North Northamptonshire Council

Connected Communities
Executive Advisory Panel

19th April 2024

Report Title	**Customer Service Operation Update**
Lead Member	Cllr Lloyd Bunday – Executive Member for Finance and Transformation
Report Author	Simon Mills, Assistant Director Customer Experience

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	☐ Yes ☒ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	☐ Yes ☒ No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	N/A
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with?	Modern public services

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Customer Service Plan 2024-25
Appendix B – Team Charter

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1.   This report provides an update on the council's customer services operations following a period of transformational activity. The report takes stock of the impact of this activity on the day to day running of the customer service function and provides information on the current position of the service.

2.   Executive Summary

2.1.   This report aims to provide members with information about the council's customer services operations and the opportunity to provide comment and feedback.

2.2.   Following Executive approval on 14th April 2022, North Northamptonshire Council procured a new, single customer relationship management (CRM) system called PlaceCube. Onboarding the five legacy systems commenced in April 2023 and is due to be completed in October 2024.

2.3.   Following Executive approval on 19th May 2022, the Council procured a single cloud-based telephony system provided by 8x8. Migration from the existing five previous systems started in May 2023. The contact centre software rollout out to all of the council's customer service hubs completed in June 2023, providing one view of customer contact via this important communication channel.

2.4.   In addition to technological and system implementations, the service has started to align and harmonise its way of working. Further changes will be implemented throughout this financial year and into 2025/26.

2.5.   A team charter has been co-designed with the team that brings together consistent working principles.

2.6.   A great deal of work has taken place to get to the current position. Members should note that although it has been possible to move towards single CRM and telephony solutions for customer services, there are still a number of areas with multiple back-office systems that need to be accessed when serving customers. It is natural that future benefits for both the customer and the council will be delivered in phases rather than at one single point. A lot of activity is taking place to streamline ways of working across the council and it is important that the technology is now in place to facilitate this future transformation.

3.   Recommendations

3.1.   It is recommended that the Executive Advisory Panel:

(a) Note the progress that has been made to date in relation to customer services transformation.
(b) Consider the information presented in the report and the attached service plan in order to inform both a discussion now and the identification of future advisory opportunities.

3.2.   Reason for Recommendations:

• To provide the service with effective advice and scrutiny on the back of two significant transformation rollouts.

4.   Report Background

Customer relationship management system (CRM)

4.1.   Phase 1 of the PlaceCube CRM system rollout ran from October 2022 to April 2023 (onboarding of Kettering - Haylock House based infrastructure, which is currently hosted by WNC). The following are the benefit realisations and lessons learnt:

• What went well?
  o Strong stakeholder engagement: officer positivity and opportunities to shape training delivery materials.

- System ease of use, allowing to suit the needs of the organisation as per consultation with officers.
- Sharing of knowledge between service designer and business analysts, enabling a redesign of service request and ability to wireframe.
- Ability to record cases against customer records (something the previous systems in use were unable to do).
- Rapid development of key capabilities with new systems in the council, with improvements to agility acquired through experience.
- Continuing to provide services whilst a new system is implemented.
- Delivery of a project within budget and on time.

- What didn't go well?
  - Following internal resource changes, supplier support was initially not able to meet the council's specific needs. This led to the project team having to design and self-learn the system at the same time – in short, they had to react very quickly to the situation.
  - Due to supplier resource constraints, there was a delay in resolving issues whilst building the platform.
  - Limitation on the availability of council resource/ However, as the council was part of West Northants Council (WNC) digital service at that time, it was able to access additional support. This did pose problems with allocation of resources across the shared service, with multiple project timelines and commitments to take into consideration.

- What have we learnt?
  - Resource focus - In May 2023, the Digital service disaggregation was imminent (shared service with WNC), so resource needed to be ringfenced for future phases, including a service designer and low code officers.
  - Adapting the approach - Feedback from the project team that the 'show and tell' sessions could be perceived as going over the same content. These have been shaped differently, including development build specific sprints and tailored sessions on workstreams such as the waste service dashboard.
  - Earlier supplier engagement – Earlier engagement with the supplier at the start of future phases, ensuring accountability and support is in place. Weekly and monthly progress meetings planned in advance, with key stakeholders in attendance.

