

November 16th 2023

Agenda Item No.

Customer & Online Services Annual Report

Report by: Diarmuid Cotter, Head of Customer & Online Services

Wards Affected: All

Purpose

To present performance scorecard for Customer & Online Services for 2022/23 and first two quarters of 23/24.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to consider and review:

1. Note the arrangements set out in **Section 1.0** to fulfil the Council's obligation to comply with Audit Scotland's 2021 SPI Direction.
2. The Customer & Online Services performance information in **Section 2.0**, including current challenges/priorities and risks. A high-level overview of KPIs is attached in Appendix 1 – covering 4 lenses: Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF), Plan for Fife (P4F), Customer, Resources and Service Operations.

Resource Implications

None

Legal & Risk Implications

There are legal requirements highlighted within this report, linked to a risk of regulatory intervention if the Council does not adhere to the standards and expectations set by Audit Scotland.

Impact Assessment

An EqIA is not required because the report does not propose a change or revision to existing policies and practices.

Consultation

None required

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Audit Scotland published an update on Statutory Performance Direction in December 2021. The Council is required to report a range of information setting out:
- i. Its performance in improving local public services, provided by both (i) the council itself and (ii) by the council in conjunction with its partners and communities
 - ii. Its progress against the desired outcomes agreed with its partners and communities
 - iii. Its performance in comparison (i) over time and (ii) with other similar bodies including information drawn down from LGBF in particular and from other benchmarking activities
 - iv. Its assessment of how it is performing against its duty of Best Value, and how it plans to improve against this assessment.

Below is a Link to the Direction Statutory Performance Indicators published in December 2021:

https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/um/spi_direction_2021.pdf

2.0 Performance Reporting

- 2.1 Appendix 1 to this report is presented in the form of a balanced scorecard covering the areas of LGBF/P4F, Customer, Resources and Service Operations. A current snapshot of Service Challenges is included along with a section on Risks.
- 2.2 Customer & Online Services has staffing of 418fte and an operating budget of £13m. It consists of six main areas
- Contact Centre
 - Customer Service Centres (including Registration)
 - Financial Wellbeing & Revenues
 - Online Services
 - Information Team (Fols etc)
 - Customer Escalations Team (complaints etc.)
- 2.3 While some of the work in the service is self-contained there are numerous interdependencies across services particularly, Building Services, Housing, Environment, Transportation, Children & Families and Health & Social Care. Management of these relationships is vital to the success of the service.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Customer & Online Services Scorecard

Report Contact: Claire Bates

Author Name: Diarmuid Cotter

Author's Job Title: Head of Customer & Online Services

Telephone: 07906502218

Email: diarmuid.cotter@fife.gov.uk

CUSTOMER & ONLINE SERVICES (COS)

Current Challenges & Priorities

- The cost-of-living crisis has put pressure on the Financial Wellbeing & Revenues area and there is no sign of this abating. The main issues centre around the Welfare Fund.
- The Contact Centre remains an area of high demand even as more transactions are being done online. Close working between the Centre and Online Services remains a priority so that service delivery can become as seamless as possible.
- The Repairs Centre continue to manage increased workloads and the challenge of optimising scheduling tradespeople. This area has recently undergone a review and it is expected changes in this area particularly around the advancement of digital opportunities will see improvements and efficiencies.
- Customer & Online Services are actively engaged in the development of a No Wrong Door approach as part of our commitment to the Plan4Fife and involvement in supporting vulnerable citizens and aiding people in crisis. This will involve a review of how we deliver a face-to-face service in a more effective manner.
- The service realigned the Financial Wellbeing & Revenues area to ensure the service was ready for increased involvement in this area particularly with regards to supporting the vulnerable.
- fife.gov.uk continues to be updated and refined based on customer and service feedback. A primary focus will be on exploiting existing and new technologies to optimise service delivery and enhance the customer experience.
- Staff resourcing remains a challenge due to turnover and difficulties recruiting, so flexibility is required to ensure there is sufficient resource in all areas of the service.

