

WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 JULY 2011

SUBJECT:	CUSTOMER SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2010-11
WARD/S AFFECTED:	<i>ALL</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>DIRECTOR OF FINANCE</i>
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	<i>COUNCILLOR JEAN STAPLETON</i>
KEY DECISION?	NO

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents the Customer Services Annual Report for 2010-11. Customer Services is at core of the Council priorities as outlined in the corporate plan. The work of the Customer Services Teams is to implement the customer access strategy. Financial savings may be achieved by more services being available online and by the rationalisation/merger of services.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

3. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That Members are aware of the work being undertaken within Customer Services.

4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The Customer Services Teams support officers by working to ensure that the main access channels, the Call Centre, the One Stop Shops and the web, provide up to date responsive advice with an ability to resolve many enquiries at first point of contact. In November 2010 the Library Service joined the Finance Department and its role will be key in extending and improving customer services both in that service and in the help it can give to services throughout the Authority and to other organisations as part of a fully co-ordinated customer contact service.

- 4.2 The Customer Services Teams now consist of staff who work in the Call Centre, Libraries and One Stop Shops, the web services manager and the Customer Service Development Team (CSDT). CSDT work with the contact points and departments to help ensure that services are delivered in an efficient and responsive manner. CSDT also looks at the feedback received from customers and uses it to improve and develop services where appropriate. The role of all staff is to reach out to those people who do not access our services and to work together with communities to ensure customer need is met.

LIBRARIES AND ONE STOP SHOP SHOPS MERGER

- 4.3. Staff within the Library and One Stop Shop service are working towards achieving the Council Minute (248) 9 December 2010; *'Cabinet instructs the Director of Finance to bring forward and implement proposals to integrate the One Stop Shop service within Libraries including the co – location of facilities where practicable. Libraries and One Stop Shops are to be managed as one seamless information service with staff interchangeable between both functions.'*
- 4.4. A new staffing structure is being developed and is subject to consultation with staff representatives. The restructure includes the creation of generic customer service assistants who combine the Library assistant and One Stop Shop reception roles. The rest of the staff in both the Library and One Stop Shop areas will support this generic work. Many will have the ability to provide a comprehensive response across a wide range of enquiries although there will remain a number of key specialist posts in both services.
- 4.5. The service will be delivered in as open an environment as possible with single counters wherever possible with space for private discussions with customers where needed, as is the traditional model for one stop shops. This change will not diminish the specialist Library and One Stop services. Cross skill training of both Library and One Stop Shop work is crucial and dedicated training staff will deliver a training programme to ensure this.
- 4.6. This is a significant change for both services but should be successful. We will pilot the merged services at two sites - Eastham and Heswall. This will give us an opportunity to ensure we have the correct staffing levels and that the staff are supported by the right systems to deliver information and advice across these two services. We may trial different opening hours, which we believe will be more responsive to customer demand. Overall there will be an increase in Library opening hours. We will learn from the pilot sites, evaluate the service provided, and amend as required for roll out to other Libraries and One Stop Shops.
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- 4.7. The Council has approved capital funding for development of merged facilities at both Rock Ferry and Bebington. Work at Rock Ferry will result in one entrance opening into an integrated facility. The building works at Bebington will be more extensive, but will result in a co-located service. Once the pilots are evaluated a roll out programme will be delivered across the Library and One Stop Shop network.
- 4.8. CSDT is working closely with the Library service to look at how they can support staff to deliver services with the reduction in staffing numbers, advances in technology and building restructuring. Their work includes:
- Web development - the Library website will now be part of the Council website, developed in such a style to ensure no loss of access
 - Reference Library - staff are being supported to allow this specialist area to be widened and increase accessibility whilst also considering which areas can be cross supported with the Archive Service
 - Bibliographical service - the staff here are working with customer services development team to review and streamline processes.
- 4.9. The co-location of Libraries and One Stop Shops will improve accessibility to all Council services for customers, with the provision of both services in one facility. It offers savings in terms of building rationalisation. There will be opportunities throughout the structure for staff from both Libraries and One Stop Shops to learn more skills for career development. Crucially there will be no detriment to the current provision of the Library service and range of Library activities. Likewise within the One Stop Shops, the restructure is planned to deliver an enhancement to current provision.

