

# **Report to Finance & Performance Management Scrutiny Panel**



**Date of meeting: 21<sup>st</sup> June 2011**

**Subject: Measurement of Avoidable Contact (LPI NI 14) - Out-turn of 2010/11 exercises and future work**

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) That the results of the 2010/11 Avoidable Contact exercises and progress and against the Action Plan be noted; and
- (2) That the Panel approves a cessation in the work relating to Avoidable Contact and that there is a change in focus looking at customer services more generally.

## **Reason for decision:**

To note the results and conclusions from the work of the Avoidable Contact Working Party in 2010/11 and to approve a change in approach to look at customer services more generally.

## **Other options considered and rejected:**

To continue the work focusing on Avoidable Contact.

## **Report:**

- 1 In June 2010, the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel asked that the Council's work on Avoidable Contact continue although the requirements of undertaking such work had been removed as a National Indicator. To this end the former Corporate Executive Forum established a Working Party to progress work in this area. At the September meeting of the Scrutiny Panel an action plan was presented resulting from the outcomes of the 2009/10 exercise and a programme of Avoidable Contact exercises was created beginning in quarter 3 of 2010/11 and monitored through a Local Performance Indicator.
- 2 Progress against the Action Plan can be seen in Appendix 1. With regards to the Avoidable Contact exercises for 2010/11 these were undertaken in two ways and it was decided to expand the range of services included. For those services that were part of the previous legislative regime and had consequently undertaken exercises for the previous two years the 2010/11 exercises focussed on telephone contact. For the services that had not previously undertaken the work the exercise was carried out across all the customer channels – telephone, correspondence, e-mail and face-to-face. A summary of the results of the exercises are attached as Appendix 2 along with some observations from the results.

- 3 From the 2010/11 exercises the results show an overall drop in Avoidable Contact to 20.5%. However, whilst the figure is a consideration the on-going focus of the exercise was to generate improvements in customer service. It was apparent from the services that had undertaken the exercise previously and the areas with the highest numbers of contacts, little new useful data was gained and the continuation of the exercise in these areas would not be considered an effective use of resources. With regard to the services undertaking the exercise for the first time there were mixed results. Some services did not receive sufficient customer contact to make the exercise meaningful. However, in other areas specific areas of concern were extracted from the results. For example, in Public Relations and Community Services the dominant cause of avoidable contact was e-mail spam. Whilst this does not directly affect the customer it is a waste of valuable resource in dealing with the e-mails. The second principal finding relates to information desks, particularly at the Civic Offices, whereby the information desk is handling contacts which could have been avoided if improved signage had directed customers to the appropriate area. From the customer experience it is clearly better to be directed to the correct place first time, although the information desk staff are there to provide such assistance. There are examples of out of date signage around the building such as references to the Youth Training Scheme on the main list of services which is repeated on the staircase signage. Another example relates to the main Housing reception area which refers customers to the Housing Repairs desk opposite which then states it is closed and refers the customer to a phone. Signposting however is not restricted to physical signs and across services there is merit in looking corporately at how customers are signposted through the internet and via the switchboard.
- 4 Another potential benefit lies in formalising in some way the activities handled by information desks and other offices around the district. Many arrangements are informal and therefore not advertised by the Council to the customers. Examples include cheque payments being accepted at Traps Hill Library and the acceptance of Benefit claim forms and other documents at the Debden Housing Office. Recognition of the additional duties undertaken by these locations and their promotion would make more customers aware of these services.
- 5 In conclusion, from the results of the Avoidable Contact exercises there are areas of customer service that could benefit from additional work, namely around reviewing the areas of e-mail spam, signposting and the use of outlying offices. It is recommended that the work relating to specifically Avoidable Contact is ceased and that work progressing customer services more generally would be a more productive use of resources.

#### **Resource implications:**

There are currently no resource implications.

#### **Legal and Governance Implications**

Local Performance Indicator NI 14.

#### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications**

There are no specific implications.

#### **Consultation Undertaken**

All Directorates are represented on the Working Party.

### **Impact Assessments:**

#### **Risk Management**

No risk management issues have been identified.

#### **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

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