NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – CUSTOMER SERVICES

1 MARCH 2012

Baseline Data: Budgetary details

Customer Services

Total transactions per year: 447,785

Total cost to run Customer Services is **£2,907,793** (including controllable costs and re-charges/back office costs ie Finance, HR)
£1,569,554 (including controllable costs and print, but excluding re-charges/back office costs),

Cost to Serve

Channel		including controllable costs and re-charges/back office costs) Each transaction costs:	(including controllable costs and print, but excluding re-charges/back office costs), Each transaction costs:
Web		28p	17p
Email	21,567 dealt with	£7.92	£4.80
Telephones (Contact centre)	359,218 phone calls received	£3.96	£2.40
Face to Face	67,000 interactions	£22.13	£10.53

The Deprivation Index:

The Deprivation Indices, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government, studies poverty across a range of significant indicators - all to try and work out which places are the poorest, and theoretically have the greatest need for support from their local council and other agencies. The idea is to try to break out different areas which are all influenced by poverty. The figures show that out of 326 Councils up and down the country, where Liverpool is the highest ranked area for deprivation, and Hart District Council (Hampshire) the least deprived area, Northampton is ranked 119th on the list and is therefore in the top third of areas of deprivation.

Face to Face Interactions

The cost to service face-to-face has risen considerably over the past 2 years. One of the key drivers of the One Stop Shop transformation project Business Case was to support and future-proof the drive to channel shift to the phones and web, to address the cost imbalance in the main, but also to improve the choice in how to access council and partner services. Considering the deprivation status of Northampton, and the current financial climate worsening, the need to provide face-to-face support to our vulnerable customers has remained a critical function.

Emails

Email is currently an expensive access channel to run. This is because the e-mail information has to be handled by staff and manually dealt with. Often essential information is missing and multiple contacts need to be made. Improvements to this process have been made and 6000 on-line forms were completed which involved no staff intervention at all (completely automated).

We are currently developing in conjunction with ICT an online form for the website to replace all email contacts. This means the customer will be given options to refine the service they want. The implementation date of this cost saving improvement is June 2012.

Also in June, the new website goes live. This will be a task focussed approach, getting customers access to online forms and processes as simply as possible. On an information page, we will have a 'call to action' part of the screen listing relevant online transactions, therefore driving customers further towards self service.

Channel Shift within the transformed One Stop Shop

Footfall   67000
Phone calls generated from the 'self-serve' area: 359,218
Emails generated from the 'self-serve':   21567
lagan transactions online (not all online transactions):   5377
online visits (less internal usage):   926,529

These figures tell a picture. They show demand for web is there, and we can say that when transactions are migrated across or improved, transactions will increase further.

Encouragement for web usage - within the site we are making it easy to use. Simple layout, improving the search, simplifying content, using real 'english' terms instead of council based 'english', and improving links to transactions. This also includes removing email as an option.

External to the site, friendly URLs are used to advertise initiatives. Facebook and twitter are used to both push out communications and respond to customer comments, so awareness of the site increases. By responding we encourage more use of the web as an access channel generally. Cross linking with other websites including direct gov, and the county and local district councils so customers can find the right service provider. Also use of the PCs in the OSS self-serve area to do direct channel shift, so showing customers how to use the web. General awareness through our printed literature always listing the website. Also, sending pins codes with CTAX bills to encourage citizen account usage.