CALL CENTRE AND ONE STOP SHOP PERFORMANCE

- 4.10. The Call Centre and One Stop Shops continue to monitor performance and key element's of this information are detailed below.

- a. Call Centre Performance:

Total Calls offered:		Percentage of calls handled: (Target 95% not to fall below 90%)	
2009/10	813,837	2009/10	92%
2010/11	796,372	2010/11	95%

Emails received	
2009/10	11,123
2010/11	11,801

The Call Centre has taken responsibility for handling calls for a number of new services in 2010-11. These include Sports and Leisure Centre bookings, Parks and Countryside enquiries and initial enquiries from customers interested in becoming Foster Carers. The Sports and Leisure centre enquiries have generated a significant number of additional calls with 50,294 being handled between September 2010 and May 2011. Short term call handling support has also been provided by the Call Centre to assist Electoral Registration during the Local and General Elections in April/May 2010 and the Pension Fund, following the issue of the annual pension statements in December 2010.

The 2010/11 figure for calls handled shows an improvement of 2.9% in comparison to 2009/10.

Performance was again affected this year during the period of adverse weather conditions in December 2010 and January 2011. This prompted a surge of calls from customers enquiring about refuse/recycling collections and highway maintenance issues. The increase in calls was managed by providing updated information to the customer via the telephony messaging facility and the website. Our generically trained staff also assisted with call handling in this service area when required.

The workforce management system implemented within the Call Centre in September 2009 has contributed to the improvement in the percentage of calls handled and allowed the effective management of the staff resources.

b. One Stop Shops performance:

April 2010 to June 2010.

One Stop Shop	Total Customers	Total Enquiries	Average Waiting Time (minutes)
Bebington	4022	4844	6.5
Birkenhead (Conway)	17452	20681	10
Bromborough	465	633	1
Eastham	2313	2850	4.2
Heswall	2273	2633	4.7
Hoylake	134	154	1
Liscard	2681	3046	13
Moreton	6303	7530	5.1
New Brighton	1956	2051	13
Rock Ferry	6544	7235	3
Seacombe	6697	7467	7.3
Upton	367	495	1
West Kirby	3146	3488	1.3
Totals	54353	63107	

July 2010 to September 2010

One Stop Shop	Total Customers	Total Enquiries	Average Waiting Time (minutes)
Bebington	4112	4858	5.5
Birkenhead (Conway)	18743	22079	10
Bromborough	466	610	1
Eastham	2236	2741	3.6
Heswall	2339	2763	4.1
Hoylake	134	150	1
Liscard	2896	3295	10
Moreton	6438	8107	2.8
New Brighton	1715	1790	10
Rock Ferry	7413	8308	3
Seacombe	6764	7694	8.3
Upton	346	474	1
West Kirby	3137	3472	1.5
Totals	56739	66341	

October 2010 to December 2010

One Stop Shop	Total Customers	Total Enquiries	Average Waiting Time (minutes)
Bebington	3426	4058	6.5
Birkenhead (Conway)	15960	18525	11
Bromborough	419	561	1
Eastham	1983	2410	3.8
Heswall	2150	2480	5.6
Hoylake	137	166	1
Liscard	2623	3039	11.2
Moreton	5526	8268	3
New Brighton	1490	1585	11.2
Rock Ferry	6575	7060	3.1
Seacombe	6265	6796	6.7
Upton	336	513	1
West Kirby	2997	3272	1.7
Totals	49887	58733	

January 2011 to March 2011

One Stop Shop	Total Customers	Total Enquiries	Average Waiting Time (minutes)
Bebington	3614	4414	6.6
Birkenhead (Conway)	16715	19890	11
Bromborough	440	557	1
Eastham	2188	2629	4.3
Heswall	2013	2340	4.5
Hoylake	77	86	1
Liscard	2970	3449	15.1
Moreton	5858	7553	4.4
New Brighton	1868	1951	15.1
Rock Ferry	7415	8244	3.3
Seacombe	6943	7979	10.7
Upton	335	444	1
West Kirby	2690	3048	1.3
Totals	53126	62584	