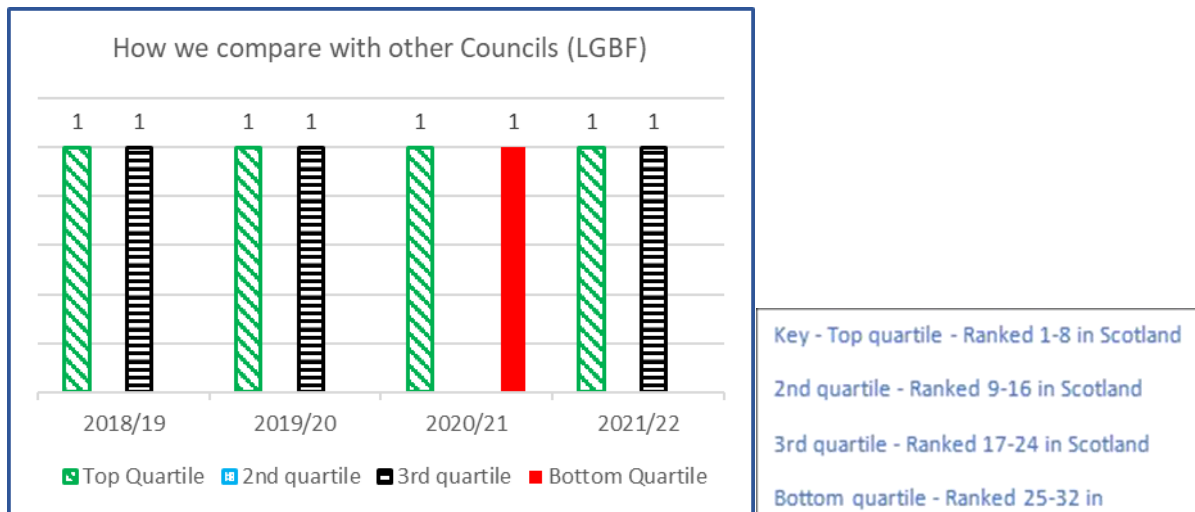
RISKS/EMERGING RISKS

COS monitors Service Risks. The risks covered by the service, other than wider Council risks, are based on the ability to deliver two key services: -

- Welfare Fund payments
- Council Tax collection

Welfare fund payments are currently out with the set parameters, a resolution has been put in place for the next six months to bring these back within the agreed timescales.

KEY OUTCOMES (LGBF/P4F)



- Customer & Online Services has two metrics that have LGBF comparisons.
- Cost per dwelling is consistently in the top quartile. Council Tax received % is improving. The collection of Council Tax has increased back to pre-pandemic levels in 2022-23. Indeed, the in-year collection of Council Tax is at the highest level achieved mirroring the collection achieved in 2017-18.
- Figures currently unavailable for 2022/23 for LGBF.

PI Short Name	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Ranked Quartile
Cost of collecting Council Tax per dwelling (£) Fife (LGBF)	£3.43	£2.15	£1.68	£1.53	£2.58	Not available 22/23
Income from council tax received by year end (%) Fife (LGBF)	95.7%	95.3%	93.6%	95.3%	95.8%	Not available 22/23

A RAG has been added to the following sections of the Template: -

Key to Council Scorecard Results Tables	
Green (G)	Performance improved, on or above target and no action required
Amber (A)	Performance static, slightly below target and action in place
Red (R)	Performance significantly worse, and requires immediate action
N/A	Not Available to report

CUSTOMER

PI Short Name	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Q1 2023/24	Q2 2023/24
Number of fife.gov.uk sessions	4.8m	4.7m	6.1m	5.8m	7.9m (G)	1.73m	1.83m
Number of Online Transactions	168,739	172,965	135,427	175,506	179,468 (A)	97,962	
Number of Online Accounts	147,000	160,661	81,245	142,025	175,875 (G)	190,534	
Number of Transactions by Customer Service Centres	356,710	312,877	83,192	145,068	187,240 (G)	52,934	57,933
% of Contacts Answered – Contact Centre (all teams)	73.3%	81.96%	86.93%	86.43%	88.38% (G)	91.1%	91.6%
Number of Twitter Followers	48,278	50,886	53,150	53,900	55,244 (G)	55,053	54,879
Number of Facebook Fans	37,833	42,527	52,441	53,613	56,472 (G)	56,798	57,121
% agreeing that the council is good at listening to local people's views before it takes decisions (Scottish Household Survey)	45.8%	53.9%	48%	*N/A	N/A	Not measured for quarters	
% agreeing that the council is good at letting people know about the kinds of services it provides (Scottish Household Survey)	63.5%	64.8%	*N/A	*N/A	N/A	Not measured for quarters	
Customer and Online Services Stage 1 Complaints dealt actioned < 5 days	97%	94%	92%	96%	93% (G)	98%	96%
Customer & Online Services Stage 2 Complaints actioned < 20 days	100%	94%	100%	96%	94% (A)	100%	70%
Fife Council Stage 1 Complaints actioned < 5 days	90%	86%	89%	88%	86% (A)	87%	88%
Fife Council Stage 2 Complaints actioned < 20 days	82%	84%	80%	84%	76% (A)	67%	75%

*data not collected due to Covid.