4.2. Phase 2a and 2b of the Placecube rollout ran from May 2023 to December 2023 (onboarding of Thrapston (June 2023) and Wellingborough December 2023) based infrastructures including waste services dashboards and integration). The following are the benefit realisations and lessons learnt:

- What went well?

  - Good team work; communication and flexibility to complete testing out of hours to meet deadlines.
  - Quicker at identifying bug fixes for the supplier to resolve.
  - Training materials and engagement with officers.
  - Rollout after three phases remains on budget.

- What didn't go well?
    - System issues, classed as bug fixes, taking time to get resolved by the supplier.
    - The case management system has been built in a certain way, which utilises its own branded forms. Using our own forms via Firmstep resulted in complex integrations, which caused a delay with testing and go live.
    - Other project streams coinciding around peak activity times.

- What have we learnt?
    - Adapting the approach - To carry out impact assessments for all changes, even those perceived as minor, creating more opportunities for officer to assess the changes proposed.
    - Adapting the approach – Due to the complexities of the system build, ringfence more time for testing on future phases, where practical.

How is the system working and what are we looking at next?

4.3.   Our customer relationship management (CRM) system is now live in four of the services six hubs including Thrapston - Cedar Drive; Kettering - Haylock House; Rushden - Newton Road and Wellingborough - Tithe Barn.

4.4.   Officers operating within these hubs are recording all contact channel interactions onto the system (appointments; email; phone; reception and web forms). We also record if each instance of customer contact is avoidable. This helps us review service delivery in the future to help resolve customer queries quicker as well as self-serve on our website where possible.

4.5.   Our in-house developers have set up datasource and reporting capability in the CRM system, allowing us to export data to support ongoing service liaison meetings. Our aim is to provide a service specific service summary report each month, detailing all the interactions that have taken place and helping all services better and more efficiently serve our customers.

4.6.   Phase 3a of the Placecube rollout is in progress and due to be completed by June 2024 (onboarding of The Cube hub-based infrastructure). Phase 3b will commence shortly after and is due to complete in October 2024 (onboarding of the Kettering - Bowling Green Road hub based infrastructure).

Cloud based telephony system (8x8)

4.7.   The 8x8 Contact Centre solution rollout went live on 14th June 2023 as planned (onboarding of all six customer service hubs). Prior to the go live date, the main North Northamptonshire Council contact telephone number was ported (brought in off our legacy systems, into the 8x8 database) on 6 June 2023. The customer service managers were key in ensuring the ported number was tested and the customer journey met the design expectations. Throughout the project, there was regular senior officer oversight and involvement from service leads, ensuring that decision making was consistent and supported the engagement and training of colleagues, as well as opportunity to raise any concerns or knowledge gaps. The following are the benefit realisations and lessons learnt:

- What went well?
  - Minor teething issues with IT equipment were quickly resolved.
  - Positive engagement and sharing of cloud based implementation good practice with Buckinghamshire Council. As well as regular meetings with the WNC telephony project team, ensuring shared service dependencies were identified and maintaining a good working relationship.
  - Positive engagement with staff and stakeholder by-in, good engagement with change champions and officers.
  - High attendance at the 8x8 supplier led contact centre training sessions.

- What didn't go well?
  - Training overlapped with testing, due to demand on resource from other competing projects and operational activities. This was mitigated by the test manager who made sure all test cases were correctly created and signed off by 8x8.
  - There was a desire to attend training sessions as close to go live as possible, which also caused overlaps and potential changes to agreed processes, off the back of product testing.

- What have we learnt?
  - Adapting the approach - In collaboration with our suppler, identify capacity and availability on both sides, when planning training and go-live dates.

How is the system working and what are we looking at next?

