

WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 JULY 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

CUSTOMER SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report is the annual update on the work of the Customer Services teams. It highlights key areas of delivery, performance, successes and challenges and shows the breadth of the service as the corporate contact point of much of the Council. It also includes future plans for further development.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Customer Services provides three main access channels, face to face, telephone and the web. Staff working within Customer Services receive a wide range of training and development. This helps to resolve enquiries on first contact with the Council, and to provide the relevant information and advice to enable informed decisions.

3. CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY UPDATE

3.1 The Customer Services Development Team works alongside departments to improve their processes; ensure that the customer facing element of the service is transparent and is easily accessed. Their remit is to support the delivery of quality and consistent service across all access channels, ensuring that individuals have a choice in how they contact the Council, in line with the Customer Access Strategy. Their objective is to work with departments to identify efficiencies.

3.2 Technical Services

3.2.1 Work has been ongoing to maximise the number of Technical Services related enquiries delivered using the corporate customer relationship management (CRM) system. The system is used initially by Customer Services staff when a member of the public contacts the Council. Improvements have been made to enhance the customer experience, by helping staff more effectively manage customer expectations. Once a service has been requested by the customer, they are informed when the service will be delivered or what action will follow. If the Council does not provide the service, the customer is given advice on who does, which reduces unnecessary referrals to departments, thus reducing the overall cost of service delivery. Improvements have also been made for customers where there is a charge for the service as payment can be accepted at the point of contact by credit/debit card.

- 3.2.2 Improvements to the way in which household waste enquiries, fly tipping and abandoned and nuisance vehicles are recorded now means that the Call Centre can direct the call to the right place in the Technical Services Department, enabling the Department to trace and report on all enquiries. This has improved the customer experience and reduced overall administration costs.
- 3.2.4 The CRM system now integrates with the system used by the household waste contractor, Biffa. This enables Customer Services to have the most up to date information in terms of waste collections. Other benefits are as follows:
- Customers receive a speedier response as the enquiry is now directed to crews whilst on the round
 - Front-of-house staff have more current information with regard to completion of rounds and specific bins which have not been presented for collection
 - No training will be required for front-of-house staff to access the contractors system as this now fully integrates with CRM.
 - It is a step towards the vision of “customer self-service” where a customer is able to log onto the Wirral Council website, report a missed bin collection and track progress to resolution.
- 3.2.5 In total savings in excess of £30,000 have been achieved through re-engineering various waste and traffic related services using CRM.

3.3 Adult Social Services

- 3.3.1 Following a restructure within the Department of Adult Social Services, the majority of the access workers on the Central Advice and Duty Team, within the Call Centre, moved to new roles in locality offices. A new Call Centre team was recruited to deliver a first level signposting and referral service relating to Social Service enquiries. The team was successfully introduced on 2 November 2009, following two weeks of intensive training. Performance to date has been very positive.
- 3.3.2 The adaptation service has been streamlined and this has reduced the cost and timescales of service delivery, by ensuring that occupational therapy needs assessments are proportionate to the service requested. This has been achieved by using a self assessment form that provides relevant information without the need for an interview or home visit.

3.4 Emergency Duty Team (EDT)

- 3.4.1 A project is currently being undertaken to identify refinements for improving the DASS/CYPD out of hours service. Several options are being reviewed to determine which is the most effective and sustainable way forward for the current team to operate in the future.

3.5 Children and Young People

3.5.1 As already detailed the Central Advice and Duty Team within the Call Centre has recently reformed following the existing staff transfer to posts within the Department of Adult Social Services. The new team responds to telephone contact regarding children's social care issues, by initially identifying if the case is already known to the department and if so, logging and referring the call to the appropriate team. If the contact is a new case they refer it to the CYPD duty team currently situated on site. Signposting to other services is also provided by the team.

3.6 Corporate Systems

3.6.1 Text messaging has recently been implemented as a cost effective additional access channel for customers. This has initially been utilised in a number of pilot areas. Customers are now given the opportunity to receive a text message reminder when they book a bulky waste collection (ERIC). They can also contact the Council by text message, if they suspect somebody is committing Housing/Council Tax Benefit fraud. The School Governor Service is also using the service to remind attendees when meetings and training sessions are planned. Future plans are to roll out the service to other departments by using this as the corporate system for text messaging.

3.5.2 A method by which job applications are scanned and confirmed is being piloted at the One Stop Shops. This solution will then be used to introduce scanning to other service areas to reduce administration costs, and improve service delivery.

