

# Guildford Borough Council

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 16 January 2024

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Director: Community Wellbeing

Author: Nicola Haymes, Executive Head of Communication and Customer Service

Tel: 01483 444 500

Email: nicola.haymes@guildford.gov.uk

Lead Councillor responsible: Angela Goodwin

Tel: 01483 824616

Email: angela.goodwin@guildford.gov.uk

Report Status: Open

## **Customer Services: Performance and Progress update**

### **1. Executive Summary**

The Overview and Scrutiny committee requested an update on the performance and progression of Customer Services since the previous update in July 2023. This report provides an overview of this and invites comments.

### **2. Recommendation to Committee**

That the Committee note and comment on this report.

### **3. Reason(s) for Recommendation:**

3.1. The committee has asked to review the performance and progression of customer services improvement as part of its work programme.

## **4.Exemption from publication**

4.1 No

## **5. Purpose of Report**

5.1. The report provides an update on the performance and progression of customer services at Guildford Borough Council since the previous report to Overview and Scrutiny in July 2023.

## **6. Strategic Priorities**

6.1. Customer services is at the heart of what we do at Guildford Borough Council, acting as the front door to the council for our residents.

6.2. Customer services contributes to the councils' values of listening to the views of our residents and delivering excellent customer service.

## **7. Background**

7.1 The Customer service team, supported by the digital offering, are the front door for all enquiries into the council, bringing together areas that were previously within the services themselves. This was a large organisational change and, unfortunately, this initially led to a drop in customer service performance whilst this change embedded.

7.2 In January 2022 an action plan was put in place to improve our customer services offering both digitally and on the phone. Significant changes have been made to both services to improve customer experience when engaging with the council.

7.3 This report provides an update on the progress of this and the current performance of the service.

## **7.4 Our strategy and target operating model**

- 7.4.1 Our customer engagement strategy, corporate customer charter and target operating model set out our goals and shape how we approach customer service at the council.
- 7.4.2 The strategy also sets out our target operating model of customer contact which is 75% of customer transactions undertaken online, 20% via the telephone and 5% face to face.
- 7.4.3 Our corporate customer charter sets out our promise to our customers and our target response times for customer contact. The charter is published on the external website ( Corporate Customer Charter - Guildford Borough Council)

## **8. Customer Service Performance**

### **8.1 Customer service centre and call wait times**

- 8.1.1 We have taken steps to significantly improve the call wait times for our customers. The report that we previously brought to Overview and Scrutiny in July demonstrated the positive impact these changes had had on call wait times for customers. Appendices A and B shows that these improvements have been sustained over the past 6 months.
- 8.1.2 We do continue to offer the call back option for residents who would prefer not to wait on hold and receive a call back from us instead. This option becomes available after a certain amount of time and is now rarely used except for during occasional peak times of calls.
- 8.1.3 Overall the changes that we have made have meant that call wait times for customers has significantly improved from January 2022 when 38% of calls were being handled to around 85-95% of calls now being taken each week. This is alongside the team also responding to online contact within advertised time frames and managing face to face contact through reception. Appendix 2 includes a comparison of 2022 stats with the most recent weekly figures.

8.1.4 Information on the areas with the highest calls over the past 6 months can be found in Appendix 3.

8.1.5 This sustained improvement to service has meant that the team has been able to focus on further supporting the wider council to support our customers. We are also in a much stronger position to be able to cope with peak demands in call levels such as annual garden waste renewals, council tax annual billing and during severe cold weather which causes peaks in repairs calls.

## **8.2 Customer and Digital Channel shift**

8.2.1 Online and digital engagement with customers is crucial to allowing our residents to find the information they need at the time that is most convenient to them.

8.2.2 Both our website and online portal, MyGuildford, help to support this by acting as the first point of contact for residents to find the information they need the first time without the need to speak to us.

8.2.3 MyGuildford allows customers to log and track customer requests, pay for services and link their council tax and benefits information so that it can be viewed in one place.

8.2.4 As of 13 December 2023 there are over 63,500 customers registered to use the MyGuildford portal which represents over 83% of the customers who contact us. This is an increase of over 6,500 in the past 6 months.

8.2.5 Having a strong digital presence does not mean that we are removing other ways for customers to contact us. We fully acknowledge that we need to provide a service for all residents including those who are not digitally able to engage with us through these routes.

8.2.6 However, in order to be able to support those residents who are not digitally enabled, we need those that can, to use the online services available.

8.2.7 Online contact through all means is just as important to us and our residents as contact via the phones. It is crucial that we do treat online customer contact with the same importance as other routes such as via the telephone, as delays in replying to online contact will result in residents calling to chase requests which blocks phone lines for residents who are not digitally enabled, or who require extra support from being able to get through to speak to an agent.

8.2.8 We continue to make improvements to our digital customer journeys based on resident feedback and continue to deliver improvements to bring both new features and increase the online options available to our residents.

## **9. Consultations**

9.1 The Lead Councillor for Engagement and Customer Services has been consulted on this report and approved its submission to the Committee.

## **10. Key Risks**

10.1 Much of our current strategy and operational delivery is based on continuing to achieve a channel shift of customer contact towards our online services for those residents who are digitally enabled to do so. Without this there is a risk that customer service agents on the telephones will not be able to support the number of calls received or our residents who are not able to access support online.

10.2 Customer service covers all contact that a customer has with the council, not just those that are via the customer service centre. There is a risk that the level of service is not replicated across all council departments. A strong customer engagement strategy and charter

that all services own, are bought into and implemented on a daily basis would help to mitigate this risk.

## **11. Financial Implications**

11.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **12. Legal Implications**

12.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## **13. Human Resource Implications**

13.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

## **14. Equality and Diversity Implications**

14. 1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report. Any future changes to the service will have regard to the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) and may be subject to an equalities impact assessment

## **15. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications**

15.1 There are no climate change or sustainability implications arising from this report

## **16. Suggested issues for overview and scrutiny**

16.1 As requested as part of its work programme, this report gives the Committee the opportunity to comment on the progress and performance of customer service.

16.2 The committee is asked to confirm if they wish for further progress reports for this area to be brought forward.

## **17. Summary of Options**

17.1 None

## **18. Conclusion**

We know that there is always more we can do to make improvements to the service we offer our customers. We will continue to strive for improvements and work with customers and councillors to ensure that what we are doing meets the needs of our residents. We would encourage councillors to share any ideas or feedback you receive from residents on improvements we can make with us via email and would welcome your input.

## **19. Background Papers**

19.1 None

## **20. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Average monthly call statistics April 23- Oct 23

Appendix 2 – Detailed weekly call statistics – November and December (to date) 2023

Appendix 3 – Areas with the highest call volumes (June – November 2023)