

**Corporate Affairs Scrutiny Panel**

**Customer  
Excellence**



**March 2010**

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## 1. BACKGROUND / TERMS OF REFERENCE / METHODOLOGY

- 1.1 In June 2009, when setting its work programme, the Corporate Affairs Scrutiny Panel identified NI14 '*Reducing avoidable contact: minimising the proportion of customer contact that is of low or no value to the customer*' as a performance indicator that they wished to monitor and challenge throughout the year.
- 1.2 Essentially, avoidable contact is when a customer has to make further contact with the Council because their issue was not dealt with satisfactorily the first time, or they were incorrectly signposted.
- 1.3 It was determined that monitoring of NI14 should be linked to a broader piece of work being undertaken by the Panel which was focusing on customer excellence.
- 1.4 The Panel met with the Director of HR & Organisation Development in July 2009 to discuss the Council's approach to customer excellence.

### 1.5 **Background**

- 1.5.1 The Kirklees customer service strategy has evolved over a number of years, but more recently there had been a change in focus, centring on embedding customer excellence across the Council and its partners.
- 1.5.2 Partners were involved in developing this approach and it was subsequently agreed that the principle of customer excellence would be branded as ONE Council and ONE Partnership.

### 1.5.3 **CASE STUDY – ONE COUNCIL IN PRACTICE**

Staff in the Library and Information Centres (LICs) have received training to develop an understanding of health issues in their area and how to give advice to customers. They are trained to quickly identify a customer's needs and signpost them accordingly. This has resulted in marked changes, with good feed back from both health partners and the public. Adult Social Services and Gateway to Care have also developed links with the LICs. In areas where there are a large number of housing issues, Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing also hold surgeries in the LICs.

### 1.6 **The Panel's Focus**

- 1.6.1 The Panel determined that they would focus on two aspects of the customer excellence approach in Kirklees:
- DigiTV - INtouch
  - Kirklees Direct

1.7 This report sets out the Panel's findings and subsequent recommendations.

## **2. DigiTV - INtouch**

2.1 In June 2009, the Head of Performance & Communication attended the Corporate Affairs Scrutiny Panel to brief Members on the remit of her Service. Members were briefed on DigiTV, known as INtouch Kirklees, a local digital television site which offers advice, services and information for people who live in Kirklees.

2.2 Members had previously been unaware of this service, despite the promotion that had been carried out by the Service, and it was therefore agreed that they would explore the service.

2.3 Over the following months, members of the Panel tested INtouch and discussed their findings in November 2009. Further queries were subsequently sent to the Head of Performance & Communication.

### **2.4 What is INtouch?**

2.4.1 INtouch Kirklees is a local digital television site which offers advice, services and information for people who live in Kirklees. The site contains information and advice from many different organisations and individuals including: the Council, West Yorkshire Police, the local health authorities, Kirklees Partnership and Metro, as well as voluntary groups and individuals across Kirklees. It also features online forms which can be used to access Council and other services through the television.

2.4.2 INtouch is also available via mobile phone. Anyone who has a mobile phone which can connect to the Internet will be able to use the service.

2.4.3 INtouch began as a pilot project in November 2001 and the site was launched in July 2002. The aim of the project was to test the views of local volunteer households towards using digital TV to find out about and use local public services. It brought together people from the public, voluntary and private sectors.

2.4.4 The pilot project ended in June 2003 and concluded that *"INtouch has clearly demonstrated the feasibility of using digital TV for the provision of locally focused and shaped public services."*

2.4.5 The project received extra funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister until the end of March 2006 and since then, the Council's Web Development Team has maintained the site.

2.4.6 Due to the success of INtouch, the Council was also given the opportunity to develop a national digital television project – DigiTV.

This has helped other local authorities to create their own digital TV sites.

2.4.7 It is hoped that the site can be further developed in the future to offer a wider range of services.

2.4.8 The INtouch digital TV site is aimed at people who do not have access to the Internet, who would otherwise be excluded from using online services. The Head of Performance & Communication has advised that users include people who are housebound or isolated, carers, people on low incomes, job seekers and older residents.

2.4.9 Members observed that the speed of the site was quite slow, and it has been noted that the speed depends on the type of digital TV service that someone subscribes to, and on the hardware that they have in their homes. It was explained that the amount of 'bandwidth' made available from Virgin Media and Sky for the interactive services is very low compared with the speeds that it is possible to receive from broadband.

## 2.5 **Panel Area of Investigation - INtouch Usage**

2.5.1 Individual sessions (number or users) and screen usage (page hits) is monitored, and the Service are able to identify which pages or features users are looking at, what time they use the site, and how they are accessing it.

