



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9.30 am THURSDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2014

COMMITTEE ROOMS 1/2 - PORT TALBOT CIVIC CENTRE

PART 1

1. To receive any declarations of interest from Members
2. To receive the Minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 16th October 2014 (*Pages 1 - 6*)
3. To receive the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2014/15. (*Pages 7 - 10*)

To scrutinise information and monitoring issues being reported by:

Joint Report of the Director of Environment, Head of Human Resources and Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services

4. Update in Relation to Sickness Absence Data and Feedback from the Sickness Taskforce (*Pages 11 - 30*)

Report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services

5. Blue Badge Scheme in Wales (*Pages 31 - 36*)
6. Customer Services, Contact Centre Performance (*Pages 37 - 52*)

Performance Scrutiny (contained within the circulated Cabinet Board papers)

7. Complaints, Compliments and Comments - Annual Report 2013-14
8. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report 2014-15 Quarter 2 Performance (1st April 2014 - 30th September 2014)
9. To select appropriate items from the Cabinet Board Agenda for pre-scrutiny (Cabinet Board reports enclosed for Scrutiny Members).
10. Any urgent items (whether public or exempt) at the discretion of the Chairman pursuant to Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972
11. Access to Meetings to resolve to exclude the public for the following item(s) pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the relevant exempt paragraphs of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

PART 2

12. To select appropriate private items from the Cabinet Board Agenda for pre-scrutiny (Cabinet Board Reports enclosed for Scrutiny Members).

S.Phillips
Chief Executive

Civic Centre
Port Talbot

Friday, 21 November 2014

Committee Membership:

Chairman: **Councillor D.W.Davies**

Vice Chairman: **Councillor A.Jenkins**

Councillors: Mrs P.Bebell, A.Carter, Ms.C.Clement-Williams,
M.Harvey, Mrs.L.H.James, A.Llewelyn, A.R.Lockyer,
Mrs.K.Pearson, Mrs.S.M.Penry, L.M.Purcell,

A.J.Siddley, J.Warman, I.D.Williams and
Mrs.A.Wingrave

Notes:

- (1) *If Committee Members or non-Committee Members wish to have relevant items put on the agenda for future meetings, then please notify the Chief Executive/Chair eight days before the meeting.*
- (2) *If non-Committee Members wish to attend for an item of interest, then prior notification needs to be given (by 12.00 noon on the day before the meeting). Non-Committee Members may speak but not vote, or move or second any motion.*
- (3) *For pre scrutiny arrangements, the Chair will normally recommend forthcoming executive items for discussion/challenge. It is also open to Committee Members to request items to be raised - though Members are asked to be selective here in regard to important issues.*
- (4) *The relevant Cabinet Board Members will also be invited to be present at the meeting for Scrutiny/ Consultation purposes.*
- (5) *Would the Scrutiny Committee Members please bring the Cabinet Board papers with them to the meeting.*

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POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms 1/2 - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

16 October 2014

Chairman: Councillor D.W.Davies

Vice Chairman: Councillor A.Jenkins

Councillors: A.Carter, M.Harvey, A.Llewelyn, A.R.Lockyer,
Mrs.K.Pearson, Mrs.S.M.Penry and I.D.Williams

Officers In Attendance H.Jenkins, Mrs.K.Jones, Ms.C.Furlow, B.Lee,
N.Evans and Mrs.S.Edge

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.H.Thomas and A.N.Woolcock

1. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 4TH SEPTEMBER 2014**

The Committee noted the minutes.

2. **TO RECEIVE THE SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15.**

Members requested confirmation that the sickness report scheduled would be ready for the November meeting.

Officers confirmed that the sickness taskforce discussed at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 4th September was underway and consequently it would be possible to provide a progress report for the next Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 27th November. It will be a summary report of the work done so far, and could include additional information at the request of Members.

Following discussion the Committee agreed that the report should include a breakdown of the additional costs of sickness absence.

The Committee noted and agreed the Forward Work Programme.

3. **TO SELECT APPROPRIATE ITEMS FROM THE CABINET BOARD AGENDA FOR PRE-SCRUTINY (CABINET BOARD REPORTS ENCLOSED FOR SCRUTINY MEMBERS).**

(a) Insurance Arrangements 2014/15

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services explained that the Council has insurance in place, and that the policies were changed to run from 1st October to 30th September each year, approximately 5 years ago. This was to avoid the busy periods for insurance companies of January and April, and meant that the Council gets preferential premiums.

The Committee chose not to scrutinise this item, but noted the report.

(b) Treasury Management Monitoring

Members considered the report on Treasury Management Monitoring, and officers highlighted that since the previous report on 24th July, the Council currently had £488k generated on investments made, but that there were no additional changes.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services updated that since the report was written, changes in market information indicated a likely rise in interest rates next year, which meant that some loans would be called in, and so it was now prudent to make new arrangements. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services informed Members that on 8th October new borrowings of £15m had been arranged.

Members asked for clarification on which part of the council's budget the £10m invested for over 12 months had come from. Officers clarified that this was funds from the Council's reserves, which were invested whilst not being used, and would contribute to the £664k income target to be generated from investment this financial year.

Following scrutiny the Committee noted the report.

(c) Timetable - Review of Policy concerning Grants to the Third Sector

Members received a report proposing an updated timetable for the review of the policy concerning grants to the Third Sector.

Officers explained that the previously agreed timetable was no longer feasible. The new timetable would allow for the policy to be developed within a reasonable period of time and also provide a long lead in time for the voluntary sector bodies that might be affected by any policy change.

If the Cabinet Board approved the timetable, then Officers would look to work with the Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum throughout the period of the policy review. The draft policy would be reported back to the Scrutiny Committee before going out to formal consultation. It is anticipated that the draft policy would be ready for consideration at the beginning of the next financial year. Officers noted that involvement of the sector during the policy review period would provide for good engagement with the voluntary sector, however, a further period of formal consultation on the draft policy would also be conducted. The final draft policy would be brought back before the August 2015 recess.

Members highlighted the need to consider the impact of any cuts to funding for any voluntary sector providers, especially in the light of the frequent references to making use of the voluntary sector in the budget proposals that are currently out to consultation.

Members also noted that the involvement of the voluntary sector in the previous review had been very positive, and that it had held up well to scrutiny.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

(d) Pontardawe One Stop Shop/Advice Hub

Members received a report on the Pontardawe One Stop Shop/Advice Hub.

Officers highlighted the enhanced service that was now available through the library. Library staff were now dealing with many of the enquiries that the Customer Services staff had dealt with previously. Housing benefits staff were attending 2 days per week to deal with Housing Benefit and Council Tax enquiries, and were very busy on those days. NPT Homes staff were also attending on the same 2 days per week as the Housing Benefits staff to deal with NPT Homes enquiries. This was working better than previously, and there had been great improvements in the links between NPT Homes, and Housing Benefit due to the staff being in place on the same days.

Members were advised that the new service had realised £20k in savings, which was less than the originally anticipated £40k savings, but emphasised that there was now an enhanced service in place.

Prior to the removal of the Cashiers service, the customers were assisted in making alternative arrangements. Officers assisted approximately 80% of external customers who were paying by cash to set up direct debits. Those customers who still wished to pay in cash were still able to do so, but at the Post Office which was very close by.

Members asked whether the removal of the Cashiers Service had meant that there had been any increase in arrears. Officers confirmed that they were unaware of any impact on the arrears, and noted the high percentage that had now changed to make payments by direct debit.

Members were informed that an opportunity was taken to support claimants affected by changes to the Welfare Benefits and additional organisations were brought into the hub for the 6 month pilot.

Members asked whether other agencies pay for space in the building. Officers explained that there were different arrangements for each agency. NPT Homes pay rent for the days they are in attendance. Officers are currently in discussions with NPT Credit Union, and a proposal will be brought to the next Cabinet Board regarding this. Citizens Advice Bureau will not make a financial contribution, but it would be a condition of the grant from NPTCBC that they attend the hub on the relevant days.

Members queried whether further promotion of the service was being done, and officers confirmed that the hub had recently been re-advertised since NPT Credit Union had joined.

Members suggested that going forward in the next 12 months there should be further liaison between the Council and other local community resources to see how the hub could link into these other resources, perhaps assisting in disseminating information available through the hub to other local areas. Officers and Cabinet Members welcomed this, and noted that it could be particularly helpful with the implementation of Universal Credit, which was expected to be rolled across Neath Port Talbot soon. Officers emphasised the importance of the Council supporting those most vulnerable through the implementation of Universal Credit.

Officers explained that the service was only able to deal with general advice for Blue Badge applications, but that from 8th December a new service where applicants could be interviewed by video link to the necessary staff would be piloted.

Members noted that they had been getting increased queries from their constituents on Blue Badges, and asked whether there had been changes to the scheme. Officers explained that Welsh Government had changed their policy, and agreed to bring a new report back to Members to explain the changes. Officers noted that changes to Welsh Government's policy had included important changes regarding cognitive disabilities, and so was expected to be an impact on those with Learning Disabilities.

