Agenda Item 10

Leicestershire County Council

ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 NOVEMBER 2024

ADULT SOCIAL CARE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

Purpose of report

1.   The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on progress made with improving the performance, efficiency and effectiveness of the Adult Social Care Customer Service Centre (CSC).

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2.   The Committee received a report on 6 June 2022 which set out a number of recommendations for improvements to the service delivery model following a Peer Review of the CSC conducted on 2 March 2022.

3.   The Adults and Communities Departmental Management Team agreed recommendations for service model improvements in May 2022. It mandated the Adult Social Care Front Door Improvement Project, which sits within the County Council's Customer Programme.

4.   The Customer Programme is one of the County Council's key cross-cutting programmes, as set out in the Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26. It sits within the Strategic Change Portfolio and has a current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) target to deliver £110k in 2024/25, increasing to £640k in 2025/26.

Background

5.   The purpose of the Adult Social Care CSC is to provide the main entry point for people who may require support from the community, professionals and other partner organisations. It triages incoming contacts and seeks to provide resolution through one-off advice and signposting, or through additional adult social care support up to and including the provision of services where eligibility criteria has been met.

6.   Contacts come through to the Department through three main channels; telephone, email and online via a dedicated portal which offers a range of self-service forms for professional and public use as appropriate.

7.   At the time of the Peer Review in March 2022, the CSC service model had been in operation for several years, with the service design based on a two-tier model. Tier 1 support was provided by the Corporate Resources Department and Tier 2 was managed within the Adults and Communities Department.

8. The Improvement Project commenced in spring 2023 with the transfer of Tier 1 staff from the Corporate Resources Department to the Adults and Communities Department to give the Department more control and ownership over the range of improvements needed.

9. The Improvement Project was tasked with addressing several operational and performance issues, including:

    - Inconsistent call answering/missed call rate for customers.
    - Backlog of emails not dealt with.
    - Staff recruitment and retention issues leading to vacancies.
    - High staff turnover and loss of knowledge, expertise in the service.
    - Hand-offs/convoluted customer journey within the service.
    - Unstable resource model to match demand.
    - Conflicting key performance indicators (KPIs) between Corporate Resources and Adults and Communities.
    - Data quality/inconsistent data recording.

10. Additional performance issues were identified in a diagnostic undertaken by the project in October 2023:

    - All channels (inbound calls, email, and online portal contacts) generate considerable outbound call demand, with high levels of no further action at the end.
    - High level of manual effort required to handle and screen emails.
    - High volumes of contacts (across all channels) are about people with allocated social care workers (between 30-40%), rather than enquiries about new people requiring advice and support.
    - Approximately 20% of contacts are inappropriate referrals/not for adult social care.
    - Only 13% of incoming calls result in information given as the primary outcome.
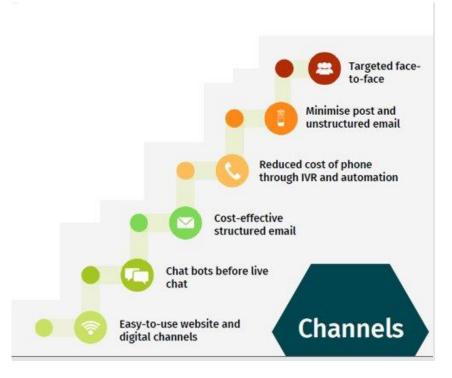
Project activities and achievements

Diagnostic

11. The Project has undertaken a diagnostic comprising of an analysis of available data for telephony, email, and online portal contact. This was used to establish a baseline of average demand activity for the period 1 June 2022 to 31 May 2023. Improvements in performance and service delivery from June 2023 onwards, as referenced in this report, are measured against this baseline.

12. As part of its diagnostic activity, the project undertook a series of workshops and engagement events to identify key issues impacting service delivery and service objectives, including clarification of its role and function, identifying its objectives in relation to the wider strategic objectives of the Adults and Communities Department and the KPI's that would be used to measure improvements in service delivery. Learning from the diagnostic has informed the County Council's wider approach to reviewing customer service, and its draft Customer Experience Strategy (currently out for consultation until 10 November 2024) due to be presented to the Scrutiny Commission on 6 November 2024 for comment and thereafter the Cabinet in December for approval.

