Advance questions and answers on reports on the O&S agenda 9 August 2022

5. Work Programme Update – Digital Update
(Report author: David Elkington – Head of ICT)

Question(s) from Councillor Cullinan:
1
Is it correct that all waste queries will continue to be redirected to Stratford District Council? Will a customer have to redial or can they be redirected?
How will this operate digitally? Will there be links on our WDC website?

Response:
At the moment, if a customer rings one of our waste contact numbers the diversion to SDC is automatic.

When they reach the main waste number, there is a "push-a-button-for-X-service" menu which navigates them to the right part of the service. Depending on the option selected, if it's a service that SDC provides for us the redirection to their contact centre happens automatically. The same happens if they directly ring the 123+ number. People don't have to redial or manually redirect.

Similarly on the website, the forms are provided by SDC (for the integration to their back office systems) and presented as if they are part of WDC's website. When people click on the links from the 123 section of our website, the redirection is automatic, customers do not have to find these things out for themselves.

The decision to redirect to Stratford in the long term is more of an operational/political one.

At the moment, we don't have the systems or staff setup to deal with the waste service. That's not because of any fundamental issues with our ability to do what Stratford has done, it's merely a reflection that when the service was designed it was intended to be delivered via a single route.

If we did need to make a change in the future, providing we have enough notice to prepare and are able to fund the necessary resources, it is entirely possible.

2
Does the 'Customer Relationship Management System' include how we handle phone calls to WDC? If not is this being considered elsewhere in the strategy? I did find the centralised call answer system at SDC so much easier to navigate. I am sure our residents would agree.

Response:
The CRM system won't directly alter how telephone calls are directed in the short term, but it could act as a catalyst to do so if the Council wishes to.

At the moment, WDC operates a distributed call handling system; some services are directed to the Customer Services team or the Revenues and Benefits teams, whilst others are directed to individual services. This is achieved through a combination of Interactive Voice Response (IVR – the "push a button for X service" technology) and switchboard operators who are part of the customer services team. We have around 30 telephone numbers published on our website with is less than ideal and our ability to manage demand is limited.

Our IVR technology is every bit as capable as what SDC uses so it's absolutely possible to autonomously direct people to where they need to go; it's the execution behind the scenes that makes the difference. SDC's centralised contact centre means that a pool of customer service staff deal with a number of services directly. The centralised model is a more efficient way of working, but establishing it requires technology that we don't currently have; primarily a CRM.

The job of the CRM is to manage the interaction with the customer; to direct the conversation, ensure that all the right information is collected, get that information to the right place at the right time and allow anyone (including the customer themselves) to pick up the request at any stage. It is a key technology if we wish to make a transition to a more centralised operation.

Potentially, with a good CRM system in place, customer service representatives could manage the interaction with customers across multiple communication channels for multiple services. There would be complete visibility of requests across all services and no opportunity for jobs to fall off the radar. This could improve both the customer experience and service performance.

The method of customer delivery isn't directly considered in the Digital Strategy – however the original strategy suggested that it would be one of three documents – Digital, ICT and Customer Access. It's the latter strategy that will set the direction for customer interactions.

In all scenarios however, CRM is a cornerstone technology for the Digital Strategy. Without this, anything we do will result in nothing more than an email being pushed from the website to the back office – and I believe that our ambitions and desires to truly offer transformational services for our communities, to be far greater than that.