

Report to Scrutiny Commission

Neighbourhood Services & Community Involvement

Date of Commission meeting: 25 October 2017

Channel shift update

Report of the Director of Delivery, Communications &
Political Governance



Leicester
City Council

Useful Information:

- Ward(s) affected: All wards
- Report author: Miranda Cannon, Director DCPG
- Author contact details 0116 454 0102

1. Summary

This report provides scrutiny with a summary of the channel shift programme including the vision for the programme and current key areas of activity.

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny

Scrutiny is asked to consider the report and make any comments about the current work of the programme.

3. Main report

3.1 Introduction

Channel shift is about moving as much customer contact away from expensive face to face and telephony channels as possible. In doing so improving service standards and the user experience, and protecting a core face to face service for those who really need it.

Specifically the vision for the channel shift programme is to achieve the following:

- On-line is the primary contact channel and channel of choice (for us and our customers)
- Make it easy for our customers to transact on-line
- 100% routine and high volume transactions on-line by end 2018
- Automated back office processes behind all on-line transactions
- One main customer portal (*Firmstep CRM*)
- One main contact phone number
- Face to face the exception for most complex transactions / vulnerable customers
- Harnessing and using the data we gather
- Delivering significant cash savings

Each year, Customer Services alone receives in the region of 750,000 phone calls and 90,000 visitors to the Customer Service Centre on Granby Street. Outside of Customer Services there are around 70 teams who handle their own customer contact with volumes across different types of contact channels equating to almost 100,000 contacts per week.

The cost of handling this contact is significant, yet often a large percentage are simple transactions or requests, such as “I’d like to request a bus pass” or “I’d like to report a pot-hole”. Providing easy to use, accessible options for customers to self-serve particularly for those simple transactions is a key element of channel shift.

3.2 Customer relationship management (CRM) system and My Account

In support of the channel shift agenda, the authority procured and implemented a new customer relationship management (CRM) system. My Account is the customer’s online portal into the CRM, bypassing the need for a customer services officer to handle their enquiry.

The portal is accessible at leicester.gov.uk/myaccount or through the link on the corporate homepage of the Council website.

The customer is asked to create an account, in which case they are guided through a simple registration process, or to log in if they already have an account. Alternatively, they may continue without an account but they will not be able to view their account history. Within the portal, all service areas are displayed and expand upon selection to reveal the associated forms. The forms are intuitive to use and adapt as they are completed, only asking questions that are relevant to that enquiry. When the customer submits their enquiry they are sent an acknowledgement email and the enquiry is sent as directly as possible to the relevant business area. In addition to service requests, customers may also make comments, compliments and complaints using the “My feedback” feature.

For the user, the benefits of using My Account are:

- The ability to access council services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- No waiting in queues.
- Easy to use, intuitive processes.
- Instant email confirmation including a unique reference number.
- Ability to see account history and requests made.

For the Council, the benefits of My Account are:

- Reduced operational costs.
- Solid reporting ability.
- Useful customer insight.
- Holistic view of customer contact.
- Rationalisation of back office information storage, back office databases and processes.

Should customers not wish to register and create an account, there is an option to continue without an account and have access to the forms available in My Account and continue their transaction in that manner.

My Account was launched on the 4th of October 2016. It is a core part of the channel shift vision in terms of a single customer access portal. As at 4th October 2017 which is one year since My Account went live, there are 28,161 registered My Account users and a total of 60,148 transactions have been done via MyAccount. There are 68 live eforms on MyAccount and this will continue to grow in number via the channel shift programme. The transaction types with consistently the highest usage are requesting a bulky waste collection, requesting or reporting a problem with orange bags and requesting a new housing repair. A soft launch of MyAccount was done initially but following on from that in February 2017 onwards we have been actively marketing this and seeing growth of between 2,500 and 2,750 new registrations per month.

There is a user testing group in place consisting of service users, corporate service users and partner organisations to evaluate ease of use, appropriate language, etc. of new products both on-line and other forms of communication. We have received feedback from visually impaired users, staff and volunteers from the library service, Age UK, Citizen Advice LeicesterShire volunteers, and just under 100 members of the public visiting Granby Street customer service centre. This group tested the MyAccount offer prior to 'go live', during their testing we received feedback in completing a number of tasks, from registering for MyAccount to changing their details on the system and completing eforms, their feedback was very positive, 9 out of 10 customers believe that they could use MyAccount successfully to contact the Council. We are continuing with this approach. In addition My Account actively seeks feedback ratings and comments and via this continues to receive overwhelmingly positive feedback from customers. The current average star rating is 4.3 out of a possible 5.