3.7 Regeneration

3.7.1 The Housing Options service has a role to ensure early intervention is undertaken for the prevention of homelessness. Initial discussions indicated that a set of questions, answers and scripts could be developed. This would enable One Stop Shop advisors to guide callers through the housing options processes and gather all the relevant details. Then, if appropriate, to book an appointment or the customer could see a specialist housing advisor. The Housing Options service was successfully implemented in all One Stop Shops earlier this year.

3.7.2 The introduction of home installation grants has resulted in the Call Centre and One Stop Shops providing a front line service for these enquiries.

4. PERFORMANCE

4.1 The Call Centre and One Stop Shops continue to monitor performance and key elements of this information are detailed below.

Total customer numbers	2008/09	2009/10
Call Centre	745,026	747,306
% of calls handled (<i>target 90%</i>)	86%	92%
emails	10,249	11,123
One Stop Shops total visits	232,825	223,368
One Stop Shops total number of enquiries	268,154	256,444

- 4.2 The 2009/10 figure for call centre performance shows an encouraging improvement of 6% in comparison to 2008/09.
- 4.2.1 Performance was affected this year by adverse weather conditions in December 2009 and January 2010 that prompted a surge of customer enquiries to the Call Centre. This was managed by providing updated information to the customer via the telephony messaging facility.
- 4.2.2 The workforce management system implemented within the Call Centre in September 2009 has contributed to the improvement in the percentage of calls handled. This has allowed the management of staff resource more effectively when peaks in call volumes occur. In addition, the new procedure for dispatching Council Tax Benefit notification with the annual Council Tax bill has reduced the number of enquiries received in March which has enabled the Call Centre to respond to callers more effectively.
- 4.3 The One Stop Shops have seen 223,368 customers generating 256,444 enquiries during 2009/10. The electronic Interview Logging system allows accurate recording of customer volumes and multiple enquiries. The system is being further refined so that it is web based which will make it easier for changes to be introduced in the future. Further enhancements include the introduction of a post code, which will provide improved information in terms of customer insight.

- 4.4. The top ten customer requests at the One Stop Shops:

Service Area	2008/09	2009/10	+/- %
Housing Benefit	88,769	92,777	+4.5%
Wirral Homes	31,839	33,107	+4%
Council Tax	36,435	39,134	+7.5%
Adult Social Services	22,061	21,646	-1.8%
Children and Young People	12,535	11,464	-8.5%
Wirral Partnership Homes	15,514	10,083	-52.5%
Regeneration	8,602	7,823	-9.8%
Technical Services	9,002	8,164	-10.3%
Homeless	5,303	5,728	+9%
Non Council Enquiries	12,139	14,567	+20%

4.4.1. Resolution rates within the One Stop Shops

Service Area	2007/08	2008/09
H.B.	68.9%	73.1%
Council Tax	86.4%	87.4%
CYPD	99.0%	99.1%
DASS	97.8%	98.0%
Wirral Homes	97.3%	98.3%
WPH	97.4%	96.6%
Regeneration	96.0%	96.0%

4.4.2 The ethos within One Stop Shops is to resolve at first point of contact. Wirral has a highly transactional service when compared to other local authorities in the Merseyside area and nationally.

4.4.3 The transactional nature of the One Stop Shops is shown through the work carried out for the Revenues and Benefits teams when One Stop Shop advisors are not directly dealing with customers. In 2009/10 the teams processed 8,537 items of Revenues and Benefits work.

4.5 One Stop Shops Performance Indicators

	2008/09 Target	2008/09 Actual	2009/10 Target	2009/10 Actual	2010/11 Target
% waited 15 mins or less for interview	89%	88.6%	90%	89.3%	90%
% interviewed for 20 mins or less	82%	79.5%	82%	79.6%	79%

4.5.1 Indicators have shown that people are waiting slightly longer, but the added value of staff being able to respond to multiple enquiries in one visit has kept customer satisfaction levels high in terms of waiting times.

4.5.2 In 2010/11 there will be more services re-engineered for delivery through the One Stop Shops and the Call Centre. Therefore, performance indicators have been reviewed and adjusted in order to reflect this. New indicators are now set for 2010/11 which focuses upon the percentage of queries resolved at the first point of contact in One Stop Shops and customer satisfaction levels of the overall One Stop Shop service.

