

17th October 2022

1) Customer Services

The first 6 months of the year have seen Customer Services deal with 161,000 calls, 54,000 emails and over 7,200 face-to-face interactions. Customer satisfaction remains high, with almost 94% of customers rating their interaction with us as satisfactory or very satisfactory.

The workstreams under the “How We Support our Customers” programme have been re-profiled to reflect the priorities linked to our Survive to Thrive approach. As a result, the below activity is currently underway:

1. Consolidating resources (telephony, CXM, CCM, structures and staffing etc)
2. Consolidating internal helpdesks into one CS offer
3. Optimising the web content and online interactions
4. Meeting customers where they are (Cost of living support, work with libraries and VCSE, alignment with ICS)
5. Organisation-wide learning (Safe Customer Interaction, Complaints learning log)

Enhancing the offer at the front door

By onboarding more services and delivering a unified front door, we will be able to offer a better service to customers with improved first contact resolution, but also identify efficiencies in our processes and resources. Currently, work is focusing on supporting our colleagues in the Revenues and Benefits teams.

Consolidating resources

Work continues on the development of a unified CXM solution, alongside multi-skilling of staff and re-allocation of resources so that we have the flexibility needed to effectively manage increasing demand over winter. In addition, work is being carried out with Transformation resources to identify the opportunities presented by bringing together our internal helpdesks across WNC services.

Improving the customer experience through our website content

Currently we are working with the Communications team on improving the accessibility and ease of navigation of the ‘Cost of Living’ area of the website, to help residents, partners across other agencies, including the VCSE, and internal colleagues, find out the most suitable solutions to their financial worries.

Meeting customers where they are

Our outreach programme of work with libraries and community centres continues, with a focus on supporting residents with the cost of living crisis. The team will be supporting with the rollout of HSF3, to reach those residents who are in need of assistance getting the right support.

Disseminating learning throughout the organisation

Our current focus is on sharing learning from complaints and Member Enquiries to support service areas in developing content which will assist with enquiries in a proactive manner, via information shared on our Intranet pages. In addition, we are working with colleagues in Health and Safety and Communications to roll out a 'Help us help you' campaign, under the umbrella of Safe Customer Interactions – we know people are experiencing increased stress and anxiety, and unfortunately this has translated in aggressive behaviours towards our staff. We are committed to ensuring that vulnerable customers receive the support they need in order to have a positive interaction with us, but also that our staff and other customers are safe.

Emergency planning and Business Continuity

The team have coordinated the activities necessary for a successful implementation of the London Bridge plan, with local events linked to the funeral of Her Majesty the Queen being well organised, safe and well-attended. In addition, work continues on developing and exercising multi-agency plans with partners, regularly testing our organisational ability to respond to emergencies.

The Flooding Plan, The Mass Fatalities Plan and The Severe Weather Plan are all now up to date and agreed by partners across the LRF.

2) Legal and Democratic Services

Coroners and Registration

The Service has been working on ceremonies online. The Registration booking system was updated on 13th September and the service has been contacting customers in date order to invite them to book their ceremony and feedback on their experience. The go-live date was 12th October to the general public. The Service has also looked into West Northants offer for statutory weddings and we are pleased to announce we have increased the offer from x4 per week in Northampton Central Library to an additional x2 ceremonies, which will now take place from November in Towcester Registration Office. On the 28th September the Service looked at deaths this year since the 1st April, compared to the last year. We saw an increase of 138 death registrations. The Service has prepped for winter and changed the calendars to reflect increased deaths appointments between Christmas and New Year and for the first few weeks

in January. As critical and statutory services, both Coroners and Registration will remain open during Xmas and New Year period.

The draft Mass Fatality plan consultation to all relevant stakeholders (Police, NHS, Fire etc) completed on 16th September. A tabletop exercise is planned for the County for 21st October. The exercise will start at Police Headquarters in the morning and will involve The Leys Body Store in the afternoon. The team are currently reviewing and preparing for winter should The Leys body store be requested to activate. The Body store has a capacity of 184 fridge spaces and 12 frozen spaces. Training is in the process of being planned for November between LA/ NHS and Police. Public Health have confirmed they will vaccinate (Covid and Flu) employees of Death Management for resilience in staffing. Northants Police have agreed to support The Leys body store with specialist trained staff for admission and releases, in addition to the Fire Service who have supported since April 2020 with the body transfers from Hospital to The Leys. The Service has also celebrated a year anniversary of partnership working with Northamptonshire Support After Suicide Service (N-SASS). The service has referred, and N-SASS has accepted 41 referrals.

