Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 20 February 2018

Wards: All

Subject:

Lead officer: Sophie Ellis, Assistant Director of Business Improvement

Lead member: Cllr Allison, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Contact officer: Sophie Ellis, Assistant Director of Business Improvement

Recommendations:

1. That the Commission comments on the progress of the Customer Contact Programme

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. This report outlines the progress and issues related to the Customer Contact Programme since its last report to the Commission on 20 September 2017.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1. The Customer Contact programme is delivering the key technology and re-designed processes to support the council's Customer Contact Strategy, aimed at meeting the changing needs of our customers for access to services, and in particular for services accessed via the internet. This strategy focuses on two key outcomes: firstly, to improve service users' experience of accessing council services, and secondly to reduce the cost of those services by encouraging people to self-serve, and by responding to customer enquiries the first time that they are raised. This will reduce unnecessary effort for residents, and 'avoidable' work for staff.

2.2. In March 2015 the council awarded a contract to General Dynamics IT Ltd (henceforth GDIT) to deliver this technology and support the associated changes in business process design. There have been delays in the delivery of functionality and a number of items of functionality are still in development.

2.3. Direct savings targets have deliberately not been attached to the programme itself because the improvements provided will be translated into efficiencies by all services across the council. On this basis the programme underpins a number of savings captured in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

3 PROGRESS IN DELIVERING THE PROGRAMME

3.1.   Whilst there has been progress on the programme, it continues to experience significant delays. The council has deployed the mechanisms within the contract to alert GDIT to their concerns over these delays and secure their resolution, as a result of which commercial negotiations are underway

What has been delivered?

3.2.   The Commission may recall that in September 2016 the programme had delivered:

- Hosted hardware, infrastructure (servers, cables, firewalls etc.) and associated technology (connections to the council's existing systems and networks) to support the new systems;

- Configuration of the software itself to Merton's requirements;

- An IT system that contact centre staff will use to record and deal with customer enquiries online, in person, and over the telephone;

- Updated (non-transactional, static) content for the new 'beta' website;

- Redesigned processes and operating system for an on-line waste service, entirely driven from within the CRM system (Waste Pathfinder) and available to customers in a beta website.

- A new transactional website, designed to ensure customers can easily access information and services on all devices, including mobile phones.

- Streamlining of microsites (discrete portals or websites provided by different systems to facilitate access to services provided by different systems).

- Redesigned and automated 75 processes within Traffic and Highways.

- Redesigned and automated 8 processes within the Building Control service.

- Redesigned and automated 27 processes within Parks and Greenspaces pathfinder, including the provision for customers to book and pay for courses, events and spaces online.

- Redesigned and automated 6 processes within the Property function.

- Redesigned and automated three processes related to Mayoral Charity Events to allow online bookings.

3.3.   Since the last update, the programme has focused on:

- Amending the waste processes to take account of the new integrations required with Veolia's IT systems, rectifying issues with processes.

- Finalising elements of functionality on the website that were not available at the point it went live (events calendar, authoring tool, secure pages for microsites).

- Launching the council's new intranet platform.

- Commercial negotiations – the Commission will want to note that in recent weeks these have absorbed the majority of effort on the programme and this has impacted on the rate of progress in delivering the final elements set out in the above list.

Work in progress

3.4.   Officers continue to work closely with GDIT to achieve the remaining deliverables of the programme, as follows:

- Redesign and automation of 15 Complaints & FOI processes, allowing customers to submit FOIs online Complaints.

- Website – work is ongoing to complete the rebranding of the website, with some pages that have been redesigned with the new 'look and feel' yet to be published. Additional resources have been identified to complete this work over the coming weeks.

- Refining and improving existing online website processes to take account of feedback from customers and Members (for example introducing the option for customers to report fly tips without providing personal details).

- Customer account – the functionality that allows customers to create an 'account' that allows them to track their interactions in a single place is in development. This involves some complexity as it involves the integration of several systems. This is because the council has specified that it wants the best experience for its customers by avoiding them having to have multiple accounts, usernames and passwords for the various systems in use for different services. The account is required to provide seamless integration for customers so they can view their Council Tax, Parking and Libraries information – each of which is provided through a separate system.

- Parking bay suspensions – customer requests to be automated.

3.5.   Work is also ongoing to ensure that the same level of customer experience is available following the altered delivery arrangements set in place through the South London Waste Partnership Phase C project. This has necessitated new system integrations (with systems used by Veolia and idverde) and the reconfiguration of some processes. There have been a number of challenges associated with the complex technical interfaces required and the adoption of new/different operating systems within delivery partners.

4   UPTAKE

4.1.   The take-up of the new system has confirmed that there is high demand for such on-line services by Merton residents.