- Fife.gov.uk is the main contact method with over 7.89m sessions in 22/23, a significant increase from the 5.8m in 21/22. It has 216 forms available for online transactions with just under 180,000 submitted in 22/23 and 97,962 in

first two quarters of 23/24. There has also been a significant 23% increase in the number of online accounts created since 21/22.

- Overall response rates for the Contact Centre are good and have shown a steady improvement even if individual areas can have pinch points.
- Customer Service Centres saw a significant increase in transactions being carried out going from 145,068 in 21/22 to 187,240 in 22/23, an increase of over 29%. In the first two quarters of 23/24 there have been 110,867 transactions
- Complaints total in 22/23 was 245 and year to date in 23/24 is 109. Responsiveness level for the service continues to be satisfactory. The service oversees complaints activity on a Council wide basis.

RESOURCES

PI Short Name	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Q1 2023/24	Q2 2023/24
Customer & Online Services – Average WDL per FTE	13.02	DIV/0	17.06	16.14 (G)	15.64	15.29
Customer & Online Services – Long Term WDL per FTE	7.52	DIV/0	13.79	11.01 (G)	10.14	9.42
COS Workforce who are Female (%)	80.70%	79.70%	73.60%	75.80% (G)	Not measured for quarters	
COS Workforce who are Full-time (%)	67.60%	68%	64.70%	63.50% (A)	Not measured for quarters	
COS Workforce who are Permanent Employees (%)	88%	88.90%	88.80%	91.90% (G)	Not measured for quarters	
COS Number of Voluntary Redundancies (FTEs)	13	15	0	0	Not measured for quarters	
COS Employees aged 24 and under (%)	2.90%	2.60%	4.70%	5.80% (G)	Not measured for quarters	
COS Employees aged 29 and under (%)	7.60%	7%	10.80%	13.20% (G)	Not measured for quarters	
COS Employees aged 55 and over (%)	23.70%	24%	31.20%	31.60% (G)	Not measured for quarters	
COS Number of WYI Bids	0	0	0	2 (G)	Not measured for quarters	
COS Number of WYI Programme new starts	0	1	0	0	Not measured for quarters	
Cost of collecting Non-Domestic Rate per chargeable property (£)	£11.35	£14.19	£3.92	£1.96 (G)	Not measured for quarters	
Cost of collecting sundry debtors per debtor account issued (£)	£2.91	£6.71	£4.73	£4.78 (A)	Not measured for quarters	

- FTE Working days lost target has not been met since 2017/18 but there has been improvement in this area with almost 1 FTE working day decrease compared to 21/22, and the first two quarters of 23/24 have continued this downward trend with the average of 15.29 in quarter 2. Continuing this downward protective remains a focus. The target is 13 as we aim to get back to 18/19 figures.
- There has been an increase in the number of permanent members of staff rising to 91.90% in 21/22, giving stability to the majority of the workforce.
- The cost for the delivery of the Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) service decreased significantly in 22/23 to £1.96 per property compared with £3.92 in 21/22. The overall reduction per property is directly attributed to an increase in the 10% statutory penalty imposed which increased from £384,189 in 21/22 to £497,584 in 2022/23. Again,

Appendix

this is another indicator of the fact that businesses are struggling with pandemic recovery and increased energy costs.

- The costs of raising an invoice has remained static. In 21/22 the cost was £4.73 per invoice raised compared with £4.78 in 22/23. This cost varies dependant on the volume of invoices raised each year.

The table below provides information on **Customer & Online Services** workforce data by Budgeted (FTE) for the current year and the last 4 years.

Budgeted (FTE) April 2019	Budgeted (FTE) April 2020	Budgeted (FTE) April 2021	Budgeted (FTE) April 2022	Budgeted (FTE) April 2023	Difference in FTE 2022-2023
279.51	441.48	400.81	409.40	418.64	9.24

