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**Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement)**

**Executive Board**

**Date: 16 April 2008**

**Subject: Numbering Strategy and Golden Number**

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**Electoral Wards Affected:**

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

**Specific Implications For:**

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. Members will be aware of the recent debate at Full Council regarding the Council's Corporate Contact Centre, with particular reference to work that was being progressed to develop a new telephone numbering strategy for Leeds City Council.
2. This report details the options available to the Council and makes a proposal to implement 0113 numbers as the basis for the new telephone numbering strategy.
3. The report also provides an update on the development of a 'golden number' for customers accessing principal Council services by means of the Corporate Contact Centre.

## **1.0 Purpose Of This Report**

- 1.1 To seek approval for the development of a new telephone numbering strategy.
- 1.2 To update members on the development of a 'golden number' for customers accessing principal Council services by means of the Corporate Contact Centre.

## **2.0 Background Information**

- 2.1 Stage 1 of the Customer Strategy Delivery Programme entailed the development of a Corporate Contact Centre for Leeds City Council and the migration of existing 'call centres' into the new centre. This was completed successfully, on time and within budget by March 2006.
- 2.2 As part of this phase, a telephone numbering strategy for the Council was developed and implemented, based on the introduction of 0845 numbers. This strategy enabled easier access to our services, by providing a series of connected and easily recognisable numbers and, allowed the routing of calls more effectively, making it possible for callers to get through to the right person first time and, get their enquiry dealt with in the most efficient way. It also provided location independence, improved call routing functionality, disaster recovery and business continuity, online management and reporting of inbound services which, at that time, couldn't be achieved with the traditional 0113 numbers.
- 2.3 The first of the 0845 'silver' numbers were introduced for some of the services which had migrated to the Corporate Contact Centre and launched to coincide with the official opening in March 2006.
- 2.4 These services and numbers were:

Council Tax	0845 1260113
Benefits	0845 1270113
Environmental Services	0845 1240113
Customer Relations	0845 1290113
Social Services	0845 1274113
- 2.5 However, following the introduction of these 0845 'silver' numbers, a small number of complaints were received from customers because some telecom providers charge more for making 0845 calls than local calls (although BT charge less) and some do not include 0845 numbers as part of any inclusive minutes or discount packages.
- 2.6 Stage 2 of the Programme, which commenced in April, 2006, involved the ongoing transformation of other appropriate services to enable customer contact element to be migrated to Contact Leeds. It also included the delivery of a comprehensive staff training and development programme and the development of a Knowledge Base, for the whole of Contact Leeds, to enable the resolution of 80% of enquiries, at first point of contact. This stage was completed at the end of March 2008.
- 2.7 Moreover, one of our key aims has been to introduce and launch a 'golden number' for general enquiries and to make it easier for customers to access services delivered from the Corporate Contact Centre. Many of the objectives outlined in 2.6 are key to the development and introduction of a 'golden number and this now represents Stage 3 of our improvement programme.

- 2.8 In July 2006, Ofcom announced it would be introducing new UK-wide 03 numbers to increase certainty, trust and confidence in the numbers that consumers use to call public services, voluntary organisations and companies who want a national presence. It said that the 03 number range would be for the exclusive use of public bodies and other not-for-profit organisations and, it was anticipated that 03 numbers would be available by the end of 2007.
- 2.9 In view of this pronouncement and, the adverse reaction of a very small minority of customers, it was decided to stop the introduction of any further 0845 numbers, including the 'golden number' to allow a fundamental review of the numbering strategy, when details of the 03 numbers and strategy were made clear by Ofcom.
- 2.10 Ofcom have now published details on how new UK-wide 03 numbers will be implemented and, the options for a new numbering strategy and 'golden number' are detailed in this report.
- 2.11 The next steps, commencing April 2008, include the transformation of services within the Corporate Contact Centre to drive through efficiencies by rationalisation, performance management, multi-skilling and, developing strong links with service partners to ensure continuous process improvement, effective communication, efficient change management and the launch of a 'golden number'.
- 2.12 When the Corporate Contact Centre at West Gate was officially opened in March 2006, eight existing 'call centre' services had been migrated into it and, approximately 68% of public telephone calls to the Council were being handled by Contact Leeds.
- 2.13 Since April 2006, the telephone and e-mail enquires for several other services have been transitioned into the Corporate Contact Centre, including Grass Cutting, Contract Service Desk, Choice Based Lettings, Homelessness Advice and Prevention, Benefits Fraud, Energy Efficiency Advice, Elections and the Switchboard.
- 2.14 Other services, due to be migrated this year are PEPU, Registrars and all the Emergency Out of Hours services after which, approximately 85% of all telephone calls to the Council will be handled by the Corporate Contact Centre.
- 2.15 In addition, discussions are being held with Education Leeds, Planning Services, Car Parking and Taxi and Private Hire Licensing.
- 2.16 Work has commenced on the development and implementation of a Knowledge Base for Contact Leeds, which will enable non-specialists to answer 80% of high volume, low complexity enquiries at first point of contact, a key requirement for the introduction of an effective 'golden number'.