5. FOCUS ON CUSTOMER SERVICE

5.1 Customer Care Standards

5.1.1 A peer review exercise is currently under way to assess awareness of, and performance against, the Corporate Customer Care Standards. Should this exercise identify the need for further training and awareness initiatives, then I will review what additional supporting resources are required. It is imperative that the customer standards which are endorsed by the Council are acted upon by all staff so that members of the public can be assured of a consistent level of service.

5.2 Customer Surveys

5.2.1 A customer survey was carried out in September 2009, which aimed to establish levels of satisfaction with service delivery. Satisfaction levels were generally high among those surveyed.

5.3 Customer Focus Group

5.3.1 To assist in understanding customer needs and preferences, a customer focus group has recently been set up. This comprised a group of local residents and was used to explore and define what constitutes good customer service. An independent facilitator helped generate discussion and responses on subjects such as contacting the Council and preferences in doing so. The intention is to use such direct consultation, supported by customer feedback analysis, satisfaction surveys and exit interviews to provide the services customers require, at the appropriate time and using the most relevant delivery channel.

5.4 Mystery Shopping

5.3.1 As part of the ongoing commitment to continuously improve service delivery, Customer Services undertook a mystery shopping exercise between June and September 2009. The exercise measured various factors relating to customer care performance delivered through the Call Centre and One Stop Shops. Overall the exercise reported a generally good or excellent service was being provided. Some areas for improvement were identified and as a result an action plan has been developed to address these outcomes within agreed timescales.

5.4.2 The outcomes from the survey, focus group and mystery shopping exercise are being developed into an action plan which will be incorporated into the Customer Access Strategy as it is imperative that feedback is provided to participants and customers about what is being implemented from the process.

6. ASSESSMENT OF CUSTOMER SERVICES WORK

6.1 Access to Services

6.1.1 The Audit Commission Access to Services inspection team ranked provision of services at two stars, on a scale of zero to three stars, with promising prospects for improvement. Building on this positive assessment, the Authority has continued to progress the recommendations to ensure that services are provided in ways that customers want.

6.2 Charter Mark

6.2.1 An on-site review took place in January 2010 when Customer Services demonstrated continuing compliance with and commitment to the Charter Mark standard.

6.2.2 The review focussed on performance, consultation and communication. The assessor spent a considerable time visiting the Call Centre and One Stop Shops. He noted "...good examples of improved performance through an increase in services provided through the Customer Relationship Management system." Partnership working has increased in the One Stop Shops, with Wirral Partnership Homes, Job Centre Plus, Money Made Clear and Health Trainers. A new Central Advice and Duty Team has been set up for Social Services within the Call Centre. Productivity has increased in the Call Centre since the implementation of the Workforce Management System.

6.2.3 Customers whom the assessor met, felt that the information they were given at the time was good, and the process with the Advisors was easy, encouraging and reassuring. Partners stated that the partnership working 'ticked all the boxes' and provided value for money to the end user.

6.3 Investors in People

6.3.1 As part of the corporate assessment for the Investors in People Standard a number of staff from the Customer Services Section were interviewed by the internal reviewers, successfully contributing to the Department and Council as a whole reaching the required standard. The Assessors confirmed in November 2009 they were "satisfied beyond any doubt that Wirral Council continues to meet the requirements of the Standard."

6.4 Wirral Alcohol Services Harm Reduction Team Award

6.4.1 The One Stop Shops have been working in partnership with the Harm Reduction Team since April 2007 who in turn have trained One Stop Shop advisors to identify, screen and refer clients where necessary. The One Stop Shops won an award in October 2009 for the completion of the most alcohol audit forms during that quarter, only previously won by the NHS Healthy Hearts Team. Such joint working was a first nationally and this partnership initiative was highly commended at the Municipal Journal Awards in 2008.

6.5 Equality Framework for Local Government

6.5.1 In November 2009, Wirral successfully achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard Local Government (ESLG) underlining the Council commitment to embedding equality in all that it does, of which Customer Services is a key part given its role in the organisation. The assessor expressed appreciation of the learning approach, adding that Wirral did not just meet the necessary criteria, but met it with significant strength.

6.6 Environmental Management System (EMS)

6.6.1 In November 2009 the Finance Department was recommended to have continued certification to ISO14001 following a Surveillance Audit which included a site visit to a One Stop Shop. The EMS serves as a tool to continually improve environmental performance and continued compliance demonstrates that Customer Services are fully aware of their obligation for environmental concerns and that important emphasis is placed on that factor.