4.8. Following the completion of the contact centre solution rollout, a programme board has been established to track changes to the interactive voice response (IVR), which is the technology behind our phone queues and agent groups. This is the customer facing interaction when a call comes through our 0300 126 3000 telephone line.

4.9. Having the service on one telephony platform has enabled us to train multiple officers in skillsets to offer stronger resilience on high demand lines. For example, our Wellingborough hub is now accepting between 1-1.5k calls extra per month, which has reduced the abandonment rate at the Kettering - Bowling Green Road hub.

4.10. Being a cloud-based solution has enabled the team based at Haylock House the ability to work remotely, something the previous solution was unable to do.

4.11. We will be reducing the complexities of selecting a local area as we onboard the remaining hubs to the CRM, as well as working with services who are onboarding to a one system database i.e. revenues and benefits.

4.12. The structure and menu wording will also be reviewed to ensure that it reflects the customer journey better, that it is in plain English and easier to navigate.

4.13. The new income management system (IMS) went live in January 2024, which includes a one platform for automated telephone payments (ATP). As a result, we have been able to remove the multiple ATP options throughout the IVR and

present the ATP option at the front of the script. Customers also have the option to select a soft key at any point, to go directly to the ATP. This has made it easier for customers to make payments and prevent funds going to the incorrect legacy accounts.

Performance full year 2023/24

4.14.

Telephone Contact	
Calls Offered	390,644
Calls Accepted	305,225
% Accepted	80%
% Within SLA (<1min)	60%

Other Contact Channels	Customer Volumes
Face to Face	74,751
Emails	122,848
E-Forms	29,158
Total customer contact	**531,982**

5.   Next Steps

5.1.   Alongside the customer service transformational projects, work has gone into establishing how the team transition to one way of working and purpose.

5.2.   The team have been involved with developing a team charter which benchmarks our ways of working against North Northants Councils values and behaviours.

5.3.   This includes a learning and development programme, focusing on in person training events every quarter for every officer, with content that reflects the environment the team are working in. For example, we are producing a 'crisis management for call handlers' course for Q1. These sessions will also offer officers the opportunity to network and share best practice.

5.4.   We have six customer service offices across North Northants:
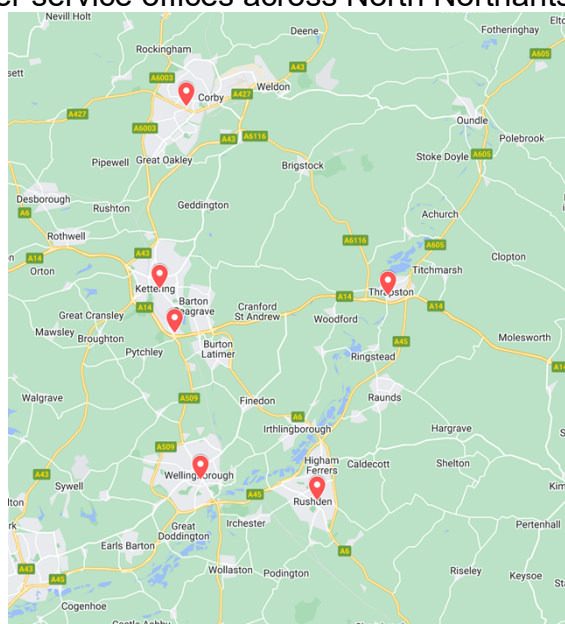
5.5.   The team will have the opportunity to work from any of these locations, which will incorporate a consistent approach to hybrid working.

5.6.   The customer service team leaders have been assigned specific project ownership, which will include a review of our current service processes and the identify the opportunities to align and optimise.

5.7.   As part of the 8x8 purchase, a workforce management system was included called Verint. This integrates data from the contact centre system, which will allow us to forecast staffing based on call volumes, by officer skill set.

6.   Implications (including financial implications)

6.1.   Resources, Financial and Transformation

6.1.1. The service has a balanced budget for the 2024/25 financial year. There are no resource or financial implications arising from this service update.

