

Pre-meeting questions and answers on reports being considered on the Audit & Standards Committee Agenda 7 January 2025

4. Internal Audit Progress Report: Quarter 2 2024/25

(Report author(s): Ian Davy – Audit and Risk Manager)

Question(s) from Councillor Syson

This audit is dated 3 September 2024 but is only just coming to committee. In it it says

"Presently, the Council's online forms, telephones, social media, and face to face operations are all independent. This approach makes it virtually impossible for a customer to easily transition between one communication channel and another, as their information exists in isolation. It also creates significant limitations on the ability to provide customer updates, particularly if information is held in service specific software or mailboxes with restricted access.

As of April 2023, there were 132 email addresses published on the Council's website as a means for the public to contact WDC; the Council also currently has over 100 online forms. This is being addressed and the introduction of a CRM should reduce the number of direct numbers available to call."

Question 1:

Please can you advise me where we are as on January 2025 with the introduction of the CRM, and the reduction of direct numbers available to call.

I am aware that "The second stage of the Change Management Programme will focus on customer service redesign, reviewing all customer related processes and procedures, and creating a new operating model for customer service delivery. The aim of introducing a CRM is to have a more holistic view of each customer and their service interactions, thus minimising the amount of customer data that is needed. The creation of a customer portal will enable the customer to see their history of interaction, launch new requests, submit information, and get updates on requests in progress by single sign-on."

Response: Following approval by Cabinet, the Council successfully procured a new CRM system in August 2024. The first service the CRM has been used to support is Waste and Recycling, where the Transformation Team, ICT, Customer Services, Matt Pearce (Media and Comms) and Contract Services have worked together to successfully transfer customer facing interactions back from Stratford DC. These processes went live before Christmas; any customer can fully complete a request online or contact the customer services team, and any required actions are automated to the fullest extent possible.

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A significant consideration when designing these services has been the consistency across channels. A customer can now start their journey online and if necessary, interact with a customer service officer later on. The officer will be able to see the customer's case and the latest status in real time, simply by searching for the customer's name or address. This information is also accessible to the Contract Services team, as a single source of information. There is a complete picture of an interaction, at any point, across all channels, that is easily accessed. These services are also the first examples to be brought into the centralised Customer Services team – offering improved resilience and consistency for customers who choose to contact us by phone or in person.

The waste and recycling service is the first example of how this technology will be used, which in time, will be rolled out across other service areas.

In terms of reducing telephone numbers, towards the end of 2024, Customer and Digital Services completed a replacement of our contact centre call management system. This was a pre-requisite to any future work to reduce contact numbers. Whilst there are no “visible” changes at present, behind the scenes Customer and Digital Services have been planning what steps can be taken to start reducing the volume of telephone numbers that we publish. The planned approach has been tested as part of the Waste and Recycling transfer, which will be the first to see the dedicated numbers currently published replaced by a single WDC contact point.

For generic email addresses, the launch of the new waste and recycling forms was the first example of how the CRM can be used to replace emails with structured forms. The forms still offer the flexibility for a customer to express an issue, but with the consistency of collecting key information that helps enable staff to deal with the problem efficiently. We anticipate that this approach will successfully replace most generic addresses, which are a design consideration when the Transformation Team support services with redesign actions.

Question 2: Have we a time scale for this yet? If so what is it?

Many thanks for your help.

Response: The customer portal launched as part of the waste and recycling service introduction in December 2024. When customers log a new query, they have the option of signing up and creating a new “my account” entry or they can register from the website here... <https://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/myaccount>. Registering for an account allows Customers to monitor progress towards calls, receive updates and reduces the need to enter some information repeatedly. It will also allow them

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to save progress on more complex forms and return to them at a later point if needed. The portal currently only offers a limited number of services, but over the next 24 months, as more services become integrated with the CRM, this will grow. The team also intends to look at integration with other online services, to create (as far as possible) a seamless transition between different systems, without the need for a customer to re-authenticate themselves repeatedly.

As mentioned previously, the waste and recycling services were the first example of where a customer facing service has been integrated with the central customer services team. A plan for future steps is currently being reviewed, based on the experience we've learned from the waste interactions. The transition arrangements will typically be considered on a service-by-service basis, again over the next two years as each service takes time to transform, but an outline plan will be sent to the Change Programme board within the next three months.

I hope this information helps to answer your questions, but should you require anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

5. Treasury Management Activity Report for period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024

(Report author(s): Karen Allison – Assistant Accountant (Capital and Treasury))

Question(s) from Councillor Syson

Thank you very much for this report and many congratulations on the in-house function investing core cash funds on outperforming the Benchmark, even though, alas, it will not be as much as anticipated.

