

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission – 23 July 2009

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Customer Contact Centre

1. **Purpose of Report** – Responding to request from the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting on 30 April 2009 :

- 1) Future proposals for the Contact centre (including expansion)
- 2) Missed calls – difficulties and delays in getting through

2. **Recommendations**

- It is recommended that the Council/Committee:
- 2.1 not applicable – information only as requested

Note: In preparing this report, due regard has been had to equality of opportunity, human rights, prevention of crime and disorder, environmental and risk management considerations as appropriate. Relevant officers have been consulted in relation to any legal, financial or human resources implications and comments received are reflected in the report.

3. **Information, Issues and Options**

3.1 **Background**

The contact centre was implemented in 2005 with the main aim of being the first point of contact for all council services; Lagan Frontline (CRM) would enable officers to answer 'frequently asked questions' FAQ & 'easy to answer questions' EAQ.

- A phased approach was adopted starting with Benefits, Council Tax/NNDR plus Compliments & Complaints in April 2005 Street Scene was phased in, May 2005 Planning, Environmental Planning & Building Control was introduced. Ad hoc service calls were scripted and Make-a- Payment line was introduced to enable money to be taken by Customer Service Centres until they received Chip & Pin functionality.
- The resolution rate was approx. 80% - within the scope and parameters set by the service areas represented, investigative conversations and cases were raised for the back office teams to complete work, this often caused delays in the completion of work, the customer would then call back thus creating more calls into the contact centre
- In November 2008 the BI team reviewed the number of cases being created for the Council tax back office – the purpose was to review processes, to move certain transactional requests from the back to the front office, reducing cases and completing request for service at the first point of contact – Front Office optimisation.
- February 2009 saw the implementation of the above, team were up-skilled, and completed an assessment both knowledge and technical based.
- The average Council Tax call time has increased from in 2005 - 3.30 minutes a call, in 2007 to 4.30 minutes once the Direct Debit payment was introduced and currently is 9.30 minutes during summary period, these times do not include after call work which varies. What has reduced is the need for customers to call back chasing up progress.

3.1.1

Call volumes and the ability to handle all calls into the council at first point of contact

We have seen a year on year increase in call volumes; we also handle emails which have increased.

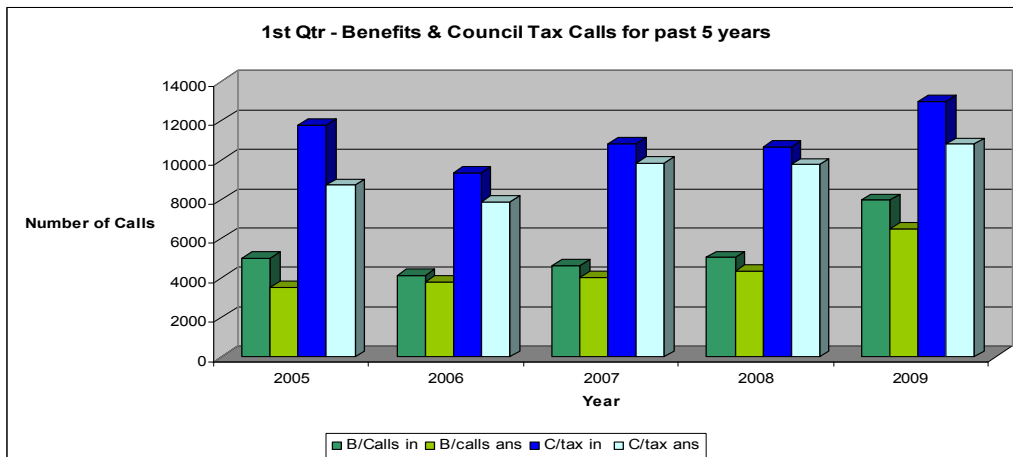
	Calls in	Calls answered
2005-06	200073	172169
2006-07	201365	175913
2007-08	204020	178685
2008-09	186848	165164

The figures above are for financial years, these do not include those calls that receive an engaged tone, below I have shown this years email volumes.

