

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 29 July 2021
Subject: Customer and Partnerships Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor S Kane

Recommending:

That the report of the Customer and Partnerships Portfolio Holder be noted.

ICT

Service Management

- The day-to-day ticket management is progressing well with strong focus and the most urgent / high impact calls. Resourcing has been more difficult during the final stages of the Accommodation project as many ICT resources have been involved in setting up and moving equipment between sites.
- The daily stand-up process is working well across the whole team and is being used to share resourcing issues and prioritise resource.
- KPIs have been set up and are being monitored. The number of new calls coming in each day remains high.
- The team is currently being supplemented with contract resource as filling the First line roles has proved difficult. These roles are being re-evaluated.

Projects

- Over 100 projects have been delivered in the last 6 months. These vary in size but are primarily a result of the new project management governance processes and additional resource now in place. The plan is to now roll these processes out at a corporate level to assist with, and align projects to the Stronger Council, Committees, Place steering groups.
- With some of the smaller projects now addressed the plan is move onto more significant projects including moving to Azure, replacing the telephony and upgrading the windows 2008 legacy estate.

Strategy

- Work is nearly concluded on the 3 elements of the ICT strategy: infrastructure, application and service management. This will then be collated and used to help steer future initiatives. It also includes roadmaps for the next set of projects requiring completion.

Accommodation Project

- There has again been considerable activity from ICT on this project. The main refurb and networking were completed early, but there has been a high number of individual items that needed moving and reconfiguring.
- The Audio-visual equipment has all been set up and the meeting rooms are ready for use.
- In addition, new systems are being launched including a new booking system and visitor management system.

Restructure of Team

- There are still 2 vacancies in the ICT team on the ICT service desk. This is due to those roles being hard to fill in the current market. There is work ongoing to look at these roles and decide the best way forward

Customer Service

Accommodation Project

- Getting ready for the re-opening of the Civic is receiving full focus. With the customer experience in mind, the external area is being refreshed with welcome signage as well as planters located at the entrance. When entering the building, visitors will be greeted by 'floor sticker' signage to guide them around the welcome area.
- Officers from Customer Service, Revenue & Benefits plus Homelessness team will be onsite daily to support those residents in need of urgent support.
- Our new Community Hub will open once the Welcome Lounge area is up and running. A full communication plan is being developed including a video to support the launch. Partners joining us include Food Bank, Phoenix Futures, Nacro, VAEF, ECC Family Solutions, Essex Adult Social Care, DWP, CAB, CHESS Homeless, Changing Pathways and Peabody. The aligning service areas will be in attendance in the Hub on the same days/times as partners providing a one stop multi agency approach for our residents.

Multi-Channel Digital Platform

- As part of our digital strategy, we are investigating potential suppliers for a multi-channel customer engagement platform in the Contact Centre. The platform will enhance our customer experience via additional contact channels such as live chat and an IVR function as well as providing improved analytics.
- Expected benefits will be increased first point resolution, better customer contact analytics, reduced call volumes and an improved customer experience. Our Officers will be freed up to help those customers who need us the most.

Members Technology

- A working group has over the past few months focussed on addressing Member's technology issues. All Members have been contacted on a one-to-one basis to identify their level of digital adoption, any technical issues, training needs and feedback on use of technology.
- Improvements have been made and we will continue to listen to Members needs and refine processes to ensure ease of use.

Customer Shoes Behavioural Training

- The next stage of our pilot saw us hold a seminar attended by thirty-eight colleagues, held by the training provider the Impact Factory and again feedback was positive.
- This training is most suited for those with a basic level of customer service behavioural skills who would benefit on coaching for difficult and challenging conversations. We have recognised a need for more real-life scenarios to be included and experienced Officers dealing with daily challenging conversations are supporting with 'knowledge share' short videos or in attendance at the next session planned for September.
- We are mindful the training is designed to support Officers when faced with challenging situations and for this reason are rebranding the training 'In Your Shoes'
- Members have expressed an interest in receiving this training and this will be investigated in due course once the content is refined.
- In conjunction with other service areas, we are taking a holistic view of our customer behavioural training to define training modules, starting with level one 'in your shoes' behavioural skills, to module two telephone aggression and module three conflict management.