Legal Services

The outcome of the Legal Services review was presented to Cabinet early in the month and the project will now move forward to create a single in-house model for the provision of legal services for the Council, this is to achieve savings and improve service delivery.

In the meantime, Officers from the current in-house team have had success in prosecuting a food outlet with deplorable hygiene breaches of the food and safety hygiene regulations. The company received fines issued to the value of approximately £28k.

Waste prosecutions have also been extremely busy with totalled fines issued for approximately £3k.

As part of a major project and much hard work, the team also completed on the licence to occupy for the Northampton Bike Park project in Delapre. The Bike Park was successfully opened to public earlier this month and has so far, proved very popular with local residents.

Democratic Services

Officers from both the Democratic and Electoral Services teams have been supporting the Democracy and Standards Committee to oversee the Council's response to the consultation on ward patterns undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. The team have procured specialist software which provides instant feedback on proposed changes in order to aid this process. The results of the committee's deliberations are put forward for consideration by Council elsewhere on this agenda. Two of the Council's

Overview and Scrutiny Committees are in the process of finalising their reviews about the Council's Tree Policy and Child Mental Health Services. These are due to report to Cabinet shortly. The team have also been working on a number of updates to the Council's Constitution, the outcome of which is also reported to this meeting.

Elections

The elections team are continuing to work on the annual canvass, and we are in the final stages of this process with the Canvassers visiting properties, we are only awaiting a response from 7% of our properties. Our team also spent a few days at the university during their freshers fair and enrolment week to try and get students registered, we managed to get around 600 students registered. The new register will be published on the 1st of December, and we will then be distributing the register to the political parties, credit reference agencies and other organisations that are entitled to it.

3) Human Resources

The delivery of the Pay and Grading Project remains one of the main priorities for the service. The HR team are currently involved in formal desktop matching of roles to the new job family architecture. This is a resource intensive stage of the project which is due to complete late Autumn.

Survive to Thrive: HR are sitting on spending restriction panels and the HR Business Partners are reviewing recruitment spend business cases. There are also a number of projects under the Budget Taskforce which we are delivering including full review of agency spend, vacancy management, workforce variation analysis and implementation of a Corporate Voluntary Redundancy, Flexible Retirement and Reduction in Hours window.

People Strategy: WNC's new Recruitment Hub went live on 11/10/2022, this is a key milestone in talent acquisition workstream, making our vacancies more visible to job hunters, publicising our employer brand and simplifying the application process for candidates and our recruiting managers. The final draft of the Wellbeing Strategy for WNC has been to our Trade Unions and will shortly receive final sign off. There is a programme of projects underpinning this strategy and work will now commence on delivering it. The new behaviours framework for our workforce has been published, setting out the expected behaviours from our leaders, managers and workforce that support our THRIVE organisational values. To support the roll out of this the West Ways of Working training is underway which focusses on our vision, values, behaviours and the development of a team charter.

4) Digital, Technology and Innovation

Key projects

- As with much of the organisation, the DTI division has been working hard to realise savings and efficiencies through contract consolidation, rationalisation of systems and processes and other general efficiencies.
- Our new e-recruitment system, Tribepad, was launched by the team working with colleagues in HR earlier this month. Early feedback from colleagues is very positive, with most citing the system as being considerably easier than its predecessors and thus speeding up workflow.
- Our new internal helpdesk system, Halo, was also launched by the team earlier this month. Like the recruitment system, this tool makes getting support from internal teams such as IT, payroll and HR considerably easier and quicker, and provides us clearer data to help manage demand. These two systems contribute to cutting the time spent on admin tasks and increasing overall organisation productivity.
- Tenders for replacing all of our internal staff computers and supporting office hardware, and for replacing our ageing telephony system and contact centre, were released this month. This will allow us to support our staff with newer, quicker tools that help them better respond to the needs of our residents in a timely fashion.
- Supporting the initiative to rationalise our property portfolio, the team is deep into planning a speedy exit from our Daventry premises, ensuring that the multitude of systems and infrastructure hosted in that office are relocated and made available to staff at other sites.
- We continue to work on replacing our income management system. This is in delivery, running until April next year (as it is shared across four councils). As well as modernising and streamlining the system, it will allow the removal of another £100k system.
- Progress continues on both the disaggregation of the Digital service with NNC (expected to occur February), and a wider project to assess the options for disaggregating the rest of the DTI service (report due March).
- We are continuing work on implementing direct debits for Garden Waste services, which will be online to support new subscriptions in 2023.
- We continue to be supporting the development of key business changes and transformation projects across Place, HR, Legal, Communities, Adults and in the Children's Trust and Northamptonshire Partnership Homes.

Councillor Mike Hallam

Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services