Members queried whether the reason that so many Council Tax enquiries were not dealt with one stop, was because the enquiries were now being dealt with by Housing Benefits staff. Officers were unsure of the reason why this was the case, and explained that this was why there was a proposal to further investigate this, and report back to Members.

Officers brought Members attention to the Equalities Impact Screening that had been carried out prior to the project beginning which was included in the report to Policy and Resources Cabinet Board on 14th November 2013 (and circulated at the meeting). Officers noted that the impacts of the project on the protected groups were what had been expected. The screening highlighted the need to maintain the availability for customers to access a service in the Welsh Language, and this had been done through the library staff. The screening also noted that entrances to the building had been adapted to allow disabled access.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board, and made the following proposals;

Going forward in the next 12 months there should be further liaison between the Council and other local community resources to see how the hub could link into these other resources, perhaps assisting in disseminating information available through the hub to other local areas.

The Blue Badge Scheme to be scrutinised by the Committee, and that this be added to the Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

(e) Welfare Reform - Low Income Families Project - Employment

Members received a report on the Welfare Reform – Low Income Families Project – Employment.

Members were informed that prior to the pilot project, Job Centre Plus had been making informal referrals to the Libraries, and that library staff were

unable to deal with the entirety of the demand this had generated. Job Centre Plus has requested that the project be rolled out across all libraries, and officers were having discussions with them regarding funding towards it.

Members noted recent newspaper articles on the impact of this type of project, and asked whether other partners were involved in the programme, raising concerns that there may be some duplication. Officers explained that they were confident that other services were aware of this service and so this should minimise the risk of duplication.

Officers stated that 54% of those referred did need help, and agreed that there was scope for further involvement with partners. Part of the work going forward was expected to be mapping out the services, and it was agreed that this would be brought back to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

Members queried the apparently low level of referrals that actually attended the Library, and asked whether this could be increased. Officers acknowledged that this was a low percentage, but noted that some of those people referred may have been able to access the services from home. Officers informed Members that they had requested a meeting with Job Centre Plus to see how many people will be affected by the next set of changes.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

(f) Policy and Resources Cabinet Board Forward Work Programme 2014/15

Members asked whether the Access to Services report would be ready to come to the November meeting. Officers confirmed that it would come to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in the New Year.

CHAIRMAN

**Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Draft Forward Work Programme Autumn 2014**

Date of Meeting	Agenda Item
04.09.14	Quarter One Performance Monitoring
	Sickness Absence
	Scrutiny Work Programme
	Cabinet Board Items
13.10.14	Special meeting to consider the Council's Budget Savings Strategies
16.10.14	Any additional items following the special budget meeting.
	Cabinet Board Items

Date of Meeting	Agenda Item
27.11.14	Sickness Absence
	Quarter Two Performance Monitoring
	Update report on Blue Badges
	Contact Centre
	Cabinet Board Items
15.01.15	Update report on Debt Collection levels
	Cabinet Board items

Note:

Welfare Reform – an all Member seminar to be held highlighting what the Council has done in relation to the reforms and any areas that require additional work. This may allow for additional areas of scrutiny to be identified for later in the year.

Follow up work will be required in relation to the ICT Strategy of the Council and how this can have a positive impact on other services. A particular reference to how if the Council's website is improved this would result in less demand on areas such as the contact centre.

Procurement – a seminar for Members highlighting what the Council spends on goods and services, items that achieve value for money and providing information to Members on any checks that are in place to ensure that we are spending the right amount of money on difference goods/services.

Treasury Management – Members need a fuller understanding of the issues relating to Treasury Management – a seminar should be held in the New Year.

There needs to be additional seminars on budget scrutiny and performance scrutiny particularly in relation to budget scrutiny as the process has now changed.

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE

POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

JOINT REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT, HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

27th November 2014

SECTION C – MATTER FOR MONITORING

WARDS AFFECTED: All

Update in relation to sickness absence data and feedback from the Sickness Taskforce

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update in relation to sickness absence data across the Council, feedback from the Sickness Taskforce and specifically, the review of long term sickness absence cases within the Environment Directorate.

Sickness Taskforce

Background

At the last meeting of this Committee, Members endorsed the new approach proposed to develop a sustainable strategy for managing long term absence across the Council. New arrangements for managing absence were developed and implemented in 2010, following a joint management / trade union review. This strategy has been successful in reducing the instances of short, intermittent absence, however long term absence has remained stubbornly high.

The Taskforce has been established to undertake an examination of long term sickness absence [over 28 days] to understand what actions would be needed to reduce the incidences of absence and / or the length of absences, with the aim of reducing the costs of absence. The Taskforce will report to Members on actions identified and proposals to address these actions.

The Taskforce has carried out an initial review of the arrangements for managing absence within the Environment Directorate.

Feedback from review of Environment Directorate

The Sickness Taskforce Team have produced a report setting out the findings of their review to date, of managing absence within the Environment Directorate, identifying:

- Good practice
- Constraints to managing long term sickness in a timely manner
- The support available to managers and its effectiveness
- Any training needs identified
- Patterns and behaviours of employee long term sickness and early interventions that would support an early return to work or prevent absence occurring in the first instance.

The findings report is attached at Appendix 1, and will be presented at Committee along with illustrated case study examples setting out good practice in the management of absence, as well as the pattern and behaviour of employee long term sickness, and where earlier intervention could have supported an earlier return to work.

Sickness Absence Data

Data in relation to sickness absence across the Council is attached at Appendix 2. A verbal presentation of this data will be made at Committee.

As agreed at the last meeting of this Committee, each Scrutiny Committee will receive quarterly sickness monitoring reports, in addition to the Performance Monitoring Reports already received.

Recommended

That the Scrutiny Committee note the update in relation to sickness absence across the Council and the findings of the Sickness Taskforce to date, and receive a further quarterly update from the Taskforce.

Background Papers

Maximising Attendance at Work Policy and Procedure

Officer Contact

Sheenagh Rees, Head of Human Resources, telephone 01639 763315 or email s.rees5@npt.gov.uk

Karen Jones, Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services, telephone 01639 763284 or email k.jones3@npt.gov.uk

Gareth Nutt, Director of Environment, telephone 01639 686668 or email g.nutt@npt.gov.uk

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Report of the Sickness Taskforce

Review of absence management arrangements

Environment Directorate

Methodology

The Sickness Taskforce team identified all the employees currently absent for 28 days or more within the Environment Directorate. In order to build a robust picture of the approach to sickness absence management, also identified all cases of long term absence over the last 12 month period. In total 38 recent and current cases were examined.

The personal records of absent employees, as well as information held on the sickness database, were examined to provide a profile of actions taken in relation to each case of absence. Whilst this will be flagged up as a constraint in the body of the report, it is important to state from the outset that the team encountered considerable difficulty in obtaining good robust data and documentation in relation to sickness absence management. Currently information is held across 6 locations, including HR paper files, EDRMS, VISION, the Sickness database, OHU files and manager files.

Exploratory interviews were held with line managers who have responsibility for managing absence, seeking information from them and their views on case management, barriers they have encountered and their recommendations for improving the processes. Similar discussions took place with the HR Officers who support the Environment Directorate and the Occupational Health team.

It is very clear from the data and information obtained that managers within the Environment Directorate seek to actively manage sickness absence and some examples of very good practice in relation to the management of absence. It was also clear however, that there are some constraints in the processes in which managers operate. The review team have sought to identify these in an objective way in order to develop recommendations to improve the process and ultimately reduce the incidence and length of absences.

In examining cases, the Taskforce sought to identify:

- Good practice
- Constraints to managing long term sickness in a timely manner
- The support available to managers and its effectiveness
- Any training needs identified
- Patterns and behaviours of employee long term sickness and early interventions that would support an early return to work or prevent absence occurring in the first instance

Findings

Good practice

Robust Manager Referral

Of the manager referrals examined, the team identified two examples of very good referrals to the Occupational Health Unit, providing robust background information in relation to the employee, the work undertaken and the specific health issue, as well as an explanation of the reason for referral, asking specific questions to support the manager in identifying strategies to effect a return to work. By providing the OHU team with this detailed information, it enabled the OHU team to provide a balanced report, taking into account the information received from both manager and employee. It also enabled the OHU team to provide the manager with the targeted information that s/he requested.

The better the manager referral document, the better the OH advice

Early Intervention and effective communication

In one case study, early intervention and communication was the key to a speedy and successful return to work. The manager discussed a planned surgical procedure with an employee prior to her absence, agreed the plans for the absence and planned the return to work, all in advance of the surgery. This ensured that both parties had the same understanding about the absence, the estimated length of the absence, how contact would be maintained during the absence and the support that would be provided to the employee on her return to work.