Total Monthly Interactions by Phone/Web

Comparison of Transactions by Phone/Web
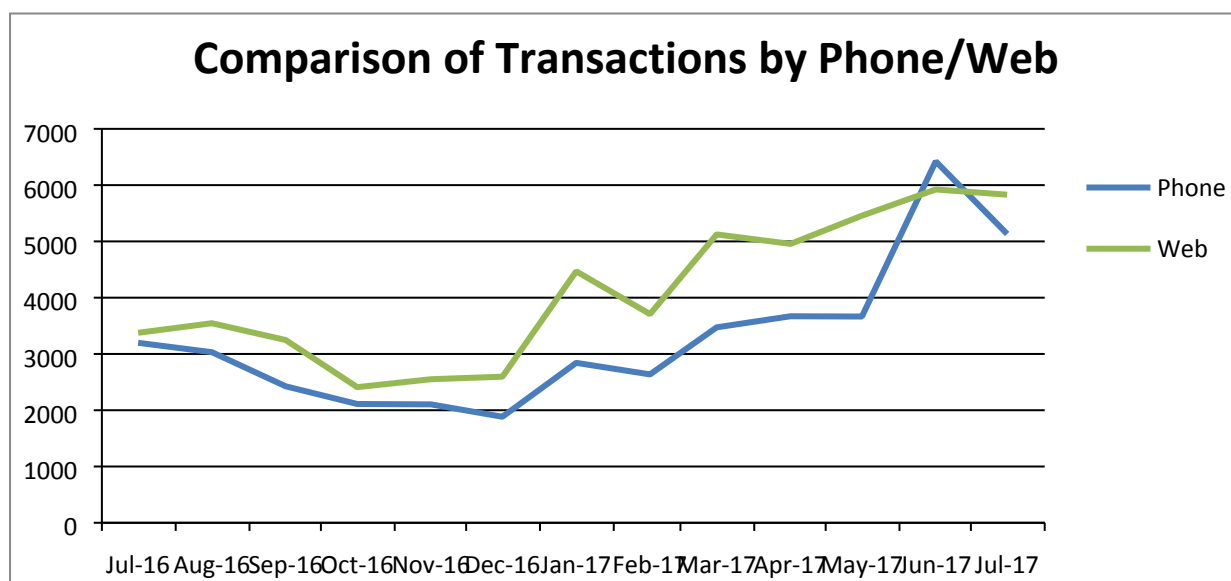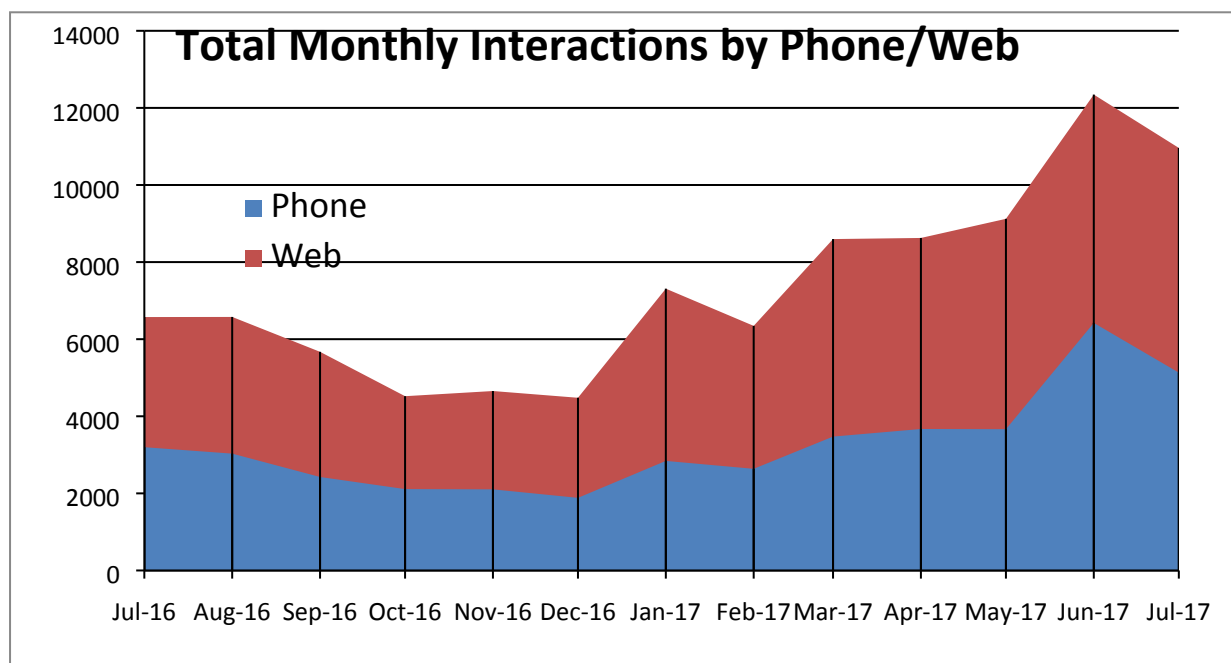
4.2.   The high level of uptake of the new automated processes offers reassurance that for many residents the design of the system is intuitive. Notwithstanding this, feedback from a number of residents and Members suggest that there is room for further improvement of these – it was always the intention of the programme that feedback from users would be sought and improvements made to the automated processes on the basis of this. As an example of this, on the basis of feedback the processes for reporting issues that are not related to a specific customer or property are being amended so that customers do not need to provide personal details.