My question:

Separately, I note that we are also part of the Link Asset Services Treasury Management Benchmarking Club, a local group comprising both District and County Councils. Do we have any idea how this group performs in comparison with other groups? Is it a group that generally does well?

Thanks.

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Response: Still awaiting data from Link Services. Will respond as soon as we have the information.

11. Review of 2024 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) & UK Parliamentary Election (UKPGE) Elections

(Report author(s): Graham Leach - Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer)

Question(s) from Councillor R Dickson

It's impressive to see such a high return rate amongst postal voters. In Kenilworth residents continue to report to us delays in their postal service. For both the P&CC election and the GE, were there any postal votes returned after the deadline for counting, if so, how many?

This was the 2nd year in which voters in polling stations needed to produce some form of voter ID. For these elections how many voters were returned away for failure to produce appropriate ID?

Finally, given the efforts made by WDC to encourage people to register to vote, is there any data available that compares the number of people who registered to vote compared to the known number of people eligible to do so? I accept that this may be an estimate, and it may only be possible by comparison with the 2021 census data.

Response: Please see tables below. In response to the third question there is no specific data set available to identify people who are not registered to vote. The Census data could provide guidance on an overall number, but this depends on assumptions on responses provided.

Number of postal votes returned after close of poll – We record this figure for 7 days after the election.

Election	Postal Votes
PCC 2024	110
PCC 2020	156
UKPGE Warwick & Leamington 2024	75

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UKPGE Kenilworth & Southam 2024	90
UKPGE Warwick & Leamington 2019	234
UKPGE Kenilworth & Southam 2019	170

Voter ID data – This is collected by Presiding Officers in the polling stations

Election	The total number of polling station electors who applied for, but at least initially were not issued with, a ballot paper	The total number of polling station electors who were not issued with a ballot paper and who later returned with accepted ID and were issued with a ballot paper
PCC 2024	119	97
UKPGE Warwick & Leamington 2024	95	83
UKPGE Kenilworth & Southam 2024	42	41

12. Warwick District Council and Parish Election Scale of Fees

(Report author(s): Leanne Marlow – Elections Manager)

Question(s) from Councillor Kohler

Thank you for the report on 'WDC and Parish Election Scale of Fees'.

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It would really help to understand the changes being proposed if you could provide a simple table to show the overall change to the fees that will be charged to Town Councils. If it is easiest, calculating the fees due under this scheme for the 2023 elections would provide an apples-to-apples comparison.

A simple table with a row for each Town Council and columns for:

- 2023 Actual Fees
- Proposed Fees

(Of course, if you already have a more detailed table that goes down the ward level, that would be even more helpful.)

Secondly, could you clarify if Town Councils have already been consulted on this report?

Finally, I note that the report references 3 supporting documents, but only 1 is included as an appendix. Should the 'Elections Funding Pay Bands 2025 - 2026' and 'Expenses Guidance for Returning Officers – February 2024' also be published?

Response: Thank you for your email.

In respect of supporting documents, there is an error in the report as third document (Appendix 1) is not a supporting document as it forms part of the report and is referred elsewhere. The other two documents are supporting documents that have been considered as part of the report and are there provided as links for anyone to access online or look up if they have the paper copy.

There are two parts to the report and these may have become confused over how I have written the report.

The first part is the fees that will be to employees working on the election. The information here is far more detailed than has been produced before to improve transparency of payments to employees. However, related to this is the important part that we are proposing to align fees with the national band of payment fees the Council can claim back via the electoral claims unit for national elections. This also allows greater consistency in fees used for all elections.

A second part is the recharging of election costs back to authorities and how that will be split proportionally for elections. This is not just back to Parish & Town Councils but also the split between say WDC if it has a by election at the same time as the PCC elections last year. There are also a number of variables in each election which make it hard to calculate what may be the cost in the future. For example in 2023 we had a very time limited window for counting results due to national bank

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holidays therefore had more staff at the count than usual to complete this on time, or say a by election where we don't always have a charge for a count venue (or a venue for postal vote opening).

I will talk with Leanne and see if we can provide some broad headings of cost recharges and the split of these, for example Where a polling station is delivering two elections we would expect a 50/50 split of all costs for that building and staffing time.

Town and Parish Councils have not been consulted on the report, as in this respect it is WDC setting its proposed fees and its proposal for recharging of elections, this would include say WCC and how cost will be divided if there was a Town Council by-election the same day.