Launch of Touch Tone (replacement for Speech Recognition)

- Touch tone went live three weeks ago, and the good news is we are currently receiving only 25% of the call dropouts previously seen with speech recognition, this is a positive improvement to our customer experience, further analysis in due course

Resource

- The Customer Satisfaction & Complaints Team Manager currently on a year's secondment has been appointed to a new role therefore this position will be recruited to.
- The vacancy for Digital & Members Team Manager role will also be recruited to following a review of the role content.
- An additional Lead Officer is being recruited to support additional workload with the launch of our Community Hub.
- In readiness for the transition of Revenue & Benefits first point customer enquiries to the contact centre, project/change management resource will be secured to lead this work.

Revenues & Benefits

Support the re-opening of the Civic Offices

- The Revenues & Benefits team will play a key role in supporting the Customer Service team in re-opening the Civic Offices to the public and provide further support to the Community Hub to help facilitate a "one stop shop" experience for the customer.

Support for local businesses

- The Revenues & Benefits team have paid out approximately £45million in business support grants over the past 15 months, in support of our local businesses. The Government grant schemes are now coming to an end as businesses across all sectors can re-open and offer their trade to the public.
- In June, the team issued approximately 800 new rates bills to those businesses previously in receipt of the 100% Expanded Retail Discount announced by the Chancellor in the

Spring Budget. These are eligible retail, hospitality and leisure businesses that, for the period 1 April to 30 June 2021, received 100% discount in respect of their business rates and from 1 July to 31 March 2022 will now receive a discount of 66% of the chargeable rates.

- The staff of the Revenues & Benefits team will continue to be pro-active in their approach to helping local businesses re-establish their trade throughout the district.

Test & Trace Support Payments

- The Revenues & Benefits team saw a decline in applications during the months of March, April and May but have experienced an upsurge in applications during the month of June.
- Overall, the trend is still far lower than Q3 and Q4 of last year.

Sundry Debtor's System

- The Revenues & Benefits team is introducing a new Sundry Debtor's System (ASH), which will "go live" during the month of July. This will replace the existing and AIMS system.

Q1 Collection Rates for Business Rates & Council Tax

- Business Rates - 20.25% (this follows £8.32million increase in collectable debit as a result in the changes to the Expanded Retail Rate Relief). Whilst it is difficult to gauge the precise position due to the re-billing, in doing some calculations the collection rate equates to 27.50%, which compares to 28.40% for 2019/20.
- Council Tax - 26.69% compared to 27.22% for 2019/20

Parking

EV Charging

- The parking team are looking into a pilot project for Electric Vehicle (EV) charging in Oakwood Hill East Car Park. InstaVolt, the UK's largest public charging network, propose to install, operate, and maintain 2x rapid EV charging points at no cost to the Council. InstaVolt will also pay the Council an annual rent for the chargers in return of a 20-year lease. We are currently reviewing InstaVolt's standard lease agreement.

Car Park and Street Furniture Maintenance Contract

- It was decided to combine the car park maintenance and street furniture contract as one contract rather than two separate contracts to achieve value for money and continuity. Following a tender exercise where we had three bidders, WH Construction Ltd scored the highest on both quality and price. WH Construction Ltd are based in the Epping and use a local supply chain, which will help EFDC to reduce its carbon footprint. This contract also features a Social Value element which will help create employment opportunities for residents. Regular meetings with the Contractor will take place to monitor and manage the contract and to ensure that EFDC maximises the benefits of Social Value.

Parking Tariffs

- Normal Car Parking Tariffs were re-introduced on 1st June in all EFDC off-street car parks