This approach, if replicated by other managers would minimise the amount of absence individuals have as it ensures no delays are created through lack of contact or decision making.

Case Conferences

A case conference approach was used as an intervention in one particularly difficult case. In this case, the relationship between the employee and the line manager had deteriorated and the manager was finding it difficult to agree a clear way forward with the employee in relation to their return to work. The case conference approach is where the OH Physician chairs the meeting and all parties are present including the employee, line manager, trade union representative, HR representative and OH Advisor. This approach enables all parties to discuss how to facilitate a return to work or reach another conclusion in relation to the absence, agree actions and have a common and clear understanding of the next steps. In the case examined, the case conference helped conclude what had been a lengthy and difficult absence to manage.

This approach could be used by other managers in similar circumstances, or as an earlier intervention in more straightforward cases, to enable one meeting with all parties to take place in order to agree actions and avoid multiple meetings to reach the same conclusions.

Constraints

Management capacity

Management capacity to manage absence was clearly identified by the Task Force as a constraint for some managers within the Directorate. This was particularly notable in Streetcare, attributable to the numbers of employees that managers have direct responsibility for in relation to managing absence.

The time that managers therefore have available to dedicate to the management of absence is restricted. This has led to a practice where all absent employees, short term and long term, are called to meet with their manager on a day set aside every 4 weeks. No other contact is made with absent employees, and if an employee cannot attend the meeting, no contact will be made for a further 4 week period. This practice is creating delays in the management of absence and resulting in some employees having a longer absence that could be necessary.

One employee attended a 4 weekly meeting with management 5 days before an arranged OH appointment. The meeting with management had no practical value, as the OH advice was needed to inform the discussion.

The Manager representative who leads the 4 weekly meetings varies from month to month, so that there is inconsistency in the contact, and meetings are arranged with no planned purpose for the meeting. The Taskforce team found evidence that this has led to a lack of progression in cases and decision making.

- Management capacity could be released in some cases by changing the method of communication. A telephone call may be more appropriate in some circumstances. By amending timescales to better coincide with OHU appointments, planning the purpose of meetings and therefore reducing the number of meetings held each month, managers may find managing absence a less time consuming task.
- That said, the arrangements for the management of sickness should be reviewed in order to ensure adequate management capacity is accounted for. For example, where there are supervisor posts within the structure who currently do not support the management of sickness, with some training support and guidance, could assume the responsibility for keeping in touch with absent employees, monitoring absence and return to work interviews. This could lessen

the burden of more senior managers, who could then focus on the more serious cases of absence that require a more formal management response.

Temporary Redeployment

Temporary redeployment is an action advised by Occupational Health where an employee is fit to return to work in some capacity, but not fit in the short term to assume the duties of their substantive job. Usually, but not always, this is most associated with jobs that have physical requirements such as lifting, pushing, etc. OHU can only recommend temporary redeployment and it will not always be possible and practical to accommodate this.

The Taskforce found that temporary redeployment or lighter duties had been recommended in 10 of the cases examined, but could only be implemented in 3 of these cases. It is important to add that the majority of the service areas identified in these cases have intense physical requirements and the scope for restricted duties can be limited.

There was evidence that some managers are nervous about redeploying staff within their own service area without very clear guidance from OHU on the type of lighter or restricted duties that are suitable, in case the employee's health is put at further risk of damage.

- If detailed OH guidance can be provided this will give managers more confidence to arrange a return to work to temporary redeployment on lighter or different duties within their own service where that is possible. In order for the OHU to provide this detailed guidance, it is essential that managers provide detailed information in the referral to the OHU, setting out the duties of the job – the provision of a job description to the OHU should address this.
- Where it is not possible for a manager to identify temporary redeployment within their own service, there is no process, other than through the Council's prior consideration recruitment process to identify redeployment opportunities within the wider directorate and the council as a whole. The Taskforce team have not yet identified a process that could address this need, but it is an area that will be considered further as the work of the Taskforce progresses.
- It must also be accepted that if an employee cannot, for instance, undertake any of the duties of his or her job, and does not have easily transferrable skills, it will not always be possible or realistic

that temporary redeployment will be identified. Where it is possible however, the Council should seek to make this happen, as it makes better use of Council resources.

Keeping in Touch

The Taskforce found evidence that managers were not always comfortable about maintaining contact with absent employees, and reported a fear of being seen to harass employees who are sick. Contact mainly takes place at meetings held under the maximising attendance at work procedure (see point above in relation to manager capacity).

There were examples of situations which managers find particularly difficult and are unsure of how best to communicate, for example where an employee has been diagnosed with cancer or a terminal illness, or where the absence has been caused in response to a bereavement.

Regular informal weekly contact is identified as good practice and the CIPD state that it is a key factor in helping an employee return to work, can reduce the duration, or even prevent long term absence. The Taskforce sought out examples of how other employers seek to minimise absence, and found that Cafcass claim to have halved their absence rates with immediate intervention strategies which include regular informal contact, maintained throughout absence. Methods of maintaining contact are agreed with the employee prior to, or at the start of the absence.

- Better guidance and very practical advice for managers in how and when they should communicate, will help support managers managing what can be very difficult and sensitive situations, and for which not all managers will be naturally equipped.

Policy guidance

There was evidence that managers need more policy guidance in relation to when they should instigate the formal absence management process under the Underlying / Serious Medical Conditions Procedure.

- In the cases examined, there is inconsistency in when the first meeting is held, ranging from 9 days after the first day of absence to 5 months.

- Earlier and consistent interventions would enable return to work plans to be put in place at an earlier stage and the identification of support necessary to facilitate the return.
- There was evidence that managers also need more guidance in relation to the timescales between each stage of the process.
- There were 15 examples of cases where employees attended multiple meetings at stages 1 and 2 of the procedure, evidencing a lack of progression and no decision making taking place.
- In contrast, there were also examples of employees who attended one stage 1 meeting and one stage 2 meeting, at which a decision in relation to their continued employment was then made.
- There were then also examples of the formal process not being used at all.

Through analysing cases and discussing case management with managers, it was clear to the Sickness Taskforce that the current Maximising Attendance at Work Policy is very effective for the management of short term absence, but less so for managing long term absence.

The current policy was developed to give managers control and flexibility in relation to managing absence, however the lack of guidance in relation to timescales and the progression through the stages has caused confusion and inconsistency in relation to how cases are being managed and led to a lack of timely progression through the stages of decision making.

- The team identified good practice examples in the public and private sector including the NHS, KPMG, Yorkshire Water and Cardiff City Council, where clear points in time are set out in the policy guidance for referring to the OHU, when formal meetings will be held and when decision making will occur.
- In discussions with Environment Managers, it was clear that managers want to retain some element of flexibility to ensure that they are able to adapt processes to the particular circumstances and needs of individual employees, but that they would value more guidance in relation to timescales and progression between the stages of the process.

Availability of data and sickness records

As stated at the beginning of this report, the Taskforce team did encounter difficulty in locating all available information relating to each individual employee's absence. This is because information is not held in one place, and is controlled by line managers, HR and OHU with little accessibility across the 3 points.

- Improving record keeping and ensuring that information can be stored and shared in a way that maintains medical confidentiality and data protection, but enables key stakeholders to know what they need to know will significantly improve the ability of managers to manage absence and HR and OHU to support managers effectively.

Effectiveness of Support available

OHU Support

The Taskforce found that managers do rely and value the contribution of the OHU, however did express some frustrations in relation to a lack of decision making by the unit, biased reports and timescales for advice.

It was clear to the team that on referral to the OHU, managers have an understanding that responsibility for managing the absence has passed over to the OHU, including decision making.

- Clear guidance needs to be provided to managers in relation to the role of the OHU. The OHU provide advice to managers but cannot make decisions in relation to the employment of individuals. That responsibility continues to remain with managers.

A common complaint from managers is the length of time it takes to receive advice from the OHU. However, the findings of the taskforce are that the earliest an employee will be referred to the OHU by managers is after at least 28 days absence and on occasions significantly longer. The OHU waiting list is currently 2 – 3 weeks from point of referral to appointment. Reports are issued to managers within 2 weeks of the appointment.

The OHU hold an average of 556 assessment appointments a month. At least half of these are as a result of sickness referrals made by managers. Approximately 60 of these every month are new referrals. Clinics are held with Physicians 4 – 6 times per month, the Occupational Health Advisor and an Occupational Health Screening Nurse. The capacity of the unit

limits the OHU ability to decrease the length of waiting time for appointments significantly.

However what the team did establish is that many referrals are made simply because an employee is off sick. In some cases a referral to the OHU has no value, and will not provide a manager with information that they do not already know.

In some cases, managers provided little or no information in the referral document, which also meant that the OHU had only the information provided by the employee on which to base their advice. This reduces the value of the referral to the manager and results in what managers perceive as a biased report because it is only based on information provided by the employee.