13.   The project developed two key themes from the initiation phase; the need for immediate improvements in performance within the existing service model (termed Continuous Improvement) and exploration of potential alternative service models which might be adopted in the future if there was an evidence base pointing to an improvement that could not be realised through the existing model.

14.   Project activity focussed upon Continuous Improvement, commencing with changes to the operational structure which brought the CSC resource into the Adults and Communities Department under a single management structure. Following this, utilising outputs from the diagnostic and supporting workshops, change activity has focused on improving workflows and reducing failure demand to reach a point where true adult social care demand can be quantified.

15.   A design group has been established to support the workstream, this operationally orientated group has been instrumental in supporting the diagnostic and subsequent analysis, developing and trialling initiatives and implementing the Continuous Improvement changes outlined in this report. The design group reports through to the Improvement Project Board, sponsored by the Assistant Director for Access, Integration and Prevention.

Service objectives

16.   The Adult Social Care CSC has evolved over time, responding to a range of service demands and challenges since its original inception. Whilst its ability to flex to operational and organisational requirements is a strength, workshops identified that a lack of clear definition as to what the limits of its role and functions are, leading to the potential to create failure demand.

17.   "Failure demand" refers to any customer demand caused by a failure to do something or do something right for the customer. For example, someone contacting the Adult Social Care CSC where:

   • It is not a social care responsibility, i.e. social care are unable to support/incorrectly signposted.
   • They could not get through to the person or service that would have been better able to provide support (for example, where a person already has an allocated social care worker or team).
   • There is insufficient, accessible information and advice in the public domain to enable them to help themselves.
   • There is a lack of timely follow up from the service that should be supporting them.
   • Customers making multiple and repeat calls due to lack of response or lack of response as promised.

18.   The Department has established internal objectives which serve as drivers for Continuous Improvement, and which will inform future models of delivery in terms of structure and process, which are:

   • Reduce the demand for social care by triaging out those whose needs can be met via the provision of information, advice or signposting to support agencies.

- Provide effective information and advice that prevents or reduces the need for social care whilst promoting wellbeing.
- Enable people requiring help, and organisations, the ability to self-serve at a time that suits them (for those able to do so).
- Provide a timely and proportionate response to initial contacts made.
- Manage risk effectively; prioritise the most urgent cases.
- Get people through to the right place first time, with minimal hand-offs wherever possible.
- Capture relevant information that enables faster/most cost-effective commissioning decisions by other teams in Adult Social Care.
- Provide proactive and predictive customer insight to improve the customer journey and departmental efficiency.

19. The project worked with Adult Social Care stakeholders to define a set of strategic outcomes which underpinned the role and function and service objectives. These outcomes, expressed as 'I statements', were agreed in March 2024 as follows:

- I can get through to the right person first time, someone that can help me get an appropriate resolution to my query.
- I receive information and advice that helps me get the support I need.
- The advice I receive enables me to manage my wellbeing, preventing or delaying my need for support from adult social care.
- I can contact Adult Social Care at a time and in a way that best suits my circumstances.

20. The project follows the principles of the Council's overarching Customer Programme in terms of ensuring that customers are routed to the most appropriate and cost-effective channels across the range of demand-types the service receives. The diagram below illustrates this approach as a stepped hierarchy of service response via website, email, portal forms, chat bots and live interaction. This approach aims to ensure that the Authority's staffing resource is properly prioritised for those customers who most need it.

Amalgamated workforce

21. The newly established Adult Social Care team has resulted in operational improvements, as well as achieving a greater level of stability in terms of workforce recruitment and retention, including:

- Improved recruitment, induction, and training.
- Improved retention and reductions in staff turnover.
- Adoption of OneNote information pack and Joy app.
- Shared meetings with Tier 1 Advisors and Tier 2 Community Support Workers, daily planning meetings and improved supervision, leading to greater knowledge and working practices more aligned with the social care profession.
- Improved morale by allowing greater autonomy within individual roles and across the team.