Below is information on the first two months performance in 2011/12

April 2011 to May 2011

One Stop Shop	Total Customers	Total Enquiries	Average Waiting Time (minutes)
Bebington	2296	2807	8.3
Birkenhead (Conway)	10905	13335	10.4
Bromborough	231	307	1
Eastham	1557	1893	5.3
Heswall	1417	1662	5.2
Hoylake	57	66	1
Liscard	1583	1964	13
Moreton	3587	4589	4.4
New Brighton	1127	1371	1.5
Rock Ferry	4348	5059	4
Seacombe	4765	5767	8
Upton	243	322	1
West Kirby	1726	2037	1.5
Totals	33842	41179	

The top ten customer requests at One Stop Shops

Service Area	2009/10	2010/11	+/- %
Housing Benefit	92,777	89,345	-3.7%
Wirral Homes	33,107	38,336	+15.8%
Council Tax	39,134	32,577	- 20%
Adult Social Services	21,646	22,356	+ 3.2%
Children and Young People	11,464	11,486	-
Wirral Partnership Homes	10,083	8,817	-14.4%
Consumer Advice, Environmental Health, Pest Control, Licensing	7,823	7,770	- 0.6%
Technical Services	8,164	7,929	- 2.88%
Homeless	5,728	7,328	+ 27.6%
Non Council Enquiries	14,567	14,851	+ 1.95%

Resolution rates within the One Stop Shops

Service Area	2009/10	2010/11
Housing Benefit	73.1%	76.2%
Council Tax	87.4%	88.5%
Children and Young People	99.1%	99%
Adult Social Services	98.0%	98.7%
Wirral Homes	98.3%	97.8%
Wirral Partnership Homes	96.6%	98.6%
Consumer Advice, Environmental Health, Pest Control, Licensing	96.0%	98.1%

WEB

- 4.11. The current website was launched on 18 May 2010 to a very positive response, and since that date we have experienced an 18.5% increase in visitors to the site from the previous year, which has exceeded our target increase of 10%. Most recent visitor figures (May 2011) indicate that we attract over 158,000 visitors per month generating up to 755,000 hits.
- 4.12. The site is being continuously developed, most of which is in response to the daily feedback we receive from our customers who have embraced the “rate this page” facility with enthusiasm.
- 4.13. In the 2011 SOCITM Better Connected report, Wirral maintained a two star website in a review that is acknowledged as being more demanding year on year. Many positive things were mentioned in this report plus a number of recommendations around the transactional elements of the site. A number of these have already been put in place and the next to be addressed is the redesign of the homepage to increase the “push” of customers to online services which should be live by the end of summer 2011.
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- 4.14. In line with the ambition to consult more with customers and have more transparent processes, an E-petitions system has been launched. This service is still in the early stages but a number of petitions have already been submitted and in some cases attracted a strong following.
 - 4.15. Teen Wirral (www.teenwirral.com), the new website for 13 to 19 year olds was launched at the end of summer 2010 and contains 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 duty to publicise positive activities, and a website is the most relevant way of communicating with young people.
 - 4.16. A new Intranet homepage has been developed in the highly regarded, and increasingly used, opensource free software Drupal. This helps to improve communication to staff and has also put a template in place for further information areas such as information security, training and development. This homepage and use of Drupal will pave the way for integrations into Electronic Document Management Systems and a new integrated intranet.
 - 4.17. The Web Manager was invited by SOCITM to present the use of Drupal Opensource software to Bath and North East Somerset Council. Drupal is now the SOCITM web creation software of choice and a number of councils have developed sites with the software. Thus far five councils have been in touch with Wirral for best practice advice.
 - 4.18. The Library website will be integrated into the Council website by the end of July 2011; a new design has been put in place that will also be adopted across the rest of the website. This design is felt to be eye catching and intuitive with a far greater emphasis on self service and online tools.
 - 4.19. A number of future developments are being assessed for suitability such as the use of mobile Apps to give greater and more efficient access to services. Video could provide an alternative way for advice and information to be distributed in a clearer and more accessible manner, with greater analysis of how successful a customer's journey has been through the web site, and an emphasis on guiding the customer to the correct online service as efficiently as possible. The Intranet and Extranet will be developed in future strategies and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) will have a greater part to play in identifying what services and amenities are available to customers within their local area.
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Online Forms