- The referral process should be reviewed to ensure that managers have robust guidance in relation to when they should refer an employee. This should ensure that the OHU resources are maximised for the cases to which the unit can add most value. This should release some capacity within OHU and lead to shorter waiting lists.
- The referral process should be designed to make it easier for managers to complete the referral information, and to ensure that the information is provided that OHU need in order to provide a balanced and informed report.
- A better system for the provision of data between Manager / HR / OHU could reduce the timescales for providing reports to managers.

HR Support

The Taskforce found that the support provided by the HR Team to the Environment Directorate is more intensive than across the rest of the Council. For instance, whilst all HR Officers will support the formal stages of the Maximising Attendance at Work Policy, and in particular the decision making stages, the HR Officers who support Environment also monitor absence, identify patterns, write to employees to invite them to attend informal review meetings, attend these informal meetings with managers, and update the sickness absence database with case management information on behalf of the manager.

As a result of the Council's difficult budget position, the HR Division, like all other services has significant savings to achieve over the next 3

financial years. The Head of HR has advised the Sickness Taskforce that from 1st April 2015 as the number of professional staff in HR will be reduced by 3, the level of support that is currently provided to the Environment Directorate in managing absence will not be sustainable with the resources available. The Sickness Taskforce flags this up as it will undoubtedly have a further impact on the capacity for managing absence within the Environment Directorate.

Consistency of the support from HR was flagged up as an issue of concern by managers within Environment. For example Streetcare managers have had 3 different HR contacts for support in relation to managing absence over the past 12 months. This specific example has resulted from the movement of HR staff to cover maternity absence.

- The Taskforce has fed back to the Head of HR, who has committed, as far as is possible and, within the resources available, to provide more stable support to Directorates, but taking into account the financial and resource constraints facing the HR service.

Managers reported that the HR advice to managers in relation to the application of the procedure was, at times, inconsistent (some of this also relates to the points in relation to the policy itself, above). The Sickness Taskforce did not find evidence that that incorrect advice has been provided by the HR team, but did find that there was inconsistency. HR often advises on difficult and complex issues, for which there is no 'right or wrong' answer, and sometimes a judgement is required. It is important however that HR Officers have a common approach to exercising judgement and are clear on the application of employment policy and procedure.

- In order to ensure that there is better consistency in the HR support provided, the HR Manager lead for Maximising Attendance at Work will hold a series of workshops for HR Officers.

Recommendations

1. Toolkit for Managers

The Taskforce have developed a Toolkit for Managers providing practical guidance and support in relation to:

- Making and maintaining contact with absent employees
- The role of the Occupational Health Unit and services available

- How and when to make a referral to the Occupational Health Unit and how to ensure the referral adds value
- Return to work planning
- Guidance on the formal stages of the Underlying/Serious Medical Conditions Procedure
- Managing bereavement in the workplace
- Managing work related stress
- Managing employees diagnosed with cancer (based on the Macmillan Cancer Toolkit)

This Toolkit will be trialled with line managers in the Environment Directorate, prior to any roll out across the Council. The Toolkit will eventually be incorporated into the referral system described in recommendation 2. This will ensure that it is a tool that managers can use to retrieve and store specific information on case management rather than it being a long document that managers may be reluctant to read.

2. Improve and develop new process for Sickness Referral, guidance and prompts for key stages of absence management and data / information collection and sharing

- The Health & Safety Manager and Occupational Health Advisor are working with IT and the Sickness Taskforce team to build an electronic sickness referral and case management system that is intended to provide an easily accessible interface for clinical and non-technical users to manage, amend and retrieve data from a variety of existing sources and perform statistical analysis relating to case histories.
- Managers, HR Officers and trade union representatives will be involved in the development of this system to ensure that it is fit for purpose.
- A key aim will be to improve the way in which managers refer to the Occupational Health Unit, and the timeliness of the OHU providing reports to managers. This will include a need for managers to discuss case details with a member of staff from the OHU prior to a referral being made to ensure a referral is necessary. The advice provided over the phone or by using the system could be all that is required to progress case management.
- Another key aim will be to improve the capacity of managers, HR and the OHU through implementing this system.

As the system is developed, arrangements will be made to hold a presentation for Members.

3. Review the Maximising Attendance at Work Policy and Procedure and how it relates to long term absence and serious / underlying conditions

- The Sickness Taskforce will make a site visit to Cardiff Council to research the Cardiff Council Critical Illness Policy and the dedicated HR team to supporting long term sickness absence. This research visit will be used to inform the development of practices in Neath Port Talbot.
- The review of the policy itself will seek to incorporate the feedback from Environment Managers and HR, improve consistency, reduce multiple meetings under formal stages, aide progression through the stages, provide better guidance on timescales, as well as allowing flexibility depending on the particular circumstances. Recognised trade unions will be involved in this review, and it is proposed to trial new arrangements with Environment Managers before making further recommendation to Members to agree changes to the policy.

4. Provision of training for HR Officers and Managers

- The trial of the toolkit in the Environment Directorate will provide an opportunity to hold briefings for managers in relation to the aspects of sickness absence management they find most difficult – e.g. communicating with absent employees and dealing with difficult situations
- Workshops will be held with HR Officers to improve consistency in HR advice and guidance.

Next steps

- The Sickness Taskforce will trial recommendations in the Environment Directorate, reporting back on the effectiveness of recommendations for further possible roll out.
- The Taskforce have begun a review of sickness absence management arrangements in Homecare and will provide a report to Members at Committee in early 2015 on findings and recommendations.

Quarter 2, 2014
Average Sick Days Lost per Head of Service (Excluding Teachers)
1st April 2014 to 30th September 2014

Service Area	FTE Days Lost	FTE Employees as at 30.9.2014	Average FTE Sick Days
Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services	311.42	74.7	4.2
Human Resources	232.63	74.5	3.1
Education – Partnership and Community Development	1362.99	289.8	4.7
Education – Schools (and Schools Inclusion)	4884.11	1162.4	4.2
Education – Support Services and Commissioning Development	1662.45	330.1	5.0
Financial Services	624.51	183.9	3.4
ICT	156.08	105.2	1.5
Legal and Democratic	282.95	71.6	4.0
Business Strategy and Public Protection	704.03	175.5	4.0
Children and Young People’s Services	1985.56	299.3	6.6
Community Care and Housing	3318.74	642.6	5.2
Engineering and Transport	823.45	154.5	5.3
Planning	130.5	68.9	1.9
Property and Regeneration	521.33	186.2	2.8
SWTRA	226.96	167.0	1.4
Street Care	2793.96	504.3	5.5

Quarter 2 (1st April to 30th September)

Sickness Absence (Excluding Teachers) – Working Days Lost Top Five Areas

Quarter 2 2013/14 compared to Quarter 2 2014/15

	Employees Sick (Not FTE)		Calendar Days Lost		Working Days Lost		FTE Days Lost	
	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014
Primary Schools	427	426	6430.00	6339.50	4819.00	4756.50	2048.06	2406
Secondary Schools	216	223	4321.50	3417.00	3171.50	2550.50	1543.97	1323.37
Access Managed Services	210	228	4493.00	5728.50	3230.00	4129.50	1223.23	1394.62
Integrated Community Services (Home Care and Day Care)	124	140	2723.50	2799.00	1943.00	1987.50	1158.03	1203.11
Waste and Neighbourhood	101	93	2377.00	2678.50	1705.00	1912.50	1641.91	1831.15
Total (for Top Five Areas)	1,078	1,110	20,345	20,962.5	14,868.5	15,336.5	7,615.2	8,158.25

Estimated effect of reducing sickness down to Council average of 9.19 days in targeted areas

	FTE Employees	FTE Days lost	Average FTE Sick Days	Current Council Average sick days	FTE Days lost at Average sick days	Possible reduction in number of sick days if brought down to average	Average cost of 1 day sick by division	Days * Daily Cost	Cost of cover - assumes post covered at same rate	Total
	A	B	B / A	D	E = A x D	B - E	From Payroll			
ELLL - Partnerships	309.72	3,105.44	10.03	9.19	2,846.33	259.11	131.37	34,040.21	34,040.21	68,080.43
ELLL - Support Services and Commissioning	371.80	4,541.23	12.21	9.19	3,416.84	1,124.39	116.72	131,238.89	131,238.89	262,477.79
Community Care and Housing	647.37	8,415.97	13.00	9.19	5,949.33	2,466.64	118.63	292,620.97	292,620.97	585,241.94
Engineering and Transport	143.02	1,653.18	11.56	9.19	1,314.35	338.83	125.53	42,531.18	42,531.18	85,062.36
Property and Regeneration	196.52	1,851.04	9.42	9.19	1,806.02	45.02	119.55	5,382.27	5,382.27	10,764.54
Street Care	495.85	5,621.92	11.34	9.19	4,556.86	1,065.06	125.05	133,181.15	133,181.15	266,362.31
Totals		25,188.78			19,889.73	5,299.05	736.84	638,994.68	638,994.68	1,277,989.37

Please note the data in the above table does not include support, management and administrative costs.