2.5.2 In October 2009, usage was:

<b>Week Commencing</b>	<b>Hits</b>	<b>Sessions</b>
28 September	34,769	607
5 October	8,233	677
12 October	21,346	647
19 October	20,852	749
26 October	14,989	727
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100,189</b>	<b>3,407</b>

2.5.3 Qualitative data is also monitored, including the difference that the site makes to people's lives. The Service identify that benefits include: increased skills and confidence, reduced isolation, more opportunities to participate in local activities, and better access to services.

## 2.6 **Panel Area of Investigation – Reporting Faults**

2.6.1 Members sought clarification on who runs the helpline when faults are experienced on INtouch, and questioned whether there were standards for returning calls.

2.6.2 Faults with the hardware are the responsibility of the service providers (for example, Virgin Media or Sky), and are handled by their customer

services. Any issues with the software or content can be reported directly to the Council's Web Development Team. If they are unable to find a resolution, they are passed to the Looking Local help desk, who normally respond within four hours.

## **2.7 Panel Area of Investigation – Affordability (Television)**

2.7.1 Members were concerned that the service was only available to those who could afford to pay for Sky or Virgin television services. It is not available to Freeview users and Members asked whether this could be explored.

2.7.2 However, the service is not available on Freeview, because the boxes are not advanced enough to run the full service. Sky and Virgin Media boxes have a 'return path', which means that they can send information as well as receive it. This is essential for enabling residents to use services via their digital TV (for example, sending a message to their councillor, order a garden waste collection, or renew a library book).

2.7.3 Looking Local have been lobbying at a national level for a 'return path' to be built into Freeview equipment. The next generation of Freeview boxes should be more sophisticated and would therefore enable the INtouch service to be widened.

2.7.4 The Service has said that their research has indicated a very high take up of Sky and Virgin Media products amongst low income households, and that INtouch does reach people who would not be able to access online information otherwise.

## **2.8 Panel Area of Investigation – Affordability (Telephone)**

2.8.1 Members were concerned that the cost of using a mobile could be prohibitive for many people; and also raised the issue that parts of the district could not access the internet on their phone due to poor signals.

2.8.2 The Service has advised that the INtouch mobile site is offered as an alternative way of accessing services and information, and as it uses the same site as the digital TV, it is provided at no extra cost. It was acknowledged that 99% of people who access the Internet via a mobile phone or handheld device will also use the Internet via a PC (*ONS 2008*).

## **2.9 Panel Area of Investigation – Generating Revenue**

2.9.1 Members questioned whether the site could offer access to private sector services, such as recruitment agencies or advertising, in order to generate revenue.

2.9.2 The Service recognised that this was possible but advised that they had not done so to date as they felt advertising could undermine the

confidence of users and weaken the identity of the site. The fixed screen size makes it difficult to distinguish between adverts and content, and the current user content rules prohibit commercial content.

## 2.10 **Panel Conclusions**

2.10.1 The Panel was satisfied with the outcome of its investigation and is not making any recommendations.

## 3. **KIRKLEES DIRECT**

3.1 On 23 September 2009, members of the Corporate Affairs Scrutiny Panel undertook a visit to Kirklees Direct at Queensgate House in Huddersfield.

3.2 Kirklees Direct (KD) falls within the Environment, Transportation and Property Directorate and the visit was hosted by three managers from this service including the Contact Centre Manager and the Operations Manager.

### 3.3 **Services provided by Kirklees Direct (KD)**

3.3.1 KD supports a number of Council services:

- Highways
- Environmental Waste
- Housing Repairs
- Planning
- Environmental Health
- Taxi Complaints and Compliments
- Revenues and Benefits
- Generic Services – Council Switchboard; Helpline; Payments

3.3.2 This mostly consists of handling phone calls but in respect of Environmental Waste and Housing Repairs it also includes handling e-mails. KD does not just transfer calls elsewhere; it seeks to give answers and solutions. By taking calls where operatives can offer solutions, this frees up Council officers to do other things or even potentially replaces the need for them.

3.3.3 KD handle over 1 million calls a year (including switchboard calls). Between April and September 2009, £1.3million was taken in payments over the phone by Kirklees Direct. This figure does not include the automated collection phone line.

3.3.4 Calls are answered by Customer Service Officers who are each trained in up to 8 services – this number is driven by current telephone limitations. There are a handful of bilingual staff and use is made of the translation line, which allows a three way conversation.

