

## **WIRRAL COUNCIL**

### **COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**4 JULY 2012**

SUBJECT:	CUSTOMER SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	ACTING CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR CHRIS MEADEN
KEY DECISION?	NO

#### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 This report presents the Customer Services Annual Report for 2011/12 as well as detailing for Members the current and future work programme. Customer Services represent much of the front face of the Council contact facilities which for the purposes of this report includes call centre, libraries, one stop shops and the web. It also encompasses the customer services development team which provides a framework to lead, develop and innovate within our frontline service areas. Together as one combined service area our aim is to deliver the library, customer access and web strategies.

#### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

2.1 Customer services like most services in the Council is stringently scrutinising its role and function. The external economic climate and the internal budget deficit could make customer service appear as an optional extra to the delivery of council services. However it is particularly important during these difficult economic times that our customers need to be able to contact us, and feel assured that they we will receive a timely and accurate response. They need to have places available where they can relax, learn, develop and feel safe.

2.2 National trends do see Local Authorities looking at delivering more with less and part of the modernisation review of public libraries states that during times of increasing financial pressures it is imperative that local authorities consider innovative ways of working to generate library improvements and efficiencies.

2.3 Wirral Council have decided that by combining libraries and one stop shops to provide a merged customer service focussed workforce to offer the level of customer experience that the public want. This initiative is now being rolled

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out elsewhere in the country as a model which provides excellent best practice as regards value for money. It has taken time to produce but is now ready to be rolled out as a modern merged workforce drawn from a wide range of skills and experience.

- 2.4 Other benefits of working together mean that the service can access funding to support this innovative joint working and that is the intention for future development. Aligning the merged services work with local needs and local priorities has been paramount to all of this.
- 2.5 The challenge for public services, including public libraries and one stop shops is how to demonstrate how we can help deliver the shared council priorities. A recent study by PricewaterhouseCoopers funded by the Laser Foundation sought to establish the impact of public libraries partnerships on council shared priorities. The research found evidence of a clear and measurable contribution made by libraries to wider policy priorities at both local and national levels' particularly in the areas of merged services supporting education, children, health, the vulnerable and older people.

#### **LIBRARIES AND ONE STOP SHOP SHOPS MERGER UPDATE**

- 2.6 **Staffing and structure** - A structure has now been developed which sees the senior management teams working together in the delivery of a merged staffing structure across the network of libraries and one stop shops. The ethos of the structure is flexibility with staff from similar levels in both services meeting regularly to ensure that all aspects of the services are delivered and standards maintained.
  - 2.7 The generic customer service assistant role is a combination of the previous library assistant and one stop shop receptionist and is currently working at the two pilot sites of Eastham and Heswall. It has been and continues to be a challenge to bring together two large service areas where work overlaps and cultures are significantly different. This challenge is not just for the staff, but also for our customers who are adjusting to a different type of service delivery. Generally feedback has been very positive from staff and customers alike who see the benefits in the two services working as one, without the loss of the traditional functions of the two separate services.
  - 2.8 When not attending to specialist enquiries at the booths, our one stop shop advisers will be trained and then able to support the delivery of the wider library functions, adding interest and variety to the role.
  - 2.9 The immediate action is for 'roll out' across the whole network, learning lessons from the two pilot sites. It has taken longer than anticipated and this is for a variety of reasons including, staffing volumes, HR issues relating
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previous contracts and anomalies in the application of council policy and practices. Information Technology is fundamental in taking the structure forward and that for some staff there will be a change in their working pattern to benefit the service. For clarity of expectations, unified conditions of service relevant to the merged service will be developed. Ascertaining the correct staffing numbers required will be ongoing to ensure a streamlined workforce adaptable enough to be able to respond to potential changes in opening hours. We intend to do this by having a peripatetic team of staff that will help us ensure we remain open across our sites, and also ensure we are not over staffed at any sites. Changes in job roles require sensitive negotiation and consultation whilst recognising the national trends in Council front line services.

- 2.10 We have in the past twelve months made significant progress forward in managing this change with staff, allowing them the time to start to understand the reasoning behind merging. This process by necessity is slow, but in order for this to succeed staff need to feel involved and consulted and at the same time have a realistic understanding of the need to change.
- 2.11 Staff across all the service areas have worked to an interim structure for over 12 months and so we are working to a date when roll out of the programme can take place. We are looking for this to take place during July / August or as near as. New job descriptions for all roles within the merged service have been written and are currently being progressed with the TU and staff.
- 2.12 Most Library staff have now been trained to deliver the generic customer services assistant role, and are awaiting the full merger in order to put their new skills into practice. Likewise training for the one stop shop staff is progressing so that they can support the new customer services assistant role.
- 2.13 Four area management groups are being proposed to assist with managing the service. Sites have been grouped to ensure an equal distribution of staff and building responsibilities for the Area manager role.

### **Facilities Update**

- 2.14 Alongside the staffing and establishment changes we are working on a programme of building and facilities refurbishment. Our vision is for buildings that are attractive and comfortable for our customers and staff and efficient and cost effective for the council to maintain. Where possible we will provide buggy parks for parents of young children, lockers for customers, cycle racks and drinking water fountains. We will use lighting both internal and external to help us create the welcoming environment we seek for our customers.
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Combining services makes real savings for the council and we are aiming to avoid duplication and vacate surplus buildings where possible.

- 2.15 The merged service will have integrated space, with 'zones' to relax, learn and seek advice and help. Our aim is to provide a space which is free flowing and less formal, but also provides private space for those customers who need it. The look will be modern and inviting, a place which we hope all sectors of the community will want to visit and use.
  - 2.16 Space permitting we will create a community cafe or a coffee lounge area with vending machines. There will be comfortable seating and a range of newspapers / magazines and popular publications providing a welcoming social space for users to gather and spend time whilst in the building .When setting up cafes we will look to the work being done by council colleagues in developing community enterprises. We hope that this could see fulfilling work experience opportunities for local young people with learning difficulties who could operate the facility.
  - 2.17 These refurbished, revitalised buildings (where applicable) will adopt the new corporate colour scheme of holly and lime green supported by clearer signage inside and outside the building. All of the sites are now equipped with digital signage displays that allows us the opportunity to deliver richer more visually appealing messages to our customers.
  - 2.18 We will introduce Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) machines into some of our buildings to allow customers the option of self access and discharge of books. This has been installed already at Heswall and is proving popular with all age groups and will free up staff to deal with more complex enquiries as well as allowing them the opportunity to interact with customers away from the barrier of the counter.
  - 2.19 We will improve the range of facilities for our younger users by providing new children's play furniture and children's computers where it is practicable.
  - 2.20 We are looking to ensure our public access PC's are up to date as we want to encourage all ages to access them to help reduce digital exclusion. Free Wi - Fi will be made available to our customers.
  - 2.21 Where it is appropriate we will invest in new shelving which will be mobile so the space can be used as flexibly as possible.
  - 2.22 We will trial the use of customer pagers at Rock Ferry which will alert customers when an adviser is free to deal with their enquiry. This will allow the customer the opportunity to utilise the various facilities available e.g.
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browsing the library shelves, using the free computer facilities or simply enjoying a coffee or newspaper.

