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To: Corporate Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 24 September 2010

Subject: Kent County Council's Contact Centre (Contact Kent and Consumer Direct South East)

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides information for Members of the Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the performance, staffing levels and funding of the Contact Centre and current developments. Consideration of the report at the meeting will be preceded by a tour of the Centre.

Introduction

1. Contact Kent was transferred from the site of the County Library at Springfield to its present location on the first floor of Invicta House nearly 6 years ago and currently supports 87 different services (see appendix a) on a 24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year basis. The range of services provided varies from transferring callers to other parts of KCC to library book renewals, reporting pot-holes, arranging temporary housing for Maidstone BC residents and handling reporting of child protection concerns for both new and existing cases. This requires a high level of customer service skills, dealing with different needs and conversing with a wide range of callers.
2. This is set within a highly productive and disciplined environment in order to ensure a consistent quality service and to minimise the need to transfer callers to other parts of the organisation.
3. The centre also provides business continuity for District Councils and other parts of KCC, dealing with emergencies such as the disruption caused by the snow in January 2010.

Performance Overview

4. The table below shows the number of inbound calls handled for the top services in terms of volume:

Adult Education	Blue Badges	Education Line (inc School Admissions)	Kent Highway Service	Kent Libraries	Registrations All	Social Services	Social Services OOH
66,740	48,790	53,663	150,071	186,399	127,906	77,203	36,458

In addition to inbound calls, in the last year the Centre dealt with:

- 93,463 outbound calls, and
- Lone worker support for 500 staff

5. Call Performance Information:

Contact Kent Calls Performance		Fiscal 09 / 10	
Calls Offered		1,138,710	
Calls Answered		1,074,312	
Service Level Achieved (answered in 20 seconds)		82%	80% Target
Calls Abandoned Total		64,398	
Calls Answered		95%	95% Target
Average Wait	Minutes : Seconds	00:14	
Average Abandon	Minutes : Seconds	01:04	
Average Handling	Minutes : Seconds	02:19	

6. Consolidated multi-channel information

All Channels	2010 Forecast volumes
Calls Offered	1,130,248
Calls Answered	1,073,310
Other Contacts (Fax / Email / Post)	122,686
Web Channel Contacts (Specific To Contact Kent Services)	3,342,945
Face to Face (Total Customers Served)	407,346
Total Contacts (Calls Offered + Other Contacts + Web Views + Face to Face)	5,055,273

7. Quality of service delivery:

- A measure of the successful performance of the centre is the number calls not transferred out of Contact Kent (known as the Depth of service). The current level is 74 %
- Customer satisfaction results show 96% of people are satisfied/very satisfied (11 services surveyed as per appendix b)

8. Service Level Agreements detailing delivery and measurement requirements on a professional basis are agreed, signed and in place with all major internal and external customers. Regular review meetings are held to assess the working relationship, to suggest improvements and to discuss any issues and concerns, with constructive feedback welcomed.

9. Contact Kent is a founder member of the Top 50 call centres for customer service, which is a quality benchmarking organisation for the public and private sector and includes organisations such as First Direct and Liverpool Direct. The Centre has won awards for Best Call Centre in 2009 (highly commended in 2010) and Best Training Team in 2010 (as assessed by the Good Communications Awards). It is also accredited to the Customer Contact Association (CCA) Global Standards, version 4. It was shortlisted for CCA quality awards in 2009 and 2010 (to be awarded November 2010) and the Guardian Awards in 2009

Staffing levels

10. Contact Kent employs 146 fte which covers the Contact Centre and includes 9 staff working in Gateways (all except Thanet). Included in this figure are 4 staff who are working from home as part of a remote working pilot. The current turnover level for advisers is 13% which compares favourably to the industry average of 18%*). Staff absenteeism for advisers is 4.47% (industry average is 7.8%*)

* Dimension Data's Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report 2009

Budget information

11. The total Budget for Contact Kent this year is £3,269,200, consisting of £94k external to KCC revenue, £665,763 internal income and £2,509,437 base budget. The average cost per contact is currently £2.50, based on a cost per call minute of £1 and an average call handling time of 2.5 minutes. The out of hours cost per call is £21.20 (some of these costs are met by the £386k transferred to the Contact Kent base budget to pay for Social Services Out of Hours)

Current Strategy

12. Current initiatives include: -

- Piloting remote working, with 4 advisers currently working from home. This initiative will test the feasibility and practicalities for creating a virtual contact centre, linking other KCC locations (ie Gateways) and home workers with the main centre.
- Email/call blending, which has been trialled in Highways and has improved the response time from 48 hours to 1 hour and is estimated will save 1 fte when expanded to all services
- Interactive Voice Response and call back capacity, giving the option to segregate and automate calls in an emergency, ie dealing with information requests for gritting routes
- Virtual Private Network system that links District Councils, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue, Medway Council and Primary Care Trusts through a telephone system that allows the free and quick transfer of calls between those organisations. This initiative allows callers to be

transferred to the correct organisation without the need to redial, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and reducing costs.

- Customer Service Advisers are supporting the Gateway face to face service, using the Contact Kent infrastructure for training, performance management and support. This also underpins the multi-channel delivery by Contact Kent, supporting the channel shift strategy

13. To realise further cost savings, whilst improving access, the following services are being evaluated for transferring to Contact Kent: -

- Kent Contact and Assessment Service
- Children and Families Information Service
- ISG Help desk
- Employee Services Connect
- Initial enquiries for Fostering and Adoption
- Calls into Commercial Services' County Supplies

In addition, it is proposed that we encourage callers to use on-line services, instead of telephoning, which will free capacity to handle the new services with minimal extra resource.

Consumer Direct

14. This is a discrete service, operating separately from Contact Kent, but sharing the same infrastructure, dealing with Trading Standards enquiries for the South East of England. Managerial support, training, resource planning and performance management is also linked between the two. More details about this service were provided to the last POSC meeting.

Opportunities

15. Given the successful performance of the contact centre to date, there is now an opportunity to undertake a further study of all contacts made to KCC, to assess how they could be handled by Contact Kent

Recommendations

- To note the current high quality of customer service and performance of the Contact Centre
- To support the transfer of additional services into and through the contact centre, maximising efficiencies, service quality and customer satisfaction
- To support the direction that assessment undertaken by Contact Kent is as 'deep' as possible, reducing the need for future contact as measured by the first contact resolution rate (FCR).

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