2009	Spam	Total emails in	Do it On-Line	Total worked on
Jan	148	572	102	424
Feb	171	545	80	374
Mar	164	974	137	810
Apr	139	838	149	699
May	236	736	101	500
Jun	257	921	95	664

Due to the current economic climate we have seen a significant increase on 2 specific lines, the figures below are for January to March of each year (1st Qtr)

	Benefits Calls in	Benefits calls answered	Council Tax in	Council Tax answered
2005	5014	3554	11769	8729
2006	4154	3808	9348	7864
2007	4656	4044	10847	9839
2008	5053	4346	10690	9776
2009	7954	6502	13000	10810



Restrictions

- Contact centre limited to 15 in coming lines – callers will receive engaged tone when all officers on calls and restricted number of callers queuing.
- operational hours 08:00 to 18:00 – 3 start times, adequate staffing levels
- contact centre staff cover customer service centres – reducing staffing levels
- We are reviewing the feasibility of extension of operational hours of the Customer Service Centres within Attleborough, Swaffham & Watton this is a

phased project and although we have resourced this with 2 extra staff this has increased the risk of requirement for coverage.

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 NI14 – Councils are required to report on this National Indicator and seek to improve service delivery to our customers, taking note of the comments against the avoidable contact response.

In the first 2 weeks of April 2009 from an overall figure of 3,038 interactions face to face, telephone, letter, fax & email the avoidable percentage per service area below was recorded.

Env Services 60.6%
C/tax 40.9%
Benefits 13%

Final count for April
7,560 contacts collated 68.2% Unavoidable & 31.8% avoidable.
Top 3 were

Benefits 33.2% = 462 avoidable contacts
Council Tax 33.8% = 563 avoidable contacts
Environmental Services 56% = 825 avoidable contacts

This is not for blame but to enable service managers to

- Review avoidable contact trends, comments and what would be required to avoid in the future
- What action required immediately to rectify
- What lessons learnt, how to ensure minimum risk of reoccurrence

To enable best use of resources and greater customer satisfaction we need to ensure this process is adopted by all service areas, monitored monthly and amendments &/or improvements made. This will better enable callers to get through to the council with requests for service rather than responding to incorrect information receive, by removing the excess demand which is avoidable.

3.3 Options

3.3.1 Future proposals for the Contact Centre

- BI team to continue reviewing back office processes within a schedule of service areas, working with the Front Office Optimisation model and where of value to customer bring to the front office.
- Ensure when efficiencies found posts or funding transferred
- Joined up/linked processes – offering the customer a 'One and done' at first point of access.
- Expanding and improving access to all services by enabling transactional functions on our Website, by making sure we use one source of information all access channels feed from. Mobile working linking back through single system ease of capture and imparting of information

3.3.2 Missed calls

- Promote channel shift, making more use of the website for query and transactional handling.
- Expand telephone platform offering more lines into the contact centre in general the council - caveat more staff required within CCC
- Expand digital telephone environment throughout the council to enable overflow to

specific service areas when all contact centre team engaged handling calls.

- Expansion of contact centre environment ready for growth with recommendations from BI team, the work would only be transferred to the contact centre if there was extra capacity to handle the elongated calls, this would ensure we do not impact negatively on existing service.

3.4 Reasons for Recommendation(s)

- 3.4.1 The Customer Contact & Service centres are the face and voice of the council but we are also the ears, feeding back invaluable information from our residents, businesses and visitors – we need to listen and continue with the things we do right and make right the thing we do wrong.

4. **Risk and Financial Implications**

4.1 Risk

- 4.1.1 If we do not move forward, expand and improve we will receive more negative feedback and complaints.

4.2 Financial

- 4.2.1 Efficiencies will be gained by ensuring the BI team walk through the processes, using systems thinking and Front Office Optimisation model.

A Customer Access Strategy is being drafted which has identified the requirement for channel shift to web usage which would free up valuable officer time and costs.

5. **Legal Implications**

- 5.1 None

6. **Other Implications**

- a) Equalities:
- b) Section 17, Crime & Disorder Act 1998:
- c) Section 40, Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006:
- d) Human Resources:
- e) Human Rights:
- f) Other: [e.g. Children's Act 2004]

7. **Alignment to Council Priorities**

- 7.1 Your council your service

8. **Ward/Community Affected**

- 8.1 All Breckland

Background Papers

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Key Decision Status (Executive Decisions only):

None

Appendices attached to this report: