

**Reducing repeat customer contact
through tackling failure demand.**

Draft Scrutiny Report



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Desired Outcomes and Recommendations

Desired Outcome – That an effective process is developed to ensure that customers receive the right housing repair work first time.

Recommendation 1 – That the Director of Communities and Environment engages with Scrutiny on the findings arising from the co-location pilot scheme involving housing repair specialist staff at the Contact Centre and in determining longer term options for ensuring that customers keep getting the right housing repair work done first time.

Desired Outcome – That Customer Service Officers and customers are kept regularly informed of progress in dealing with service requests and are notified immediately of any significant changes that may impact on initial service expectations.

Recommendation 2 – That the Director of Communities and Environment leads on undertaking a review of existing customer service processes and procedures, including the use of the Contact Centre workbook scripts, to identify potential improvements that will better align service processes with communication links to Customer Service Officers and also directly with the customer.

It is expected that the key targeted service areas be prioritised as part of this review and that particular focus is also given to maximising the use of modern communication technologies when communicating with customers.

Desired Outcome – That mechanisms are put in place to ensure that customers receive timely notifications of any service assessment appointments and planned works.

Recommendation 3 – That the Director of Communities and Environment leads on undertaking a review of the Council's automated systems of sending notification letters and also seeks to maximise the use of modern communication technologies, including text alerts or emails, to speed up notifications to customers in relation to any assessment appointments and planned works.

Desired Outcome – That appropriate resources are put in place to undertake the task of effectively simplifying benefit notification letters to customers.

Recommendation 4 – That the Director of Communities and Environment leads on looking at the feasibility of establishing a task force with the appropriate software and legal expertise to focus on finding an effective means of simplifying existing benefit notification letters that will not be open to legal challenge.



Desired Outcomes and Recommendations

Desired Outcome – That the Council's Interactive Voice Response telephony system continues to be development and remains fit for purpose.

Recommendation 5 – That the Director of Communities and Environment undertakes a review of the Council's current Interactive Voice Response telephony system to identify possible improvements, including the feasibility of introducing a voice telephone input option as part of the system.

Desired Outcome – That the Council progresses to a digital benefit claims system that will enable more claims to be dealt with at the first point of contact.

Recommendation 6 – That the Director of Communities and Environment progresses to withdraw paper benefit claim forms once a new digital system is in place and an effective customer service support network is also in place to ensure that customers have access to appropriate support with their online claim applications and leads to more claims being dealt with at the first point of contact.

Desired Outcome – That all landlords are effectively using the Landlord Portal to access relevant information.

Recommendation 7 – That the Director of Communities and Environment progresses to adopting a mandatory self-serve approach for all landlords to access relevant information through the Landlords Portal and not via the Contact Centre.

Desired Outcome – That Customer Service Officers are empowered to use their discretion and seek additional advice when dealing with potentially complex cases.

Recommendation 8 – That the Director of Communities and Environment takes the lead in undertaking a review of existing Contact Centre procedures to provide a greater degree of flexibility in the approaches taken by Customer Service Officers so that they feel empowered to use their discretion and seek additional advice when dealing with potentially complex cases.



Desired Outcomes and Recommendations

Desired Outcome – That an appropriate options appraisal is undertaken regarding the introduction of a dedicated route of communication for Elected Members to escalate complex cases that have come to their attention.

Recommendation 9 – That the Director of Communities and Environment leads on undertaking an options appraisal based around the suggestion of introducing a dedicated route of communication for Elected Members to escalate particular complex cases that have come to their attention. Once completed, this is to be shared with Scrutiny for further consideration.

Desired Outcome – That appropriate investment is made into robust customer service data collection and analysis to inform longer term strategic planning.

Recommendation 10 – That the Director of Communities and Environment works with the Director of Resources and Housing to explore opportunities for further investment into robust customer service data collection and analysis to assist with longer term strategic planning.



Introduction and Scope

Introduction

1. Resolution at the 'First Point of Contact' is the panacea of customer service in that it delivers fulfilment to the customers with minimal impact on the organisation because it is a 'one and done' approach. The level of contact which an organisation receives because of the failure to do something, or get something right, for the customer (such as confusing letters, overly complicated processes, missed appointments or deadlines, staff errors, contractor delays) is regarded as 'failure demand'.
2. It is widely acknowledged that the financial climate for local government continues to be challenging. Between the 2010/11 and 2016/17 budgets, the Council's own core funding from government reduced by around £214m with a further reduction of £25.1m in the 2017/18 financial year.
3. Failure demand is seen as a fundamental contributor to repeat customer contact with the Council and although it is impossible to state categorically, estimates put the level of failure demand within the organisation at approximately 15-20% of all contact to the Contact Centre, which has a significant impact on resource levels.
4. As such, there is a specific expectation to save £130k linked to reducing repeat customer contact as part of the Council's budgetary saving targets for 2017/18 and this area of work will also continue to be one of the Council's key service review priorities over the next three years.
5. It was therefore acknowledged that the Citizens and Communities Scrutiny Board could assist in providing a strategic focus on the aspects of service delivery (Strategy, Policy, Structure, Process

and/or Information) which generate failure demand within the organisation rather than this being viewed narrowly as a customer service issue.

6. In particular, we agreed to help facilitate the targeted work already being planned as part of the internal service review with those service areas that create the highest volume of customer contacts with the Contact Centre (i.e Housing Leeds, Council Tax and Housing Benefits). This work aimed to identify why customers are getting in touch; what particular service failures they are reporting; identifying areas of failure/blockage; and identifying what actions are required to tackle failure demand within those service areas.
7. Whilst our primary focus was on reducing repeat customer contact through tackling failure demand, we were mindful to acknowledge any opportunities where wider customer access solutions could be identified to help alleviate resource pressures on the Contact Centre too. However, we would also advocate that a more detailed review is carried out to continue exploring such opportunities in the future.

Scope of the inquiry.

8. The purpose of our inquiry was to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following areas:
 - The current understanding of the general determinants of service failure and the key factors that contribute to receiving repeat customer contact (focusing on policy, people, process and information).



Introduction and Scope

- The extent to which customer services can implement solutions that help identify customers who repeatedly contact the council due to service failure with the aim of mitigating the impact on their health and wellbeing.
- The mechanisms in place for Elected Members to escalate particular cases to senior staff, including during out of hours.
- The existing expectations shared between the Corporate Contact Centre and the Housing Leeds service areas.
- The current understanding of the determinants of service failure linked to Housing Leeds service areas and particularly the factors that contribute to receiving repeat customer contact.
- The existing expectations shared between the Corporate Contact Centre in relation to Council Tax and Housing Benefit service areas.
- The current understanding of the determinants of service failure linked to the Council Tax and Housing Benefit service areas and particularly the factors that contribute to receiving repeat customer contact.

Best Council Plan

9. The Council approved its refreshed Best Council Plan 2017/18 in February 2017. This new Plan maintains our clear, strategic ambition to be the Best City, meaning a strong economy in a compassionate city. It also continues to reflect our Best Council ambition to be an efficient and enterprising organisation as we acknowledge that our drive for

efficiencies has already helped Leeds manage the significant reduction in government funding at a time of increasing demand-led cost pressures.

10. Linked to this, we also recognise the importance of 'getting the basics right' as the Council needs to continue to deliver and commission good quality public services; keep to budgets and deadlines; maintain assets effectively; and streamline internal processes and systems. In doing so, our staff also need to be engaged and motivated to do their best through a mixture of support and empowerment. Such factors have therefore been a key consideration throughout our inquiry as we strive to tackle failure demand and reduce repeat customer contact to the Council.

Desired Outcomes, Added Value and Anticipated Service Impact

11. We set out to assist in providing a strategic focus on the aspects of service delivery (Strategy, Policy, Structure, Process and/or Information) which generate failure demand within the organisation.
12. In doing so, we sought to achieve the following key outcomes:
 - To better understand the determinants of failure demand within the organisation.
 - To propose key actions that can be taken to tackle the determinants of failure demand;



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- To make the case for an organisational response to tackling failure demand which extends beyond it being seen as a purely customer services issue;
 - To reduce the level of contact into the contact centre due to failure demand.
13. During our inquiry, we were pleased to acknowledge the level of commitment already in place towards achieving more collaborative working between customer service staff and those service areas that create the highest volume of customer contact. Our report provides an overview of such positive working practices but also sets out a number of further recommendations which we believe will also help towards achieving the above outcomes.

Equality and Diversity

14. The Equality Improvement Priorities 2016 to 2020 have been developed to ensure that the council meets its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010. The priorities will help the council to identify work and activities that help to reduce disadvantage, discrimination and inequalities of opportunity to achieve its ambition to be the best city in the UK.
15. Equality and diversity issues have been considered throughout this scrutiny inquiry and the individual, organisation or group responsible for implementation or delivery of the recommendations arising from this inquiry should also give due regard to equality and diversity and where appropriate, an equality impact assessment will be carried out.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Targeting key areas of failure demand.

16. As set out in our introduction, we were mindful of the targeted work already being planned as part of the internal service review with those service areas that were creating the highest volume of customer contacts with the Contact Centre (i.e Housing Leeds, Council Tax and Housing Benefits).

17. We agreed to help facilitate this targeted work and to also provide a strategic focus on the aspects of service delivery (Strategy, Policy, Structure, Process and/or Information) which generate failure demand within the organisation rather than this being viewed narrowly as a customer service issue.

18. We therefore held separate service specific evidence gathering sessions and noted a number of key factors in relation to the following service areas:

Housing Leeds

19. Over a 12 month period (Oct 2015 to Oct 2016), the Contact Centre received 248,909 housing related calls (17.6% of the total calls received by the Contact Centre) and 16,030 (6.4%) of these were considered to be avoidable calls.

Council Tax and Housing Benefits

20. On average, the Contact Centre deals with 323,400 contacts per year in relation to Council Tax and Housing Benefits. This figure was broken down as follows:

Council Tax

- General calls = 8,000 per month
- Messages = 1,100 per month

- Emails = 5,200 per month
- Recovery calls = 3,100 per month
- Total = 17,400 contacts per month

Housing Benefits

- General calls = 6,300 per month
- Messages = 300 per month
- Emails = 1,300 per month
- Landlord calls = 750 per month
- Landlord emails = 900 per month
- Total = 9,550 contacts per month

21. In supporting the need to target these particular service areas, we were pleased to learn that various joint initiative approaches between these service areas and customer services had already commenced to help tackle failure demand and reduce unnecessary contact with the Council. These are summarised below.

- Following customer and staff feedback, Customer Service, Council Tax and Benefits are working together to improve the customer journey in relation to queries and correspondence on Council Tax and Benefits.
- Experienced officers in rent collection and arrears management were co-located in the Contact Centre for one week to identify specific issues. From this, a working group was set up with representation from Housing Leeds and the Contact Centre to develop service improvements.
- From customer and staff feedback, Customer Services and Housing Leeds have also worked on key areas to improve the customer journey in relation to responsive repairs.



Conclusions and Recommendations

22. We considered the actions arising from these initiatives, which are summarised in Appendix 1. This illustrates the issues being dealt with and the improved outcomes that will be achieved for the customer.
23. However, in supporting such actions we also observed a number of common themes and key principles linked to tackling failure demand. Our report therefore goes on to summarise these as well as highlighting where we believe additional action is still required.

The need to manage customer expectations more effectively.

24. It is evident that repeat calls are often linked to customer expectations surrounding a particular service. Customers will generally be given a timescale for how long it will take for their issue to be dealt with and when they can expect it to be resolved. Unrealistic timescales will therefore lead to customers becoming frustrated and compelled to ring the Contact Centre for an update when expectations are not being met.
25. In particular, it was highlighted that many repeat calls often stem from customers chasing up or querying their benefit claim applications. To help address this, we were pleased to learn that work is already being undertaken within the Benefits Service to review the guidance provided to customers regarding appropriate timeframes for processing benefit applications and dealing with associated enquiries so that customers are provided with more realistic

expectations that can be managed more effectively.

26. In relation to Housing Leeds, particular issues were raised in relation to housing repairs, with an acknowledgement that confusion can often occur from the outset when trying to establish the correct type of housing repair work required. To help address this issue, we learned that a 3 month co-location pilot scheme would be undertaken which meant that repair specialists would be based at the Contact Centre to help provide on the spot advice to Customer Service Officers. This will enable them to book the right repair first time. Once completed, we would welcome further scrutiny of the findings arising from this pilot scheme and how this is being used to inform longer term options for ensuring that customers keep getting the right housing repair work done first time.

Recommendation 1

That the Director of Communities and Environment engages with Scrutiny on the findings arising from the co-location pilot scheme involving housing repair specialist staff at the Contact Centre and in determining longer term options for ensuring that customers keep getting the right housing repair work done first time.



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Better aligning service processes with customer communication links.

27. Within our introduction, we highlight that resolution at the 'First Point of Contact' is the panacea of customer service. It is therefore vital that customers are given better information at First Point of Contact to ensure that they do understand each stage of the service process. This principle also links very closely to the points we have made around managing customer expectations effectively. In particular, should any significant change be made in the service process that would have an impact on a customer's initial expectation, then this needs to be communicated effectively to the customer.
28. Case study examples were shared with us during our inquiry which demonstrated that even whilst internal service processes may have been working well, the customer sometimes remained outside of the main communication loop. This inevitably leads to customers contacting the Council again to either request an update or to complain if initial expectations are not being met.
29. To assist Customer Service Officers in delivering a consistent approach, we noted that they are provided with a workbook of 'scripts' as a key reference tool when dealing with customer queries and that these are regularly updated to ensure the accuracy of the advice being provided to customers.
30. However, as part of any script we would expect Customer Service Officers to also be prompted to check each time that customers have fully understood any agreed action and next steps in the service process. To avoid confusion and any unnecessary repeat calls into the Contact Centre, we acknowledge that individual service areas also have a vital role to play in ensuring that Customer Service Officers and customers themselves are kept regularly informed of progress in dealing with service requests and that both are also notified immediately of any significant changes that may impact on initial service expectations.
31. We therefore recognise the need to undertake a review of existing customer service processes and procedures, including the use of the Contact Centre workbook scripts, to identify potential improvements that will better align service processes with communication links to Customer Service Officers and also directly to the customer. Whilst we would advocate that such a review should be applied to all service areas, we also appreciate the resource implications of this and therefore accept that a more phased approach may be more appropriate, with the key targeted service areas being prioritised first.
32. As part of this review, we would also expect the Council to be exploring opportunities for maximising the use of modern communication technologies when communicating directly with customers. We have also highlighted this separately within our report as this was a key factor raised during our inquiry.



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Recommendation 2

That the Director of Communities and Environment leads on undertaking a review of existing customer service processes and procedures, including the use of the Contact Centre workbook scripts, to identify potential improvements that will better align service processes with communication links to Customer Service Officers and also directly with the customer.

It is expected that the key targeted service areas be prioritised as part of this review and that particular focus is also given to maximising the use of modern communication technologies when communicating with customers.

Maximising the use of modern communication technologies.

33. As already mentioned, we would expect the Council to be exploring opportunities for maximising the use of modern communication technologies when communicating directly with customers. In particular, we recognise the need to speed up notifications to customers in relation to any assessment appointments and planned works.
34. In relation to emergency housing repairs, we noted that previously it was general practice to send written notification to the customer of when repair works will be carried out. This was done through an automated system that would send a letter to the customer.

35. However, a case study example was shared whereby a customer had received her letter after the initial assessment appointment had taken place. The automated letter therefore caused confusion which led to the customer ringing the Contact Centre for clarification.
36. Whilst recognising the need to undertake a review of the Council's automated systems of sending letters, we strongly believe that the Council should be maximising the use of modern communication technologies, including text alerts or emails, to speed up notifications to customers in relation to any assessment appointments and planned works.

Recommendation 3

That the Director of Communities and Environment leads on undertaking a review of the Council's automated systems of sending notification letters and also seeks to maximise the use of modern communication technologies, including text alerts or emails, to speed up notifications to customers in relation to any assessment appointments and planned works.

Simplifying notification letters to help avoid confusion.

37. It is evident that repeat calls can also stem from the confusion caused by the complexity of notification letters and particularly benefit notification letters, which has remained a long standing problem primarily due to legislative



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requirements placed upon the Council to ensure that the customer is fully informed about the eligibility criteria associated with their respective benefit claim.

38. Despite this, we were pleased to learn that the Benefits Service has started to look at alternative approaches that would simplify the key messages being directed to the customer whilst still meeting this legal requirement, for example, signposting the customer to where they can access this additional information if required.
39. However, we recognised that such work can be very resource intensive and puts additional pressure on a service area that is already stretched. We also believe that such an approach warrants a dedicated task force, with appropriate software and legal expertise, to look at this objectively in order to find an effective means of simplifying existing benefit notification letters that will not be open to legal challenge.

Recommendation 4

That the Director of Communities and Environment leads on looking at the feasibility of establishing a task force with the appropriate software and legal expertise to focus on finding an effective means of simplifying existing benefit notification letters that will not be open to legal challenge.

Improving self-serve options and promoting these more effectively.

40. Interactive Voice Response (IVR) is an automated telephony system that interacts with callers, gathers information and routes calls to the appropriate recipient. Whilst an IVR system can accept a combination of voice telephone input and touch-tone keypad selection, we noted that the Council's current IVR system only involves touch-tone keypad selection. We therefore discussed the potential benefits of reviewing the current IVR system to establish where further improvements could be made and to also look at the feasibility of introducing a voice telephone input option too.

Recommendation 5

That the Director of Communities and Environment undertakes a review of the Council's current Interactive Voice Response telephony system to identify possible improvements, including the feasibility of introducing a voice telephone input option as part of the system.

41. During our inquiry we were pleased to note that work is now being progressed in procuring an on-line application form for Benefits and on line discount and exemption forms for Council Tax.
42. We recognise that many repeat calls are associated with the paper based claiming process, with customers often ringing to check that all details have been entered correctly and that any supporting evidence has also been received. As such, we would therefore support a move



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towards withdrawing the paper claim forms once a new digital system is in place. This would also be better aligned to the Department of Work and Pension's 'digital by default' approach for Universal Credit claims.

43. However, we are also mindful that a key factor in delivering this approach successfully links to the Customer Service support network and the need to ensure that Customer Service Officers within One Stop Centres/Community Hubs have the necessary skills and capacity to assist any customers with their online claim applications so that their claims can be dealt with at the first point of contact.

Recommendation 6

That the Director of Communities and Environment progresses to withdraw paper benefit claim forms once a new digital system is in place and an effective customer service support network is also in place to ensure that customers have access to appropriate support with their online claim applications and leads to more claims being dealt with at the first point of contact.

44. Whilst there is high take-up of Registered Social Landlords using on-line access for information on their tenant's claims and payment details, particular reference was made to the fact that many private rented sector landlords are still using the Contact Centre to access information rather than using self-serve options through the Landlord Portal. Whilst work continues to encourage this channel shift amongst landlords, we believe that the Council should now be moving towards

adopting a mandatory self-serve approach for landlords, which again would mirror the DWP's 'digital by default' approach.

Recommendation 7

That the Director of Communities and Environment progresses to adopting a mandatory self-serve approach for all landlords to access relevant information through the Landlords Portal and not via the Contact Centre.

Having a greater degree of flexibility and discretion when dealing with complex cases.

45. We acknowledged earlier that Customer Service Officers are provided with a workbook of 'scripts' as a key reference tool when dealing with customer queries and to help provide a consistent approach.
46. However, during our inquiry we did query the extent to which Customer Service Officers are empowered to deviate from such scripts when dealing with situations that appear more complex and would therefore warrant a different response identifying appropriate solutions.
47. In doing so, it was agreed that there is scope to provide an even greater degree of flexibility so that Customer Service Officers do feel more empowered to use their discretion and seek additional advice when dealing with complex cases. We therefore recommend that existing Contact Centre procedures are reviewed to facilitate this approach.



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Recommendation 8

That the Director of Communities and Environment takes the lead in undertaking a review of existing Contact Centre procedures to provide a greater degree of flexibility in the approaches taken by Customer Service Officers so that they feel empowered to use their discretion and seek additional advice when dealing with potentially complex cases.

Establishing clear escalation routes where appropriate.

48. During our inquiry, we also discussed appropriate escalation routes, particularly as part of the Council's out of hours (OOH) service. In doing so, particular importance was placed upon ensuring that this service is easily accessible to all and that the OOH Customer Service Officers are particularly empowered to use their discretion in seeking additional advice when dealing with potentially complex cases, which links closely to our earlier comments.
49. However, we also discussed the potential benefits of Elected Members having a dedicated route of communication, either by telephone or email, to be able to escalate particular complex cases that have come to their attention too. However, we are also mindful that such an approach does not lead to the perception of a two tiered system. As such, we would welcome more thought around this suggested approach and for an options appraisal to be brought back to Scrutiny for further consideration.

Recommendation 9

That the Director of Communities and Environment leads on undertaking an options appraisal based around the suggestion of introducing a dedicated route of communication for Elected Members to escalate particular complex cases that have come to their attention. Once completed, this is to be shared with Scrutiny for further consideration.

The importance of robust data collection and analysis to assist in longer term planning.

50. As part of our inquiry, we particularly queried the extent to which data analysis is undertaken by the Contact Centre to help establish potential variances in service demands across the city and assist in undertaking longer term strategic planning.
51. In response, we noted that whilst the Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is able to collect an abundance of raw data, particularly linked to housing related customer enquiries, this approach does not apply to other service areas, such as Council Tax and Benefit customer related enquiries. The data analysis linked to those service areas is therefore not as easily accessible and more resource intensive to collate and analyse.
52. It was also evident that whilst the Contact Centre does have systems in place to collate raw data, it continues to



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lack the appropriate resources and skills to be able to undertake detailed analysis of such data which would assist it to undertake longer term strategic planning. We regard this as a lost opportunity and believe that investment in robust customer service data collection and analysis is vital if we are to achieve the Council's ambition to be an efficient and enterprising organisation.

Recommendation 10

That the Director of Communities and Environment works with the Director of Resources and Housing to explore opportunities for further investment into robust customer service data collection and analysis to assist with longer term strategic planning.



Evidence

Monitoring arrangements

Standard arrangements for monitoring the outcome of the Board's recommendations will apply.

The decision-makers to whom the recommendations are addressed will be asked to submit a formal response to the recommendations, including an action plan and timetable, normally within two months.

Following this the Scrutiny Board will determine any further detailed monitoring, over and above the standard quarterly monitoring of all scrutiny recommendations.

Reports and Publications Submitted

Scrutiny Board presentation (7th November 2016) on the key areas aligned to session 1.

Working group presentation (5th December 2016) on the key areas aligned to session 2, including the following:

- Briefing paper on Housing Leeds and Customer Services Joint Working on Rents
- Briefing paper on Housing Leeds and Customer Services Joint Working on Responsive Repairs Failure Demand
- Case Study – Repeat Contact – Costings for Contact Centre

Working group presentation (15th February 2017) on the key areas aligned to session 3, including the following:

- Briefing paper on Council Tax and Benefits Joint working with Customer Services to reduce failure demand.
- Case Study – Repeat Contact – Costings for Contact Centre



Evidence

Dates of Scrutiny

Scrutiny Working Group – Scoping exercise – 6th October 2016
Scrutiny Board Meeting – Agreeing terms of reference – 7th November 2016
Scrutiny Board Meeting – Session 1 of the inquiry – 7th November 2016
Scrutiny Board Meeting – Session 2 of the inquiry – 5th December 2016
Scrutiny Working Group – Sessions 3 of the inquiry – 15th February 2017
Scrutiny Working Group – Session 4 of the inquiry – 13th March 2017

Witnesses Heard

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- James Rogers, Director of Communities and Environment
- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer Customer Access
- Adam Quesne, Head of Customer Contact
- Wendy Allinson, Citizens@Leeds Development Team Lead
- Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services, Housing Leeds
- Robert Goor, Response/Planned Service Manager, Housing Leeds
- Steve Carey, Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits
- Andrew Cameron, Head of Council Tax and Benefits

Appendix 1

Overview of existing joint working initiatives aimed at reducing service failure.