### **Site Update**

- 2.23 **Eastham** is the first library one stop shop to be refurbished. It is now lighter and more open plan with improved accessible shelving, which can be more easily moved to make full and flexible use of the space in the library and will enjoy new flooring and furnishings throughout. The redesigned space will include an attractive coffee area with comfortable seating, space to sit and use a laptop as well as a secure buggy park. New signage both inside and out will make the building easier to navigate. Unfortunately the works were protracted because of some contractual issues and the need to work around keeping the building open where possible. In doing so we could have compromised health and safety and the noise levels were distracting for customers and staff alike. We have learnt lessons from this and will in future consider closing the facility for as short a period as possible to avoid these issues where the level of work requires this and it may also reduce the overall timescale of the works. Any closures will be minimal and in consultation with members and local users.
- 2.24 **Rock Ferry** library one stop shop is the next facility to be merged and the development which will include building work is progressing well. We have finalised the design and the public have been asked for their views on the improvements. Colleagues in Technical Services are liaising with the appointed firm of architects as part of the tendering process for the work. No firm date has been set for the work although we anticipate work starting by August with completion in December. Inevitably there will be some disruption as the building work is undertaken and this may mean some activities are suspended and operate from alternative venues during the work. We have liaised with current users of the building to keep them briefed on the plans and to minimise inconvenience. There will be one entrance to a more open environment with free flowing space for customers to access the library one stop shop. The decision has been taken not to use metal security shutters as it is anticipated that this will have a positive effect on the overall ambience of the neighbourhood after hours and increase confidence in the community that the area is a safe place. The site will provide a much improved community hall environment. From listening to users, customers, staff and partners, the type of facilities needed at Rock Ferry have been identified and the development will seek to meet these needs where possible and increase the number of groups and activities on offer within the facility.
- 2.25 **Heswall** - the ground floor of the library one stop shop will see extensive remodelling to create an attractive and welcoming open plan space. The
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most obvious change will be to relocate the children's area to the rear of the library away from the automatic entrance doors and the area will be partially screened in glass to reduce noise whilst maintaining visibility. A cafe area with attractive lighting, comfortable furniture and tables is to be created in the former children's space that can be utilised when waiting to see an adviser. New flooring will be installed throughout. Upstairs the former exhibition room will be redecorated and refitted to allow for study and PC use, meetings and events as well as exhibitions. The heavy doors will be converted to automatic opening to improve accessibility. Public access computers will be relocated to the non-fiction area adjacent to the lift. An agile working space / small meeting room will be created through the more efficient use of space. New signage both inside and out will make the redesigned spaces easy to use.

- 2.26 **Moreton** one stop shop on Knutsford Road at the back of the complex will be vacated and the service will relocate into a remodelled and modernised space within Moreton library, one of our busiest libraries. The location of the library is excellent, close to the main shopping area and bus stops and highly visible from the main road. Work will commence by October and the one stop shop will not relocate into the library until the work has finished. The existing one stop shop can host existing surgeries from the library to avoid disruption to services. These plans will lead to a more flexible open area including private interview rooms, an agile working space, coffee area and better use of ICT facilities.
- 2.27 **West Kirby** one stop shop will move into the library in a reconfigured modernised space. The library and one stop shop are currently located next to each other within the Concourse and the move will release the existing one stop shop area for alternative use. Work will commence by about October and again the one stop shop will not relocate until it has finished. The library will be designated as the fourth central library one stop shop with opening hours in line with the other three in Birkenhead, Wallasey and Bebington.
- 2.28 **Birkenhead Central Library** plans are being drawn up for a potential capital bid to focus on the relocation of all public facilities such as the Reference Library all onto the ground floor leaving the first floor predominately for staff and back office work as well as a new meeting room with the basement exclusively for storage. There would be re-modelling in the main room so that all services can be offered from one new "joint" counter rather than three separate ones as is the current arrangement. A cafe run by a Social Enterprise would look to be provided in the entrance lobby area. Most of these works will require an application for funding from the capital programme.
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- 2.29 **Wallasey Central Library** has services delivered from the two separate buildings and we will look at options to relocate the Children's Library within the main Lending Library, the provision of a new "joint" counter for Adult, Children's and Audio Visual which will mean users have a single point for all transactions to be carried out, current concerns of parents and children having to walk through a car park to access the Children's library would then be addressed. The Reference Library would remain as is on the first floor. Most of these works will require an application for funding out of the capital programme after finalising on site plans which would include local consultation.
- 2.30 **Bebington** Library is subject to large £1.2m capital programme allocation which was to include the merger of the One Stop Shop from Pennant House as part of the borough wide merger of the two services. The One Stop Shop service is subject to a Cabinet decision for it to remain at Pennant House. The condition of the building continues to deteriorate as discussion has been ongoing about the future of Pennant House, Mayer Hall and 63 the Village. Some small remedial works will take place to paint the outside of Pennant House. Internally a separate staffing area is to be created as the building has suffered from pest infestations. In terms of one stop shop staff merging with staff from Bebington central library whilst more problematic, staff will be swapped with other sites to gain experience and to feel part of the merger.
- 2.31 **Birkenhead One Stop Shop** site on Conway Street will next year see the vacation of Connexions. This then may allow a reconfiguration and modernisation of the space on the first floor if funding is available. There are no plans to vacate Birkenhead Central Library and so we will look into a small mobile or 'pop up' library provision at Conway to show the two services as integrated as possible and to widen access for the public to joint services.
- 2.32 The smaller library one stop shops will have minor adaptations so that they can operate as much as possible as a merged facility.

### **CALL CENTRE**

- 2.33 A number of new services were migrated to the Call Centre this year. These include enquiries relating to Parks and Countryside, Business Rates, free school meals, One Stop Shop appointments and invoices received by customers concerning a Council Service
- 2.34 Call Centre staff handled telephone enquiries in response to the Budget consultation exercise 'You Choose' in August 2011. This service was introduced at short notice, and its success was as a result of a number of departments working together to provide a range of access channels available for customers to have their say.
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- 2.35 The first phase of an extensive project to handle telephone contact from customers of the Library service was introduced. The Call Centre currently handles enquiries concerning book renewals and reservations, and also provides general information and advice for four libraries. This project will progress over the coming months as further libraries are migrated. Interestingly the call centre had to handle a 15% increase in calls from what had been initially projected which revealed that by using the corporate call centre true volumes were much more accurate and should assist improving the overall service to the users.
- 2.36 In addition to Call Centre staff responding to customers with regard to existing and new services, they have also supported departments to deliver services themselves, using the Call Centre technology. These include Human Resources, with regard to the Schools Job Evaluation exercise and the Department of Adult Social Services helpline in relation to the 4 week delay in assessment of care packages. The value of utilising both the human and technological expertise of the centre again showing its value.
- 2.37 Customers have the option to provide feedback about their experience of accessing the Council's website by using the 'rate this page' facility. Call Centre staff are now responsible for managing the comments left by customers which provide an insight into their experience. These comments are reviewed on a daily basis and either responded to with further information if possible, or referred to the relevant department for further action. This feedback has, in some cases resulted in improvements being made to the information or flow of information on the website, which benefits future users. The regular monitoring of the feedback ensures that customers receive information speedily and this form of contact is logged appropriately, as many customers view it as an alternative access channel.