- 4.20 As part of our ongoing commitment to producing a 24 x 7 self serve portal, we have developed over 20 forms that integrate seamlessly into the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM). These forms have been thoroughly tested and have seen positive take up with customers. A development programme is in place which is used to select the next batch of forms for development, batches being selected based upon complexity and potential volume of usage.
- 4.21 An “online forms” product has also been procured that is hosted by the Customer Services Development Team. This product allows rapid production of the simpler forms in conjunction with the business owner and is also used to “pilot” forms before they are handed over to IT Services for development into CRM integrated forms.
- 4.22. As more forms come online, feedback builds up to enable the forms to be fine tuned to ensure the customer finds them easy and straight forward to complete.
- 4.23 The online forms that currently integrate into CRM can be tracked by the customer. The customer can track their service request via the web to see if their enquiry is still being progressed (Open) or completed (Closed).

Customer Service Toolkit

- 4.24. A Customer Services Toolkit (CST) has been developed that sits on the Intranet and allows front of house staff to view procedures that cover the vast majority of questions that they are asked by customers.
 - 4.25. This has been met with great enthusiasm by the staff and has been an invaluable training tool allowing consistency within communications and training procedures.
 - 4.26. The CST receives continuous feedback via a “rate this page” mechanism, which allows staff to leave comments on each webpage which the training staff can then act upon to improve the service.
 - 4.27 Work is continuing on the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) and other component parts which make up the customer tracking system to improve the look, feel and functionality so that it is more user friendly.
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- 4.28 Customer Services, the Web Manager and IT Services are working to develop and test on-line forms which will integrate to the Oracle CRM system. The integrated on-line forms allow customers to log a request for a service on the website which will automatically generate the correct tasks. Some of the services are delivered by external contractors, but the Council maintains a view of the requests being logged. These on-line forms are primarily in the Streetscene areas, but use is being extended.
- 4.29 We have worked closely with a specialist contractor to further develop the CRM functionality which has successfully streamlined the delivery of responses to replacement bin requests. This has allowed us to replace over 27 different system processes with just one, This change reduced expenditure by £75,000 whilst also reducing training requirements, the potential for errors, and allowed more effective charging for replacement bins.

Streetscene

- 4.30 Work has continued to move all Streetscene services to a consistent delivery using the CRM. Statistical reports were also developed to enable Managers to monitor the performance within their areas against their targets.
- 4.31 The Highways Maintenance functionality and reports were amended in CRM to reflect Colas requirements and to allow effective monitoring of the contract.
- 4.32 The CRM was developed to support the transfer of parks and open spaces to the Department of Technical Services so that customer contact data could be captured to inform the development of the contract.

Projects in other Service Areas

- 4.33 The CRM was developed to support the Dog Fouling taskforce initiative. A web form was developed for customers to report Dog Fouling issues. The web form integrates directly into the CRM.
- 4.34. The Housing Options service was reviewed, re-engineered and scripted for delivery by customer service advisors. The service is now delivered in all One Stop Shops and only emergency cases are referred directly to specialists in the service area. Text messages are used to remind customers of their appointments.
- 4.35. In September 2010 all telephone calls relating to leisure services were transferred to the Call Centre which now handles leisure bookings and general enquiries relating to leisure services.
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- 4.36. Due to significant staffing reductions in the Business Rates Section, the service has been reviewed to determine which customer contacts can be handled by the Call Centre. Accounts Receivable staff numbers have also been reduced as part of the EVR/Severance scheme, and therefore the service has been re-designed for delivery by customer service advisors in the Call Centre.
- 4.37 Cabinet on 14 October 2010 (minute 182) '*agreed the transfer of the management of the financial functions in respect of Accountancy, Purchasing and Contracts and Income*'. Following the transfer of the Personal Finance Unit from DASS into the Finance Department in March 2011, processes have been reviewed and a specification developed to implement a document management system, which will facilitate service delivery by Call Centre and One Stop Shop staff.
- 4.38 Work has taken place with the Change Programme Team on the fostering campaign with the customer services development team developing an on-line form to allow expressions of interest to be registered on-line, as well as via the Call Centre and One Stop Shops. This also provides statistical data for the service area and for Press & PR.
- 4.39 We have seen an increased number of service areas requesting statistical information with regard to customer contacts, for example, expressions of interest in the Home Insulation Campaign.
- 4.40 Business analysis has been carried out, options put forward and recommendations provided in Housing Benefit Overpayments, Licensing and Freedom of Information requests. We have also supported staff from Corporate Services in the development of a Financial Inclusion Strategy and Plan.
- 4.41 Channel migration forms part of the customer access work programme with a focus on developing and promoting lower cost access channels capable of supporting transactional self-service where appropriate.