Housing Leeds and Customer Services Joint Working on Rents		
Issue	Action	Outcome
CSOs sometimes not able to get through to Housing Office leading to messages being work queued through to the Housing Office – creating delay in response for the tenant	<p><u>Carried Out</u> Reviewed contact details for Housing Offices and provided CSOs with up to date names and numbers for offices and Team Leaders to go direct to if needed.</p> <p><u>Underway</u> Review of Housing Office telephone arrangements to maximise call performance.</p>	Calls are able to be better directed to the correct member of staff either for advice or call transfer.
CSOs felt would be able to deal with more calls at first point of contact over current £200 limit	<p><u>Underway</u> Reviewed process with Housing and CC staff and revised the protocol. New policy for CSOs to arrears letters 1 and 2, with arrears up to £400.</p> <p>Training to be given to CC staff and launching new process in Jan 2017</p>	CC staff will be dealing with more cases with a higher value and reduce the amount of calls being transferred through to local offices.
All arrears letters include both Housing Office and Contact Centre telephone numbers and so tenants sometimes contact Contact Centre in relation to arrears letters where they can't deal with the enquiry	<p><u>Underway</u> Changes to arrears letters so that: Arrears letters 1+2 – give Contact Centre telephone number All other Arrears letters give Housing Office telephone number.</p>	Contact from tenant will be with appropriate officer who is able to deal with the contact, reducing the need for calls to be transferred.
CSOs not able set up direct debit over the phone with tenants meaning delays in DD being set up.	<p><u>Underway</u> Procedure changed so that CSOs are able to set up DDs over the phone. Provided information to CC staff and training material. New procedure to be launched in New Year.</p>	Tenants will be able to set up a direct debit over the telephone at first point of contact.

Appendix 1

Housing Leeds and Customer Services Joint Working on Responsive Repairs Failure Demand		
Issue	Action	Outcome
Customers struggling to get an instant response where they have an issue related to their repair, often leading to a complaint being raised as the quickest option to get a response	<p><u>Carried Out</u> Trialled the “Mears Hub” approach with one team in the Contact Centre, giving a point of contact for both staff and customers to resolve an issue with the first call. Also trialling first contact resolution with customers calling directly to the Customer Relations line.</p> <p><u>Underway</u> The Mears Hub is being expanded to cover all Contact Centre teams.</p>	Calls are able to be better directed to the correct member of staff either for advice or call transfer. More is able to be resolved quickly without the need to log a complaint – a better customer experience and a big saving on unnecessary work on unwarranted complaints work.
Customers felt issues were not being listened to or acted upon.	<p><u>Carried Out</u> A member of the P&R team attends tenants repair focus groups, bringing issues directly back to Customer Services to resolve or improve.</p>	Customers feel listened to and can see we are acting on their suggestions and frustrations – for example, the current IVR review was suggested through this route
At busier times, customer have to wait to get through to the Contact Centre	<p><u>Carried Out</u> A busy day plan is in place so steps can be taken to redirect housing office traffic away from the Contact Centre. Maximum staffing to answer calls during busy periods. Website messages on best times to call are in place.</p> <p><u>Underway</u> A callback facility will be installed in Jan 17 to customers do not have to hold in a queue. Better use of SM to keep customers up to date with busy times being considered</p>	Customers are able to get through to us quicker, with shorter queues more often.
Sometimes there is confusion about what type of repair is needed	<p><u>Carried Out</u> New staff now visit Mears as part of their induction training to better understand the repairs process. Regular updates and improvements to the workbook used by staff as a reference tool.</p> <p><u>Underway</u> Consideration to basing repairs specialists at the Contact Centre to give on the spot advice to staff on booking the right repair</p>	Customers get the right repair first time, better for them and for us, reducing cost, frustration and failure demand.