## **LIBRARY, CALL CENTRE, ONE STOP SHOP AND WEB PERFORMANCE**

### **2.38 Library Performance**

	<u>2011/12</u>	<u>2010/11</u>	<u>2009/10</u>	<u>2008/09</u>	<u>2007/08</u>
<i>ISSUES</i>	1,844,132	1,883,554	1,870,668	1,826,529	1,676,186
<i>VISITS</i>	1,817,492	1,778,182	1,756,063	1,823,462	1,768,656
<i>NEW BORROWERS</i>	16,819	16,948	15,671	16,951	16,121

- 2.39 The total issues for 2011/12 saw a decrease of 2.2% on 2010/11 having the year prior seen a 0.7% increase. The largest percentage increases were at
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Higher Bebington (10.2%) and Ridgeway (10.0%), the largest decreases were at Beechwood (16.3%) and New Ferry (23.9%). For New Ferry this can be put down to the major refurbishment of the centre and closure for five months.

- 2.40 The total number of visits for 2011/12 saw an increase of 2.2% on 2010/11 having the year prior been a 1.3% increase. The largest percentage increases were at Greasby (29.5%) where the library was closed for two weeks in July 2010, Eastham and Wallasey Village (both 11.3%). The largest decrease was at Beechwood (18.2%). The number of visits to libraries increased by 2.2% and this is contrary to the national trend of decreasing visitor figures. An increase in the number of our "virtual visits" has also been recorded where users have been given increased opportunity to renew items online rather than having to physically visit a library.
- 2.41 The number of items issued reduced by 2.2% from 2010/11 which reflects the pattern of the last 5 years of small percentage reductions. It is expected that the move to offer new ways to loan materials (E-Books and E-Audio) will see the number of "traditional" item loans reduce

### **E- Books**

<i>ISSUES</i>	<i>TITLES IN COLLECTION</i>	<i>EXPENDITURE</i>
4,120	3,751	£32,750

- 2.42 In November 2011 a new E-Book service was launched and 31 March 2012 there have been 4120 'checkouts', the highest monthly total being January 2012 with 859 'checkouts'. Expenditure on E-Books in 2011/12 was £32,750.

### **Call Centre**

- 2.43 The Call Centre's performance statistics are as follows:

	Calls offered	% Calls handled
2010/11	796,372	95%
2011/12	837,005	88%

Emails received:

2010/11	11,801
2011/12	10,251

2.44 The Call Centre was offered over 40,500 more calls in 2011/12, when compared with 2010/11. This increase is reflective of the additional services migrated to the Call Centre this year. This increase, coupled with the loss of staff following the Early Voluntary Retirement/Voluntary Severance exercise affected the percentage of calls handled.

### **One Stop Shops**

2.45 One Stop Shops performance statistics for 2011/12:

<i>One Stop Shop</i>	<i>Total Customers</i>	<i>Total Enquiries</i>	<i>Average Waiting Time</i>
Bebington	14,623	17,618	8.5 mins
Birkenhead (Conway)	64,382	76,624	9.8 mins
Bromborough	760	1,014	2.1 mins
Eastham	9,123	11,143	5.2 mins
Heswall	9,364	10,895	5.3 mins
Hoylake	305	354	0 mins
Liscard	7,410	8,975	9 mins
Moreton	21,752	26,690	4.5 mins
New Brighton	7,076	8,117	1.2 mins
Rock Ferry	29,145	32,387	6.5 mins
Seacombe	29,159	34,732	8.9 mins
Upton	836	1,046	3.7 mins
West Kirby	11,283	12,425	1.3 mins
Totals	205,218	241,660	

2.46 The 2011/12 statistics highlight a 4.15% reduction in overall customer numbers compared to the previous year 2010/11. A more detailed analysis shows a 9.9% reduction in Housing and Council Tax Benefit enquiries. This may be attributed to a number of factors and initiatives that have been undertaken in the last year. The new benefit claims procedures were

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reviewed and leaner processes introduced which resulted in a reduction in the need for repeat visits from customers. Other changes in Benefit processes included increased use of electronic data gathering with less need for the claimant to provide proof of income etc. Similarly an increased use of e-mail and telephone to contact landlords directly for proof of tenancy reduced the need for visits to one stop shops. A further contributory factor is the work that has been done to improve the detail contained in the Housing Benefit notifications meaning clearer information first time to customers.

2.47 The top ten customer requests at One Stop Shops:

<i>Service Area</i>	<i>2011/12</i>
Housing Benefit	80,452
Wirral Homes	35,687
Council Tax	35,742
Adult Social Services	20,798
Children and Young People	11,127
Wirral Partnership Homes	6,260
Consumer Advice, Environmental Health, Pest Control, Licensing	7,638
Technical Services	8,503
Homeless	7,400
Non Council Enquiries	10,374

2.48 The resolution rates of queries at the combined One Stop Shops were:

<i>Service Area</i>	<i>2011/12</i>
Housing Benefit	82%
Council Tax	90%
Children and Young People	95.5%
Adult Social Services	97.3%

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Wirral Homes	96.5%
Wirral Partnership Homes	97.2%
Consumer Advice, Environmental Health, Pest Control, Licensing	97.8%

Resolution at first point of contact for all services	80.3%
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2.49 A further analysis of resolution rates shows an improved performance with one stop shops resolving 80.3% of all enquiries at first point of contact in comparison with a figure of 72.1% for the previous year. This correlates with the improved Housing Benefits processes mentioned above as the resolution rate of housing benefit enquiries rose from 76.2% to 82.0%.

### Web

2.50 The web performance statistics for 2011/12 were:

	2010/11	2011/12	% Increase
Visitors	1,479,276	1,971,610	33%
Unique Visitors	587,420	779,910	33%
Page views	6,585,664	7,914,446	20%

2.51 The current council website was launched on the 18 May 2010 to a very positive response, since that date we have developed the site extensively and achieved a 33% increase in visits and a 20% increase in page views since May 2011; this has exceeded our target increase of 10%. Most recent visitor figures, May 2012, indicate that we attract over 164,000 visitors per month and our web pages have been accessed over 7.9 million times in the last 12 months.

### CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY (CAS)

2.52 **Systems update** – the main system used is the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) along with other component parts which make up the council's customer tracking system. A business case has been developed for functionality that will deliver savings as well as delivering service benefits such as customer insight data, capturing equality & diversity

data and being able to use email confirmations that will allow us to inform customers via email when service requests are closed which will in customer service terms “close the loop”.

- 2.53 Customer Services, the Web Services Manager and IT services have introduced on-line forms which integrate directly into the Oracle CRM system. These integrated on-line forms allow customers to log a request for a service on the Council’s website which will automatically generate the correct tasks for the back office staff. As some of the services are delivered by external contractors this means that no Council resources are required to deliver the services, but the Council maintains a view of the requests being logged. These on-line forms are primarily in the Streetscene areas, but the use of these forms is being extended. CRM functionality has also been developed to allow Biffa to raise “Bin in Wagon” service requests. Prior to this the Call Centre had to raise them, and this has therefore helped to reduce the cost of service delivery.
- 2.54 We have implemented an on-line forms package which can be used for self-service and can be used internally to support service delivery and it also provides simple workflow, which means that the package can be expanded into service areas which require workflow functionality.

### **C A S – the Library One Stop Shop merger process update**

- 2.55 Telephone calls to the library service were analysed and scripted and those calls made to four of the library sites are now handled by the call centre. The roll out of further library sites is dependent on resources being made available in the call centre
- 2.56 The Finance administration work has been reviewed and the library administration team co-located with the Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services administration team, as part of this review petty cash handling in libraries is being re engineered and where practicable reduced.
- 2.57 The Library Reader Services section is responsible for the purchasing of library book stock; the cataloguing and classification of stock; so that it can be easily retrieved; and the management of stock throughout the network of libraries in the borough. The service has recently been reviewed and a number of recommendations have either been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. These include the electronic receipt of book supplier invoices via electronic data interchange (EDI), the automatic transfer of invoices from the library management system into the Councils Oracle Payments system and the direct delivery of new books from suppliers to all branch libraries. These recommendations will enable the council to reduce expenditure in this area by approximately £5,000 per year.
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- 2.58 The Customer Service Development Team significantly supported the production of the Library Strategy. Consultation on this strategy was carried out in February 2012. Online forms were produced and staff visited every library to promote and publicise this. Following on from this consultation a focus was needed on the proposed changes to library opening hours and this was undertaken through questionnaires and at a targeted event at Bebington Central Library on 28 February 2012.
- 2.59 The Reference Library Service (RLS) main function has been to provide a cultural resource for family history or local history projects through the on-going collection of local information and relevant materials. An outline review of the RLS was completed in September 2011 to document materials held and their current accessibility, identify opportunities for service improvements and efficiencies in recognition of the reduced specialist staffing resource available. This would be supported by improved access to materials and investigating the potential for joint-working with the Council's Archive and Records service. Recommendations under review include a shift in the service to a much more open access, greater use of customer insight to inform service provision and a focus on working in partnership with the Archives & Records service.

### **C A S - Other Service Re-engineering Projects**

- 2.60 Following new Government legislation and guidance, work was undertaken with colleagues in DASS and the One Stop Shops to develop and implement new processes and documentation to support the delivery of the Blue Badge service.
- 2.61 The 'Accounts Receivable' (Sundry Debtors) service has also been developed for delivery by the front of house services.
- 2.62 Telephone calls in respect of Business Rates have also been analysed and scripted and are now handled by the call centre.
- 2.63 Following the transfer of the Personal Finance Unit from DASS into the Finance Department in March 2011, processes have been reviewed and refined and a document management system implemented which improves work processes, performance management and creates efficiencies with better links to the Housing Benefit service.
- 2.64 Freedom of Information requests have been reviewed and new processes implemented to align them with customer feedback, providing better visibility and reporting of the service.
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- 2.65 Document scanning is now being used at all One Stop Shops for job applications received. All of the new Multi functional devices (MFD's) on site have a secure process to enable applications to be scanned securely to the HR recruitment shared area. This has not only saved time and made the process more efficient for the advisors and HR but has also saved paper as forms were previously faxed. The proposal is to now roll this out to other service areas e.g. Trading Standards allowing supporting evidence to be scanned and received by the department as soon as the enquiry is received.
- 2.66 SMS text messaging is used on a service requirement basis and this year a new account was created for Rock Ferry Children's centre for the service to send out messages and reminders to their customers/clients.

### **C A S – One Stop Shop update**

- 2.67 One Stop Shop staff now successfully deliver the new Blue Badge Scheme within exceptionally short timescales.
- 2.68 With regard to the Military Veterans Service the one stop shops had the opportunity to support the Wirral Veterans Contact Centre and met with them on several occasions to explain the assistance that they could offer on site to complement the work that they were already carrying out with veterans who had approached them. The Military Veterans' Service now provide surgeries at two One Stop Shop sites working with service personnel to support mental health and emotional wellbeing issues along with that of their families.
- 2.69 Connexions work from a number of sites following a restructuring of how they deliver their services. They offer high quality careers education, information, advice and guidance for young people aged 13 to 19 (and up to 25 in certain circumstances). Connexions Advisers work to increase the number of young people who are in employment, education or training and improve choices and skills ensuring they achieve employability and a successful transition to adult and working life. Libraries and One Stop Shops offer the perfect venue to help support these aims with private rooms for one to one interviews, computer and printing access as well as direct links to other relevant services.
- 2.70 Moneyline credit union work from Seacombe one stop shop and offer affordable loans to help customers manage debt effectively. From January 2012 to May 2012 Moneyline have seen 240 people and issued 120 affordable loans for items such as furniture, deposits on properties and household items. 35 customers have also set up savings accounts which will assist them in managing their future financial affairs.
- 2.71 Plasma screens are now operational across the network of libraries and one stop shops and display information on a range of council and partner
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organisations. Research has shown this approach to be a much more effective communication medium than traditional methods and we continue to exploit its potential for publicising council services. By advertising revenue earning activities such as the Invigor8 leisure programme and the forthcoming productions at the Floral Pavilion we also support generating income for the authority.