### **3.0 Numbering Strategy - Our Options**

3.1 The following options are available for the development of a numbering strategy.

#### **3.2 0113**

Until recently, geographic numbers were not resilient, in that they were linked to a specific telephone exchange and, if that exchange failed, or the lines to which the number was delivered failed, then calls were lost. This meant that for normal 0113 numbers, disaster recovery and resilience across the Affiniti network was restricted to the Leeds exchange. If there was an emergency incident in the city centre which

affected the Corporate Contact Centre, it would only have been possible to divert calls to an alternative location on the same telephone exchange.

However, technological developments now make it now possible to deploy specific 0113 geographic numbers on an Intelligent Network platform and provide location independence, subject to an additional cost to provide this flexibility.

The overwhelming majority of our customers who dial a 0113 number from a landline will be charged at a local call rate, equating to approximately 3.25p per minute. Charges from mobile phones vary, dependent upon service provider and network used e.g. from 12p for one provider to 20p for another. However, some telecom providers include geographic numbers as part of any inclusive minutes or discount packages.

### 3.3 0845

With 0845 numbers there is location independence, improved call routing functionality, disaster recovery and business continuity, online management and reporting of inbound services.

Customers are charged for dialing 0845 non-geographic numbers from a fixed line at differing rates, dependent upon the telecom provider used, irrespective of where they are calling from within UK e.g. from 2p with one provider to 5p with another. Charges from mobile phones vary, depending on service provider and network used e.g. 12p with one provider to 25p with another. 0845 numbers are not usually included as part of any inclusive minutes or discount packages.

### 3.4 0800

Customers are not charged for dialing 0800 numbers from a fixed line however, charges from mobile phones vary, depending on service provider and network used e.g. from 10p with one provider to 15p with another.

### 3.5 0300

As with 0845 numbers, with 0300 non-geographic numbers there is location independence, improved call routing functionality, disaster recovery and business continuity, online management and reporting of inbound services.

Ofcom have ruled that calls to 0300 numbers will cost the same or less than calls to geographic 01 and 02 prefixed numbers. 0300 numbers will be included as part of any inclusive minutes or discount package. These rules will apply to calls from any type of line including fixed line, mobile or payphone.

## 4.0 **Numbering Strategy – Issues to Consider**

4.1 Whichever numbering strategy is chosen, some customers without inclusive minutes or discount packages will benefit and some will lose. For example, with the 0113 or 0300 option, one customer calling from a fixed line from one provider will have to pay 3.25p per minute, as opposed to 2p per minute with the 0845 option. However, another customer calling from a fixed line from a different provider will have to pay 3.25p per minute, as opposed to 5p per minute with the 0845 option.

4.2 With the 0800 option, customers calling from a fixed line will not be charged but, customers calling from a mobile phone would be charged anything from 10p to 40p per minute, depending on service provider. It should be noted that in the recent mock inspections, ALMO's have been criticised for using 0800 numbers because, the majority of tenants use mobile phones, as opposed to a fixed line telephone.

- 4.3 The 0300 numbers are new and relatively untested. Very few customers are aware of the details on how these new numbers will work or, how much it will cost to ring them. There is going to be considerable confusion about the prices and services relating to 0300 numbers and, customers could be deterred from calling them. Whilst Ofcom have stated that customers will be charged the same rate as for calls to 01 and 02 prefixed numbers and, that they will be included as part of any inclusive minutes or discount package, this has still to be tested and, not all telecom providers have confirmed this position. As a result, the cost of calling 0300 numbers may change in the future. In addition, 0300 numbers have been principally designed for public bodies which require a national presence. Feedback also indicates that the majority of customers prefer geographic (01 and 02) numbers and most organisations who have adopted 0300 numbers, have also published geographic numbers alongside the 0300 numbers. With the 0300 option, it is likely to be necessary for the Council to publish equivalent 0113 numbers, thereby adding confusion for the customer and doubling the costs to the Council.
- 4.4 As most telecom provider packages apply to evenings and weekends, when access to most council services is not available, very few customers with inclusive minutes or discount packages would benefit if the 0113 or 0300 option were chosen.
- 4.5 If the 0113 option is chosen, there would be an additional cost to deploy the numbers on an Intelligent Network platform and have location independence, improved call routing functionality, disaster recovery and business continuity available as standard. Whereas, if the 0845 option is retained or, the 0300 option chosen, these essential services are already included.
- 4.6 If the 0113, 0300 or 0800 option is chosen, the cost to Leeds City Council, for calls handled by Contact Leeds, could range from £15,000 to £100,000 per year, from our current telecom provider and, would mean the loss of approximately £15,000 per year revenue from the 0845 option.
- 4.7 It is essential that a decision on the numbering strategy is made by May 2008, in order to initiate the communication plan and market, advertise and launch the new/existing 'silver numbers' for specialist services and soft launch the 'golden number' for general enquiries, during Autumn, 2008. This would be followed by a publicised, marketed launch of the 'golden number', during the early part of 2009.

