
Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	11 August 2015
Report By:	Chief Financial Officer	Report No:	FIN/54/15/AP/FB
Contact Officer:	Alan Puckrin	Contact No:	01475 712223
Subject:	Customer Service Centre – Performance Update		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Committee on the performance of the Customer Service Centre (CSC) and to ask Committee to note proposals for changes to the opening hours.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Customer Service Centre was opened in its new location at Clyde Square in the summer of 2012. The Council's first Customer Service Strategy was approved by Policy & Resources Committee in November 2012. A refreshed Customer Service Strategy will be presented to the September Policy and Resources Committee.
- 2.2 The Customer Service Centre has evolved since its opening at Clyde Square in 2012 and has taken on a number of new services as well as expanding on the depth of enquiry that is handled in certain areas. Due to the Welfare Reform changes Revenues and Benefits enquiries are taking up the vast amount of time in terms of volume, complexity and duration of enquiry and volumes are increasing.
- 2.3 Over the last 4 years since the CSC was established, the number of telephone calls and customers interviewed for services other than Revenues and Benefits have remained fairly static whilst, in comparison, Revenues and Benefits have seen an increase of 31% and 39% respectively for telephone calls and customers interviewed. This has had a detrimental effect on performance.
- 2.4 In order to improve customer service, officers have put in various steps such as utilising the Modern Apprentice Scheme, using temporary resources, purchasing a quality monitoring package and reviewing the way in which the teams are set up.
- 2.5 Whilst the above have assisted, without training and developing the CSC staff then improvements will be limited. It has proven very difficult to cross train existing staff as well as train any new staff while the CSC is open without causing unacceptable delays for customers. It is proposed that the best way to support the CSC with effective training and development and to allow team meetings as well as feedback on performance is to change the opening hours on a Wednesday morning from 8.45 am opening to 11.00 am. Although the front facing element will be closed until 11.00 am on a Wednesday morning, a general telephone service and the Corporate Desk and Registrars Service will still be provided as normal.
- 2.6 A Customer Charter which is attached as appendix 3 has been developed. The charter has been circulated to CSC staff for comment and has now been updated to reflect the commitment and values that the CSC should strive to achieve on a daily basis. It also lists the behaviours that in return we expect from customers who access the CSC. If approved this Charter will be displayed in the CSC for our customers to see.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Committee note the significant increase in demand for Revenues and Benefits enquiries.
- 3.2 That Committee note the proposals to the change to opening hours on a Wednesday morning from 15th October 2015.
- 3.3 That Committee approve the Customer Charter shown in Appendix 3.
- 3.4 That Committee note that a refreshed Customer Service Strategy will be presented to the September meeting.

Alan Puckrin
Chief Financial Officer

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Customer Service Centre originally operated from what is now the Central Library from 2009 until the summer of 2012 when it moved into the new facility at the front of the Greenock Municipal Buildings. The current opening hours of the Customer Service Centre are 08.45 to 16.45 (Monday to Thursday), 08.45 to 15.45 (Friday) for face to face enquiries and 08.45 to 16.45 (Monday to Thursday) and 08.45 to 16.00 (Friday) for telephony. Corporate reception operates from 08.30 to 17.00 (Monday to Thursday) and 08.30 to 16.00 (Friday). Any Corporate meetings scheduled outwith these core hours are organised by the relevant service.
- 4.2 The Customer Service Centre has evolved since its opening at Clyde Square in 2012 and has taken on a number of new services as well as expanding on the depth of enquiry that is handled for some services. Following the Welfare Reform changes Revenues and Benefits enquiries are taking an increasing amount of time in terms of volume, complexity and duration of enquiry.
- 4.3 A customer service hub was opened in Port Glasgow in 2014. It is operated by a single Customer Service Advisor. The Services delivered from the Hub are as follows:-
- Revenue & Benefits Enquiries
 - Document evidence/copying
 - Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction enquiries
 - Council Tax enquires (no payments taken)
 - Environmental enquiries (with the exception of bulk uplifts)
 - Voter registration enquires
 - Education enquires – clothing grants and free school meals
 - Collection point for SWF crisis grant vouchers
 - General enquires
 - I-heat referrals

