

# Minutes



## Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

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Date: 30 September 2024

Time: 2.00 pm

Present: Councillors M Howells (Chair), M Linton, A Pimm, P Bright, M Pimm, G Horton, A Screen and K Thomas

In Attendance: Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director – Transformation and Corporate), Ceri Foot (Service Manager Customer Services), Bridie Edwards (Project Manager), Samantha Herritty (Scrutiny Adviser)

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### 1 Apologies

Councillors Reeks and Cleverly and Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance).

### 2 Declaration of Interest

None.

### 3 Customer Contact Improvement Project

Attendees:

- Rhys Cornwall - Strategic Director - Transformation and Corporate.
- Bridie Edwards - Project Manager
- Ceri Foot - Service Manager for Customer Services

The Strategic Director - Transformation and Corporate (SDTC) introduced the report and the Project Manager and Service Manager - Customer Services (SMCS) presented the report.

#### Questions:

- The Committee enquired why an investigation was considered and whether Officers had experienced the services themselves. The SDTC informed the Committee that the project arose from increasing awareness of challenges in the service following Covid-19. They took the decision for pace and clarity to engage with Basis for the review. The SMCM noted that Basis were provided data who provided workshops, show and tells, and met regularly with the core team. The SDTC noted that they had experienced services themselves.
- The Committee asked whether the service was working to industry standards. They also asked how well My Council Services (MCS) app was utilised by residents and how could it be more widely advertised. The SDTC highlighted the benefits of MCS and noted that deficiencies were with it not being compatible with other software used by NCC. They assured the Committee that they are focused on ensuring that the software works well to ensure the ease of access for residents to council services. The SMCS informed the Committee that there was an Operations Manager for MCS and that work with Customer Focus Wales was ongoing to discuss strategies, new

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technology and artificial intelligence etc. They noted that standards were different across each authority.

- The Committee asked whether the budget cited for the project was the total and what did it include. The SDTC confirmed that this is the total budget over a two-year period, and that they were expecting to stay within it.
- The Committee enquired whether staff morale had been considered and how were staff coping with changes and the project. They also enquired where staff were based, and whether staff numbers were in an adequate position to cope with the increase in demand. The SMCS informed the Committee that staff were coping well and had support available. They noted that staff were positive about the project as it may help assuage regular issues arising. They informed Committee that staff are based at the Civic Centre, the Central Library and also from home. The SMCS noted that most staff turnover was due to staff moving to jobs elsewhere in the authority. The SDTC noted that solutions to these issues were not as simple as employing more staff but ensuring that there were effective systems and responses from service areas and training available.
- The Committee asked if contact with Councillors is monitored and whether Councillors could be trained in contacting service areas. The SMCS confirmed that correspondence with elected members is monitored by customer services and city services when forwarded and put into MCS. The Project Manager confirmed that those not sent in wouldn't be counted so the true figure could be higher than anticipated. The SDTC also stated that services could improve in providing more succinct answers to residents.
- The Committee questioned whether Officers had considered alternative digital access and support for residents such as YouTube guides. The SDTC agreed that services need to be easily accessible and to follow the suggestion about YouTube guides up.
- The Committee also asked for an update on how residents can contact the Council without digital facilities. The SMCS informed the Committee that staff were prepared to assist residents who had no access to digital facilities and assured Committee that no one was turned away.
- The Committee asked what progress had been made to reduce the call waiting time. The SMCS noted that daily consideration is given to how to reduce wait times by working to balance staff distribution where it will be most impactful. They noted that there can be unavoidable longer wait times where multiple issues arise at once. They noted that it is difficult to predict busier periods but resources are managed within these challenges. The Committee asked what the average wait time was for the 44% of calls ended. The SMCS noted it varied and that it was difficult to say why the call was ended.
- The Committee asked whether a call back system had been considered. The SMCS noted that they had looked at it but low capacity meant that staff were busy from the beginning of the day. They noted that this is a facility offered for residents engaging with the Council in Welsh. The Committee asked whether video calls were being considered. The CMCS noted that this had also been considered and would be better from an equalities perspective, but a review was required first. The SDTC felt that this

could help avoid situations from escalating.

- The Committee asked how Officers intended to increase running capacity. The SDTC noted that improving systems, training and collaboration between areas could allow the customer contact team more time to assist with complex issues rather than repeat ones and reduce wait times. They noted that project implementation was imminent and that there were priority areas of work with detailed plans. They noted that there is an 18 month implementation period and that it was organisation-wide with some changes being more quickly implemented than others. They assured Committee that projects, progress and improvement could be shown in future actions within the report.
- The Committee asked for an overview of recurring issues raised by residents and whether it was difficult to signpost residents or pass queries to partners. The SMCS agreed to provide a breakdown of the top 10 most popular contacts. The SDTC noted that Social Services contacts were not included as to not overcomplicate the project as they have statutory processes in place but that they were represented on the project board. The SMCS highlighted that there is a good relationship with Wastesavers and the Project Manager noted that Wastesavers utilised MCS. The Committee asked whether MCS would be promoted in Newport Matters once the website is complete. The SDTC highlighted that work on the website was ongoing and would look at what information was on the website.
- The Committee asked whether more Human Resources (HR) involvement was necessary. The SDTC noted that not all improvements are focused in customer services and organisational change was required. They highlighted that the Chief Executive was clear that this was organisation-wide and was keen to have all Heads of Service involved. The SMCS informed Committee that the HR and OD Manager had been updated and was happy with ongoing work.
- The Committee asked how many calls were repeat calls. The SMCS informed Committee that there was no way of distinguishing this and that it could be causing some inflation in figures.
- The Committee asked if there would be more detailed action plans. The SDTC informed Committee that there would be, and these could be included in future reports.

#### **Comments and recommendations:**

- The Committee requested figures on Welsh language contacts in the contact centre.
- The Committee requested a breakdown of top ten most popular reasons for contacts in the customer contact centre.
- The Committee requested an update on website progress.
- The Committee recommend using video guides where it would be helpful for residents.
- The Committee recommend exploring alternative methods of contact in future such as video calls and call back system.
- The Committee recommend breakdown of actions to measure performance, presented similarly to service area reporting.
- The Committee recommend HR representative on the project board.
- The Committee recommend a 6 monthly update in person.
- The Committee recommend feedback sessions for staff as project progresses.
- The Committee were content with report.

#### 4 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

##### **a) Actions Arising**

The Scrutiny Adviser noted outstanding items but these had been chased

##### **b) Forward Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Adviser informed the committee that dates will be confirmed for the committee to receive the Highways Asset Management Plan, Local Development Plan Deposit Plan and the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.

They noted the committee that the next meeting is on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 2024 at 2pm.

The Committee felt that the Placemaking Plan should be postponed and reviewed once the working group had concluded. The Chair agreed to write to the Head of Service and the Scrutiny Adviser agreed to pass this on.

##### **c) Outcomes Monitoring**

The Scrutiny Adviser noted some outstanding but assured Committee that these were being followed up.

#### 5 **Minutes of the previous meetings held on 22nd July 2024 and 29th July 2024**

The minutes of the previous meetings held **22<sup>nd</sup> July 2024 and 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024** were **approved as a true and accurate record.**

The meeting terminated at 3.40 pm