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| Committee: | Executive | Agenda Item No.: | 7. |
| Date: | 7 th November 2011 | Status | Open |
| Category | 2. Decision within the functions of Executive | | |
| Subject: | Contact Centre Review 2011 | | |
| Report by: | Director of Corporate Resources | | |
| Other Officers Involved | Head of Customer Service and Performance | | |
| Director | Director of Corporate Resources | | |
| Relevant Portfolio Holder | Councillor E. Watts, Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Policy and Performance | | |

RELEVANT CORPORATE AIMS

CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICES – Providing excellent customer focused services.

The Contact Centre service primary aim is to deliver excellent customer focused services whilst remaining within budget.

TARGETS

Not applicable.

VALUE FOR MONEY

This report details the current performance and budget pressures within the Contact Centre service and how better value for money can be achieved.

THE REPORT

The Contact Centre service has worked hard to meet national standards for customer service. In 2007 the Contact Centre achieved Charter Mark status. The certification continued for three years with an annual compliance check. Over the three years partial compliance areas gradually reduced as further improvements were made to the service. In 2010 the Contact Centre achieved the new Customer Excellence award and played a key role when the Council achieved corporate accreditation earlier this year. However the service is currently under performing and has over the last year been struggling to meet the standards set by the Council. The service is also experiencing severe budget pressures as a result of reductions in staffing numbers.

Below is a table which illustrates the service performance from 2006 to March 2011.

| | 2006/07 | % | 2007/08 | % | 2008/09 | % | 2009/10 | % | 2010/11 | % |
|--|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|----------|---------|-----|
| Calls Received | 101305 | | 97293 | | 97761 | | 92581 | | 93642 | |
| Calls Answered | 70805 | 70% | 76467 | 79% | 84931 | 87% | 84660 | 91% | 81443 | 87% |
| Calls Abandoned | 30500 | 30% | 20826 | 21% | 12830 | 13% | 7921 | 9% | 12199 | 13% |
| % of calls answered within 20 seconds | 39 | | 47 | | 64 | | 77 | | 72 | |
| % of calls answered outside 20 seconds | 61 | | 53 | | 36 | | 23 | | 28 | |
| Average wait time to be answered | 01:52 | | 01:35 | | 00:48 | | 00:27 | | 00:37 | |
| Average wait time before abandoning | 02:07 | | 02:09 | | 01:41 | | 01:25 | | | |
| Face to face volumes | 72964 | | 71327 | | 72405 | | 69830 | | 68094 | |
| Visitor volumes | 9352 | | 7109 | | 5729 | | 6044 | | 6420 | |
| Switchboard volumes | 122086 | | 80562 | | 59713 | | Nil | | Nil | |
| Cheque volumes | 26415 | | 22360 | | 19050 | | 16804 | | 16898 | |
| Cash volumes | 107504 | | 105233 | | 101320 | | 96934 | | 89953 | |
| Counter Card | | | 4580 | | 6694 | | 8824 | | 13259 | |
| Debit Card/telephone (CC only) | 3016 | | 1494 | | 2398 | | | | 4468 | |
| Postal Payments | | | | | | | 1704 | 2 months | 11191 | |

Between April and September 2011 the telephone abandonment rate has been running at an average 18%, reaching a peak of 23% in both May and June.

As a result in a reduction of staffing from a peak of 26.85 FTE in 2009 to 22.17 FTE currently, management have struggled to keep the service operational across four centres and a number of channels (face-to-face, telephone, payments, postal, email).

Throughout 2011 the service has frequently been running with minimum staffing levels. In addition the overtime budget for 2011/12 (£6,180) has already been fully spent. This budget is used to cover sickness/ annual leave and to ensure the service is open to the public. As previously stated the budget is not realistic and needs to be £25,000 per year based on the current staff size and service level. Other 'savings' are now being used to temporarily maintain the service. In addition the staff have approximately 543 hours owed to them which we are currently unable allow as time off. Also the service currently has a reception post at Bolsover but no allocated budget which is creating added staffing pressures. Sickness absence is increasing as the pressures amplify. The lack of staffing resource and overtime budget is pushing the service into crisis. We have already on one occasion had to close on a Saturday due to insufficient resources.

The Contact Centre Service has been the subject of three previous reviews to address staffing levels and performance which have resulted in only minor changes to how the service operates. Over the last few months a number of options have been presented to members and senior officers to address the under performance and budget pressures. These options have been backed up with details of performance levels and channel transactions/volumes. One option which was explored in more depth was the possibility of closing the service on Saturday mornings.

Currently all four Contact Centres open to the public from 9.00 am to 12.30 pm every Saturday with staff working 8.45 am – 12.45 pm to allow setting up systems and cashing up. We have eight members of staff working (two members of staff in each office) to cover the whole service. Through the year we open approximately 49 Saturdays. It costs approximately £20,000 per annum in staffing costs (not including on costs) to deliver the basic Saturday service plus additional costs for lighting, heating etc for four buildings.

Our statistics show that the Contact Centres are less used on Saturdays than any other day of the week. Transactions have fallen from on average 300 per Saturday (split across four centres) in 2009 to 279 in 2011. In contrast 443 transactions on average are made during an equivalent mid week period.

A further consideration is that there is no ICT support available to Contact Centres on a Saturday morning. If any of the systems go down Contact Centre staff are forced to operate manual systems which are both time consuming and generates more work when the service resumes.

The Council already provide customers with a variety of 24/7 electronic channels for making contact and paying bills. Those with access to the internet can pay on line, fill in a form, get further information and report problems. We also operate an automated 24/7 payment line as well as opening the telephones at 8.00 am every weekday morning.

A number of partner issues will need to be resolved with Bolsover and South Normanton Contact Centres if a decision to close is made. These are minor considerations. Out of hours emergency cover arrangements would remain the same.

Although it is noted that any closure of service is a reduction in service to customers the Council has a duty to ensure services are providing value for money for all residents. Currently only a small percentage of residents are using and benefiting from the Saturday service. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed on the possible impact of closure on Saturday. No adverse impact on recognised equality groups has been identified. Customers will need to be notified of the closure.

Clearly this proposal has not been presented to members without careful consideration. If Saturday opening was to cease 1,600 staff hours could be utilised Monday to Friday in order to improve performance, remove the urgent budget pressure and meet customer service targets, thus improving the overall service to all customers.

ISSUES/OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The contents of the report.

IMPLICATIONS

Financial: Within existing budgets, with possible savings on heating, lighting etc.
Legal: None
Human Resources: Employees and the unions have been consulted. No comments have been received.

RECOMMENDATIONS that

- 1. Elected Members agree that due to the budget pressures and current low levels of performance that the Contact Centre service is withdrawn on Saturday mornings from early 2012.**
- 2. The exact closure date be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader.**

REASON FOR DECISION TO BE GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONSTITUTION

To address resourcing issues within the Contact Centre service

ATTACHMENTS: No
FILE REFERENCE: N/a
SOURCE DOCUMENT: N/a