The cost of sickness for 2013/14 was £5.615m (This does not include any cover costs).

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE

POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – K.JONES

(27th November 2014)

SECTION – MATTER FOR MONITORING

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

BLUE BADGE SCHEME IN WALES

1) Purpose of Report

To provide Members of the Scrutiny Committee with details of the operation of the Blue Badge scheme to support scrutiny of this area of work.

2) Background

The aim of the Blue Badge Scheme is to provide badge holders access to services, enabling them to park closer to where they need to go. Eligibility is generally aimed at people with permanent mobility problems and those who are in receipt of benefits, which themselves include a measure of mobility assessment. The criteria have been extended to include some persons who have “served” and in the near future will enable some persons with cognitive impairments to apply.

3) Eligibility

The Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) (Wales) Regulations 2000 set the eligibility criteria for a badge. The scheme is devolved to local authorities to administer and although the rules, guidance or the law has not changed, in 2010 the Welsh Government reminded Local Authorities of their obligations to adhere to the rules and guidance of the scheme.

3a) Automatic mobility eligibility criteria

People may be issued a badge “without further assessment” if they are more than 2 years old and fall in to 1 or more of the following categories -

- Receives the Higher Rate of the Mobility Component of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA).
- Receives a War Pensioner Mobility Supplement (WPMS) or
- Has been awarded a lump sum benefit at tariffs 1-8 of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme
- Is registered blind
- Receives Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – mobility activity 1 descriptor for mobility activity 2 descriptors c, d, e, and f.
- A person who has been awarded tariff 6 – Permanent Mental Disorder of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme

3b) Personal Independence Payment (replacement for DLA - mobility)

Early indications show that fewer applicants are applying under the current PIP criteria as opposed to the former DLA (high rate mobility component). One explanation is that those who were previously in receipt of DLA are now finding that they do not meet the criteria for PIP. The DWP are gradually re-assessing existing claimants to ascertain continued eligibility for this replacement benefit with the majority of applicants being seen in person. If deemed ineligible for PIP, Welsh Government has advised that a person cannot then apply under the discretionary criteria and should be refused a badge.

3c) Discretionary mobility eligibility criteria

Welsh Government recommends that assessment of eligibility for a Blue Badge requires the applicant to provide independent supporting medical evidence of permanent mobility related difficulties. This is combined with a desk-based assessment approach and the intelligent use of existing shared information to:-

- Significantly improve the accuracy of eligibility decisions, thereby ensuring that only those people who meet the discretionary, ‘subject to further assessment’ walking criterion receive a Blue Badge.

- Improve the consistency of eligibility decisions for applicants under the ‘subject to further assessment’ walking criterion.

Historically, discretionary applications were supported in the majority of applications by the person’s General Practitioners (G.P.). It was the Government’s view that the practice of using an applicant's G.P to verify that an individual met the discretionary criteria for a Blue Badge was unsatisfactory. This decision could compromise the doctor/patient relationship and there were significant costs and delays associated with the administrative processes involved. Following a systems thinking review 3 years ago, these waste steps were eliminated for this authority and the Local Health Board, freeing up approximately £40,000 recurring in those costs. Since April 2011 supporting evidence provided by the applicant combined with a desk-based assessment approach and the intelligent shared use of information already held within the Council helps to determine eligibility in accordance with the stipulated criteria for a Blue Badge.

Difficult circumstances have occasionally arisen where a person has re-applied for a badge having previously received a G.P endorsement some years ago for a temporary or non eligible condition without review. In view of this, Welsh Government recognised the best practice example developed in Customer Services in NPTCBC and subsequently recommended this systematic sift of discretionary applications to all Welsh Councils. Additionally, Welsh Government has recently provided a Blue Badge verification toolkit to assist local authorities to achieve a more consistent approach in the eligibility assessments. This decision record tool should enable all local authorities to cease reliance on G.P. and achieve a pan Wales approach. It has been designed to reach a decision on those applicants who mainly fall under the discretionary criteria based on the information and evidence they provide in support of their application during the face to face interview process.

Non eligibility under the discretionary criteria remains the same for those who

- Receive lower rate DLA – mobility component
- Receive Attendance Allowance
- Have an impairment in one arm
- Have bladder or bowel conditions e.g. Crohn’s disease
- Have temporary conditions e.g. lower limb fractures, asthma, ME
- Are pregnant

Cognitive impairment criteria

The scheme in Wales is being extended to applicants in the near future with local authorities responsible for checking each application initially. This criteria applies to people who have difficulty planning or following a journey, to such an extent that they need constant supervision. Applicants may also apply in this respect if they are outside the qualifying age for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or they choose not to apply for the benefit.

This may capture people with:

Autism

Alzheimer's or dementia

Stroke survivors

Learning Disabilities

Mental Health difficulties

Head injuries

This criteria is not entirely based on diagnosis of conditions, but requires that the applicant meets the safety needs described above. Applicants who fall into this category who are unable to clearly demonstrate/evidence their needs to the local authority may be referred to an Independent Advisory Service, depending on the result of the toolkit decision. This service will be responsible for making a decision in these cases.

Neath Port Talbot Council overview

Blue Badges are valid for 3 years and the person should re-apply as there is no automatic renewal process although a reminder letter is sent to the badge holder. Information is also on the Council website with a pre-eligibility check tool being launched in the near future to help manage expectations and reduce queries about perceived eligibility. The eligibility criteria is generally aimed at people with mobility problems and in receipt of benefits which themselves include a measure of mobility assessment.

Data on Blue Badges issued in NPTCBC over the last 3 years is given below.

Applicants aged under 65					
	New application	Re Application	Awarded New Blue Badge	Awarded Reapplication Blue Badge	Unsuccessful
2012	419	1393	366	1330	6.4%
2013	447	1325	373	1240	9%
2014	399	1042	342	930	11.7%

Applicants aged over 65					
	New application	Re Application	Awarded New Blue Badge	Awarded Reapplication Blue Badge	Unsuccessful
2012	403	2643	353	2479	7%
2013	432	2639	354	2359	11.7%
2014	323	2210	245	1921	14.5%

There is a perception that the Blue Badge assessment process fails persons over the age of 65, however this is not supported by the above data in that there is no significant difference in outcomes because of age.

Appeals/Reviews

There is an internal appeal/ review process where the applicant has initially failed to provide adequate evidence enabling this decision to be reconsidered via the provision of additional supporting evidence. We also signpost ineligible applicants to alternative services that may be identified besides e.g. radar key, I can't wait card, concessionary bus pass scheme.

Enforcement

A main reason behind UK changes to the Blue Badge scheme in 2011 is the perceived extent to which it is misused/abused and particularly in big city areas. The concern is that without legal action being taken against offenders, not only will a scheme that was designed to help disadvantaged members of society fall into disarray, but members of the public who abide by parking restrictions will become disillusioned with imposed parking controls that are abused.

In the last 6 months we have received 5 reports of misuse and wrote to the badge holder to advise that a report of abuse had been received and reminding them about their duties and responsibilities. In the main the badge was being used by a relative when the holder was not present. The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 enables enforcement action to be undertaken but when considered by Audit, Legal, Parking Enforcement and Senior Management, was not deemed a priority due to resources required to investigate/take action etc.

As Customer Services staff interview applicants in person this enables us to stress/reinforce the purpose of the scheme and responsibilities of the badge holder to uphold the purpose of the scheme to help reduce the potential for abuse besides.

Information on the Blue Badge scheme can also be found on the Council's website www.npt.gov.uk and the Welsh Government website wales.gov.uk/docs/det/publications/140806.

Appendices

None

List of Background Papers

None

Officer Contact

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE

POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – K.JONES

(27th November 2014)

SECTION C – MATTER FOR MONITORING

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

CUSTOMER SERVICES, CONTACT CENTRE PERFORMANCE

Purpose of Report

To provide Members of the Scrutiny Committee with information to assist them to scrutinise the performance of the Council's Corporate Contact Centre which acts as the first point of telephone contact for the Council during its official opening hours.

Background

Customer Services has developed a balanced scorecard approach to allow managers to look at the service from the perspective of customers, staff, internal processes and finance. This helps to provide a picture of overall performance and highlights activities that need to be improved by combining both qualitative and quantitative measures. It is a means for the service to translate its vision and strategies into action which is particularly important at a time when resources are diminishing to ensure a culture of continuous improvement aligned to our service and individual standards and performance measures. This business tool has been increasingly important in recent months as workloads at the Contact Centre have increased and performance has deteriorated.

This approach has helped us to identify what factors have influenced our performance and determine the greater flexibility needed in the deployment of staff to better focus on continuous improvement and achieve efficiency savings opportunities across the service. We cannot do this alone as many factors both internal and external influence our performance. We need to secure the support of other colleagues across the Council where necessary, to improve and implement changes

envisaged effectively and efficiently. The following report card will serve to highlight the journey that the service has followed over recent months, what steps we took to help mitigate influencing factors and what is required to help stabilise performance going forward.