Performance

22. A range of performance measures were established, reflecting minimum service levels and requirement for improvement for both the customer experience and operational effectiveness of receiving, triaging and actioning contacts into the Department.

23. A performance dashboard has been created. This supports reporting to the Project Board whilst also providing the business with a performance overview on a month-by-month basis. A snapshot from September 2024 is attached to this report as an Appendix. All performance is measured against baseline data taken from the Diagnostic period (1 June 2022-31 May 2023).

24. Key performance areas to note (as at September 2024) are:

Performance Metric	Baseline (June 2022–May 2023)	Current (end Sep 2024)	Target or direction of travel from last month
Reduction in overall monthly contacts (indicates reduced failure demand)	10,091	8,319	**17.5% ↓**
Improved call handling rate	60.8%	86.1%	**Target 80%**
Call queue time	19:01 mins	06:04 mins	**Target 10:00**
Calls relating to people who are allocated to a worker or team	35%	29%	**Target: Reduce** (see paragraph 29)

25. In line with ambitions set out in the draft Customer Experience Strategy, the project is seeking to build a culture that is aligned with good customer experience, making it easier for customers to give feedback, and finding ways to regularly review and update the service based on the feedback received. As part of this, the programme undertook a review of customer service satisfaction across its highest customer contact areas during July and August of this year. Adult Social Care customers were

targeted through a text message sent out to customers who had been in contact during early July.

26. In summary, 28% of respondents were Adult Social Care customers (84 individuals in total). When asked how satisfied they were with the level of customer service they had received from the County Council, 61% stated fair to high levels of satisfaction,. Reasons for satisfaction were associated with:

- Responsiveness (contact answered quickly).
- Taking the enquiry seriously.
- Kind, patient and supportive staff.
- Efficient, for example, referrals made same day.

27. 39% of Adult Social Care customers reported some degree of dissatisfaction due to:

- Telephony options not clear/relevant for their enquiry.
- Not easy enough to speak to a person.
- Length of time to respond beyond the initial contact, such as, when referred on to any team (a non-CSC issue).
- Reference to certain social care teams not answering calls (a non-CSC issue).

Current initiatives

28. The diagnostic identified that a significant proportion of telephone contacts received related to people who were already known to Adult Social Care and were either allocated to an individual worker or team. This accounted for 35% of calls for the baseline snapshot. Actions to reduce this volume have included:

- Introduction of an allocated worker online look up tool, searchable by a social care ID (LAS) number or NHS number.
- SMS messaging to advise individuals that they have an allocated worker.
- Reworking of the Telephony Call routing (IVR) to direct public and professional contacts away from advisor resource and to the look-up tool for direct access to their allocated worker where applicable; freeing up lines for those who still need to speak to the CSC.
- Supporting communications across the Department to ensure that staff are providing full contact details, including message taking and duty numbers in communications to people.
- Revised webpage to publicise the look-up tool.
- Introduction of a standardised email footer for all ASC staff to include full contact details and working hours.

29. Most of these actions have been implemented since February 2024, however, whilst performance has improved in this area, calls for people already allocated to a worker or team remain at around 29% of the total volume. This is recognised as "failure demand" and represents significant effort in resource hours (equating to approximately 8,000 calls per year).

30. Further work is being undertaken to reduce this through enabling customers to search for Allocation to team, utilising the social care ID (LAS)/NHS number search tool, as well as the potential to explore other, lower cost effective ways to identify and

handle calls for allocated workers, looking at both technology capabilities and/or other staffing models.

31. The Adult Social Care CSC receives approximately 29,000 email contacts per annum. Approximately half of these are from East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS), Police and Primary Care with the remainder coming from a wide range of sources including social care providers, other professionals, members of the public and internally generated contacts.

32. The email channel is most effective when contacts are presented in a consistent and structured format. Unstructured emails, utilising free text or attachments, require significant resource to interpret, query, log, and triage to a conclusion. A significant portion of these contacts could be more effectively triaged through the online channel (portal), resulting in reduced outbound calls (to clarify information) and re-keying into the social care information system (LAS).