### **C A S - Call Centre Update**

- 2.72 A number of additional services have been migrated to the Call Centre this year, following the Council's Voluntary Severance/Early Voluntary Retirement initiative. This has required staff to undertake a significant amount of training within a short period of time to equip them with the knowledge to deliver the new services. The Customer Services Toolkit, which is available on the Intranet as a support to all front line staff, has proved to be invaluable during this time of rapid change, as staff are able to confirm information as they continue to learn.
- 2.73 New services migrated to the Call Centre include enquiries relating to Parks and Countryside, Business Rates, Free School Meals, one stop shop appointments and Accounts Receivable invoices. In addition, the first phase of an extensive project to handle telephone contact from customers of the Library service was introduced. The Call Centre currently handles enquiries concerning book renewals and reservations, and also provides general information and advice for four libraries. This project will progress over the coming months as further libraries are migrated.
- 2.74 Calls relating to the Local Election and Referendum in May 2011, increased throughout April with 1,641 enquiries being handled in total during the month
- 2.75 A new Switchboard system was implemented in July 2011, and staff received training in its use in a 'live' environment.
- 2.76 In March 2012, the Revenues Team within the Call Centre was offered an additional 8,805 calls, most of these being presented to the team between 19 and 30 March. Although this is a historically busy time of year, Members agreed a number of changes which could affect Council Tax accounts (3% budget reduction, pensioner discount reduced to 70 years of age and payment over 12 instalments by Direct Debit) These changes contributed to the increase in volumes as they prompted customers to contact us for clarification and application.
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## **C A S –Future Developments**

- 2.77 In the coming months the Customer Service Development Team will focus on project managing Welfare Reform changes including welfare assistance, council tax benefit abolition and replacement and the introduction of universal credit. This is to ensure that the Council provides a strategic response to this Government initiative and that the right people know how to access information about these changes and receive their correct entitlements.
- 2.78 Future developments will continue to focus upon supporting the restructuring of the library and one stop shops including staffing, buildings and processes.
- 2.79 The development of the CRM system remains a key focus, given the councils investment in this system. The CRM will adopt 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. This is particularly important as it will allow us to collect equality and diversity information about customers, helping us to shape future services.
- 2.80 The planned introduction of e-mail workflow functionality in the CRM will automatically email the back office with the details of a service request made to the call centre or one stop shops. This will allow customer service to be delivered to departments that do not have CRM as their main line of business application, whilst capturing the details to inform customer insight. E-mail workflow functionality in the CRM will allow us automatically to inform our customers via email when their service request has been updated or closed. This improves the customer experience and reduces customer contact to the Council thus reducing service delivery costs.
- 2.81 As informed by the CAS, channel of choice will be offered with an increasing emphasis on the web channel and self service where appropriate.

## **LIBRARY STRATEGY UPDATE**

- 2.82 It has been a year of significant change for libraries nationally and Wirral's libraries remain extremely popular with the public. They have continued this relationship as well as widening their reach, merging with one stop shops, expanding services, embracing new technologies and in doing so have now begun to create a public library service for the 21st Century.
- 2.83 2011/12 saw the adoption of Wirral's first ever Library strategy which set out the future for the service and how will it develop in response to the many requirements of users and the changing world the service operates in. This was also an important requirement which came out of the Library Review in 2009 and allows the service to move forward clear in how to deliver the
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service in the future. The strategy as with the Customer Access Strategy will be kept under review.

- 2.84 In line with this new strategy a number of developments have already been moved forward and these are detailed below.
- 2.85 The introduction of self service facilities into merged library/one stop shop sites with plans to expand this. The staff resources previously used for issuing and discharging library books is now used for value added services such as answering queries and sorting out problems for users.
- 2.86 Our Digital Media collection (E-Books) supplied by Overdrive was launched in November 2011. Users are able to check-out downloadable digital eBooks and audio books through our website. The collection offers many of the same features as our physical book collection making it in effect a "virtual branch" which allows users to use it directly from home or from any internet enabled device (e.g. Smartphone) free of charge.
- 2.87 The aim to improve literacy through the promotion and support for the development of reading in children, young people, those with basic skills and in families to help create a literate population continues.
- 2.88 A new volunteer policy was set out to specify how the service will work with volunteers and what volunteers can expect from the Library Service. Recruitment and placing of volunteers in library computer access suites to offer the public basic help and assistance is underway and four libraries now offer this service.
- 2.89 Library service key achievements this year include:

#### **Children and Young People**

- Schools Paperback of the Year Award.
  - Launch of the annual Summer Reading Challenge.
  - Children's Book Week.
  - National Bookstart Launch.
  - Christopher Salmon Poetry Extravaganza.
  - Extensive and varied programme of summer activity events on a weekly basis in the school holidays in all library sites.
  - Library outreach sessions to schools and other community venues throughout the year.
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- Targeted and evaluated project work specifically targeting boys and reluctant readers.
- Media Monkeys comic writing and computer skills sessions in many libraries.

### **Adults**

- Wirral Libraries Annual Bookfest week launched by Sir Andrew Motion.
  - High profile events and promotions linked to established book awards including the Orange Prize for Fiction, Costa, Man Booker and Richard and Judy's Summer Reads.
  - Wirral Libraries Reading Groups Festive Readers Evening.
  - New reading groups in libraries for teenagers.
  - Expansion of further GIR groups in libraries and in the community particularly aimed at vulnerable adults.
  - GIR project workers based in four Wirral libraries running regular reading groups and arranging reading related events.
  - Literacy and basic reading skills sessions for adults with learning disabilities.
  - Three Bite-Sized community Shakespeare Events.
  - Two Dickens Centenary Celebration Events.
  - World Book Day Events in five libraries.
  - World Book Night Events in two libraries
  - Read Yourself Well PCT funded health material collections expanded to three more libraries.
  - Raising the profile of the library through a strategic and effective marketing plan centred on the 'More Than Books' campaign producing high quality leaflets, posters and website information developed in around a programme of major corporate themes.
  - Established new Quick Choice collections of best-selling accessible fiction and non-fiction in a number of our libraries.
  - Adult Learners Week – 'Take Your Nan' silver surfing initiative.
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- Drop in local history sessions at reference libraries during local history week.
- Genealogy and local history drop in events in many libraries.
- Increased amount of home readers visited by library service to over 700.