Appendices

None

List of Background Papers

None

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CUSTOMER SERVICE CONTACT CENTRE - THE QUAYS

REPORT CARD 2014/2015

Brief description of the service

The Contact Centre is the first point of contact for the Authority; dealing with telephone and email enquiries. There are 5 telephone lines covering.

1. General number (686868)
2. Sickness line(686834)
3. Welsh Line(686869)
4. Building Maintenance Repair reporting line.(686847)
5. Out of Hours Emergency Service. From 5pm to 8.30am Monday to Thursday, 4.30 to 8.30 am Friday (686868)

The former switchboard (763333) was discontinued in September 2014. This number had been replaced by the 686868 number several years ago; however callers still relied on this number to get through to the council.

Telephone calls fall in to 2 main categories

Service requests.

I.T. systems are used to log job requests which are electronically passed to the relevant service area to action.

Switchboard Calls

We operate as the main telephone transfer facility (See appendix A for Sample demand) for the Council, named individuals, services, and departments.

From April 2013 to March 2014 the Contact Centre received 241,693 calls. This demand varies due to seasonal peaks and troughs, weather conditions and service promotions. For example, during the Summer months, Recycling and Refuse calls increase due to an increase in garden waste being generated and during the winter months calls relating to severe weather issues such as flooding, drainage and gritting are prominent. (Please see appendices A-K for data relating to the number of calls, waiting times, and number of abandoned calls.)

CCTV Out of Hours

In June 2014 the Customer Services team acquired responsibility for the CCTV /Out of Hours service from the Environment directorate. Since then the members of staff who have transferred have undergone significant training and support to enable them to deliver day time Contact Centre enquiries to help maintain operational business continuity needs.

Key priorities for 2014/2015 as per Business Plan

- Employee Development Reviews were completed for all Contact Centre staff before 31/3/2014 and identified training needs have been progressed.
- Further integration of the CCTV service to the Contact Centre remit is an ongoing process and CCTV staff are continuing to receive experience and training on systems and new processes to enable them to deliver a service at the first point of contact.
- Performance Management/Competency Framework/Business Scorecard implementation. Continue to embed and maintain a culture of continuous improvement across the service.
- Utilise data capture system to provide management information to underpin decisions based on accurate and sufficient data to allow us to identify areas for improvement and also to allow in dealing with other services.
- Review demand analysis at the Contact Centre to maintain Contact Centre business continuity and to ensure delivery of an efficient service, this allows us to identify areas of improvement and to focus on these.
- Introduce additional performance measures/standards e.g. average wait times, one stop transaction end to end times.
- Call recording/coaching system for Contact Centre telephone related enquiries. To provide high quality, customer focused service and continuously improved service performance.

How are we performing?

Measure	13/14 Actual	13/14 Q1	13/14 Q2	14/15 Q1	14/15Q2	Target14/15 RAG
Financial						
% FFP savings at risk	0	0	0	0	0	0
% revenue expenditure within budget	100	100	100	100	100	100%
% preventable / value demand	Not available	Not available	Not available	Bulk collections 24% Refuse and recycle equipment ordering 42%	Bulk collections 23% Refuse and recycle equipment ordering 38% Van permits 26.%	Data capture information to be reviewed to determine reduction in preventable demand.
% savings solutions identified for future year targets	Not available	Not available	Not available	Ongoing as per ICE work plan	Ongoing as per ICE work plan	As part of council cost savings - To be determined
Customer:						
Average customer satisfaction score	90.75%	90.75%	90.75%	95.93%	95.93%	↑ +
No of complaints received	8	0	2	3	3	↓ -
No of compliments received	30	6	4	4	3	↑ +
% complaints upheld at stage 1	0	0	0	0	0	0
% complaints upheld at stage 2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average days taken to respond – S1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Average days taken to respond -S2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Internal:						
Calls Abandoned after 5 Second wait %	12.87	11.67	15.10	22.19	18.22	↓ -
Average wait time to answer.	30	29	36	46	47	↓ -
Calls received	241963	59949	66185	60798	66630	↓ -
% callers dealt with one stop - Currently being revisited to ensure sufficient information is used to provide a precise figure in callers dealt with one stop.	24.69	23.1	26.58	25.25	19.65	↑ +
Employees:						
% staff satisfied or very satisfied with their job	-	-	-	62%	62%	↑ +
Average days lost due to sickness / FTE	1.33	0.88	0.78	0.54	1.77	2.02 ↑ +
No of staff ideas generated	5	2	0	0	0	↑ +
% of staff ideas implemented	2	1	0	0	0	↑ +
% of staff who have received a PDR in the last 12 months	100%	N/A	N/A	100%	100%	100%
% identified learning and development needs met	100%	N/A	N/A	Training started for CCTV section	Training ongoing for CCTV section	100%
Employee turnover rate due to unplanned departures	2	0	0	0	0	0

Story behind the performance

The Customer Services Contact Centre based at The Quays provides a first point of contact telephony service for the Council dealing with the switchboard function, Environment queries, sickness reporting and service related emails. There are 9.8 FTE Customer Services Officers and a Team Leader. The service was restructured in June 2014 as it acquired responsibility for the CCTV and Out Of Hours service and 8 staff from the Environment Directorate transferring across. Their training and development needs have been a priority over the Summer months to enable them to also deal with Contact Centre enquiries during official Council opening times.

First point of contact queries are inevitably wide ranging whether providing a signposting function both in and outside the organisation, providing advice and guidance, or dealing with more in depth transactions. This demand is heavily influenced by peaks and troughs experienced by sections such as Housing Benefit, Council Tax and more particularly enquiries regarding refuse and recycling changes.

Neath Port Talbot Homes has been a different organisation to the Council for over 3 years, but we continue to have calls meant for them. Consequently managers have continually worked with NPT Homes to reduce this demand to ensure we are able to give council related enquiries priority.

In the current financial climate of significant budget constraints, where demand increases as a consequence of changes in the council this will be mitigated by early and ongoing dialogue with colleagues to identify and agree where support should be prioritised to manage the customer journey and expectations.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PERFORMANCE AND ACTIONS TAKEN TO DATE

Service demand and response in the Contact Centre change on a regular and also seasonal basis being influenced by internal and external factors. We constantly monitor trends and performance to be aware of unexpected peaks and troughs and react accordingly to minimise impact and provide an effective service delivery.

1. CCTV staff/service changes

As part of the Environment Forward Financial Plan cost saving measure, In June 2014 the CCTV department closed during daytime operations and CCTV staff work their daytime shifts in the Contact Centre. As these staff operate under a somewhat erratic shift pattern their training plan was determined by this. The consequence of training 8 persons created additional time and resource from supervisors and also other team members.

2. Staff Holidays/Absences

During early Summer, Temporary agency staff were employed to ensure better business continuity as permanent staff tend to take extended leave at this time. This increased resilience and the ability to maintain performance; however, this was subsequently influenced by the introduction of the Recycle plus scheme (See point 4 below).

3.National strike 10th July 2014

A major influence on performance this quarter was particularly evident following the strike day on 10th July 2014 when a policy decision was made not to have a mop up refuse/recycling service which resulted in significant extra enquiries to the service for several weeks. (Please see appendix B.)

4. Recycle Plus Scheme

In July 2014 the Council launched its Recycle+ scheme which had a significant additional impact at a time when customers already traditionally contact the Council about refuse and recycling services and particularly regarding garden waste. Changes to routines, customer expectations and understanding resulted in unprecedented telephone demand to the Contact Centre at a time when staffing was at a minimum creating significant delays. Contact Centre staff dealt with very upset and angry customers which had an impact on morale and sickness levels.

This demand was unsustainable and unhealthy therefore the following actions were implemented in agreement with all Customer Service staff, Unison and GMB:

- An IVR(interactive voice recognition) call handling system was utilised to provide a targeted response to specific Recycle+ queries
- Weekly liaison meetings with Environment staff to promote joined up working and understanding to improve customer dealings.
- One Stop Shop staff redeployed to assist in managing the demand for an 8 week period.
- Call reporting procedures for refuse and recycling were updated to reduce time spent dealing with the initial calls.

This approach resulted in improved outcomes, reducing abandoned calls and reduced customer wait time. There is a continuing emphasis on sustaining and improving this approach where possible on an ongoing basis.

5.IT issues

To assist business continuity requirements, computer hardware and operating systems were updated over a period of weeks during July and August. Due to a number of problems experienced this created unexpected difficulties resulting in computer interruptions and downtime which affected our ability to handle the same volume of calls. These issues have since been resolved to provide more effective I.T systems therefore our ability to manage our call handling volumes increased.

