

## **Information For Members Of Scrutiny Committee 11<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

### **WWDC's Phone System**

Members will remember that until December 2006, the level of service experienced by customers contacting the council by phone consistently fell below an acceptable level. At particularly busy periods, like the March/April dispatch of council tax bills, the level of calls failing to get through often exceeded 60%, and those calls that did get through took a long time to be answered. The principal reason for the poor performance was the limitations of the antiquated phone system and the switchboard operator system which meant that even when fully staffed, customers would often be greeted by an engaged tone or, if they did get through, they would abandon their call because of the waiting time.

To resolve this issue, Cabinet agreed a customer service strategy and action plan that included the creation of a new Customer Service Unit (that went live in Jan 2007), and the purchase of a new state of the art phone system (that went live in June 2007). These 2 improvements delivered an immediate and enduring improvement to service levels:

- lost calls were reduced to less than 7%
- 90%+ of calls are now answered within 20 seconds (target 75%)
- 80%+ of these calls are answered within 5 seconds

Although these benefits are significant, it was considered that there was still room for improvement and after feedback from various sources, a new streamlined IVR (Interactive Voice Recognition) was presented to CMT, who agreed for it to go live on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2008. This enabled a number of issues to be addressed:

- It previously took 54 seconds to reach and listen to all the IVR options. The simplified IVR (with the same options) takes less than 30 seconds
- Customers with learning difficulties (or those who find difficulty using IVR) can be connected to the CSU without having to press anything
- The way calls are routed to Revs and Bens has been streamlined to support new ways of working introduced as part of the Vanguard process, and this has delivered an immediate improvement to service levels. (Council Tax - 98% of calls answered within 20 seconds and Benefits - 86% of calls answered within 20 seconds).

It is anticipated that customer enquiries to the new unitary authority will be answered by a person, not by an automated IVR system. As part of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) work, the County Council commissioned Mott Macdonald (an independent telephony company) to provide potential telephony solutions for the new authority including an option to remove all IVRs. Their report estimated it would cost an additional £238,000 per year to employ extra staff to handle the calls currently handled by the councils' IVRs (based on current call volumes and profiles). It is estimated that the cost of specifically removing WWDC's IVR would be between £105,000 and £126,000 per year (dependant on average call handling times).

### **Officer's Extension Numbers**

The CSU currently act as the first point of contact for the majority of customer enquiries. In addition to this, the CSU specifically act as the front office function for Housing Needs, Environmental Health and Commercial Services.

This effectively means calls for these 3 service areas are routed to CSU advisors who have been trained to deal with straightforward enquiries for these departments without the need to pass the customer on to specialist officers. Working in this way is intended to enable specialist officers to concentrate on more complex work without being continually interrupted by routine customer enquiries.

The agreed strategy and telephone protocol is:

- WWDC would have a single published number 01225 776655 and no other numbers would be generally publicised
- Service areas with large volumes of customer contact (i.e. Revenues, Benefits, Planning and CSU) would have options offered through an IVR to enable quick access
- All other officers would have extension numbers to enable them to be directly contacted if appropriate
- All officer's extension numbers would be listed on the intranet
- Council members are also issued with a paper copy of this list
- If a customer contacts the council and asks for a specific officer, they are put through to that officer
- Officers decide for themselves to whom they gave their extension numbers.
- Where service areas have regular contact with the same customers (e.g. Developers regularly contacting Building Control, journalists regularly contacting the Communications Team), extension numbers should be actively promoted to these customers, to enable them to get straight through to the right person.
- 'Business to business' cards have been produced to ensure regular business customers can be channelled to the right place effectively. (example set out below).



'Business To Business' Card

### Mystery Shopping Project

This project has commenced and is currently ongoing. To date over 100 calls have been made to various Service Areas. Once the project has been completed the results will be presented to CMT and then passed to Members through MIS.