Customers aged group 16-35 and 36-51 years make up the largest groups of users at 39.1% and 37.2% of all those using MyAccount, but we are also seeing a rise in users in the age group 52-70 (19.54%).

3.3 Options for customers to self-serve

For a large number of our customers it is anticipated that they will self-serve on-line using their own mobile devices or computers, either on the move or in their own home. The Council has implemented free Wi-Fi access across the city centre and there is also free wi-fi available in our Libraries for registered library users, in our Leisure Centres and at the Customer Service Centre in Granby Street.

In addition there are public computers within Libraries which are connected to the internet. There are also dedicated self-service computers/customer service kiosks at Granby Street, Pork Pie Library and Community Centre, St Matthews Centre, BRITE Centre, New Parks Library and Beaumont Leys Library. These are specifically for undertaking on-line transactions. In addition these locations have Customer Service free phones. Belgrave Library and Hamilton Library are having these facilities installed and St Barnabas is likely to be the other location.

In relation to payment transactions, customers can make a range of payments on-line including via My Account.

There are also others ways in which customers may self-serve for payments as follows:

- Self-serve payment kiosks are located at Granby Street Customer Services Centre and are being rolled out to the multi-service centres in conjunction with the TNS programme.
- Automated telephone payments can be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for council tax, business rates , housing (or garage) rents, customer accounts invoices, bus lane enforcement penalty charge notices, benefits overpayments
- Pay via Pingit which is a mobile app.

3.4 Current channel shift programme activity

Following analysis of contact outside of customer services, a number of key areas have been identified as high priorities for channel shift due to the volume of transactions and the way these are currently handled. The following projects relate mainly to those high priority areas. The work is being undertaken by the Customer Contract Transformation Team (CCTT). Key areas of work currently include:

Sports

The CCTT are working closely with Sports and aligning the channel shift work with the wider spending review of the service. Key strands are enabling memberships on-line and maximising take up of direct debits on-line; finding, booking and paying for activities on-line (including swimming lessons) and self-serve for enquiries by improving the website offer. The team are also looking to rationalise existing telephony arrangements and shift on-line as much contact as possible. All of this work will take place in the first 6 months of 2018, during the remaining six months of 2018 we will be looking at “Mobile Pro” to allow customers to transact with sports services via an mobile app

De Montfort Hall

De Montfort Hall (DMH) has approximately 4,750 contacts per week of which only approximately 50% is currently on-line. The channel shift programme is working with De Montfort Hall to streamline customer contact processes including booking confirmation emails, electronic management of waiting lists, and managing marketing activity. The

project will also introduce e-ticketing whereby the ticket would be distributed to customer by email and then is designed to display on a mobile device. They can also be printed by the customer if they wish. In supporting the move to e-ticketing it should reduce call volumes and face-to-face activity and options for handling these channels differently in future will also be considered.

Revenues and Benefits

Revenues and Benefits handle around 540,000 contacts per year. The service procured the Civica OpenChannel product in 2016. This project will implement greater on-line functionality via this product, and deliver a new portal for customers and in due course it is hoped to achieve single sign on to this portal via MyAccount to ensure a streamlined digital offering. There is also work starting with the service to look at implementing an on-line scheduling and bookings for council tax and housing benefit appointments which are currently done via phone with c150 contacts per week.

Planning

Planning currently receive in the region of 900 calls per week of which 60% are via telephone, 30% by email and the residual by eForms from MyAccount. The CCTT are working on development of an intelligent form, linking to existing databases, data sets or tools to enable customers to self-serve common enquiries eg identifying whether a property is in a conservation area, confirming whether a neighbour has planning permission etc. In addition the team are working with the service to automate how the current eform for pre-application enquiry contacts can be imported directly into the back office system, removing an administration requirement.

Registrars

Registrars receive over 600 contacts per week with 90% of this currently by phone The CCTT are working with the service to look at implementing on-line scheduling and bookings for registering births, deaths, marriages, nationality checking service, citizenship etc. In the first instance this is focusing on births and nationality checking service and citizenship.

Taxi licensing

The team have implemented an automated and streamlined process for taxi licensing involving an on-line taxi Licensing form, DBS checker and payment connector, replacing a process which was previously done largely face to face and for which there were over 130 contacts per week on average.