6.7 IRRV

6.7.1 The Authority has been shortlisted for the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV) performance award for 'Excellence in Customer Service' which is a significant achievement given that it is a coveted national award. The Authority will be visited on 2 August 2010 to assess qualification to become a finalist.

7. COMPLAINTS

7.1 The CRM system is used to record, progress and analyse customer feedback, excluding statutory complaints in Adult Social Services and Children's Social Care. The challenge is to consistently record and respond to feedback received across all Council departments. Departmental customer feedback co-ordinators take responsibility for ensuring contacts are recorded in the CRM, with supporting information, assigned to the relevant officer for a response and that a reply is sent out within the agreed timescale. Co-ordinators meet regularly to raise issues (escalation to Customer Services Group), share best practice and communicate departmental changes.

7.2 The approach to customer feedback has improved since the corporate process was implemented and the Customer Care Standards re-launched. Departments recognise a standard definition of 'what is a complaint' and commit to a standard process for dealing with these contacts. Effective comparison between service areas and departments can be undertaken, providing vital information on what customers are contacting the Council about and identifying where service improvements are required. The challenge is to maintain this consistency and drive service improvements, under the aspiration that a complaint system is about 'putting things right and learning from it'.

- 7.3 The reporting period of 2009/10 showed a 5% increase in corporate complaints received over the previous 12 months, compared to a 22% increase reported in 2008/09. A single issue again dominated 2009/10 complaint figures (as with the Strategic Asset Review in 2008/09) with the adverse weather conditions experienced in quarter 4 affecting delivery of key services such as refuse collection which recorded 359 stage 1 complaints in January 2010. The improved collation of complaints data across departments was also a contributing factor, in comparison to previous under-reporting.
- 7.4 The overall resolution rate for corporate complaints (measured against 15 working days) continued to improve from 85% in 2007/08 to 87% in 2008/09 and 90.5% in 2009/10. This is a clear indication of the effective support provided by departmental customer feedback coordinators in progress chasing complaints to ensure the complainant is responded to within the agreed timescale whenever possible.
- 7.5 Only 5% of stage 1 complainants registered their continued dissatisfaction by making a stage 2 complaint. This fell to 2% (of total complainants) for stage 3 complaints.
- 7.6 From 1 April 2009 the Finance Department took over responsibility for liaising with the Local Government Ombudsman and recorded 79 separate contacts in 2009/10, with only 4 full investigations instigated.
- 7.7 A total of 3,865 Councillor or MP contacts were recorded in 2009/10 across all services. A total of 843 compliments over all service areas were recorded in 2009/10.
- 7.8. The annual report of complaint handling was presented to Standards Committee on 21 June 2010.
- 7.9 **National Indicator – NI14- Avoidable Contact**
- 7.9.1 The approach to this indicator was to focus on monitoring key services, informed by the Customer Access Strategy. By setting the minimum requirement of data collection of capturing service type, channel and type of avoidable contact an overall rate of 28.7% avoidable contact was reported in April 2010 for Wirral, compared to 24.4% in 2008/09. The national average has yet to be reported for 2009/10 with 22% reported in 2008/09.
- 7.9.2 In April 2010, confirmation was received the Government that this indicator has been removed from the national reporting framework and there will no longer be a requirement to submit an annual figure as a national indicator. Locally the intention is to continue using the methodology developed as a tool for business analysis and identifying service re-engineering priorities. In essence a high level of avoidable contact can suggest a service is worthy of review and suitable for the implementation of more efficient processes

8. WORKING WITH OTHERS

- 8.1 Against the backdrop of deprivation, financial uncertainty, rising unemployment and the need to achieve efficiencies, Customer Services continue to provide innovative and excellent services to residents. The work is linked to the Corporate Plan and Vision - to build and create a more prosperous and equal Wirral, improve health and well being for all and to create an excellent Council.
- 8.2 As the Audit Commission outlined in the Access to Services report it is the cutting edge approach to working with others where customers benefit significantly. With the current economic climate and its associated pressures, the services offered by the OSS are as relevant as ever. They are based in the heart of local communities which allows staff to build up a trusted relationship with customers. This makes the sites ideal venues for complementary partnership services, allowing holistic delivery of services tailored to that individual - helping to achieve the overall aim to improve the health and well being of Wirral people and improve their prospects.
- 8.3 Currently the One Stop Shops work with:

- **Alcohol Services' Harm Reduction Team**

The Team was set up in February 2007 to address plans in the Government Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy. Since April 2007, Customer Services have worked in conjunction with the Team, as they use the One Stop Shops as venues in which to schedule appointments to see their clients. As mentioned previously, the OSS won an award in October 2009 for the completion of the most alcohol audit forms during that quarter, only previously won by the NHS Healthy Hearts Team. Such joint working was a first nationally having been highly commended at the Municipal Journal Awards in 2008.