Appendix 1

Council Tax and Benefits - Joint working with Customer Services to reduce failure demand.		
Issue	Action	Outcome
<p>Review the timing of when key correspondence to customers is mailed out:</p> <p>Currently large volumes of letters to customers regarding their council tax and benefits are all posted out in bulk batches for example this includes notifications, interventions, summons, unpaid DDs. This mailing process results in a high volume of calls from customers at the contact centre. This is difficult to manage peaks, frustrates the customer and thus can create repeat contact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax and Benefits are to enhance its liaison with Contact Centre staff of key mailing and posting dates of all large volume customer correspondence in order to enable resources to manage calls from customers more effectively. • Where appropriate, Council Tax and Benefits are to stagger the issuing of letters, bills and reminders etc. going out to customers to avoid a large volumes of calls being received all at once. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction of instances of excessive numbers of telephone contact from customers over short period • Reduction in customers not being able to get through first time • Resources at the Contact Centre will be allocated to manage known peaks, this will create less waiting time and reduce frustration of customers.
<p>Applications from students for discount on council tax:</p> <p>Currently large volumes of calls are received from students at key times of the year - for example at the start and end of university term when they move into or leave their accommodation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the current procedural arrangements for students for consistency in approach. • Review the IVR so that the message encourages students to go online rather than contact us by phone to notify of their student status • Look at the feasibility of all applications and queries for student to be done online. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced telephone contact • A self-service application process for students, which will be simpler and less time consuming for the business and the customer.
<p>Review timescales in which customers applications and enquires are dealt with.</p> <p>When a customer first contacts us with a query they are given a timescale for how long it will take for their issue to be dealt with and when they can expect it to be resolved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review current procedural arrangements for consistency and best practice • Review time scales and revise as necessary so they are more informative to customers • Where possible have the updated timescales available for customers to view online. • Look at the feasibility of providing live updates on current timescales on line. • Fast-track is available for urgent cases – eg – tenants facing hardship / eviction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce avoidable & repeat calls for customers • Manage expectations of customers more effectively.

Appendix 1

Council Tax and Benefits - Joint working with Customer Services to reduce failure demand.		
Issue	Action	Outcome
<p>Channel shifting of applications and enquires.</p> <p>At the moment most applications and enquiries are received and dealt with over the phone. A majority of these could be dealt with online.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review customer correspondence and transactions and examine what could be channel shifted to online from telephone and face to face. Provide web links for customers where feasible Improve self-service options and promote these more effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce unnecessary paper work Encourage self – service Improved online services. A simpler and more satisfying process for customers.
<p>Review the layout and wording of letters that go out to customers.</p> <p>It is recognised that some customers are unclear about the processes and find some of the information that they receive from us both in a letter and via the web, confusing. This results in unnecessary telephone calls, emails and written correspondence that could be avoided.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify letters to improve understanding Review information on all correspondence send to customers; which is available on the internet to ensure everything is clearly captured and presented in a way that is easy to understand by the customer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce avoidable customer contact Increase customer satisfaction.
<p>Review Landlord contact</p> <p>Currently a large amount of contact is received over the phone, via email and in writing from Landlords wanting to know what is happening with their tenant's Housing Benefit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the current procedural arrangements for landlords Where appropriate improve the information that goes out to landlords Review and improve the online portal for landlords to enable them to self-serve. Amend the IVR message so that it informs the landlord what queries we can assist with and what answers they can find on the portal. To avoid duplication between tenant and Landlords, look at ways in which we can encourage Landlords to contact their tenants directly with their queries rather than ringing the Contact Centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Channel shifting of landlord contact to online Reduce unnecessary telephone contact from landlords Encourage landlords to communicate their rent queries directly with the tenant.

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Issue	Action	Outcome
<p>Review and improve process for Nil balance bills.</p> <p>All customers are sent out a bill and statement of their Council Tax account even if they currently have nothing to pay. Customers who have nil balance are unclear why they receive a bill/notification and this results in calls being received questioning what they owe.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change wording and structure of the letters which inform customers they have nothing to pay and the statement is for information only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce level of contact that is unclear why this document has been sent to them. Clearer information provided to customers.
<p>Review the need for Housing Benefit notifications issued confirming no change to entitlement.</p> <p>Where a change happens on a customers' Housing Benefit claim but the change does not affect the amount of benefit they receive, currently a notification is produced in all circumstances. There are instances where the customer does not need to be notified and in doing so, triggers the customer to ring to ask what has happened.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review arrangements where there is no need to send this style of letter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce level of avoidable contact

Scrutiny Board (Citizens and Communities)
Reducing repeat customer contact through tackling failure demand
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