### **LIBRARY ONE STOP SHOP FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

- 2.90 Ongoing development of the service is vital and whilst bringing many benefits in improved service and increased efficiency and overall lower costs it brings with it challenges and initiatives that will be developed by our joint service. Below are detailed some of the initiatives planned to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of Libraries remains without impairing the traditional and much respected service.
- 2.91 Develop and further the role of volunteer assistance to support learning activities particularly in relation to IT assistance, Homework Clubs home reader services and children's story time and holiday activities.
- 2.92 Develop a documented cohesive learning programme to meet community needs and further digital inclusion.
- 2.93 Identify funding opportunities for additional community learning activities courses and reading promotion events.
- 2.94 Participate in Make a Noise in Libraries fortnight and the Get it Loud initiative to attract more young people into our service.
- 2.95 Further the libraries one stop shops strengthening role in relation to public health offering the Five Ways to Wellbeing programme in all libraries one stop shops and developing the library offer in this area.
- 2.96 Develop and evaluate a pilot Health and Wellbeing library at Leasowe Library in partnership with The Reader Organisation (TRO) and the Primary Care Trust (PCT).
- 2.97 Further expand the Read Yourself Well collections in libraries in conjunction with health partners to provide a collection of self-help books for people with mild mental health problems.
- 2.98 Use Librarians more strategically to actively seek opportunities to work in partnership with statutory, voluntary and community organisations to further engage hard to reach groups to extend access to library one stop shops.
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- 2.99 Continue to develop social networking and web technology to engage with new and existing users using Facebook and other technology to meet changing customer needs and expectations.
  - 2.100 Update the written stock selection policy to take account of Wirral's changing demographics.
  - 2.101 Introduce a public library stock suggestion procedure.
  - 2.102 Develop a marketing strategy to further the libraries one stop shop role as a trusted source of information offering advice, guidance and support with job applications, CV's and job searching.
  - 2.103 Roll out Frontline reader development training across all frontline staff in merged service.
  - 2.104 Establish further quick choice and easy read collections of books across the service for reluctant readers.
  - 2.105 Develop Read 2 Me support to people who cannot reach a library or may be unable to read due to an illness or disability, by reading to them in their own homes delivered by volunteers, supported by library staff.
  - 2.106 Provide IT at home service providing taster sessions on how to use a computer for accessing government and council information. Sessions can be held in libraries and individuals own homes to combat isolation.
  - 2.107 As the service is linking inexorably with the One Stop Shops the above initiatives are complemented and enhanced by number that are reflect both Libraries and One Stop Shops. These are set out below;
  - 2.108 Deliver the face to face element of the new sub regional choice based letting system to assist people who are looking for social housing.
  - 2.109 Improve access for customers or their representatives to be able to hand in Financial Assessment Forms, Disability Related Forms and Income Expenditure forms and any supporting documents into a OSS or if customer requiring assistance completing the forms to be able to go to their nearest OSS.
  - 2.110 As the implementation of the Government's Welfare Reforms commence the frontline staff will play an important role in dealing with customer's enquiries regarding their payment of Universal Credit and additional areas that impact on Housing Benefit during the transitional period.
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2.111 Develop the role that frontline staff play in delivering welfare and debt advice to ensure Wirral residents are able to maximise any benefit entitlement and improve financial inclusion throughout the borough. This will include:

- Advice on Fuel Tariffs
- Advice on opening bank accounts
- Benefits Maximisation
- Checking if a person is eligible for any other financial assistance e.g. charitable grants
- Work with Wirral Credit Union to provide access to their service within sites
- Advisors being trained to deliver first stage debt advice
- Developing a Wirral Financial Help Pack in liaison with the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector as well as the General Advice Service

2.112 Open plan working - as the buildings are refurbished and the move is to more open plan desk arrangements for advisers. This removes the physical separation that currently exists and allows staff to interact more effectively with customers by allowing them to easily leave their desks and assist a customer using a self service kiosk or public access PC.

2.113 Liaison is underway with Narcotics Anonymous with a view to supporting the establishment of a Narcotics Anonymous programme at Rock Ferry that would see recovering addicts supporting each other through the process of becoming “clean”.

2.114 Business continuity - Library one stop shops will play a role in helping other Departments maintain information and services to Wirral residents in the event of any service failure. The service will participate in a corporate discussion regarding their role within a risk management framework.

2.115 Citizen Advice Bureau - With the library, one stop shop merger it will mean that there will be one stop shop advisers based in locations which the CAB also work from. We will explore with them if there are any areas of work where the advisers could assist them, such as debt advice.

### **WEB STRATEGY UPDATE**

2.116 The website is continuously developed, most of which is in response to the daily feedback received from customers who have used the “rate this page” facility with enthusiasm. Work has been completed to ensure that this Web

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feedback is managed and disseminated to the relevant content owners by staff within the Call Centre. This ensures that feedback/contact is handled in the same professional manner as other contacts.

- 2.117 The annual SOCITM “Better Connected 2012” report has been released and indicates that the website continues to improve. We have been awarded 3 stars out of a possible 4, compared to 2 stars from 2011. Overall, the comments received were very favourable with some criticism being levelled at content rather than any technical issues. Areas for improvement have been identified and actions distributed amongst the officers responsible.
  - 2.118 The new integrated Library website was successfully launched in July 2011, whilst a large amount of feedback was initially received, both positive and negatives, we now are running on an even keel. In comparison to other website launches, the library website certainly resulted in the most feedback from the customer. A combination of the new design, the introduction of eBooks and the intuitive access to your library account to renew and reserve books has resulted in a significant increase in traffic to the library site.
  - 2.119 The SOCITM report singled out Wirral library’s website as one of the best customer experience sites they had come across and after contacting us for comments, included a Wirral Library case study within the main “Better Connected” report.
  - 2.120 The success of the new library design led onto its employment in other areas of the site, most notably the “Sports” section, where changes have resulted in a near eradication of negative feedback. Plans are in place to continue to roll out this design across the site and incorporate “top task” architecture into the Homepage and landing pages.
  - 2.121 In close conjunction with the Council’s central PR and Marketing staff Wirral has carefully introduced the use of social media via Twitter and Facebook and has seen an increase in the number of “followers” and an increase in the level of two way communication via these channels. Future management of these facilities is currently being investigated as a major increase in its use is forecast.
  - 2.122. The website was successfully used to launch the “Budget Simulator” to the public, and eventually generated 1,650 responses. This represented the second-highest response in the country. 45% of people who viewed the budget simulation completed it.
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- 2.123 The Bin Collection pages were revised and are now in a tabbed format. Feedback indicated that customers were struggling to decipher between the collection dates of the various bin colours. The tabbed format makes the facility more intuitive to use. This work was highlighted as best practise by the SOCITM “Better Connected” report.
- 2.124 A new system called Self Serve has been rolled out across the Council to enable non-school employees to securely access their pay details and manage their personal data. This system is available via the intranet or via the footer of the council website enabling staff to access their details from any web enabled pc outside of work.

### **Web Future Developments**

- 2.125 A number of future developments are being assessed for suitability such as the redesigning of the website around top tasks functionality and the use of mobile Apps or mobile optimised web design 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.
- 2.126 Greater analysis is to be undertaken in 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 will be developed in the future and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) will have a greater part to play in identifying what services and amenities are available to customers within a locality.

### **Online Forms**

- 2.127 As part of the ongoing commitment to producing a 24 x 7 self serve portal, 22 forms that integrate seamlessly into the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) have been developed. These have been thoroughly tested and have seen positive take up with customers and represent a strong beginning to the necessary channel shift. The development programme has identified a further 53 forms that have been batched by complexity and potential volume of usage. These forms have been supplied to the IT Development teams and will be released when complete and thoroughly tested.
- 2.128 The “Achieve online forms” product has enabled the Customer Services Development Team to produce a further 31 forms. 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 ITS for development into CRM integrated forms. As more forms come online, feedback builds up
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to enable the forms to be fine tuned to ensure the customer finds them easy and straight forward to complete.