Waste management

The team has been working closely with waste management across a range of areas. Waste management requests for the areas we are looking at total around 4,400 per week or 230,000 per year. We have recently successfully integrated the on-line forms for orange bag requests and to report problems with wheeled bins directly into the Biffa system which is saving considerable administrative time. The team is now working on doing the same for bulk collections (of which currently there are approx. 40,000 bookings a year via the customer service line predominantly). Primarily through the call centre. and developing an end to end on-line process for permits to tip.

Festivals and events

The Festivals and Events team receive around 13,000 contacts per year relating to applications and bookings for parks, public spaces and city centre spaces. The current online experience involves multiple pdf forms that are printed from the website and

completed. The team also receive contact through other channels. The channel shift work will create e-forms for parks, public spaces and city centre space event applications, a pre-application advice, guidance and FAQs eform, automate the capture of the data from these eforms and digitalise the current tendering process for catering providers.

Scan-station

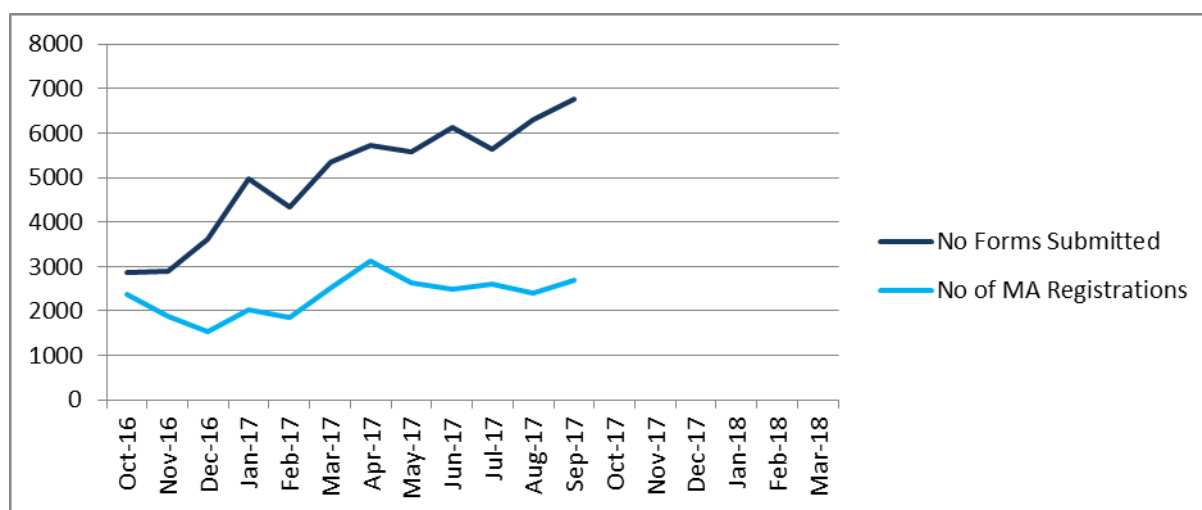
For a range of transactions, customers are required to provide us with copies of documentation eg driving licence, utility bill etc. Staff currently support around 40,000 customers a year to scan documents in the customer services centre. In early November we will be going live with 4 self-scan stations at Granby Street. These facilities will allow customers to self-scan documentation in a simple and easy manner. An assessment is underway to identify demand for this facility in each of the neighbourhood locations with a view to wider roll out.