5.0 PERFORMANCE

- 5.1 Over the last 4 years since the CSC was established, the number of telephone calls presented and customers interviewed for services other than Revenues and Benefits has remained fairly static with an overall increase of about 1.5%. Over the last 4 years the average telephone calls answered from those presented has remained at about 90%. When comparing this statistic to many other call centre operations this is viewed as a successful outcome. Recent feedback from the last cycle of Service Level Agreement meetings with Services other than Revenues and Benefits have expressed satisfaction with the level of service provided. Appendix 1 provides more detail on these figures.
- 5.2 In comparison however, there has been an increase of 31% and 39% respectively for telephone calls and customers interviewed for Revenues and Benefits; email enquiries have also more than doubled. Management Information shows that 48% of Revenues and Benefits calls are unanswered. This can result in more visits to the CSC which in themselves are more time consuming, thus making the situation worse. Appendix 2 provides more detail.
- 5.3 In order to improve the situation officers have taken steps to improve matters including utilising the Modern Apprentice Scheme, utilising temporary resources and purchasing a quality monitoring system.
- 5.4 Whilst the above have assisted a significant omission from the improvements needed is the need to cross train staff. It has proven very difficult to cross train existing staff as well as any new staff due to the opening hours of the CSC. Removing Customer Service Representatives from their duties to be trained puts more pressure on the remaining telephone or face to face staff. Revenues and Benefits are complex areas and staff cannot be trained in short ad-hoc sessions and as such the required training cannot be delivered.

5.5 An internal review of the way the teams are set up has been carried out and has been approved by CMT. There needs now to be a period of consolidation and time given for staff to be cross trained and in particular in Revenues and Benefits in order to address the level of abandoned calls, this does however require a change to opening hours.

6.0 OPENING HOURS

6.1 In order to facilitate ongoing training and development of the CSC staff and to allow team meetings for discussion and feedback on performance, the CSC will in line with many high street customer facing agencies such as banks open at 11.00 am on Wednesday mornings. The lunch break envelope has also been expanded to allow pressures on the CSC over this busy period to be partially alleviated.

6.2 Although the front facing element of the CSC would be closed until 11.00 am on a Wednesday morning, a general telephone service will still be provided as normal. Staff will cover these telephone lines on a rota basis so that no one misses out on the opportunity for training and development.

6.3 Corporate Reception and Registrars Services will be unaffected with the main doors remaining open so that these Services can be accessed as normal. The CSC will provide a floor walking service to make sure that customers are met and the situation explained to them.

6.4 The hub in Port Glasgow will also be open should any customer have an urgent Revenues and Benefits enquiry.

6.5 The change to opening hours is planned to take effect from week commencing 15th October. These changes will have to be adequately publicised and be sensitively handled. The following mechanisms will be utilised:

- An article on the Council's web site as well as updating the appropriate web pages
- an article on ICON
- a notice on the door with complete listings of opening times
- promote on the Plasma screens
- design a small post card with the revised opening times to be handed out to regular customers
- update any literature such as invoices, leaflets and forms that are issued to customers
- use of appropriate signage within the CSC

6.6 Customers will be able to continue to interact with the Council on a 24/7 basis using the Council Website on the following issues:-

- Payment of Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates and Sundry Debtors
- Submission of Enquiries/Complaints via a link on the Contact Us on the Council Website

6.7 Work is ongoing to develop other 24/7 services including:

- Expanding the services which can be paid for via the Website.
- Allow on line reporting direct to services for requests such as street lighting faults or potholes
- Allow customers (following an authentication process) to view any interaction they have had with the Council in the one place
- Implement a self-service portal that will allow customers to book and pay for a bulky uplift on line
- Implement the Citizens mobile application which is similar to the self-service portal but is suitable for use on a smart phone

7.0 CUSTOMER CHARTER

7.1 A Customer Charter which is attached as appendix 3 has been developed. The charter has been circulated to CSC staff for comment and has now been updated to reflect the commitment and values that the CSC should strive to achieve on a daily basis. It also lists the behaviours that in return we expect from customers who access the CSC. If approved this Charter will be displayed in the CSC for our customers to see.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Financial – Whilst there will be no direct financial implications arising from this report it should be noted that the Finance Service has allocated £80,000 to increase employee levels on a temporary basis from earmarked reserves, in addition to a further £20,000 recurring funded by virement from prior year Council Tax income.