33. Following analysis of email demand, it is proposed that access to this channel is restricted to EMAS, Police and Primary Care for a trial period. All other demand will be directed to the appropriate online portal form or telephony channel as appropriate. It has been agreed that a four-week trial be established, commencing in November 2024, and data collected to test whether this results in the anticipated reduction in resource/effort and to ensure that there are no disbenefits to customer or service.

34. In 2023, robotic process automation was applied to the email inbox, this activity has seen a "Bot" triage the inbox for incident reporting emails, and seeking to match the details within the email to records within LAS; this has helped to reduce risk relating to open cases as incident reports submitted are now processed the same day removing any process delays and creating a "safer" service.

35. Additional work is being undertaken with the Integrated Care Board to engage with Primary Care representatives with a view to making changes to the current way in which emails are received and moving to a more structured, standardised approach. Meetings are also being held with representatives of Leicestershire Police to investigate a redesign of police referrals.

36. The CSC provides a triaging function for a range of contacts coming into the Department. A large portion of these contacts will be resolved within the CSC (advice and signposting, temporary changes to existing packages, arranging respite etc). Other contacts are triaged, partially worked, and transferred to appropriate teams in the care pathway, often providing added value of contact taking information gathering where those teams have limited resource (such as Safeguarding).

37. For some contacts, particularly relating to assessment of need or the provision of reablement, there is the potential for duplication of effort and avoidable transfers between staff and organisations. To better understand the opportunity and scope for improvement in this area, a trial was undertaken from 19 August to 13 September 2024, during which a Home First Team directly triaged the online request for assessment (portal) form. Data collected is being used to analyse time/effort, and outcomes in comparison to a CSC baseline to identify any difference/benefits.

Resource Implications

38. The project was tasked with a review of the CSC delivery model for Adult Social Care against the specific option to amalgamate the cost resource of the current operating model under a single managed cost-centre within the Adults and Communities Department.

39. The proposed solution was to implement a structural change to bring the Tier 1 (Corporate Resources) and Tier 2 (Adults and Communities) teams under one management structure within Adult Social Care. This solution has enabled better utilisation of the whole resource pool. Resources can be flexed across the whole team to where they are needed dependent of demand. In turn, it will enable greater ongoing flexibility in how Adult Social Care recruit and use the available pooled budget to put resources into the right place.

40. The amalgamation of the two teams within the Adult Social Care management structure, with an agreed budget allocation, was achieved in summer 2023: The gross CSC annual expenditure budget is approximately £1.7m (or £1.4m net of Better Care Fund (BCF)/Improved BCF income).

41. The project is currently determining what contribution to the County Council's MTFS financial gap, this project can make. This is in the context of Continuous Improvement to ensure changes are sustained and embedded, in an environment where there is continued growth in requests for adult social care and support.

42. The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the contents of this report.

Timetable for Decisions

43. The draft Customer Experience Strategy is currently out for consultation until 10 November 2024 and will be presented to the Scrutiny Commission for comment on 6 November 2024.

44. The draft Customer Experience Strategy will then be presented to the Cabinet for approval in December 2024, subject to consultation responses being fully analysed and relevant changes reflected in the document.

Conclusions

45. The Committee are invited to comment on the contents of the report, noting the detailed activity underway, and the progress made so far in making considerable improvements to the experience of Adult Social Care customers.

Background papers

Report to Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 6 June 2022 – Peer Review of Customer Services Centre – https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=6840 – item 13

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2022-26

Draft Customer Experience Strategy

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

46.   None.

Equality Implications

47.   An equality impact assessment has been undertaken for the wider Customer Experience Strategy; any action undertaken within this project is in line with the direction set out in that Strategy.

48.   Any changes undertaken within the Adult Social Care front door is under the premise that reducing demand is targeted at addressing failure demand; reducing demand that is not for the front door, freeing up capacity for those people that need to contact the CSC. There are no proposals to remove contact channels, the focus is on diverting customers who can contact us via other channels so that the telephone is available for vulnerable customers that do not have support to access other channels.

Human Rights Implications

49.   There are no human rights implications arising from the content in this report.

Appendix

Performance Report (snapshot from September 2024)

Officers to Contact

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