



Subject:	Update on Customer Focus Programme
Date:	22 October 2021
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	Members are reminded that in February and May 2021 the Committee was provided with updates on the Customer Focus Programme, which included updates on the new Customer Hub function which has been operational from 29 March 2021.
1.2	This report provides an update: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• on the implementation of the Customer Hub function;• on progress in the development of added features in the Elected Members' mobile app and plans for release of this version to all Members; and• on the Customer Focus programme, including the Council's website development and enabling infrastructure.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. note the update on the implementation of the Customer Hub function including completion of the reception area of the ground floor in CWB and continuing works to accommodate the Customer Hub team. 2. note the update on the next release of a mobile application for Elected Members and plans to roll this out to all members in October/November 2021. 3. note that Party Group briefings are planned to take place in October 2021 to continue engaging with elected members to gather feedback on their Customer Hub experience and to continue to promote use of the new mobile app and the additional functionality in the next release. 4. note the work that is continuing to improve missed bin collections. 5. note progress on the development of the Council's websites. 6. note progress with the provision of enabling infrastructure.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The first phase of the new Customer Hub function went live on 29th March 2021 as planned. The Customer Hub deals with customer contact for all departments and services, across a number of channels (online, telephone, email). In the first phase of implementation the hub has managed all customer contact for cleansing/waste and calls formerly through the main switchboard and corporate complaints numbers. All other direct dial telephone numbers remain unchanged.</p> <p>As part of the blueprint for Elected Members attached at Appendix 1, the Customer Hub provides specific services for Elected Members in the form of a direct phone line and email account and both these channels went live on 29 March 2021.</p> <p>Work has continued with the Customer Focus Task and Finish group of Elected Members to develop a third contact channel, a mobile application which enables members to raise issues, keep track of their cases and review their history of cases. The first version of the app was rolled out to members in July 2021. Work has continued with the Task and Finish group to develop additional functionality within the app.</p> <p>Work has now started on planning of phase 2 of the programme implementation which will include onboarding of the Building Control Service. A report to a future committee will provide details of the plan.</p>

3.2 **Update on the implementation of the Customer Hub Function**

The first few months of operation during the summer period provided significantly high volumes of calls averaging approximately 800 calls per day with higher volumes experienced after bank holidays. Email traffic has accounted for one third of overall contacts. **Appendix 2** provides an analysis of the Customer Hub throughput from April to September 2021.

3.2.1 **Customer Hub Resources and Capacity**

Because call volumes have been higher than anticipated we have been closely monitoring call queues, prioritising them and assessing the impact on staffing requirements. To address demand and to stabilise the operation of Customer Hub, we used temporary staff as an interim measure and increased and extended these arrangements whilst backfilling or recruiting temporary posts for a period of 6 months. We also brought forward the recruitment of an additional 2 permanent posts within the agreed establishment.

Integral to this formative stage has been the inclusion of staff and Trade Unions in understanding the impact on staffing requirements during the transition and the early stages of operating the new Customer Hub.

Recruitment has been completed and new staff have received their initial training and development, and this will continue across all team members as we continue to build capacity.

As this is a new function and to provide assurance after the first six months of operation, an independent health check is being commissioned to review the operational set up of the Customer Hub and to assess future capacity needs.

3.2.2 **Hand offs to Departments/Services**

The handoffs from Customer Hub to services in other departments has been designed and implemented initially on a 'wide and thin' basis i.e. a basic level of information and signposting for customers is provided at the first point of contact for all services across all channels. Handoff processes have worked well in general however the focus has now shifted to improving issue resolution and responsiveness, ensuring service standards are consistent across departments and in particular as we step towards a return to office working. To facilitate this we are working with Digital Services and departments to define management information requirements to support continuous improvement in service delivery.

3.2.2 **A new physical Customer Hub**

Since October 2020, plans for the refurbishment of the Ground Floor of Cecil Ward Building as the physical Customer Hub have been delivered by our Building and Maintenance

colleagues with support from colleagues in Civic and Legal Services. Whilst it is to be determined when 'face to face' services will fully resume, the plans have included a refurbishment of the reception area as a first phase providing a more welcoming customer interface and acting as the physical focal point for customer service. This work has also provided the opportunity to upgrade digital infrastructure and to deep clean stonework. Work is now in progress to refurbish the office space adjacent to the reception area to accommodate the Customer Hub team. Photographs of the new reception area can be found at **Appendix 3**.

3.3 **Dedicated Services for Elected Members**

As stated, the Customer Hub went live with specific services designed for elected members – a dedicated telephone line and email account. A profile of Elected Members' engagement to date can be found at **Appendix 4**.

3.3.1 **Upgrade to the mobile App designed and developed for Elected Members**

After the launch of the mobile app for elected members in July 2021, we continued to work with the Customer Focus Task and Finish group of Elected Members to develop the product.

A second release of the app with new features has been developed which members of the Task and Finish group have tested and at a recent workshop fed back on their experience and recommendations for improvement. We are grateful to elected members for their continuing support and time and input to the development process. The app has been developed and supported by Digital Services who are currently planning for the upgrade of the app to be made available to all members at the end of October 2021. A training video has been developed by Digital Services Trainers to support the rollout. Members will receive an email from Democratic Services which will have links to the video – this will be accessed through the Members Portal where the other App training videos are already available.

3.3.2 **Further Engagement with Elected Members**

Party group briefings have been arranged for the end of October to continue engaging with elected members to facilitate a demo and promotion of the upgrade to the elected members' app and to get their feedback on their Customer Hub experience to inform service improvements.

3.4 **Update on Missed Bin Collections**

As part of the Customer Focus programme, aligned to the overall Resources and Fleet transition and improvement programme, we have been focussing on how we can improve issues with missed bins including information flows between elected members, customers, staff and managers.

A mobile app to report missed bins has been developed for Resources and Fleet staff to use during collections and a pilot to test the technology has been completed across 10 out of 50 squads. The outcomes of the pilot have been assessed and issues which were identified during the pilot, such as a high volume of damaged, contaminated or multiple bins, have been reviewed and action plans to address these issues, including a review of back office processes and systems have been reported and agreed through the People and Communities Committee.

Plans are now being developed to extend use of the mobile app to capture further information on missed collections and to focus on improving information flows between the operation, Customer Hub and customers.

3.5 **Update on development of our Websites**

3.5.1 **New Council Website**

The new council website www.belfastcity.gov.uk has now been in place for a year, aiming to provide a consistent online experience for every user and to adhere to the relatively new legislation for public sector websites. The website was delivered on time and within budget.

The development focused specifically on accessibility and mobile responsiveness. It involved a complete content review and the size of the site was reduced by around 80%, making information more concise and relevant. We identified over 2000 pdfs and converted those still needed to HTML documents.

We carried out user testing throughout and after the project on a range of users, including those with disabilities and of different ages.

3.5.2 **Other site developments**

In addition to the main site, other sites to move under the www.belfastcity.gov.uk domain are:

Belfast Stories – 16 September 2021

Belfast Zoo – 21 September 2021

Invest in Belfast - 27 October 2021

3.5.3 **Web Governance Panel**

A Web governance panel has been established comprising of officers from Digital Services and Marketing and Corporate Communications. Any requests for mobile apps, domain names, websites and online development work are directed through this panel in order to

ensure we are managing contracts efficiently; to ensure information is correct and that Belfast is promoted in a cohesive manner.

To continue to provide assurance and to protect the investment in our online channels, any requests regarding new platforms will be channelled through the Web Governance panel.

3.5.4 **Accessibility**

The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 (the Accessibility Regulations) require us to:

1. meet the [international WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standard](#)
2. publish an accessibility statement that explains how accessible our website or mobile app is.

Beyond this, we are continually looking for new ways to ensure no-one is left behind or hindered from getting the information they need from our website.

Our default publishing method is in HTML, the language of the website. We state in our accessibility statement that we will not publish any more PDFs to the site, and if needed due to a legislative requirement, we will amend our statement to alert users to the issue and offer alternatives.

Online Design Authority

3.5.5 An online design authority has been established to champion the removal of barriers to accessibility and usability. It thinks from the customer perspective, rather than the service.

To support this the Online Team has developed a suite of guides to support internal staff. These include web style guidelines, publishing principles and guidelines on legislative compliance across our digital offering, including General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 (**PSBAR**).

Cabinet Office Monitoring

3.5.6 In July 2021, we were advised by the Central Digital and Data Office, which is part of the Cabinet Office, that they would be conducting a compliance audit on our main website www.belfastcity.gov.uk which would involve monitoring of the site and provision of information to assist them.

We have received their feedback within the last week and are in the process of working through their recommendations to plan improvements.

<p>3.5.7</p>	<p>The Silktide Index</p> <p>The Silktide Index presents a comprehensive analysis of public sector websites throughout the UK. Tests cover the latest standards for website accessibility, which include mobile accessibility. The Index is maintained by Silktide in partnership with Society of IT Managers (SOCITM).</p> <p>As of September 2021, the index measures Belfast City Council website as Excellent (91%), which is top in Northern Ireland councils.</p> <p><u>Enabling Infrastructure</u></p> <p>3.6 The success of the Customer Focus programme is wholly dependent on the delivery of enabling infrastructure and specific to Customer Hub, the technical infrastructure provided via telephony and systems delivered by Digital Services.</p> <p>Digital Services are continuing the development and support of the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact Centre Improving customer experience by ensuring that customer contact from any channel is directed to the right agent with the right skills. It also provides real-time information to improve agent effectiveness and management information for departments to support service improvement. • Customised CRM integration Phone and CRM system integration provides visibility of calls made and received, quick access to customer information and the ability to receive and make calls directly within the CRM. • Softphones Bring all the functionality of a desk phone onto a laptop or mobile phone. This enables the staff working in the Customer Hub to operate remotely or in the office. Implementation of softphones is being prioritised in line with the design of hand offs to departments where use of softphones is most effective.
	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p>
<p>3.7</p>	<p>The Committee agreed, in November 2017, that a budget of £500k be set aside for the customer focus project.</p> <p>Resource requirements for operation of the Customer Hub are provided for within existing Budgets.</p>

	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.8	No implications
4.0	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Elected Members Blueprint Appendix 2 - Customer Hub Throughput - April to September 2021 Appendix 3 - New Customer Hub reception area in Cecil Ward Building Appendix 4 Profile of Elected Members engagement with the Customer Hub