6. Improved staff working practices.

Areas of improvement were identified and acted on to reduce staff time spent in dealing with complex refuse and recycling enquiries. We have regular liaison meetings with service areas to enable better joint working.

7. Review staffing Model

We are currently reviewing Contact Centre and CCTV staffing model to identify working routines needed to provide the greater flexibility required to better deploy and manage the demands placed on the service.

KEY RISKS FACING THE SERVICE

- Organisational change that impacts on demand at the first point of contact e.g. cuts or reduction in Council service provision with resulting queries and/or complaints.
- Organisational appetite/resistance to adopt alternative methods of dealing with customer enquiries e.g. Voice Recognition service.
- Staff flexibility to better resource service peaks and troughs not realised.
- Increased online service requests take up not realised.
- Lack of development of and/or interruption in IT systems provision on which improved service delivery depends.

Next key actions for 2014/2015

What	Who	By When
Review staffing model to identify working routines needed to provide the flexibility required to manage the demands placed on the service.	CS Manager and Team Leader	End of November 2014
Commence Call Coaching tool to improve Contact Centre performance and ensure consistent quality standards of service delivery.	TL's and SDO	Commencing November 2014
Monitor performance management data and demand and identify how this increases as a consequence of service changes across the Council. Ensure early and ongoing dialogue with colleagues to identify and agree where support needs to be prioritised. Promote and review impact of online transaction take up.	CS Manager, TL's	Ongoing
Explore Virtual Agent /voice recognition system and complete business case proposal to automate the first point of contact telephone response for frequently requested services.	HOS/CS Manager and I.T. HOS	End of November 2014
Revised Access to Services Strategy completed and endorsed.	HOS/CS Manager	January 2015 onwards

Appendices

Appendix A

Top call demand to the Contact Centre Quarter 2 2014.

SERVICE	July	August	September	Total
Switchboard	7269	6353	8769	22391
Recycling & van permits	5628	4849	4830	15307
Refuse & Trade Waste	1918	1376	1368	4662
Blue Badges/Bus passes	1558	1355	1538	4451
Bulks	1283	1131	1199	3613
Internal / external caller	890	727	927	2544
Waste Enforcement/ Dog Query	658	534	659	1851
Building Maintenance	464	405	679	1548
Pest Control/ EHTS	563	418	482	1463
Absence line	457	376	589	1422

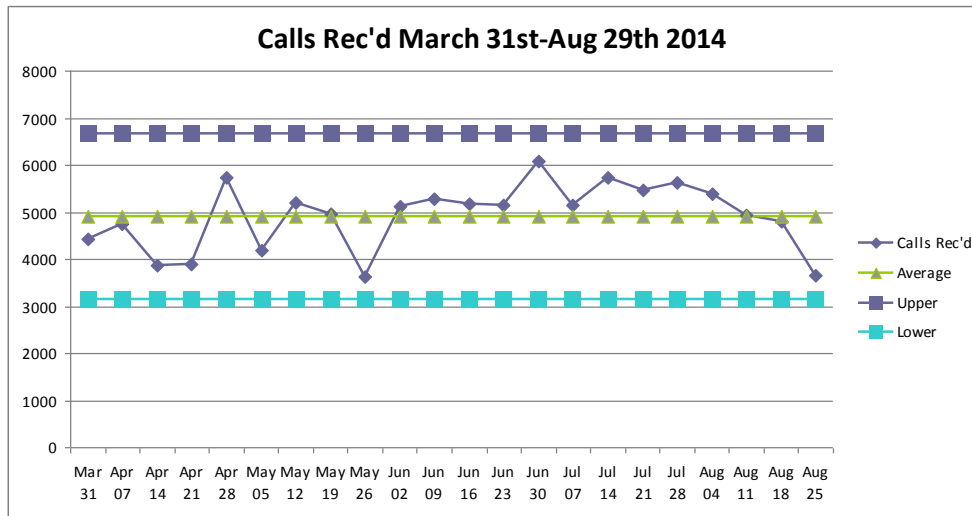
Appendix B

Impact of the 10th July National Strike 2014

	30/06/2014	07/07/2014	14/07/2014	21/07/2014	28/07/2014	04/08/2014	11/8/20104	18/08/2014
Recycling & van permits	795	1008	1382	1361	1411	1182	1218	1211
Refuse & Trade Waste	200	543	540	346	362	315	399	330