4.3. These improvements are being implemented but not as quickly as officers would like; this is largely a consequence of the delays to implementation; GDIT have stated an intention to prioritise work to complete the functionality set out in Item 3.4 above over work to improve existing processes. Officers are working to address this, utilising the mechanisms available in the contract. Work is also underway to develop the skills and knowledge within the council to reduce reliance on GDIT for these improvements so that they can be processed more quickly.

4.4. Requests from commercial 'apps' such as Fix My Street and Love Clean Streets continue to be accepted and processed through the relevant service areas to ensure customers are not disadvantaged by these delays and can use the method of reporting that is most suitable to them.

5 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

5.1. The governance arrangements for the programme have ensured that services across the organisation are fully engaged in the development of the approach in general, and in the design of Pathfinders in particular.

5.2. Governance for the programme consists of a Programme Board chaired by Caroline Holland, Corporate Services Director (programme sponsor) and including representation from each of the departments. The programme also reports monthly to the Merton Improvement Board which draws its membership from across the organisation.

5.3. An engagement and communication plan is in place. Service and customer groups are being engaged as part of the programme using a phased approach to ensure any necessary change is well planned communicated and embedded.

5.4. The new website has been designed to encourage feedback from users, Since its launch in July 2016 we have received over 2095 pieces of feedback ranging from compliments, issues with the interactive web forms, comments on look and feel of the new design and other non-web related issues. Wherever possible remedial action was taken to correct problems within 48 hours, including improving accessibility to the search functionality.

6 TIMETABLE

6.1. The Programme Board agreed a revised implementation plan presented by GDIT in September 2015. The milestones set out in this plan have not been met and subsequent correction plans presented to the Board by GDIT were rejected by the Council as they were not deemed realistic or acceptable.

6.2. As part of the commercial negotiations underway the Council has requested a realistic plan that confirms dates for delivery of final elements of functionality; GDIT have undertaken to provide this in February.

6.3. The contract term of three years expires in May 2018 and the Council has agreed with GDIT that alternative hosting and maintenance provisions will be made. Officers are, therefore, currently exploring the best option for ongoing support and hosting for the technology. It will be necessary for the Council to negotiate a short contract extension to ensure business continuity

through this transition phase. Officers are working with GDIT to establish and facilitate this.

7 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

7.1.   The Customer Contact Programme is important for the overarching transformation of the organisation as part of the Outstanding Council Programme. Funds have already been earmarked through allocated reserves to facilitate the programme. This planned one-off investment is expected to achieve ongoing revenue savings that will benefit the council each year.

7.2.   The programme is key to the achievement of planned savings through self-service and channel shift and the aspirations set out in a number of service target operating models (TOMs) are dependent on the technology the programme will introduce.

7.3.   The initial programme budget of £2.3m was approved by Cabinet on 12th July 2012. The programme is currently forecasting an overspend, but this is not yet confirmed as it will depend on the outcome of discussions underway with the provider regarding Milestone Compliance, potential claims for delay, scoping of discrete items within or outside the project, and the ongoing dispute resolution process.

7.4.   The Customer Contact Programme Board will continue to review the interdependency between proposed MTFS savings and the programme and monitor their delivery.

8 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

8.1.   The South London Legal Partnership has worked closely with the programme team in developing a suitable contract with the chosen supplier.

8.2.   They are also providing support to the current contract dispute process where the council are seeking compensation as a result of delays in implementation.

8.3.   There may be some impact on the provision of some statutory services, e.g. regulatory services, but this will be established and managed through the engagement of the relevant services and will depend on whether specific processes can feasibly be delivered through different channels and by different means.

8.4.   Discussions to consider and agree the actions to be taken to address the delays are commercial in confidence and therefore the detail of these and associated negotiations cannot, at this stage, be disclosed unless the Commission want to receive a verbal update, in closed session, at this meeting.

9   **HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

There are not expected to be any human rights issues from the programme. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is being updated at key points in the programme. Community and other key stakeholder groups will be engaged as part of the programme and any implications will be managed with the relevant officers in the Council.

Customers expectations will be managed and mediated access made available to those vulnerable or with limited on-line capacity.

10   **CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

There are not expected to be any crime and disorder implications.

11   **RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

All risks, assumptions, issues and dependencies are being actively managed as part of the programme. There are not expected to be any Health and Safety implications

11.1.

12   **APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

- None

13   **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

13.1.   None.

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