- **Wirral Working 4 Health (WW4H)**

WW4H is a new community based programme for people on working age related benefits (Incapacity Benefit, Income Support, Employment Support Allowance and Job Seekers Allowance) who want to get back into work, education or training, and employees on sick leave who want to get back into work. They use a range of One Stop Shops on an ad hoc surgery basis.

- **Primary Care Advice Liaison Service (PCAL)**

PCAL continues to use the One Stop Shops to see clients who have been referred to them via GP's. They hold a surgery on an appointment basis aimed at people who are suffering from a mild to moderate mental health problem. Funded by Wirral PCT, it is run by Wirral CAB in conjunction with Advocacy in Wirral, to provide specialist advice and support on issues such as debt, welfare benefits, employment, and housing and consumer advice. This has been a great success highlighted by the use of the dedicated Polish Advice worker at Rock Ferry, New Brighton and Birkenhead OSS.

- **Working Links**

Working Links is dedicated to getting the long-term unemployed back to work, and retaining their employment, by matching people looking for work with businesses with recruitment needs. They continue to use the OSS to see clients, and advisors are very proactive in referring customers onto them which has been very successful.

- **Wirral Change**

Wirral Change is a Black and Racial Minorities Outreach Service offering information, advice and guidance on jobs, education, training and self-employment, as well as signposting to other services for racial minority people on the Wirral. They use Birkenhead One Stop Shop on an appointment basis to see clients.

- **Money Made Clear**

Financial advice is provided at OSS through this A4E initiative which is backed by the Financial Services Authority and the Government. Recognising the current financial difficulties faced by a growing number of Wirral residents they use the OSS to deliver a free face to face money guidance service, with no restrictions placed on who can access the service. The surgeries provide impartial guidance on money matters that shape everyday lives such as debt, budgeting, saving and borrowing and are aimed entirely at addressing individual needs.

- **Health Action Area Teams**

Closer working with partners from NHS Wirral has seen surgeries provided by Health Trainers at a number of One Stop Shops in order to address the health inequalities found in Wirral. They offer a free lifestyle assessment to see exactly what support is needed and they can give more information about activities and courses to help people make that first step to a healthier lifestyle.

- **Smoking Cessation**

Using the One Stop Shop network the NHS provides one to one meetings with a trained member of staff. Issues that might affect quitting can be discussed and patients can decide on the best therapy to help them quit.

- **Condition Management Programme Team**

The NHS Condition Management Programme Team uses Moreton and Bebington One Stop Shops to work with customers who suffer from mental and physical conditions and provide one to one confidential support with a registered health professional in order to help them back into work.

- **Sencia**

Sencia works with customers to help clients achieve their personal goals. Including developing their skills and expertise to help secure meaningful and sustainable employment. They use Moreton OSS to provide a complementary service alongside those offered by the Jobcentre Plus, Condition Management Programme Team, and Shaw Trust. This enables each element of the particular service to link together in providing a seamless service in helping customers take steps towards moving back into the job market.

- **Shaw Trust**

Shaw Trust is a national charity which supports disabled and disadvantaged people to prepare for work, find jobs and live more independently and again they work from Moreton OSS.

- **Merseyside Police**

The Police continue to use a number of the One Stop Shops to run Community Surgeries. West Kirby One Stop Shop is used by the Police as a "Police Point" staffed by both Police and vetted Police volunteers who provide a more visible presence within the area. It has been extremely successful as it allows officers to remain in the local area rather than travelling back to the Police Station and provides a visible presence to the local community – proven by nearly 400 contacts in 2009-10.

- **Pension Service**

The Pension Service continues to use various One Stop Shops on a regular basis and it continues to be a very well used and liked service. In 2009/10 over 1,600 customers accessed the service via One Stop Shops.

- **Jobcentre Plus**

The One Stop Shops have been working successfully from within Job Centre Plus offices for a number of years and this has now been reciprocated to include Job Centre Plus staff being based in Moreton One Stop Shop with expansion planned to Birkenhead OSS.

- **Age Concern**

Age Concern continues to use a range of One Stop Shops to see clients on an appointment basis.