- 3.3.5 Opening hours are 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, together with an out of hours service, from 6pm to 8am on weekdays and over weekends and bank holidays. This is based at Riverside Court and deals with emergency housing repairs; night time noise; anti social behaviour; and lone workers. Anyone still in the queue at 6pm will have their call answered.
- 3.3.6 KD handle 19 different telephone numbers, and with the exception of the Highways number (which is 0800), all are 01484 numbers. KD advised that they were due to meet with Intech to discuss appropriate codes in the near future. For the most part, callers do not have to go through a series of IVR options i.e. press 1 for this, press 2 for that. KD feel that IVR options would not be appropriate as the large number of services would generate too many layers and would mean that someone would be stuck in a queue for some time. However, the Panel has learned that when IVR options were introduced on the Environmental Waste number, the wait time was reduced by 35 seconds.
- 3.3.7 IVR options may be more feasible if there was a reduction in the number of publicly advertised telephone numbers used by the Council.
- 3.3.8 Processes are in place to manage fluctuating call volumes, which are affected by a number of different factors e.g. weather. If it is particularly busy, out of hours staff may be asked to answer e-mails for example. More staff are brought in on Mondays as this is a busy day. Staff at KD are very flexible and if a day is turning out to be particularly quiet then staff may be asked if they would like to go home and come in for more hours on the next day.
- 3.3.9 The current economic situation has led to a 30% rise in Housing Benefit calls, and these can be challenging for staff to handle.

#### 3.4 **Performance Statistics**

- 3.4.1 Kirklees Direct's primary measure of performance is the proportion of offered calls which get answered. This is agreed with services when KD start to take their calls. The targets tend to be 80% for most services, although Housing Repairs is 85% - this does allow for the fact that some people will hang up whilst waiting. Other West Yorkshire authorities have the following targets:
- Bradford – 75%
  - Calderdale – 80%
  - Leeds – 80%
  - Wakefield – 90%
- 3.4.2 The average wait time is 2 minutes although callers often think it is longer as waiting in a queue can create a false perception of time.



3.4.3 Individual staff performance targets are set by the management team. Two years ago a 3% improvement in productivity target was set for officers. Each year the target rises by another 3% (in line with Council efficiency targets) until KD reach the best practice target of 60% in 2013/14. The table below details these targets:

Year	Target Improvement	Target Productivity – call minutes per year per officer	Target Productivity – shown as percentage
2009/10	3%	62,000	53.5%
2010/11	3.1%	64,000	55.5%
2011/12	2.9%	65,920	56.9%
2012/13	2.9%	67,898	58.6%
2013/14	2.3%	69,490	60%

Productivity	
Average for 211 publicly funded Contact Centres in the United Kingdom	Average for Industry Best Practice (Private and Public funded)
50.8%	60%

3.4.4 It is important to recognise that this is a productivity measure, and it would be impossible to achieve 100%. The best practice target of 60% is time that is actually spent on the telephone answering calls. The level of the target takes into account that officers also carry out off-phone work such as answering e-mails, supporting other colleagues, attending 1-2-1s, training, comfort breaks, and the inevitable break between ending one telephone call and answering the next.

3.4.5 A Team Manager is responsible for each service provided and this includes responsibility for training, keeping their team up to date, and meeting with the service on a monthly basis to look at issues such as reducing avoidable contact. At these meetings, issues and problems are discussed, solutions identified, and actions agreed. In some instances it can take a long time to address difficulties satisfactorily, if services are reluctant to heed the messages coming from Kirklees Direct.

3.4.6 Customer feedback is sought and Team Managers listen to a percentage of calls carried out by all officers and assess these on a number of call quality criteria – customer focus, knowledge, call control, and IT system accuracy.

3.4.7 Officer 1-2-1 meetings are held monthly by the Line Manager where performance results are recognised or challenged when there is a gap. Further support or training is identified as appropriate and a plan of action is agreed.

### 3.5 **Looking Forward**

- 3.5.1 Kirklees Direct has a development programme in place, which is focusing on improving performance and productivity. A new telephone system is coming in shortly, which will allow new services and skill sets to be developed – this will take approximately 6-9 months to be embedded. This is an IP (Internet Protocol) telephone system, which can handle limitless volumes of data and therefore offers the potential to handle an ever increasing level of calls and services.
- 3.5.2 If a topic is scriptable then it is possible for KD to process a query – whether this is on telephone or e-mail.
- 3.5.3 Amongst the services that could be offered more widely is a text messaging service. Building Services have recently launched a text messaging service to remind customers of appointments for Housing Repairs. There is considerable further potential for handling text messaging, although SMILE (the Council's Customer Relationship Management software) would need development to implement this.
- 3.5.4 KD could also handle e-mails for more services, although it is recognised that this would potentially need more resources.
- 3.5.5 It is the Panel's view that there are many Council services for which KD could provide an effective service, and it is clear that more services are supportive of using KD. The Panel do not feel that providing general guidance, advice and signposting requires specialist training or skills, and in many cases is entirely scriptable.

#### **Panel Recommendations**

- 1) That the Council evaluate and identify all services whose communication could be handled through Kirklees Direct, and look to implement this.
- 2) That the Council reduce the number of different publicly advertised telephone numbers that are used.
- 3) That the possibility of Kirklees Direct handling more services on behalf of partners, to generate revenue, be actively pursued.