Webchat

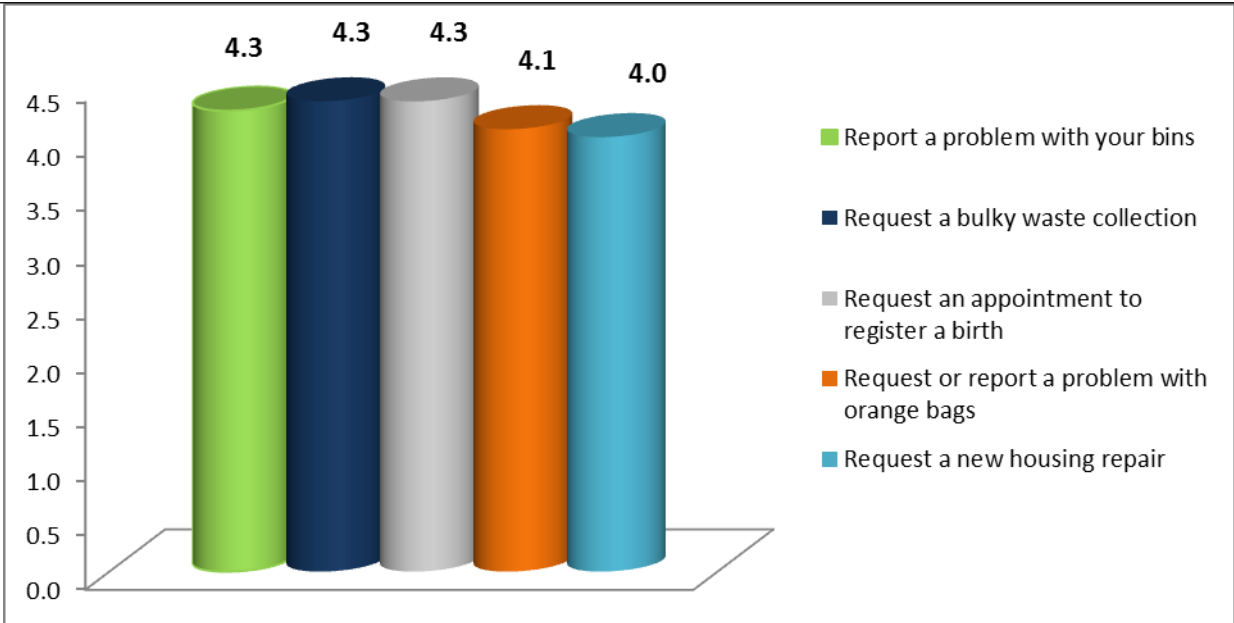
Webchat technology is being explored by Leicester City Council as part of procuring and implementing our new telephony system, and this will be looked at during late 2018. We feel that webchat offers another channel of choice for our customers, offers those new to navigating websites confidence and support. We would consider deploying webchat to assist residents navigate our Adult Social Care and Housing advice and guidance also.

3.5 Channel shift benefits

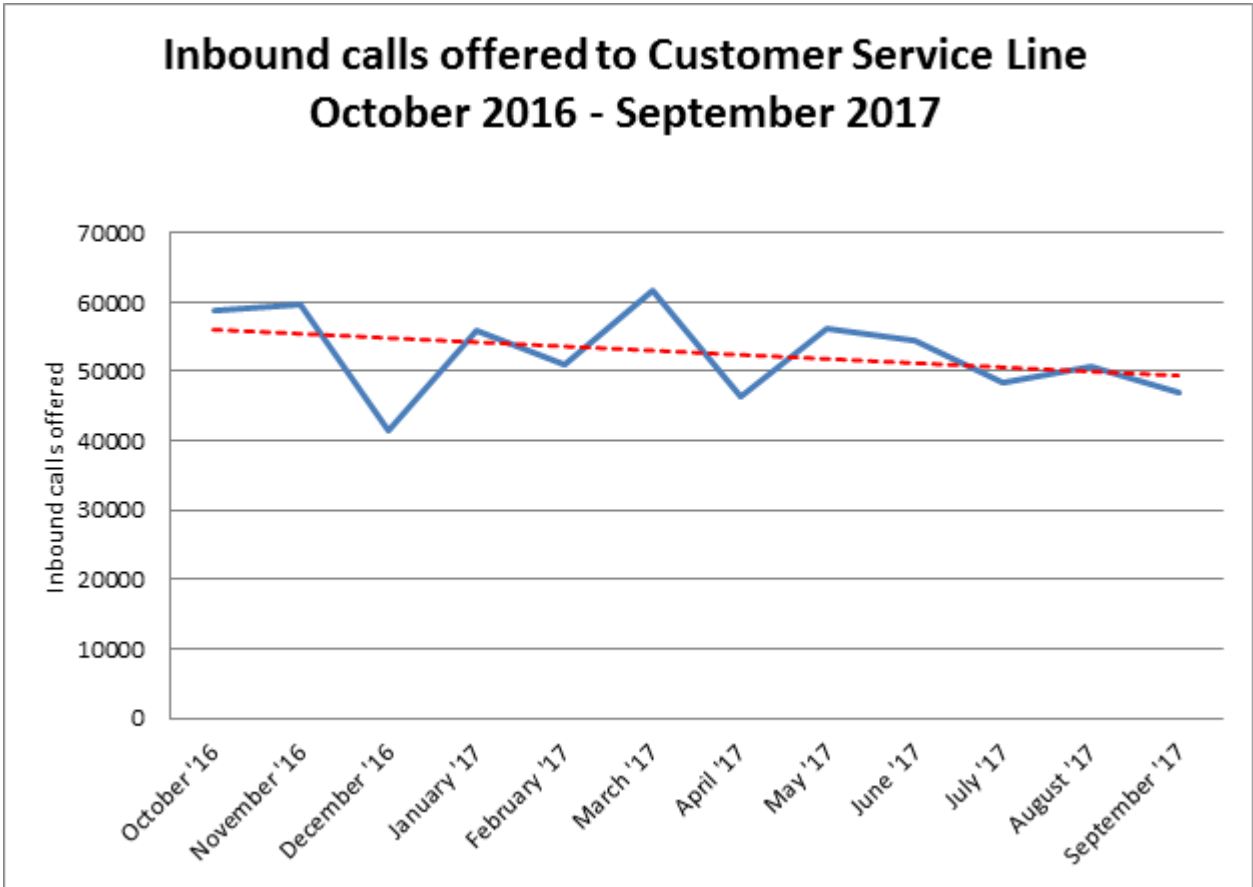
Since the official MyAccount launch in October 2016, customers have registered at an average volume of 2,300 customers per month. On average customers submit 5,000 enquiries each month. We now have over 28,000 registered users who have submitted over 60,000 transactions.