PCIDSS Compliance

- 4.42 The Payment Card Industry, Data Security Standards (PCIDSS) has established a single set of standards which are designed to protect against payment card fraud or identity theft. These requirements state that no sensitive authentication data may be stored once a transaction has been authorised. This directive applies to all call centres which use call recording equipment.
- 4.43 As a result of this, the Finance Department has reviewed the procedures currently in place when taking debit / credit card payments for Council services. In order to ensure compliance, I commissioned a PCI consultant who identified that the current call recording technology used within the Call Centre would be non compliant.
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- 4.44 As a result, new software has been purchased which omits the recording of the customer's financial details whilst still recording a call. This allows call recording to be maintained whilst excluding data that is non-compliant.

Digital Signage-Customer Information Plasma Screens

- 4.45 In line with Cabinet minute 327 (21 February 2011) we are currently extending the network of Customer Information screens. All One Stop Shops are already equipped to deliver electronic customer information quickly and efficiently via a network of information screens. The system is centrally co-ordinated through the marketing team and delivers a range of national and local content specifically selected to be of value to our customers. The extension programme will see all Wirral Libraries equipped with the system, greatly increasing our ability to communicate with the public and improving customer outcomes as a result. It is anticipated that the programme will be completed by the end July 2011.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- 4.46 In the coming months the customer services development team will be focussing on the Library and One Stop Shop integration, with a view to creating efficiencies and enhancing the services available. Future developments will also focus upon:
- The key focus for future service delivery supported by the CRM will be adopting a 'citizen-centric' approach which will enable a complete view of a customer's interactions with the Council over the range of disparate services offered
 - As informed by the Customer Access Strategy (CAS), channel of choice will be offered with an increasing emphasis on the web channel
 - Also in line with the CAS, moving more services to customer access channels supported by the CRM
 - Cabinet on 23 June 2011 agreed to migrate to a later release of the Oracle CRM to maximise available functionality and minimise support costs
 - The intention is to make the CRM supported processes for mediated service (i.e. Call Centre and One Stop Shops) and self-service (i.e. web) as similar as possible for consistent delivery and increased use of self-service
 - Options for service efficiencies using the proven CRM template for mobile working to be explored, supporting agile working
 - Greater use of other tools, as part of a wider service delivery system such as text messaging and on-line forms packages to be considered wherever feasible and proven via a business case
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CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

