

## **CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**25 September 2024**

### **COUNCILLOR L WITHINGTON - CABINET MEMBER FOR CUSTOMER SERVICES (COMMUNITY OUTREACH)**

For the period July to September 2024

#### **1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.**

Over the summer, the Customer Services team has experienced an increase in customer contacts due to various communications sent to residents regarding Trade Waste invoices and reviews related to:

- Empty Properties
- Council Tax Exemptions
- Council Tax Disregards
- Housing Benefit (HB) Entitlements

The Housing Benefit reviews targeted local pensioners, advising them to contact the Council or risk having their benefits suspended. This led to a high volume of calls from affected and concerned residents. Additionally, we have seen an increase in trade waste enquiries, with customers contacting us regarding their annual invoices and bin collection services.

As a result of this surge in enquiries, we've observed longer call wait times over the summer. In August, the average wait time was 10 minutes and 48 seconds, and we recorded the following customer satisfaction figures for the month:

- 72.4% of customers were satisfied with their ability to contact the Council.
- 92.7% of customer were satisfied with the customer services advisor who dealt with their enquiry.
- 88.7% of customers were satisfied with the advice they were given when they contacted the Council.
- 84.6% of customers expressed overall satisfaction with their experience.

The high satisfaction with advisors and the advice provided suggests that the quality of service remains strong, but the longer wait times are affecting how customers feel about their ability to contact and their overall experience of the

Council.

We continuously review our operations to improve performance. As current service levels are falling short of the expectations set out in our customer charter and standards. To ease pressure on our phone lines and provide a better experience for all, we are reinforcing several existing initiatives.

Given our limited resources, we are focusing on working smarter and more efficiently. As part of this, we are placing greater emphasis on encouraging and educating our residents to use our online services and to contact the Council through more cost-effective methods. This also aligns with our 'Greener Future' objective by reducing unnecessary travel and paper use.

For example, instead of visiting the office to make payments, customers can set up direct debits, use our automated payments line or pay at a local and more accessible Pay Point location.

These options have always been available, but we are now working to highlight them more clearly to ensure that all residents can take advantage of these convenient alternatives.

This will allow us to shift more of our advisors away from face-to-face enquiries, and to focus on call handling. This should help reduce wait times, though we will monitor any impact on in-person services and continue to ensure vulnerable customers will be seen in a timely manner when required.

Additionally, we are reviewing the reasons why customers contact us and evaluating our working practices to improve efficiency. By ensuring that outbound correspondence from various services is aligned and promotes self-service options where possible, we aim to reduce unnecessary pressure on the Customer Service Team. Our goal is to avoid sending communications that unintentionally increase customer queries, especially when multiple departments are contacting customers at the same time. However, this requires input and support from the back-office departments, which is crucial to the success of these efforts.

## **2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.**

The annual canvass will be keeping our advisors very busy in addition to the normal call volumes they deal with. Our colleagues in Electoral Services will be working with us to ensure our residents are able to speak to someone with any issues they may have.

We have identified several opportunities to improve efficiency by implementing self-service forms, and we are actively working with IT and various departments to bring these to fruition. For instance, our collaboration with IT and Building Control led to the development of an online inspection booking form, which has already resulted in nearly a 20% reduction in phone

calls for bookings.

Other planned initiatives include:

- An online Revenue Services contact form that will streamline and automate the processing of enquiries.
- Online Licensing application forms that allow customers to submit identification electronically, reducing the need for office visits.
- Improvements to the process for issuing car parking permits to make it more efficient.

Additionally, we are working with our contact centre developers to implement updates that will enable text messaging and enhance workflow management. These advancements are expected to further improve the efficiency and quality of the service we provide to our residents.

### **3 Meetings attended**

*Please note the list of meetings below covers all areas of Cllr Withington's portfolio not just customer services:*

RCRP workshop (Right care for the right person)  
Carers Voice Norfolk and Waveney Partnership  
Transport East – Rural mobility and the Regions Rail  
Sheringham Little theatre  
Norfolk joint Museums Committee  
Creative Sheringham  
FLASH Steering Group meetings  
Culture and Tourism Feasibility Study  
NN Health and Well being Partnership Meeting (Team )  
Experience Sheringham Network Event  
Early Years Museum Project in North Norfolk – Norfolk Museums Service  
ARC culture and Heritage Conference UEA  
Health and Wellbeing Board and integrated Care Partnership  
Planning Service Improvement Plan – Briefing  
Active Environments Strategy Meeting  
North Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Partnership Meeting  
Victory Home Briefing  
Employability fair  
North Norfolk Dementia Working Group  
Early Help Hun – community Hub  
Rural Support Network RSN Conference Economic Regeneration  
NN Health and Wellbeing Partnership NNHWP – Quarterly Partnership chairs Meeting  
Rural Support Network RSN Conference Affordable Housing  
Rural Support Network RSN Conference – Rural Connectivity  
Dementia Support Positivitea

CAN North Norfolk Referrers Meeting  
NNHWP Older Peoples Working Group  
Rural Support Network RSN Conference – Rural Services and Community  
Services