

*Report to: Finance & Performance  
Management Scrutiny Panel*

*Date of Meeting: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2010*



Subject: Measurement of Avoidable Contact – Council Result for 2009/10 and establishment of local key performance indicator for 2010/11

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Recommendations / Decisions Required:

- (a) That the Panel notes the contents of the report and the overall NI 14 result of 27.1% of Avoidable Contact for the Council for 2009/10.
- (b) That the Panel notes the decision of the Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG) to remove NI 14 from the National Indicator set and considers the value of retaining this measure as a Local Performance Indicator.
- (c) That, subject to (b) above, the Panel agrees that the future nature of this indicator be one of milestones set in the calendar to be achieved, and action-based rather than focused on a specific figure or percentage target.
- (d) That the Panel agrees that the first milestone should be the production of an improvement plan based on the results for 2009/10 and a forward plan for the current year's exercise.
- (e) That the Panel agrees that the remaining details of the milestones be determined by the Avoidable Contact Working Party and reported to a future meeting of the Panel.

Executive Summary:

This report details the completion of the NI 14 avoidable contact measuring exercise for 2009/10, reports the overall Council result and also the results for the service areas taking part. It also explains the background to the indicator and how, having been deleted as a national indicator, consideration needs to be given to retaining it as a local indicator.

Reasons for proposed recommendations / decision:

To note the data and results from the exercise to date and establish the corporate value of continuing the work already done as a local Key Performance Indicator (KPI)

## Other options considered and rejected

The avoidable contact indicator could be dropped entirely and not measured in any way. This would mean the benefits of the work to date would be lost and the identification of unnecessary customer contact and areas which could be improved would no longer take place.

A target of a specific figure or percentage of avoidable contact could be adopted but this would miss the point of the original national indicator, the essence of which was what improvements could be generated not what percentage was counted.

## Report

### 1. Background

1.1 NI 14 was a new National Indicator introduced in 2008/09 measuring the levels of avoidable contact experienced across the council in a range of key service areas.

1.2 The first year's results for NI 14 were reported to the former Customer Transformation Task & Finish Panel. The panel were keen to ensure that the data was not collected just to satisfy the requirements of the statutory indicator, but rather should be utilised to identify areas for improvement.

1.3 As part of the Smarter Government review in March 2010, the DCLG decided to remove NI 14 from the set of National Indicators councils were required to report upon, with effect from 2010/11. As a result, the Council no longer has any statutory duty to measure avoidable contact.

### 2. The Measuring Exercise

2.1 In both years of the exercise, 7 service areas were included as part of the measuring exercise. These were:

- Planning
- Finance (Benefits)
- Finance (Council Tax)
- Licencing
- Electoral Services
- Housing
- Environmental Services

2.2 Planning, Licencing, Electoral Services & Housing were measured across four week periods, Finance (Benefits), Finance (Council Tax) & Environmental Services across two weeks.

2.3 Full data and analysis of the results has been shared with each service area with a recommendation to share and discuss the results amongst all staff that were involved. A breakdown of unavoidable vs avoidable % contact was provided by service area, by week and also by channel of communication. The breakdown by channel proved to be a most useful line of data.

### 3. Top Line Results To-Date

#### (a) Avoidable Contact vs Unavoidable Contact % Split (2008/09 results in brackets)

3.1	Avoidable %	Unavoidable %
Planning	21.5% (22.6%)	78.5% (77.4%)
Finance (Benefits)	37.5% (38.4%)	62.5% (61.6%)
Finance (Council Tax)	24.4% (20.2%)	75.6% (79.8%)
Electoral Services	0.0% (5.7%)	100.0%(94.3%)
Licensing	19.9% (22.7%)	80.1% (77.3%)
Housing	32.4% (35.8%)	67.6% (64.2%)
Environmental Services	28.7% (24.1%)	71.3% (75.9%)
<b>EFDC Total</b>	<b>27.1% (26.9%)</b>	<b>72.9% (73.1%)</b>

#### (b) Unavoidable Contact vs Avoidable Contact % Split By Channel

3.2 One of the key patterns to emerge from the 2008/09 exercise was the increased level of avoidable contact experienced through telephone contacts. Again in 2009/10, each service's avoidable contact was broken down by channel. It highlighted that once again, with the single exception of Electoral Services, the level of Avoidable Contact experienced by telephone was higher than the overall level for all services.

