away from the website and to the telephone.

1.3 A refreshed and improved website went 'live' in October 2019 complimented by the implementation of Case Management software enabling customers to track the journey of their enquiry and receive automated communication updates.

1.4 During 2021/22, over 200k transactions were completed by customers who 'self-served' online.

1.5 Contact Centre and Face to Face Customer Service at Riverside House

Face to face customer service at Riverside House became part of Customer Services Contact Centre team in 2018; resulting in a restructure that enabled the delivery of savings of £440k per annum through a reduction of 20 FTE over a two-year period. In 2020/21 a one year budget increase of £100k was provided to temporarily increase the number of call handlers by 2 FTE along with supporting the transition to a new face to face customer services model with 2 additional FTE. In 2021/22 additional budget of £122k was provided to increase the call handling staff by 5 FTE (the 2 already in place and a further 3). This temporary increase was agreed for a further year in 2022/23. The investment has supported the recruitment of 5 temporary extra staff who helped to reduce wait times on the phones. A second and separate investment of £109k was made in 2021/22 and 2022/23. This investment supported the development of digital customer service solutions.

1.6 Staff delivering face to face customer services are also rostered to work in the Contact Centre. Processes are designed to ensure that the customer receives the same information and experience regardless of the access channel they use.

1.7 Prior to the Covid 19 crisis, the Contact Centre operated with a separate switchboard function. These calls were often transferred from one queue to another, providing the customer with a poor experience and making the analytical data unreliable because some calls were counted twice. The switchboard function was removed in 2020.

1.8 Further enhancements implemented in 2022 include a new welcome message on the general enquiries and housing telephone numbers, allowing customers to

select their enquiry type so they can be connected to the team they need more quickly. A call back request facility has also been added to the Housing line (enquiries and repairs) enabling customers to opt for a call back rather than wait in the queue. This feature will be added to other service lines in the future.

- 1.9 Despite the significant increase in digital engagement over the past 5 years, contact by telephone remains a popular channel. The Contact Centre received 89K calls in Qtr1 (Apr-Jun) 2022/23.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 It was considered that 2022 would be a good year to take stock of the Customer Service journey so far, and ensure the Council is on the right track moving forward; also taking the opportunity to learn from best practice in other local authorities.

- 2.2 The Council therefore asked the LGA to facilitate a peer challenge using the LGA Customer Services Framework as the scope; with particular focus on the Contact Centre and call handling in view of the challenging customer wait times.

- 2.3 The LGA Peer review also considered the following themes:

- Leadership and Governance
- Corporate Approach to Customer Access and Delivery
- Understanding and engaging with customers
- Service redesign
- Human Resources and Organisational Development
- Programme Management
- Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Information Management
- (IM) Strategies
- Communications strategy
- Accommodation/property strategy

- 2.4 The review, which took place between 7 – 9 June 2022 was undertaken by the following peers:

- Cllr Craig Cheney, Deputy Mayor, Bristol City Council
- Karey Barnshaw, Head of Customer Experience, Charnwood Borough Council
- Will Costello, Head of Digital and Transformation, Liverpool City Council

- 2.5 The peer team spent three days onsite at Rotherham, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from around 20 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 20 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.
- Sat in on conversations in the Customer Contact Centre.
- Observed technology systems in the Contact Centre.

- 2.6 Appendix 1 contains the feedback report from the LGA Peer Review, received on 5th January 2023. It contains the following recommendations:

1. Ensure that there is a corporate approach to improved customer access and experience.

2. Improve internal communication and co-ordination.
 3. Consider greater involvement of councillors in corporate priority programme and project management.
 4. Improve co-ordination of corporate strategies, services and teams.
 5. Explore ways to use technology to improve customer experience.
 6. Involve key stakeholders to help service improvements.
- 2.7 An action plan has been developed as set out in Appendix 2.
- 2.8 To compliment the LGA peer review a benchmarking exercise was undertaken to look at average wait times for the first 6 months of 2022/23. This was undertaken with other similar sized Councils across Yorkshire that have responsibility for the same sets of services, making it a fair comparison.

Authority (anonymous)	Average wait time
A	7 mins 19 sec
B	8 mins 17 sec
C	6 mins 26 sec
Average	7 mins 20 sec
RMBC Apr-Sep 2022	7 mins 6 sec

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The Peer Review recommendations have supported the development of the attached action plan.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The Peer Review team spoke to more than 20 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders. They also sat in on conversations in the Customer Contact Centre to better understand the customer perspective.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 A number of actions have already been completed, some of which were already underway during the time of the review, with the remainder planned for completion by November 2023.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no specific human resources implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 There are no specific implications for children and young people or vulnerable adults.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 There are no specific equalities or human rights implications arising from this report.

11. Implications for Partners

None

12. Risks and Mitigation

- 12.1 Risks will be managed through the management of the project list following standard project management principles.

13. Accountable Officer(s)

Luke Sayers,
Assistant Director, Customer Information & Digital Services

Approvals obtained on behalf of: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	10/02/2023
Head of Legal Services (Deputy Monitoring Officer)	Bal Nahal	08/02/2023

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