- 4.47 Significant work has been carried out in the area of customer insight, using customer feedback from a range of sources and initiatives to inform future service delivery. An action plan has been put together drawing on feedback garnered from Focus Groups/ Forums, Wirral's Future exercise, a mystery shopping exercise and analysis of customer feedback and complaints.
- 4.48. Work is on-going to ensure a consistent approach towards collecting customer feedback and engaging with our customers across Council services:
- Capturing Area Forum feedback in CRM
 - Review of key performance indicators to ensure relevance to the corporate plan
 - Presentation of customer feedback analysis within an updated corporate reporting template
 - Collation of wider customer feedback through all channels (including social networking) to ensure consistency of response and review for organisational learning
- 4.49 Customer Services were involved in the Wirral's Future on street consultation exercise. This was a useful exercise to improve visibility of Council officers to members of the public and to gain some customer feedback on Council services.
- 4.50 The Wirral's Future – your road and neighbourhood survey was dispatched with 144,500 Council Tax bills to all Wirral households in March 2011. There was a focus on Streetscene-related services (93% of all responses received) but the opportunity was also offered for wider comments on Council service provision and encouraging separate expressions of interest in volunteering opportunities such as becoming a school governor. The majority of responses (99%) have been collated in the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.
- 4.51 Between March 2011 and April 2011 a total of 3123 service requests were raised in CRM, with volumes reducing significantly thereafter (3392 in total). Analysis of the contacts received is summarised as follows:
- Service requests raised related to 51 different service areas, mainly across Streetscene-related provision
 - 18% road defects (e.g. pot holes; manhole covers; subsidence; condition of surface)
 - 13% = pavement defect (e.g. damaged kerbs; raised flags; uneven surface) & dog fouling (e.g. removal or reporting dog owner)
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- 7% customer feedback (e.g. complaints; compliments and suggestions across Council services)
- 5% = traffic conditions (e.g. parking; road widening; general traffic issues), street cleansing (e.g. cleansing schedules; broken glass; spillage; litter), parks and countryside (e.g. anti-social behaviour; fly-tipping; grass cutting; litter)
- 4% street lighting (e.g. damage; relocation;)
- By most popular ward:
 - 9% Heswall;
 - = 7% West Kirby and Thurstaston / Bebington;
 - 6.5% Hoylake and Meols;
 - 6% Wallasey;
 - = 5.5% Clatterbridge / Oxton
- 88% of requests received were resolved by the end of May 2011

Mystery Shopping

- 4.52 Mystery Shopping provides a key element of our programme for ongoing improvement. A Mystery Shopping exercise was undertaken from December 2010 to February 2011. Services were assessed on over 60 criteria including quality of service provided, response times and internal and external building maintenance.
- 4.53 The Call Centre and One Stop Shop service was generally rated as 'Good' or 'Excellent'. Staff were viewed as friendly and polite, and willing to go the extra step to provide great service. Where knowledge of specific areas was lacking it was found that there was generally good use of the Council website to provide information. Where the posting out of documentation was requested, all relevant documents were received within five working days, and adequate information explaining how to complete them was supplied.
- 4.54 The Library service was rated as either 'Good' or 'Average'. While the resources offered by each Library in terms of book stock and IT vary greatly depending on the size of the Library, overall staff knowledge of services requires some development.
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4.55 A number of areas for staff development included:

- More signposting of the Council website as the first port of call for information enquiries and for downloading documents.
- Timescales need to be provided wherever possible and explanations of 'what happens next'.
- Further promotion of other services that might remove the need for customers to repeat visit.

4.56 Key environmental concerns included:

- The external condition of Library buildings was often poor, with a lack of street signage.
- Quiet study areas could often be small and in some cases untidy.
- Leaflet racks were often untidy.
- Accessibility was poor in places, with the smaller Libraries in particular, not offering easy access for disabled users.

Complaints

4.57 Customer feedback incorporates corporate/statutory complaints, Councillor/MP contacts, Ombudsman enquiries and compliments received. The focus for customer feedback is to 'put things right and learn from it' which recognises that complaints specifically should not be dealt with in isolation and instead should be used to inform future improved service delivery.

4.58 During the year there were 6,485 customer feedback contacts recorded, received via e-mail (37%); web (23%), letter (22%); telephone (14%) and in person (4%).

4.59 Feedback was split as follows: councillor/MP contacts (64%); corporate complaints (19%); compliments (11%); statutory complaints (5%) and ombudsman contacts (1%).

4.60 Technical Services experienced the most complaints (54%) with the service delivery issues caused by the adverse weather conditions in December 2010 January 2011 again dominating volumes, a repeat of 2009/10. The Finance Department (18%) and DASS (17%) were the next largest contributors.

4.61 There was a 9% decrease in corporate complaints from the previous year. Overall, 92% of all corporate complaints closed were within the 15 working days target (against 90% in 2009/10 and 87% for 2008/09).

4.62 As a proportion of total corporate complaints received, 8% of complainants expressed dissatisfaction with stage 1 resolution and raised either stage 2 or stage 3 complaints.