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact £000	Virement From (if Applicable)	Other Comments

Legal

8.2 There are no Legal implications arising from this report.

Human Resources

8.3 There are no HR implications arising from this report.

Equalities

8.4 There are no Equalities implications arising from this report.

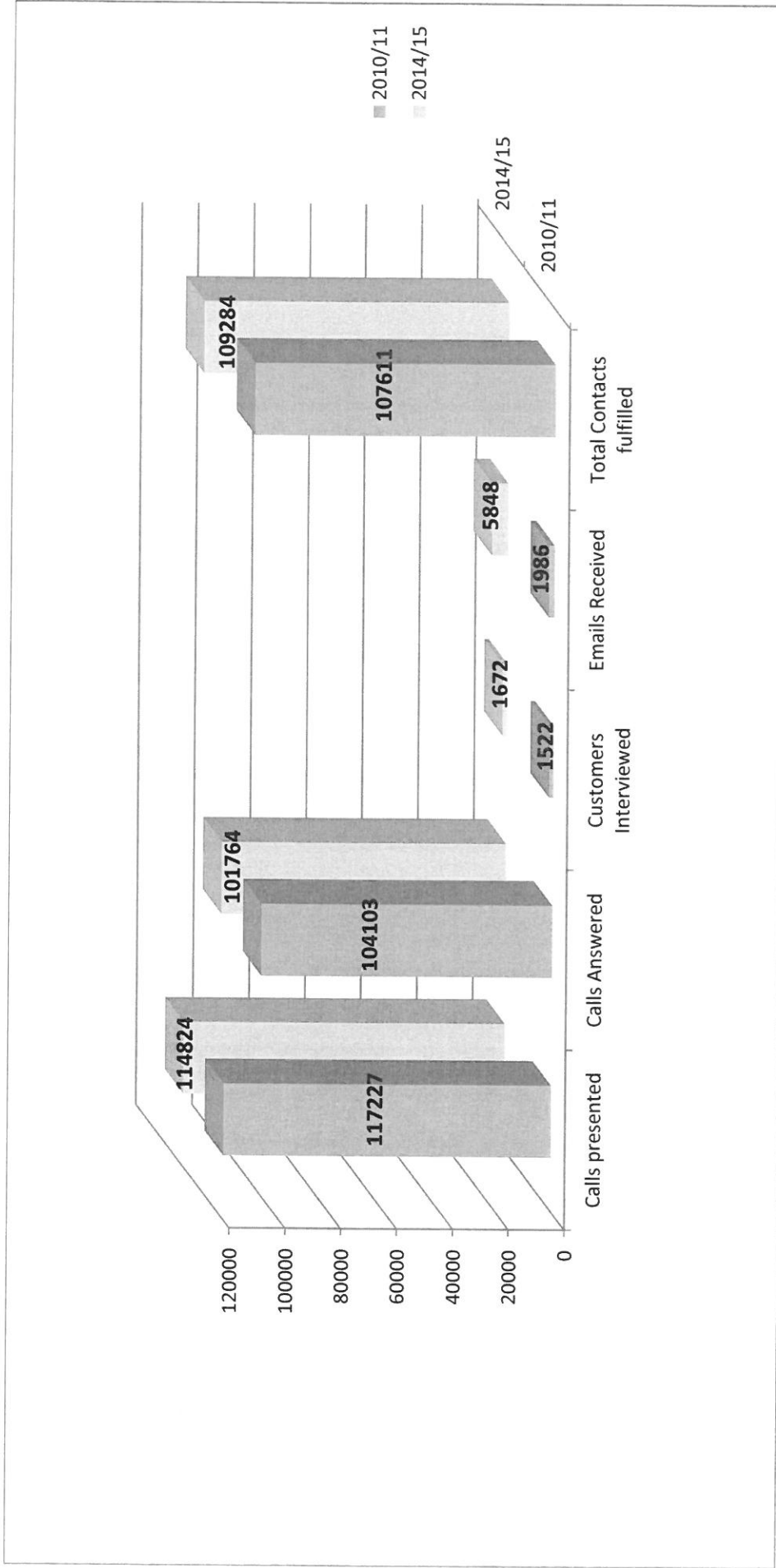
Repopulation

8.5 There are no Repopulation implications arising from this report.

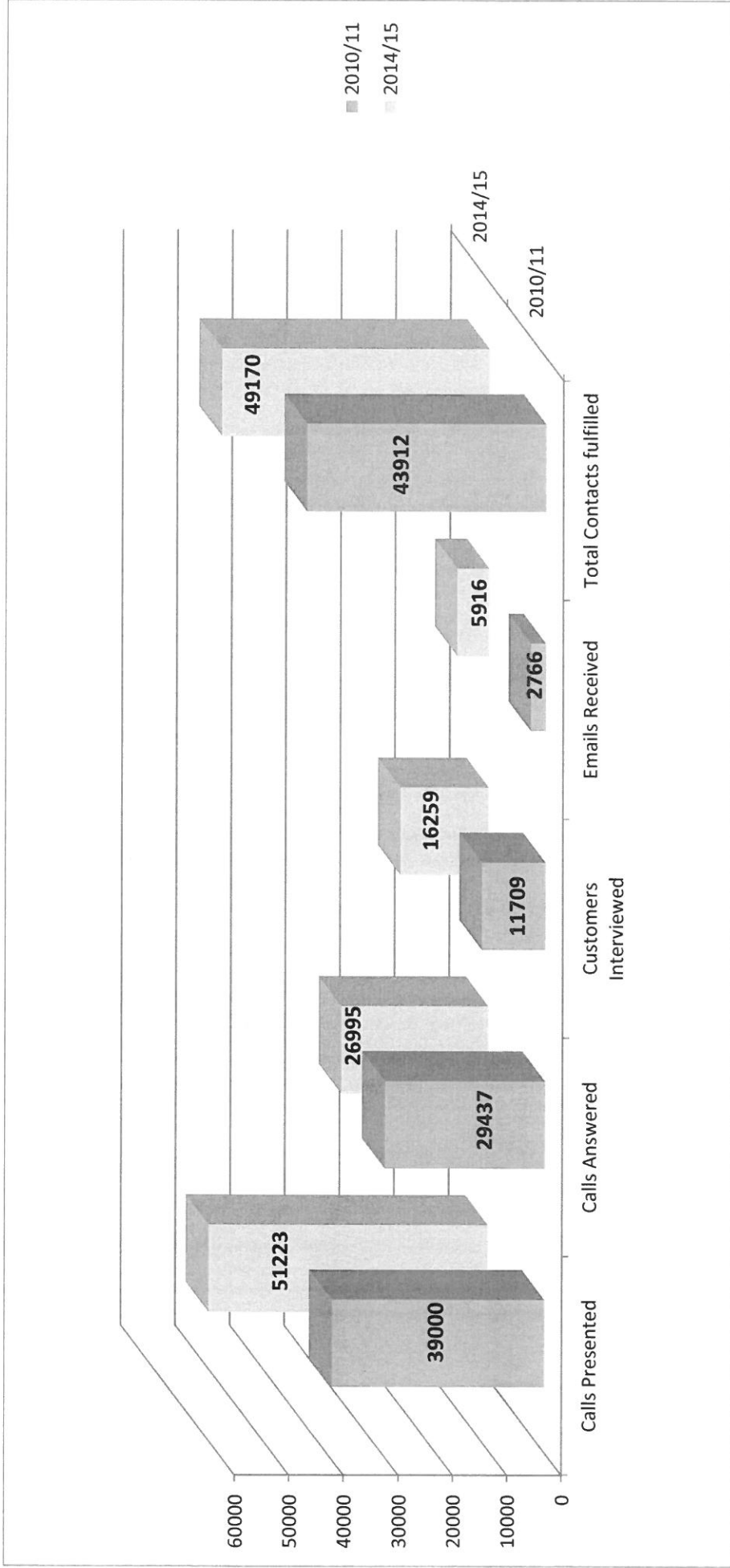
9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 None.

Other Services



Revenues & Benefits



Inverclyde Council - Customer Services Charter

Our commitment and values

At Inverclyde Council's customer services we are committed to putting our customers at the heart of everything we do.

We will do this by providing a consistent, modern and helpful service to our customers. You should expect the same level of service wherever and whenever you contact us.

You can expect us to...

- Provide an easily accessible, pleasant, clean and welcoming reception area;
- Ensure our staff are uniformed and wear a name badge;
- Be welcoming and helpful and listen to what you have to say;
- Respect your right to confidentiality;
- Give you a choice of the ways you can contact us;
- Aim to deal with the majority of enquiries at the first point of contact and where this not possible, direct you to the appropriate person or team;
- Learn from your comments, complaints and compliments;
- Keep waiting times to a minimum;
- Treat you as an individual;
- Continually strive to modernise and improve our services to you; and
- Work with other organisations in the community to provide a joined up service.

We expect you to...

- Not use inappropriate language or behaviour when you contact us;
- Provide us with all of the information we need to help us to help you;
- Let us know in advance of any meeting if you have any special needs;
- Treat us politely and with respect;
- Be on time for appointments and cancel if you are unable to attend; and
- Be patient if waiting times are longer than expected.

01 July 2015