6.1.2. The case management system for complaints; MP and member enquires is currently going through the approval process and can be shared at a future Executive Advisory Panel.

6.2.   Legal and Governance

6.2.1. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.3.   Relevant Policies and Plans

6.3.1. This service update supports our Corporate Plan key commitments to provide Modern public services 'providing efficient; effective and affordable services that make a real difference to all our local communities'.
- Providing good quality and efficient services valued by our customers.
- Using our assets; skills; knowledge and technology effectively.

6.4.   Risk

6.4.1. The CRM and telephony projects have specific risk registers in place to capture feedback and oversight via the project management teams.

6.4.2. There are no significant risks identified from the update contained in this report.

6.5.   Consultation

6.5.1. The CRM and telephony project managers were engaged with, to ensure this report captured a true reflection of their respective projects.

6.5.2. This service update report required no further formal consultation.
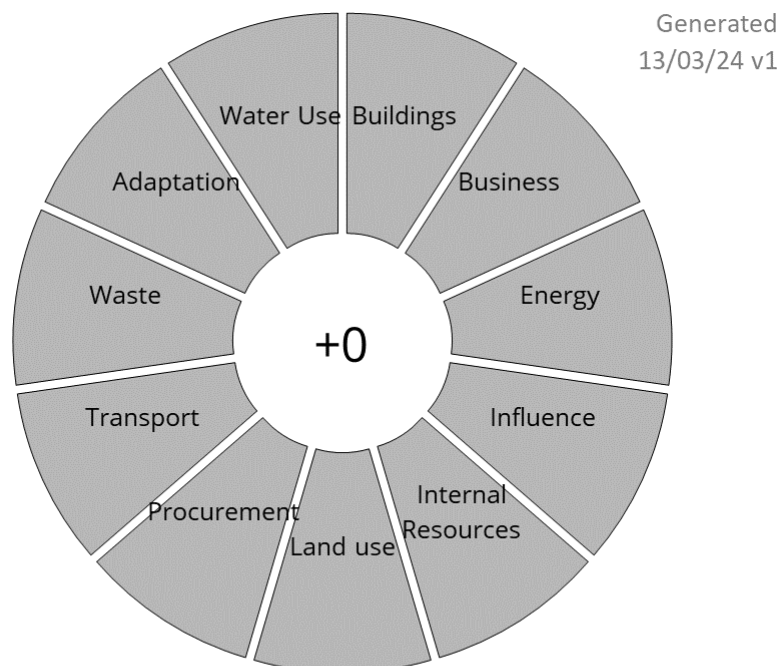
6.6. **Consideration by the Executive**

6.6.1. The report being presented to the Executive Advisory Panel, has not been presented to Executive. However, the Executive signed off the CRM business case on 14th April 2022 and the telephony business case on 19th May 2022.

6.6.2. This report was presented to and discussed at the recent Corporate Scrutiny Committee, on 9th April 2024.

6.6.3. The Executive Member responsible for the service has regular meetings with the Assistant Director Customer Experience, therefore is kept appraised of ongoing project work and service performance.

6.7. **Equality Implications**

6.7.1. There are no specific equalities implications arising from this report.

6.8. **Climate Impact**

6.8.1. The climate assessment has been completed, showing zero impact. The contents of this service report have no direct positive or negative dependencies on NNC's climate response.

6.8.2. The infographic shows the relative costs and benefits of the decision on 11 different categories with respect to the climate: Buildings, no effect. Business, no effect. Energy, no effect. Influence, no effect. Internal Resources, no effect. Land use, no effect. Procurement, no effect. Transport, no effect. Waste, no effect. Adaptation, no effect. Water Use, no effect.

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Water Use | Buildings | Business | Energy | Influence | Internal Resources | Land use | Procurement | Transport | Waste | Adaptation

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North Northamptonshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, 5 yrs & 9 mos away.

6.9.   **Community Impact**

6.9.1. There are no community implications arising from this report.

6.10.   **Crime and Disorder Impact**

6.10.1. There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7.   **Background Papers**

7.1.   None.