- 4.63 Technical Services again dominated the Councillor/MP contact received by the Council, with 82% of total contacts recorded (75% in 2009/10).
- 4.64 In terms of overall response times the average was 14 working days to respond to corporate/statutory complaints, ranging from an average of 9 working days within Technical Services to 31 working days for DASS. Corporately, an average of 6 working days was taken to respond to Councillor/MP contacts (ranging from 5 working days in Technical Services to 25 working days in DASS), which represents no change from 2009/10. Ombudsman contacts were resolved on average within 14 calendar days (ranging from an average of 7 calendar days within Technical Services to 21 calendar days in DASS), compared to a corporate average of 22.7 calendar days in 2009/10.
- 4.65 A total of 345 changes to process/procedure or improvements were made to service delivery as a result of customer feedback received. As a direct result of complaints received, 20% were identified as resulting in some positive change with DASS (44%) and Technical Services (18%) particularly successful at identifying organisational learning.

ASSESSMENT OF CUSTOMER SERVICES WORK

Customer Service Excellence

- 4.66 The Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Division was assessed against the criteria for the Customer Service Excellence Standard (previously Chartermark) in February 2011. Following this assessment, the Standard was awarded.
- 4.67 The process required the Division to undertake a self assessment against five specific criteria, and compile evidence to support it. In addition, a site visit by the assessor took place in February 2011. Within the final report, the assessor highlights a number of areas of good practice. These include ongoing improvements to the website, the 'Tell Us Once' initiative, partnership working within the One Stop Shops, and implementation of the apprenticeship scheme within customer services, giving staff the opportunity to develop their skills.
- 4.68 In addition, the development of the online Customer Services Toolkit to assist staff in delivering consistent service to the customer and aid communication was highlighted as praiseworthy, as it involved staff views with regard to its content

JOINT WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS & AGENCIES

- 4.69 One Stop Shops continue to work with a considerable number of agencies and organisations. The up to date range of surgeries is available on www.wirral.gov.uk. Working more closely with the Library service will enhance and align partnership work across the Borough.
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4.70 Her Majesty's Revenues & Customs (HMRC) is now relocated within the Birkenhead One Stop Shop where they offer face to face service. This is maximising the use of premises, retaining HMRC presence in the Borough and improving access for HMRC customers.

Tell Us Once

4.71 In the spring of 2010 we successfully bid to become a pilot Authority for a new 'Tell Us Once' service being launched by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The service is aimed at customers registering a death, and allows them to notify a number of Local Authority and Government departments of the death whilst verifying that a death certificate has been issued.

4.72 Working with the DWP, Registrars, customer services, and IT staff, have developed a process for collating and transferring required information. The service has been very well received and customer services have had very positive feedback. As a pilot Authority we have also supported regional conferences and hosted regional workshops.

CASHIERS

4.73 Cashiers are based at the Birkenhead One Stop Shop and remain consistently busy; since January 2010 we have processed an increased amount of cash and cheque payments from over 200 internal Wirral establishments.

4.74 All Income now reaches the Financial systems within 3 days, previously the average time for money to be received in the Financial systems was 21 days.

4.75 Amounts received from Wirral Establishments from April 2010 – March 2011 are as follows:

	Cash Items	Cash Income	Cheque Items	Cheque Income
April 09 – March 10	2,165	£1,170,751	34,127	£4,431,840
April 10 - March 11	7,867	£4,473,241	31,217	£4,444,617

4.76 Cashiers process payments from the One Stop Shops Drop in Boxes within a one day time limit. An overall increase in Income has been received from this source. Amounts received from Drop in Boxes from April 2010 – March 2011 are as follows:

	Cash	Cheques
April 09 – March 10	£102.00	£2,472,970.00
April 10 – March 11	£74.00	£2,622,395.00

4.77 The counter facility has also seen an overall increase in income and continues to remain consistently busy. The post facility has seen an overall decrease in both income and receipts however duties have increased due to banking of Establishment money.