### **Digital Inclusion**

- 2.129 The need to address the growing “digital divide” is a project that has recently come to Customer Services. A great deal of emphasis is placed on honing the web interface that customers interact with, but until now, little emphasis has been placed on those customers that cannot even access the website or any digital service.
- 2.130 A programme of work and a policy is currently being devised that will look to tackle a number of areas such as education, equipment provision, access and perception change. The intended outcome of this work is more opportunities for all through improved access to information resulting in economic improvement and area regeneration, job opportunities and a greater spread of channel shift amongst Wirral’s residents.

### **CUSTOMER FEEDBACK**

- 2.131 Significant work has been undertaken in support of the wider customer focus work area, of which managing the performance of customer feedback (corporate complaints; councillor/MP contacts; ombudsman contacts; customer suggestions and compliments) is an integral role for customer services.
- 2.132 The following work is on-going to ensure a consistent approach towards collecting customer feedback and engaging with our customers across council services:
- Ensuring the council’s Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system reflects the revised departmental/service splits for accurate monitoring, supported by designated coordinators
  - Alignment of data collation with new corporate plan performance framework with a focus on performance management as opposed to performance monitoring
  - Collation of wider customer feedback through all channels to ensure consistency of response and review for organisational learning
- 2.133 Key projects initiated or completed in 2011/12 include:
- Review of the ‘Wirral’s Future – your road and neighbourhood ‘survey which was sent 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
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provision. The majority of responses (99%) were collated in the council's CRM system between March and June 2011:

- 3,438 service requests were raised, across 55 distinct service areas and the most popular services contacted about were:
  - Road defects 18%
  - Pavement defects 13%
  - Dog fouling 12%
  - Customer feedback 7%
  - Tree issues 6%

- 2.134 Process implemented to ensure customer feedback received via the council website's rate this page function is recorded and managed through the CRM system.
- 2.135 Improved web form provided for customers wishing to provide feedback by this channel with efficient process to ensure routed to relevant coordinator and managed in CRM
- 2.136 Work in support of the inclusion of Freedom of Information requests, Data Protection (Subject Access) requests, internal reviews and contacts from the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) in CRM, now being recorded with effect from April 2012.
- 2.137 Responsibility taken for coordinating all customer feedback received for the Libraries service.
- 2.138 Update and revision of the council's policy towards vexatious and unreasonable complaint behaviour, to be considered by Standard's Committee in July 2012.
- 2.139 Contribution to the council's compliance with the Equality Act 2010, including the ability to record equality data against (online) customer feedback and the introduction of quarterly snapshot surveys in the call centre, libraries and one stop shops.
- 2.140 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.
- 2.141 There were a total of 6,049 customer feedback contacts recorded in 2011/12, which represented a 7% decrease from 2010/11 (6,485). This overall figure included 14% fewer corporate complaints, with the lack of adverse weather conditions affecting services over the winter months, as in previous years, a
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key factor (Technical Services recorded a 31% annual reduction in their complaints). Similarly, statutory complaints recorded a comparative reduction, of 28%. Recorded councillor and MP contacts also displayed an annual reduction (5%), along with Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) contacts (9.5%).

2.142 By channel, internet and email was used for two thirds of all contacts, continuing a trend that seen usage of these channels increase by 6% from 2011/12.

2.143 There was an increase in the average response rate for complaints with 15 working days taken to respond to all complaints in 2011/12 compared to 14 working days in 2010/11.

- Corporate complaints, which are measured against a target of 15 working days to respond, recorded an average of 10 working days, maintaining performance from 2010/11.
- Statutory complaints (DASS and CYPD Children's Social Care) recorded an average of 34.5 working days to respond, compared to 24 working days in 2010/11.
- Councillor/MP enquiries took on average 7 working days in 2011/12 compared to 6 working days in 2010/11. The corporate target is 10 working days.
- LGO contacts took slightly longer to respond to in 2011/12 with an average of 16 calendar days taken compared to 14 calendar days in 2010/11. This compares to the standard response target of 28 calendar days

2.144 An average of 9% of all complaints received across the council resulting in some organisational learning. Some examples are provided below:

- New allotment application process and database introduced to improve management of waiting list (asset management)
  - Staff training provided to improve customer care offered (environmental health)
  - Enhanced information available on website to ensure displayed information for activities is accurate and up to date (marketing)
  - Improvements to coverage provided by external contractor in response to feedback received (bridleways and public rights of way)
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- Requirement placed on external contractor to improve notice given and signage used on site when undertaking future works (COLAS/Highway maintenance)
- Revised bin collection times to avoid school traffic and minimise missed collections (refuse collection service)
- Charges to be introduced for 'no show' bookings to maximise take up of leisure classes, in response to complaints received (sports and recreation service)
- Improved instructor to child ratio to be introduced for swimming classes, in response to feedback received (sports and recreation service)
- Review of CCTV coverage and provision of safe-guarding training for staff as a result of anti-social behaviour reported in a leisure centre (sports and recreation service)
- Erection of dog fouling signs to deter local issue reported (community safety)
- Website information reviewed and improved, in response to feedback received (marketing)
- Improved landlord accreditation process introduced in response to feedback provided (housing standards service)
- Improved training implemented for SEN school escorts (transport)
- Improved disabled access at a local leisure centre (sports and recreation)
- New arrangements introduced to improve liaison between schools and admission team for 11+ exams (schools)
- Customer questionnaire introduced in response to customer comments asking for a review of fitness suite opening hours (sports and recreation)
- Increased frequency of street cleansing rota introduced to minimise future complaints (street cleansing)

### **National Feedback**

2.145 Libraries complete Public Library Statistics returns on an annual basis for CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy). The collated returns from all library authorities are published to enable performance comparisons.

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- 2.146 The Call Centre remains a member of 'Call North West', a support organisation for Contact Centres across various service sectors based in the North West. Call Centre team leaders and managers have the opportunity to attend meetings when the agenda items are of interest to our organisation. The Good Practice meetings allow open discussion and the opportunity to network with both public and private sector organisations
- 2.147 Wirral are one of the longest standing members of the National OSS Benchmarking Group who meet to share knowledge and learn from good practice. With the collection and collation of benchmarking data including, costs per enquiry and customer satisfaction levels, Wirral is able to compare performance with other Local Authorities across the country. A further benefit of the group is the ability to consider adopting already tried and tested methods of service delivery with collected data being valuable for use in service reviews.