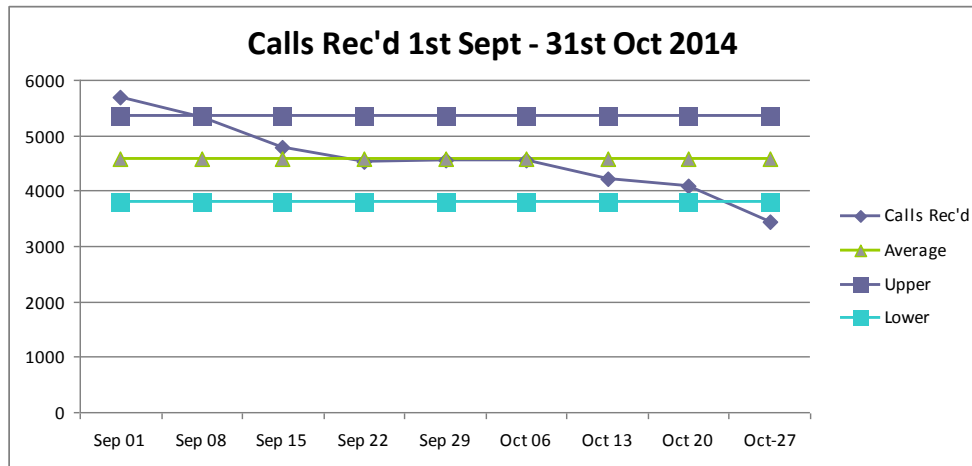
Appendix C

Calls received at the Contact Centre from w/c 31st March to 31st August 2014



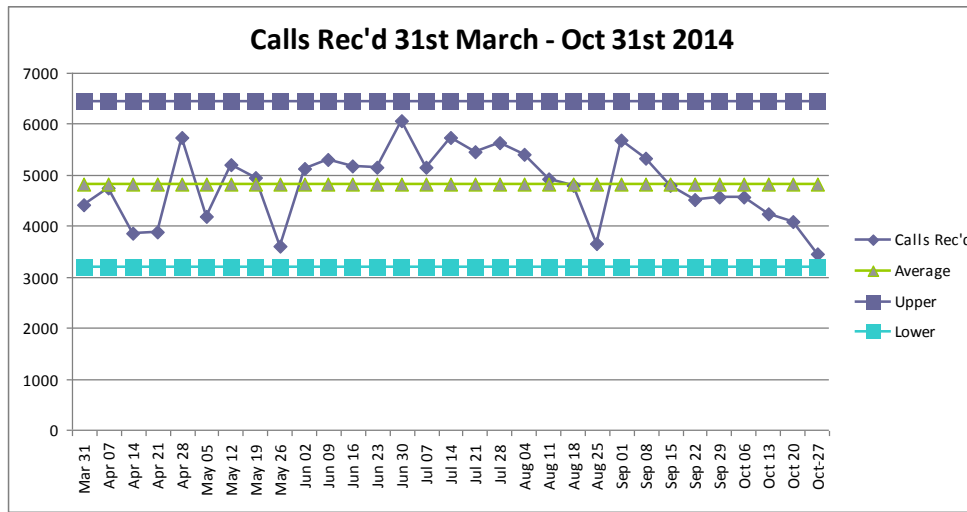
Appendix D

Calls received at the Contact Centre from 1st September to 31st October 2014



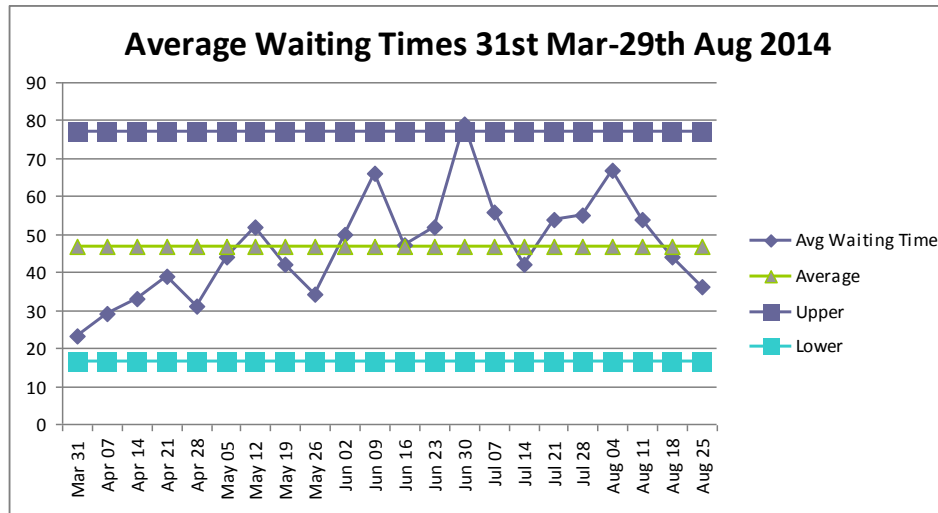
Appendix E

Calls received at the Contact Centre from w/c 31st March to October 2014



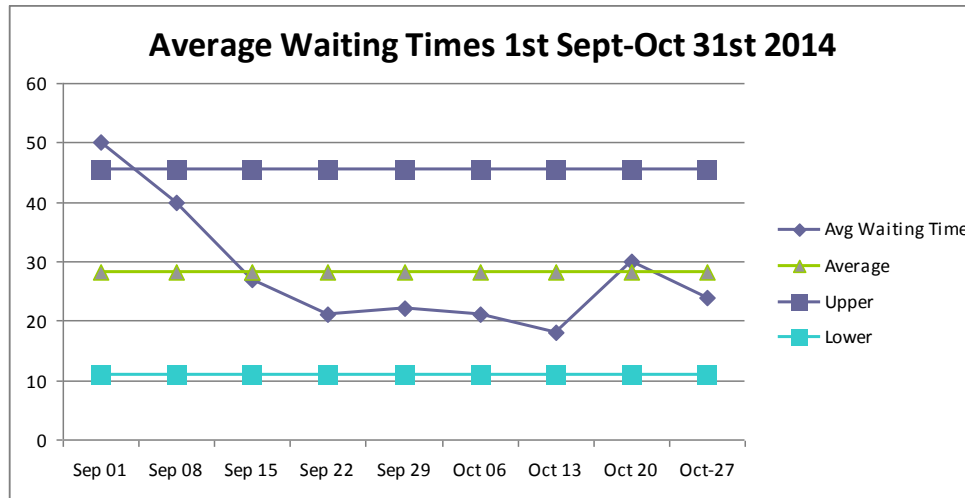
Appendix F

Average waiting times w/c 31st March to 29th August 2014



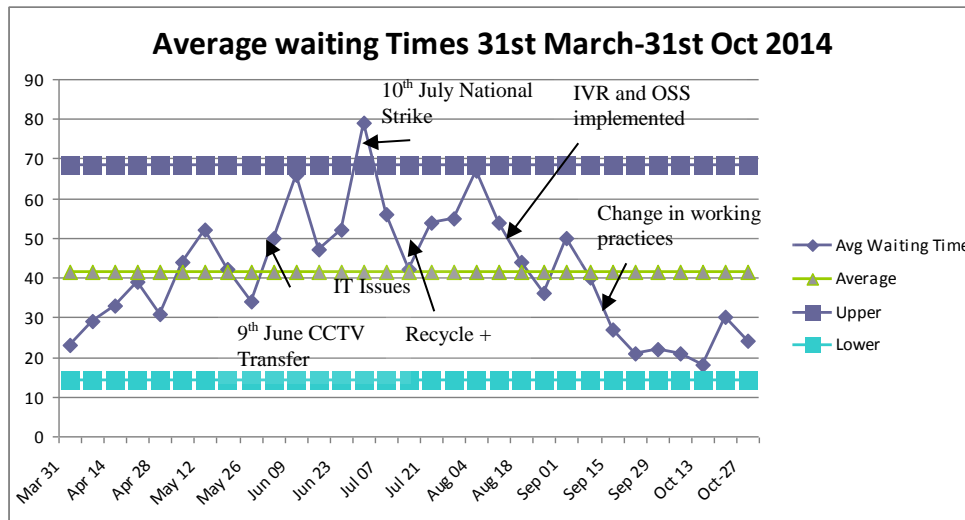
Appendix G

Average waiting times from 1st Sept – October 31st 2014



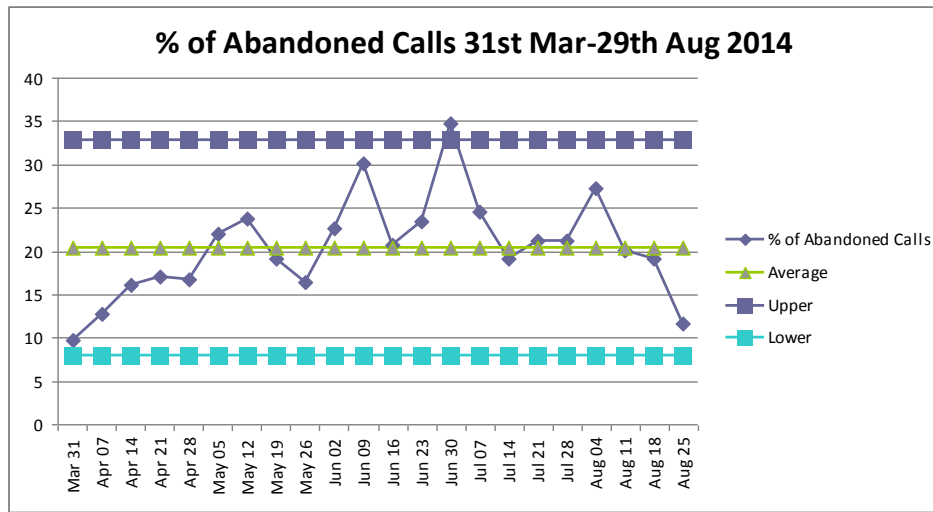
Appendix H

Average waiting times from w/c 31st March – October 31st 2014



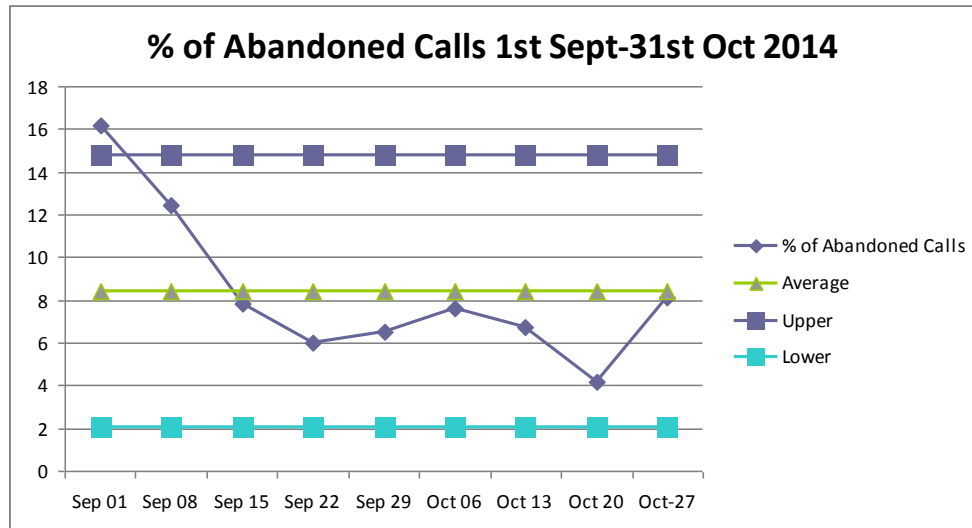
Appendix I

Percentage of abandoned calls w/c /31st March to 29th August 2014



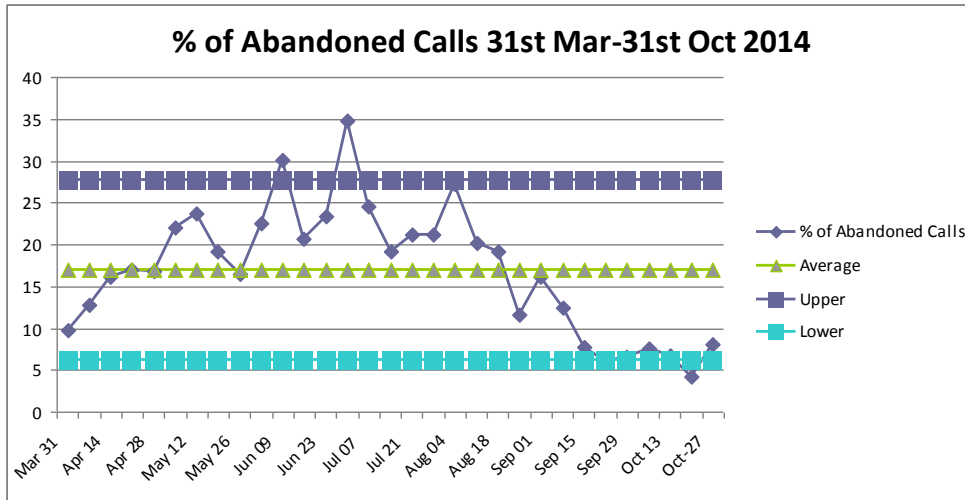
Appendix J

Percentage of abandoned calls 1st September to 31st October 2014



Appendix K

Percentage of abandoned calls w/c 31st March to 31st October 2014



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