3.3 The comparison is shown here and illustrates that the difference between levels of avoidable telephone contacts and the overall levels was often considerable:

	Avoidable % (Overall)	Avoidable % (Telephone)	+/- Var
Planning	21.5%	25.5%	(+4.0)
Finance (Benefits)	37.5%	57.0%	(+19.5)
Finance (Council Tax)	24.4%	38.1%	(+13.7)
Electoral Services	0.0%	0.0%	( )
Licensing	19.9%	29.0%	(+9.1)
Housing	32.4%	36.6%	(+4.2)
Environmental Services	28.7%	37.6%	(+8.9)
<b>EFDC Total</b>	<b>27.1%</b>	<b>35.4%</b>	<b>(+8.3)</b>

3.4 From a total number of telephone contacts recorded across the Council of 10141, this meant that 3585 calls were classified as avoidable. Of these, 1308 were a result of poor call transfer / poor signposting, 1020 were progress chasing, 955 were a result of unnecessary clarification, 236 were repeat notifications of information and 66 resulted from premature closure of contacts.

3.5 In discussion meetings with services following the exercise, this key data was highlighted and identified as an important area to focus efforts to improve service delivery and reduce future levels of avoidable contact.

(c) Percentage Split of Avoidable Contact by Type of Avoidable Contact (% for Telephone Avoidable Contact shown in brackets)

	Key:				
	UC	PCT	RN	PC	PREM
	Unnecessary clarification				
	Poor call transfer / poor signage				
	Repeat notification of same information				
	Progress chasing				
	Premature closure of a previous contact				
	UC	PCT	RN	PC	PREM
	%	%	%	%	%
Planning	29.4	35.0	11.5	22.7	1.5
	(32.2)	(33.6)	(3.1)	(29.6)	(1.5)
Finance (Benefits)	41.9	19.6	15.2	22.5	0.8
	(44.6)	(19.3)	(12.0)	(23.4)	(0.8)
Finance (Council Tax)	28.1	51.1	10.9	8.8	1.1
	(28.1)	(52.7)	(8.5)	(10.0)	(0.7)
Electoral Services	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Licensing	15.0	15.0	25.0	44.0	1.0
	(9.5)	(17.9)	(23.8)	(47.6)	(1.2)
Housing	19.9	49.4	7.1	20.2	3.4
	(19.3)	(50.0)	(5.6)	(21.4)	(3.7)
Environmental Services	19.1	26.6	4.3	48.8	1.2
	(19.9)	(23.7)	(4.4)	(50.8)	(1.1)
<b>EFDC Total</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>36.5</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>1.8</b>
	<b>(26.6)</b>	<b>(36.5)</b>	<b>(6.6)</b>	<b>(28.5)</b>	<b>(1.8)</b>

#### 4. Observations

4.1 Avoidable contact for the Council as a whole was 27.1%. This is the figure that has been reported as part of the National Indicator Set for 2009/10.

4.2 Telephone avoidable contact for the Council as a whole was 35.4%.

4.3 The results for all directorates have been distributed to their management teams. Sharing and discussion of the results is key. It is acknowledged that the recording process would have been inconvenient for the staff involved and would have been an extra daily task to perform. It is essential therefore that they see the results of their efforts and are consulted for feedback on the exercise and suggestions for service improvements to reduce avoidable contact. Service areas should analyse & distribute their results and then set up team meetings to discuss

4.4 Last year's exercise did not generate significant improvement initiatives and in conducting briefings this year, the communication of the message behind avoidable contact was hampered by not being able to demonstrate real examples of enhancements that came out of the previous exercise. If the exercise is to have any likelihood of future success, this year's exercise needs to generate real, beneficial ideas and improvements. Ensuring this happens can only be helped by making sure the results are shared and the staff's opinions are sought on what they think will improve our levels of avoidable contact. Feedback received during briefings suggested that there are ideas for improvement amongst the services but these need to be tapped into and acted upon.

4.5 Once the staff have been consulted, an Avoidable Contact Improvement Action Plan should be drawn up which addresses service level and council-wide issues. Not only will this act as a framework for improvement, but will also help to demonstrate the benefits of the exercise when rolling out the current year's exercise.