## **5.0 Numbering Strategy – The Proposal**

- 5.1 The above issues lead to a conclusion that the most appropriate option for our future numbering strategy should be the adoption of the 0113 prefix, particularly as these numbers are more resilient following recent technological developments and the fact that 0113 is already the widely recognised prefix for Leeds.
- 5.2 Whilst 0300 could be argued as an alternative option, it is relatively untested; is principally designed for public bodies which require a national presence, which Leeds City Council doesn't need; and it is likely that there would be a demand/need to also publish equivalent 0113 numbers, thus increasing cost and potential confusion.
- 5.3 Therefore, officers recommend implementing 0113 numbers (deployed on an Intelligent Network platform) as the future telephone numbering strategy.

## **6.0 The Golden Number**

- 6.1 The resolution of the new numbering strategy is key to the implementation of a 'golden number'. Plainly, it is not possible to launch a golden number until a decision is made on what prefix will be adopted. Once that decision is made, steps can be taken to activate the chosen range of numbers with our telecom provider, Affiniti.
- 6.2 In addition, work can then commence on developing a communications plan to initially launch and market the new/existing range of 'silver' numbers for specialist services, then soft launch the 'golden number' for general enquiries, growing it organically over a period of time, before initiating a publicised, marketed launch.
- 6.3 When services were originally migrated to the Corporate Contact Centre, a 'pick and drop' approach was adopted, with minimal change taking place to facilitate the moves. This means that, in the main, the different services in the Corporate Contact Centre are currently still working independently of each other. The training of some staff to have an element of multi-skilling is required, to ensure that the range of 'silver' numbers and the 'golden number' are effective.
- 6.4 At this moment in time, the majority of calls to a 'golden number' would have to be either handed off (manually or via an auto attendant) to service specialists within the Corporate Contact Centre (currently around 80% of calls to the Council) or transferred externally, for services not provided by Contact Leeds. Therefore, to mitigate the potential risk of negative public relations, by launching a 'golden number' and still having customers passed 'from pillar to post', the following actions are necessary:
- i) complete the transition of the telephone and e-mail enquires for Peace and Emergency Planning, Registrars and all the Emergency Out of Hours services to the Corporate Contact Centre, so that at least 85% of public telephone calls to the Council are handled by Contact Leeds;
  - ii) develop and implement an operational model, business processes, telephony configuration, training material and staffing arrangements for handling 'golden number' calls within the Corporate Contact Centre;
  - iii) training and multi-skilling of officers answering 'golden number' calls and implementation of the Knowledge Base, which will enable non-specialist staff to deal with high volume, low complexity enquiries for services provided by Contact Leeds;
  - iv) develop and implement operational processes to ensure that 'golden number' calls, which have to be transferred to service areas outside the Corporate Contact Centre (Education Leeds, Business Rates, Planning, Car Parking, etc), are dealt with efficiently and effectively;
  - v) develop and implement management information and performance reporting requirements;
- 6.5 It is anticipated that by November/December 2008, Contact Leeds will have completed these actions and the Corporate Contact Centre will be in a position to handle 'golden number' telephone calls and, achieve the corporate target to resolve 80% of enquiries to the Council at the first point of contact, for the services it provides.

## **7.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance**

- 7.1 The proposals in this report represent a key development as part of the Council's ongoing ambition to improve its customer relations activities. Much has been achieved in this regard in the last two years with the launch of the Corporate Contact Centre and these proposals represent the latest phase as part of our customer relations improvement journey.

## **8.0 Legal and Resource Implications**

- 8.1 For calls made by customers to the new Leeds City Council 0113 numbers, we will be charged 1.5p per minute. This charge includes the cost of deploying these specific geographic numbers on an Intelligent Network platform, to provide location independence and greater resilience. The Corporate Contact Centre handles approximately 1 million calls per year (excluding ALMO calls), at an average duration of 3 minutes per call. Therefore, the estimated cost to Contact Leeds of using 0113 numbers for the numbering strategy is £45,000 per year. This is higher than the current cost of using 0845 numbers, however, additional costs will be contained within existing budgetary provision. It is also substantially lower than the costs we would incur through providing a range of 0800 freephone numbers.
- 8.2 The launch of the golden number will require investment in a marketing campaign to promote the new service, which has been estimated at £50,000 and will be accommodated within existing resources available to support Contact Centre developments. There will also be a cost to replace the existing 0845 numbers on stationery, leaflets, telephone directories, signs, vehicles, internet, etc, and again these changes will be accommodated within existing budgetary provision.

## **9.0 Recommendations**

- 9.1 Members of Executive Board are recommended to adopt the 0113 prefix as Leeds City Council's telephone numbering strategy.
- 9.2 That the Executive Board authorises the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement) to take steps to implement the telephone numbering strategy and introduce a range of 'silver' telephone numbers for principal council services, making it possible for customers to get through to the right person first time and, a 'golden' number to enable easier access to council services.

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