SERVICE OPERATIONS

PI Short Name	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Q1 2023/24	Q2 2023/24
% of Contacts Answered – Out of Hours	93.39%	92.47%	96.72%	97.70% (G)	98.81%	99.01%
% of Contacts Answered – General	84.90%	88.53%	81.34%	83.78% (G)	83.32%	81.65%
% of Contacts Answered – Repairs	73.34%	80.83%	76.27%	78.48% (G)	88.22%	89.55%
% of Contacts Answered – Social Work	76.99%	86.32%	88.99%	90.16% (G)	90.38%	92.44%
% of Contacts Answered – Assessment	92.70%	88.70%	84.30%	76.70% (A)	80.40%	69.20%
% of Contacts Answered – Collections	95.25%	92.09%	88.83%	85.26% (A)	86.92%	84.82%
Registration input accurately %	97.94%	97.82%	98.39%	98.4% (estimate) (G)	Not measured for quarters – 2022 examination by NRS not fully complete yet.	
Rent collected as % of total due in the reporting year	99.96%	99.48%	98.05%	98.70% (G)	94.18%	98.33%
Number of welfare fund applications made	31545	35260	33856	37073 (R)	7671	7394
Average processing time – Crisis Grants (days)	2	1	3	2 (G)	2	2
Average processing time – Community Care Grants (days)	24.9	21.2	37.3	9.8 (G)	23.3	33.7
% FOI requests completed on time	84.94%	88.30%	88.55%	84.56% (A)	89.47%	71.73%
% of EIR requests completed on time	89.49%	93.55%	89.64%	91.92% (G)	88.15%	74.18%
% of SAR requests completed on time	80.42%	86.81%	83.99%	80.96% (A)	76.0%	Not available
In year collection of Non-Domestic Rates (%)	98.20%	98.70%	99%	97.60% (A)	9.30%	30.44%
Average Time to process new HB/CTR claims (in days)	14.2	20.4	37.7	19.8 (G)	21.4	18.7
Average Time to process HB/CTR notification of changes (days)	2.8	3.5	5.6	3 (G)	4.1	5.7

Average Time to Process New CTR Claims (days)	18.1	23.8	31	19.4 (G)	17.1	18
Average Time to Process CTR Changes (days)	4.5	9.1	11.1	4.7 (G)	3.1	5.6

- As a service all our operations are customer facing, this section goes into more detail than the higher-level figures in the Customer section above. It should be noted we also share some metrics with services such as Housing and Finance.
- The Contact Centre figures are divided into their main areas of speciality. Overall, the Contact Centre dealt with 855,085 enquiries across its main area of business in 22/23 continuing the trend of a slight reduction year on year (886,325 in 21/22). There were 1,016,601 enquiries in 18/19.
- There is continued progress in the Repairs Centre with elevated performance in quarter 1 and 2. This is due to a change in how the team deal with calls coming in after a review of processes. Out of hours performance has gradually improved and has seen significant change due to a change in the community alarm system.
- The greatest pressure continues to be on the Revenues areas. The ongoing cost of living crisis has increased demand on benefits and debt services. Mitigation and grants like Energy Bills support Scheme, Council Tax Allowance and changes to Non-Domestic Rates, along with school meal and clothing changes has led to an increase in calls from customers with enquiries.
- The Welfare Fund continues to experience an upward trend in demand and is currently facing challenges in processing applications for both Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants within Government set timescales. Although there has been an improvement in the processing time for Crisis Grants, reducing from 3 days in 21/22 to 2 days in 22/23, it remains 1 day beyond the target time.
- Community Care Grants experienced a substantial reduction in processing time in 22/23, decreasing to 9.8 days this was mainly due to outsourcing CCGs to NEC (formally known as Northgate) for a period of 6 months between January and July of 2022. However due to resource challenges and continued demand there has been an increase in processing time in quarter 1 and 2 this year with current status being 26 days wait. The SWF team will use NEC for another 6 months starting in November 2023 to get processing timescales back into acceptable limits.
- Rent collection continues to be monitored closely. While collection remains reasonably strong it is still not back to pre-pandemic levels.
- Service planning for Customer & Online Services will reflect what is in this report while taking cognisance of trends. Recent years have seen a consolidation of customer contact services across the Council and better use of digital platforms to improve access and information. This needs to go further if we are to realise the Council's desire for end-to-end customer management, joined up referral processes and continuous process improvement. Our improvement capability needs to grow with clearer responsibility in the organisation for customer and business process improvement.
- In other cases, there is a need to change current models if we are to retain community presence and face to face services. There is no longer the footfall to warrant the service offerings in so many of our offices for example. Welfare staff could however be aligned with community teams into a different model of local access. The Registration Service can be enhanced with greater geographical reach enabled through online options. Other services such as telephone contact and Out of Hours services will continue as is though there may be opportunities to further consolidate contact and to utilise technology improvements.