Average feedback ratings out of 5 by the top 5 forms



The positive impact of channel shift is further evidenced by the decrease in calls to Telephony at Leicester City Council. The data shows a downward trend in inbound calls offered over the 12 month period which supports the increase in submissions through online channels.



The blue line indicates the actual calls offered with the red line showing a negative trend.

To date the programme has delivered £731k of savings of which £355k is attributable to the Using Buildings Better (UBB) spending review target (because channel shift forms a part of the UBB programme) and the remainder is attributable to other spending reviews / budget savings.

We will continue to monitor closely the usage of MyAccount and feedback ratings as well as contact volumes in Customer Services over the phone and face to face. We are also looking to establish a way of measuring call volumes to other service specific phone numbers with a view to both reducing the number of service specific phone numbers and shifting the routine, high volume contact on-line, which is consistent with the vision outlined in 3.1.

4. Financial, legal and other implications

4.1 Financial implications

The Channel shift programme has delivered total savings of £355k (of which £30k relates to the Housing Revenue Account); this contributes to the indicative savings target of £2m for the Using Buildings Better spending review.

Paresh Radia, Principal Accountant

4.2 Legal implications

There are no implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report. Legal advice is being sought on a case by case basis in relation to the identified streams.

Emma Horton, Head of Law (Commercial, Property & Planning) Ext 371426

4.3. Climate Change implications

To the extent that it reduces unnecessary customer car and bus trips to the Contact Centre or other facilities, Channel Shift will reduce city-wide carbon emissions from transport. Transport accounts for 23% of the total. The intended shift of contacts/transactions which are already on-line to a more/fully automated system is likely to have only limited carbon reduction implications. It might contribute to further reductions in the Council's own carbon footprint if automation leads to fewer staff required – and a resulting reduction in office accommodation.

Duncan Bell, Senior Environmental Consultant. Ext. 37 2249.

4.4 Equality Implications

It is anticipated that the main issues that will need to be continually addressed through the lifespan of the Channel Shift transformation programme/project are the potential barriers people with the protected characteristics of age, disability and race may have/experience in accessing council information online either at home or at a customer service centre: availability of assistive technology that enables disabled people to understand this information; support that enables people with poor English language skills to understand this information – either because of literacy levels or because they do not read or speak English; or support for those who are not confident in using or do not have ready access to online technology.

Equalities implications, across all protected characteristics, for each new initiative should be considered afresh to ensure that maximum access is afforded to all potential service users who would benefit from these channel shift actions. This should be in the form of an Equalities Impact Assessment. The report discusses volume of contact, but does not comment on abandoned calls/visits or the reasons for them. This may be useful information in identifying those customers for whom mitigating actions or additional support to access the technology may be required. This could be further explored as part of any future Equalities Impact Assessments on individual projects within the channel shift agenda. The findings of the Equalities Impact Assessment should be used to further inform the development of proposals.

Surinder Singh, Equality Officer Tel 37 4148

5. Background information and other papers:

None