- **Voluntary Community Action Wirral (VCAW)**

VCAW is now based in Heswall OSS two days a week. It is anticipated that as the Council and its partners begin to develop a commissioning strategy across the whole of the public sector in Wirral, relationships with the Third Sector will be key to successful service delivery.

- **HM REVENUE AND CUSTOMS (HMRC)**

Discussions are underway as to how the One Stop Shops can link much more closely with the HMRC service. This is as part of the Government intention to have all public services more joined up, thus making it easier for people to contact organisations.

- **Wirral Partnership Homes (WPH)**

The One Stop Shops continue to respond to enquiries in relation to WPH, the areas largest social landlord, and the service level agreement was renegotiated in March 2010 to take into account value for money considerations and new charges for the services. In line with the agreement, WPH undertakes regular mystery shopping exercises. The latest feedback commented that staff demonstrated “excellent efficiency and empathy”.

- **NHS Health Trainers**

The One Stop Shops also work with NHS Wirral Health Trainers to help people start making healthier lifestyle choices and improve their own health through support and offering free lifestyle assessments. They facilitate Health Trainer surgeries at OSS situated within the Health Action Areas and proactively promote the initiative offering to make a referral to the Health trainers if an underlying health issue is identified. The One Stop Shops were also partners in two health trailer events at Rock Ferry and Eastham.

9. COMMUNITY NETWORKING

9.1 Customer Services link to a variety of community networks that exist to aid the citizens of Wirral. OSS Managers have delivered a number of presentations and have attended meetings including:

- Neighbourhood Action Groups and Key Individual Network Meetings chaired by the Police
- Membership of the Wirral Advice Network which unites solicitors, statutory and voluntary agencies across Wirral to work in partnership and to provide quality, community-based advice services for all.
- Membership of the Race Hate Task Group and the ability to report into the newly formed Hate Crime MARAC
- Wirral Ethnic Help Advisory Group
- Religious Groups where presentations have been given on the work of Customer Services

10. CASHIERS

10.1 Payments from One Stop Shop based drop in boxes are processed at the cash office and receipt levels have remained consistent, with an overall increase in income. The cash office receives all cash along with cheque payments from over 200 Wirral establishments. There has been a large increase in receipts being processed and banked by Cashiers.

10.2 Amounts received from Drop in Boxes from April 2008 – March 2010 are as follows:

April 2008 – March 2009	April 2009 – March 2010
£NIL in Cash	£102 in Cash
£2,354,276 in Cheques	£2,472,970 in Cheques

10.3 Amounts received from Wirral School, Leisure Centres and Theatres are as follows:

April 2008 – March 2009	April 2009 – March 2010
£3,387,310 = Income	£5,602,591 = Income
31,377 Cheques item	34,127 Cheques items

10.4 Amounts received from Counter and Postal Income are as follows:

	Counter receipts	Income	Post receipts	Income
April 2008 – March 2009	98,139	£17,494,732	38,650	£30,546,163
April 2009 – March 2010	113,591	£19,357,035	26,722	£28,108,110

10.5 The total income processed through Cashiers was:

April 08 – March 09 - £48,040,895 April 09 – March 10 - £47,465,145

10.6 The cash collection contract with G4S services is continuing to run successfully. The Banking service with NatWest is also running well. It is anticipated that Cashiers receipt levels for Counter Income and Internal Establishments will increase throughout 2010.

10.7 The service recently received an internal audit inspection and as a result was termed an excellent service.

11. STUDENT SUPPORT

- 11.1 During 2009/10 4,197 student loan applications were processed. There were 2,506 online applications. The transfer strategy to the Student Loans Company by March 2011 is in place and outlines the gradual reduction in claimants and staffing. It is intended to manage this staff reduction by utilising the Council redeployment policy.
- 11.2 On a more personal level the section suffered bereavement in November 2009 which has had an impact, on a small section which is in its final year before being disbanded. It is a credit to the staff in student support that they continue to work as vigilantly as ever. I would like to take the opportunity in the annual report to thank all members of the student support team past and present for their enduring commitment to deliver their service.