### **CASHIERS**

- 2.148 Cashiers are based at one site Conway Building in the Birkenhead One Stop Shop and remain consistently busy; continuing to process substantial amounts of cash and cheque payments from over 200 internal Wirral establishments and providing an excellent front of house service to the people of Wirral.
- 2.149 The success of this has seen all Income now reaching the Authorities Financial systems within a 3 day period, before the change was implemented the average time for monies received in the Financial systems was an average 21 days.
- 2.150 Amounts received from Wirral Establishments from April 2010 – March 2012 are as follows:

	Cash items	Cash	Cheques	Cheque £
<i>April 10 – March 11</i>	7,867	£4,473,241	31,217	£4,444,617
April 11 - March 12	8,163	£4,603,521	29,914	£4,215,983

- 2.151 Cashiers process payments from One Stop Shops drop in boxes within a one day time limit. This facility continues to provide a steady source of payment. Amounts received from April 2010 – March 2012 are as follows:

	Cash	Cheques

<i>April 10 – March 11</i>	<i>£74.00</i>	<i>£2,622,395.00</i>
April 11 – March 12	£585.00	£2,070,730.00

2.152 The counter facility has seen an overall decrease in income however continues to remain consistently busy. The post facility has seen an overall decrease in income but an increase receipts. Back office duties continue to be extremely busy due to banking of Establishment monies.

2.153 Amounts from Counter and Postal Income are as follows:

	Counter receipts	Income	Post receipts	Income
<i>April 10 – March 11</i>	<i>109,876</i>	<i>£24,120,334</i>	<i>23,656</i>	<i>£19,780,033</i>
April 10 - March 11	84,204	£23,309,685	26,784	£18,959,370

2.154 The total income processed through Cashiers is:

*April 10 – March 11 - £43,900,367*      April 11 – March 12 - £42,269,055

2.155 It is anticipated that Cashiers will continue to remain busy throughout 2012. Cashiers was restructured during 2011 with changed staffing. Training needs were delivered to both new staff and continuing staff whose role had changed due to the exercise. Throughout the whole of the process the section continued to meet all deadlines.

## **SUCCESS STORIES**

2.156 **Customer Service Excellence** - The Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services division was assessed against the criteria for the Customer Service Excellence standard (previously Charter mark) in February 2012. Following this assessment, the Standard was again confirmed. The process required the division to undertake a self assessment against specific criteria, and compile evidence to support it. In addition, a site visit by the assessor took place in February. Within the final report, the assessor highlighted a number of areas that warranted praise. These include:

- The 'rate this page' option on the website.
  - The process followed to merge the One Stop Shop and Library services in Heswall, and the enthusiasm shown by the staff involved.
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- Support provided by the Customer Services Development team in migrating new services to the Call Centre and One Stops.
- Customer Service Toolkit (CST)-we continue to develop our knowledge management system to assist our frontline staff in delivering services to customers. The system was developed in house at Wirral and has proved invaluable in supporting staff and improving the quality and consistency of our service delivery. Our efforts in developing the CST was rewarded when it was commended during a recent Customer Service Excellence inspection as one of the best systems the assessor had observed.
- Extension of generic working in the call centre

2.157 **Staff Development** - During 2011/12, the Development and Customer Relations Officers have been fully utilised in delivering training to one stop shop, call centre and library staff. Induction training has been delivered to a number of new recruits. Training sessions have been undertaken throughout the year following a number of recruitment exercises. In January 2012 a programme was started to train library staff in one stop shop procedures. These sessions have been held over five consecutive days with seven staff per session and to date 94 library staff have been trained. Library staff are trained to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to deliver a range of one stop shop services, as the project to merge one stop shops and libraries continues. This training will be built upon and library assistants will attend further sessions as the service develops.

2.158 In addition, all one stop shop advisers have, or will shortly receive, training in the new processes for delivering the Blue Badge and Property Pool Plus (formerly Wirral Homes) services due to extensive changes made to these schemes. The Development and Customer Relations officers have also supported at a number of events this year. These include Wellbeing for Wirral (Wirral Older Peoples Parliament) Redundancy Support for Trans Foods and Nifty after fifty.

2.159 A number of Customer Services advisers from the call centre and one stop shops elected to undertake an NVQ Level 3 in Customer Service when the Apprenticeship Scheme was introduced last year. The majority of these have now successfully completed their study which included functional skills in Mathematics and English. Following this initial phase, it is our intention to support this area of development moving forward.

2.160 We are currently evaluating an apprenticeship programme "Libraries, Archives & Information Services" which will be fully funded via Wirral Metropolitan College.

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- 2.161 A number of additional services have been migrated to the call centre this year, following the Voluntary Severance/Early Voluntary Retirement initiative. This has required staff to undertake a significant amount of training within a short period of time to equip them with the knowledge to deliver the new services. The Customer Services Toolkit has proved to be invaluable during this time of rapid change, as staff are able to confirm information as they continue to learn.
- 2.162 The effectiveness of the service they provide e.g. the updated Revenues and Benefits system, e-learning courses on fraud awareness, equality and diversity and safe guarding.
- 2.163 Two members of Customer Services are close to finishing a Masters in Business Administration (MBA), as part of the Wirral MBA programme based at the University of Chester. Over the previous six modules, learning has been closely aligned with local government experience to encourage the transfer of new skills back to the workplace. Completion of final dissertations is expected by November this year.

## **CONCLUSION**

- 2.164 This report reflects a frenetic and productive previous 12 months. The forthcoming 12 months will continue at a pace seeing the fruition of one of the councils major restructures, the library and one stop shop merger. Welfare Reform will have a major impact on the work of the customer services and will shape what and how front line services deliver to ensure the public are fully cognisant, with an informed ability to make clear choices.
- 2.165 How people choose to access services is constantly changing with social media developments. Our role is to help those who can, access services via the web and to improve the ability of those who don't currently access the web, breaking down the digital divide will be a key role across customer services teams working corporately to look at the consequential economic impacts these changes will bring.
- 2.166 Never has the work of customer services been so prolific and intrinsic in supporting the council to meet the economic and structural constraints of the future whilst ensuring the public receive a robust and responsive service.

## **3.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 3.1 Failure to deliver on the many diverse tasks that face customer services will mean that those of our customers who are the most vulnerable may not receive the services that they rightly deserve. Failure to deliver on the Welfare Reform agenda will have economic impacts for generations to come.
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#### **4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

4.1 None within the context of this report.

#### **5.0 CONSULTATION**

5.1 Consultation work undertaken is set out in the main body of this report , particularly in relation to the Library strategy.

#### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

6.1 There is potential for significant impact particularly as the effects of Welfare Reform is rolled out. Groups will be consulted as part of the wider customer focus work within the Customer Access Strategy.

#### **7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

7.1 The main area for resourcing issues are the restructuring of the library one stop shop service. There will be resource implications with regards to meeting the welfare agenda.

#### **8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

#### **9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

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

#### **10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

#### **11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 All building details for library one stop shops will be fully undertaken within appropriate planning and building regulations.

#### **12.0 RECOMMENDATION**

12.1 The report is for noting.

#### **13.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**

13.1 That Members are aware of the work being undertaken within the field of Customer Services.

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## APPENDICES

None.

Council Meeting	Date
Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee	12 July 2011
Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee	8 July 2010

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