4.78 Amounts from Counter and Postal Income are as follows:

	Counter receipts	Income	Post receipts	Income
April 09 – March 10	113,591	£19,357,035	26,722	£28,108,110
April 10 - March 11	109,876	£24,120,334	23,656	£19,780,033

4.79 The total income processed through Cashiers is:
 April 09 – March 10 - £47,040,895
 April 10 – March 11 - £43,900,367

4.80 Both the G4S Cash collection service and NatWest Banking Services continue to run successfully.

STUDENT SUPPORT

4.81 The work of the Student Support Team transferred to the Student Loans Company in February 2011. Staff who worked within this Team were either successfully redeployed or partook of the voluntary severance scheme.

BENCHMARKING

- 4.82 The Call Centre is a member of 'Call North West', a support organisation for Contact Centres across various service sectors based in the North West. Staff from the Call Centre attend good practice meetings which allow open discussion and the opportunity to network with both public and private sector organisations. This has led to beneficial relationships being formed with organisations that face similar issues. Examples of good practice discussed at the forums have been implemented within the Call Centre as new initiatives are developed.
- 4.83 The One Stop Shops are a member of the National One-Stop Shop Benchmarking Group which has been working together since 1999. The group was set up to share knowledge and good practice with colleagues from other local authority One Stop Shops. The Group regularly collects benchmarking data and customer satisfaction levels across member authorities. This enables members to compare their performance with other one-stop shops and allows members to consider adopting the already tried and tested methods of others. The information collected can also be a valuable source of data for use in service reviews and improved service delivery.
- 4.84 Wirral shares with the other authorities the One Stop Shop Customer Satisfaction Statistics. In 2010 this was 95% which compared well to the other 24 members. No Metropolitan Authority recorded a higher return.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- 4.85 In 2010, the Council embarked on a partnership with Wirral Metropolitan College to increase the number of apprenticeships within Wirral Council. This included encouraging current employees to increase their skills, knowledge and qualifications through the opportunity to convert to the apprenticeship framework. Customer Services took an active part in this initiative, and following a series of briefing sessions, 12 customer service advisers enrolled on the scheme. The participants are studying for the NVQ level 3 Diploma in Customer Service and also undertake functional skills study in Mathematics and English. A number of units requiring completion are mandatory but staff also had the opportunity to select optional units. Successful completion of the programme equates to 2 'A' level qualifications.
- 4.86 Senior advisers within the Call Centre are given the opportunity to meet on a regular basis to discuss their role, working practices, and also to highlight improvements or opportunities for change. Meetings are structured and minutes taken with each participant chairing the meeting on a rota basis. This process benefits both the staff concerned in that they can make a positive contribution to the working environment and develop their meeting and negotiation skills and also the management team in that procedural issues can be improved upon speedily, when raised.
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- 4.87 Customer Service Advisers in the Information and Advice team within the Call Centre all attended work shadowing sessions at the Leisure Centres following the transfer of telephone enquiries to the Call Centre in September 2010. This exercise has proved to be useful to staff, as they are able to understand the Leisure centre role more clearly.

CONCLUSIONS

- 4.88 Customer services remains central to the business of the Council. The merger of the Libraries and One Stop Shop services will provide improved efficiencies for customers and the Council.
- 4.89 The customer service teams continue to drive service delivery via the most efficient, cost saving access channel. They are however mindful of the need to support the right of customers to access Council services through a variety of means.
- 4.90 Customer feedback and knowledge of how and where our customers live, along with the reasons why some groups do not access services is intrinsic in all the work we do.

5. RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1 If Customer Services fail to deliver the required standard of service then the impact will be significant on those reliant on these services as well as impacting on the services themselves in higher cost and less efficiency. Equally, as the Library service is a Statutory Service, failure to properly or satisfactorily deliver would have the potential for wider implications the Authority.

6. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 None within the context of this report.

CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Consultation work undertaken is set out in the report detailing our work with services within and external to the Council and the external bodies, organisations and groups we work with.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 8.1 These groups are consulted as part of the wider Customer Focus work as well as the linkages with the Customer Access Strategy.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 9.1 There are none arising directly from this report.
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10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

11. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required specifically as part of this report although one has been developed for the updated Customer Access Strategy and also for the One Stop Shops and the Call Centre.

12. CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 None.

13 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 None.

FNCE/160/11

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APPENDICES

None.

SUBJECT HISTORY

Council Meeting	Date
Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee	8 July 2010