## 5. Future Approach to NI 14 - Avoidable Contact

5.1 Now that we could be moving in to the third year of analysing avoidable contact there is a good argument for a change to our future approach that meets what the Council wants to get out of the exercise rather than what we need to get in order to satisfy government requirements. As mentioned earlier, DCLG has decided to remove NI 14 from the National Indicator set. We will therefore be under no obligation to conduct the exercise next year. That said, it is hoped that the merit of the exercise has been proven and the possible benefits to be gained from it remain substantial. It is recommended that the principle of conducting an avoidable contact exercise next year be agreed, with the Avoidable Contact Working Party to come up with a strategy for any future exercise that fits the Council's corporate objectives.

5.2 Making a strong case to service staff to conduct another exercise in 2010/11 will not be an easy task. The Avoidable Contact Working Party will need to consider issues such as achieving strong management level commitment to the exercise; how do we best illustrate the benefits and improvements to come out of the exercise to date; how do we generate a positive attitude amongst those collecting the data towards the exercise; and how do we make the avoidable contact exercise a continual success.

5.3 It is considered important that if the work on avoidable contact is to continue it should also have the support of members and form part of the Council's own local Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The rationale behind NI 14 was never that it should be focused on specific targets or ideal percentage levels of avoidable contact. It is not therefore considered appropriate for any local key performance indicator for avoidable contact to have any percentage target set for it. Rather, it is recommended that an action-based indicator be established which sets out a plan for taking the work forward and achieving a number of milestones throughout the calendar year which contribute to the avoidable contact work.

5.4 Such milestones could include some, none or all of the following examples:

- development of an improvement action plan based on the previous year's results and which covers both service specific and council wide initiatives;
- design and implementation of the current year's exercise and identification of areas to be measured and timetable for rollout;
- briefing panel members on the proposed programme of measurement for the current year;
- briefing panel members of progress to date against the improvement action plan;
- reporting throughout the year on the results of measuring exercises undertaken
- full report and review at the end of the year

The exact nature of the milestones should be determined by the Avoidable Contact Working Party at its next meeting and submitted to the Finance & Performance Management Scrutiny Panel for approval.

5.5 In adopting this action-based, milestone approach it is hoped that the indicator would fit with the Panel's wish that all Key Performance Indicators be 'measurable' on a quarterly basis and it could therefore be considered as part of the Panel's programme of meetings alongside the full suite of KPIs.

## 6. Conclusion

6.1 Whilst the Council's result of 27.1% is not to be considered as either good or bad, the exercise highlights many opportunities for improvement of the customer experience and for the reduction of avoidable contacts.

6.2 Given our freedom to now design our own avoidable contact approach to gain the most that we can from the exercise, the Council should focus its efforts over the coming months on identifying ways of connecting the key improvement opportunities with its own corporate priorities and designing a future approach to avoidable contact which continues to address key areas of concern and generate results and data of real value.

6.3 Central to ensuring the continued value of conducting these exercises, will be the establishment of a local, avoidable contact Key Performance Indicator against which progress and achievements can be monitored and reported.

### Resource implications:

There are no specific cost implications arising out of the recommendations of this report, as analysis and improvement plan design will come out of existing resources. Any future improvements identified as part of the exercise which have resource implications will be considered when appropriate.

### Legal and Governance Implications:

The Council's legal obligations to report its level of avoidable contact against National Indicator NI 14 will cease with the reporting of the figure for 2009/10. If agreed, a new local Key Performance Indicator will be established.

### Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

There are no specific implications.

### Consultation Undertaken:

The approach to NI 14 was discussed and planned via the NI 14 Working Party. Individual service areas were consulted prior to sampling on how they thought it would work best in their environments

Subsequent consultation with the staff involved at service level was recommended to all services when their results were published.

### Impact Assessments:

#### Risk Management

The respective service director will identify any risk management issues arising from proposals for future improvement in respect of the reduction of levels of avoidable contact.

#### Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications?

No. However, the respective Service Director will identify any equality and diversity issues arising from proposals for future improvement in respect the reduction of levels of avoidable contact

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? N/A

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process? N/A

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group? N/A