12. BENCHMARKING

- 12.1 Benchmarking data remains a useful tool in comparing how Wirral is performing compared to other Authorities.
- 12.2 The Call Centre is a member of 'CallNorthWest', a support organisation for Northwest Contact Centres. Staff from the Call Centre regularly attend good practice meetings which allow open discussion and the opportunity to network with other public sector organisations. This has led to beneficial relationships being formed with organisations that face similar issues.
- 12.3 Following a piece of work carried out by the National One Stop Shop Benchmarking Club with contributions from Wirral, a redesigned customer satisfaction survey has been developed. The survey not only looks at customer satisfaction levels but also focuses on what importance customers place on the various aspects of the service. The results have shown that although customers may be satisfied with certain aspects of the service, they don't always place the same level of importance on them. Customers have identified that the greatest importance is placed on the convenience, accessibility and location of sites along with staff attitude and knowledge.
- 12.4. This has informed the way in which I now recruit and train staff with a greater emphasis on the importance of Customer Service. It has also led the way in the future development of a comprehensive on line 'staff procedure manual' which will provide advisers with up to date information, working procedures and other relevant links at the touch of a button.

13. WEBSITE DEVELOPMENTS

13.1 New Website

13.1.1 A new website was launched on 18 May 2010. This work was a joint project between Customer Services, IT Services and Marketing. The site has a number of new and improved features, these include:

- A new design
- A simplified structure that will make it easier to find information
- Content that has been completely updated
- A 'Do it Online' section to show customers which services they can access through the website
- Accessibility tools for people who are partially sighted
- The ability to share pages on social networking sites such as Facebook
- A facility that enables users to give feedback on every page.

13.1.2 Reaction to the new site has been overwhelmingly positive, with reports from front of house advisors of reduced waiting times through speedier resolution to enquiries. Feedback has been received via the "Rate this page" function that has allowed identification of problems and fine tuning information to ensure the information published is accurate and as comprehensive as possible.

13.1.3 Content within the site is maintained by Marketing within Corporate Services, to ensure that all information is written in a consistent style, is accurate, concise and through working closely with the departments, is constantly up to date.

13.1.4 Information Technology Services and Customer Services maintain the functionality of the site. This involves ensuring the site is technically fit for purpose, developing new functionality such as online forms, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), election results, e-petitions, and accessibility and user navigation.

13.2 Online Forms

13.2.1 The new website now provides a strong and usable platform to guide users to self service via extensive use of online forms. The IT infrastructure the site resides upon has been strengthened to cope with the increased demand that online forms would incur.

13.2.2 A series of forms has been developed jointly by the Customer Services Development Team and IT Services which integrate directly with the CRM system. This will allow customers to request a service and monitor its progress via the website. This will in turn generate work orders in the back office without any staff intervention, thus reducing the cost of service delivery. These forms are currently only available for the most basic level of service request, where no authentication or payment is required and are therefore currently limited to some Streetscene services. However plans are in place to extend the number of on-line forms developed in this way to include all services delivered using the CRM.

13.2.3 In addition, procurement is under way for an additional e-forms package which will facilitate service delivery across the Council and support on-line self-service. This solution will be used to develop on-line forms for service areas not currently being delivered using the CRM, and will thus promote the transfer of customer service delivery into the generic corporate channels (i.e. web, Call Centre and One Stop Shops). This will free up back office resources to focus on their areas of specialism, and will also improve efficiencies within Customer Services through economies of scale.

13.2.4 A development plan for the CRM is currently being progressed to make it more intuitive for users both internally and externally via on-line forms integration and to improve its functionality to support those staff that will not be using the CRM as their main service delivery tool. These improvements will reduce training requirements and therefore cost. The CRM is to be developed into the corporate citizen database, allowing better insight into customer requirements and demands, thus improving the customer experience and reducing the cost of service delivery.

14. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

14.1 The Customer Services training team has facilitated four Induction training sessions this year in order to equip new staff joining the Call Centre and One Stop Shops with the initial skills they require, and to ensure their understanding of their role. The team has also been crucial in the development of existing staff. They have delivered training to advisers and team leaders in Coaching and Feedback skills, new services introduced via the Customer Relationship Management System, and service related training for staff gaining career advancement. With a view to ensuring Customer Service Advisers are competent in handling stressful enquiries within the often busy working environment, 'Wellbeing for All' training has been designed and delivered to a number of staff, which will continue over the forthcoming months and form part of the regular training programme.

14.2 The Institute of Customer Service award scheme has now been completed with 100% pass rate for staff who participated. The division will replace the awards with the more nationally recognised NVQ training in future.

15. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

15.1 Tell Us Once

15.1.1 After being chosen as an early implementer of the 'Tell Us Once' project, the Council plans to introduce a 'Tell Us Once' bereavement service to customers of the Registrar service. This service has been piloted in a number of Local Authorities across the country, and has received very positive feedback from customers.

15.1.2 The focus is to allow people to inform central and local government just once for changes in their circumstances such as a birth or bereavement. Starting with the development of a bereavement service, customers will be offered a dedicated 'Tell Us Once' interview in conjunction with a Registrar appointment to ensure all relevant parts of the Council and partner organisations are informed in a single visit. The benefits will be reduced service delivery costs (single point of contact for all services) and the ability to disseminate important information effectively and quickly to minimise the burden placed on the customer at such an upsetting time.

15.1.3 The intention is to extend the service to births and other key changes in circumstances once the initial phase has been completed, further reducing the cost of the service whilst delivering improved resolution for the customer.

15.2 Payment Card Industry Compliance

15.2.1 The Call Centre currently utilises call recording equipment which captures a record of all calls made to and from customer service advisors situated within the Cheshire Lines Building. This software is crucial in the evaluation of the service delivered and also protects advisors should a dispute arise.

15.2.2 As a number of calls involve the taking of payments for Council services, the Authority now needs to ensure compliance with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS). PCI DSS has established a single set of standards which are designed to protect against payment card fraud or identity theft. These state that no sensitive authentication data may be stored once a transaction has been authorised.

15.2.3 This directive applies to Call Centres which use call recording equipment. Failure to be compliant could result in merchant service privileges being withdrawn and substantial fines being levied in cases of serious security breaches. I am currently in the process of identifying suppliers who can provide a system that will ensure compliance. The guidelines dictates that substantial progress towards compliance should be in evidence by July 2010.

15.3 Knowledge Management System

15.3.1 One Stop Shops are in the process of developing a web based information system for use by frontline staff. This will provide a quick reference facility for staff to check information on a particular service area. This approach will improve quality and provide clarity around the depth of response required from frontline advisers and will complement the work ongoing around the performance management framework.

15.4 Equality and Diversity

15.4.1 Customer Services is represented at the Corporate Equality & Inclusion Group and the Departmental Equality Group and plays a key role. Recent developments include:

- Customer Services have commissioned Voluntary Community Action Wirral (VCAW) to undertake a consultation exercise with the various groups of interest it represents. This will ensure the Customer Services Equality Impact Assessment will be scrutinised by as wide a range of people as possible to ensure it meets their needs and demonstrates commitment to providing representative and meaningful services to all of the Borough's diverse population. The consultation period ran from 1 March 2010 to 24 May 2010 with the results informing the forward planning objectives around Equality & Diversity.
- Customer Services are participating in the Government 'Home Access' initiative, a scheme to provide free computer access to low income households. Wirral has topped the North West table for take up of the scheme, thereby enabling many families to have internet access that might not otherwise have had the opportunity.
- A redesign of the customer service survey now provides E&D data across all strands. This will be further developed through the use of focus groups looking at issues identified during the surveys.
- Customer Services continues to seek out and engage with new partner organisations who can enhance the breadth of provision available to citizens from every demographic.

15.5 Future Web Developments

15.5.1 Teen Wirral (www.teenwirral.com) is the new website for 13 to 19 year olds. The site will be launching in July 2010, and will contain information about activities and advice for young people. Evidence shows that how young people spend their leisure-time really matters, and taking part in constructive leisure-time activities through teenage years has a number of benefits. It can help to improve attitudes to school; build social, emotional and communication skills; help young people avoid taking risks such as experimenting with drugs or becoming involved in gangs; and improve their confidence and self-esteem. Local authorities have a statutory duty to publicise positive activities, and a website is the most relevant way of communicating with young people.

15.5.2 The elections in May 2010 were successfully communicated via the web. IT Services developed a bespoke system to record and publish the results. The web pages allowed users to drill down through the various wards and parties to analyse each candidates voting scores. The website experienced a significant increase in visits on the night of the elections and a further leap on the Friday daytime during the local elections count. Additional resilience was in place to handle the surge of contacts and no contact difficulties were reported.

16. CONCLUSION

16.1. This report details the significant breadth of Customer Services and the success it continues to achieve. 2010/11 will see more services move to being handled by these access channels alongside more work with partners in Government and the voluntary sector.

17. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

17.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

18. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

18.1. There are none arising out of this report.

19. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IMPLICATIONS

19.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

20. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

20.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

21. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

21.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

22. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

22.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

23. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

23.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

24. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

24.1. There are no particular implications for any Members or wards arising out of this report.

25. BACKGROUND PAPERS

25.1. No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

26. RECOMMENDATION

26.1. That the report be noted.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE