People Select Committee - Review of Digital Optimisation

Report on the use of digital technology within Care for Your Area Services

Introduction

Care for Your Area Services (CFYA) provide a number of frontline, operational activities which are accessed by many of our residents and include the following functions:

- Refuse and Recycling Collection
- Street Cleansing, including Arboriculture and Cemeteries
- Grounds Maintenance
- Highway and Asset safety Inspections
- Community Transport
- Parks and Open Spaces
- Civic Enforcement
- One Call
- CCTV and Security Services
- Trading Standards
- Registration and Bereavement Services
- Markets

Whilst these services are varied in their nature and generate a significant level of customer contact, the main CFYA services revolve around waste and recycling collection, grounds maintenance and street cleansing.

The use of technology across our services is of great importance and the focus has been directed to the increased use of technology to mitigate the loss of resources linked to savings reviews i.e. to ensure that staff are utilising their time effectively, whilst also making it simpler for our customers to access our services, especially as many of these services are extremely popular with our residents.

Levels of Demand

Care for Your Area provides universal services which are accessed by nearly every resident in the Borough at one time or another. Many of these services are managed via our Customer Services team through service centre visits, e-mails or online reports, although many other requests are made directly to us from Elected Members.

As an indication of volumes of requests, our service centre received nearly 40,000 calls for CFYA last year, more than 4,000 face-to-face visits, 4,000 e-mails and 8,000 self-serve requests. This is lower than in previous years and the table below provides an illustration of contact since 2012/13.

	Service Area					Care for Your Area				
Annual										
	Volumes					Percentages				
	Calls	F2F	EMail	Self Serve	Total Contacts	Calls	F2F	EMail	Self Serve	Total
2012/13	44,228	5,957	6,156	1,607	57,948	76.3%	10.3%	10.6%	2.8%	100%
2013/14	46,187	6,404	5,716	2,394	60,701	76.1%	10.6%	9.4%	3.9%	100%
2014/15	40,651	5,716	6,438	3,373	56,178	72.4%	10.2%	11.5%	6.0%	100%
2015/16	41,785	7,796	5,401	3,948	58,930	70.9%	13.2%	9.2%	6.7%	100%
2016/17	42,285	4,768	4,907	5,034	56,994	74.2%	8.4%	8.6%	8.8%	100%
2017/18	39,739	4,202	4,198	8,373	56,512	70.3%	7.4%	7.4%	14.8%	100%
2018/19*	12,056	1,669	1,521	3,646	18,892	63.8%	8.8%	8.1%	19.3%	100%

2018/19 stats above are up to end of July 2018

As can be seen in the illustration above, there has been a gradual channel shift with telephone calls and face to face interactions decreasing, with an increase in self- serve requests.

Many of the requests that are received relate to services which are either available online or via the website, e.g. collection days or to book a bulky waste collection service. Whilst an ongoing improvement in technology should always be high on our list of priorities to allow more self-serve requests, it is also important to effectively engage and communicate these channels as we can never take it for granted that residents knows these options exist.

Whilst today's technology can be adopted to make the customer journey smoother and more enjoyable, the need for effective communication of these options is also just as important as we can't expect our customers to either access online forms if they don't know that they exist, or use the website for information if it's not attractive to look at and easy to navigate through.

Current Technology

Care for Your Area was an early adopted of the current iteration of the Civica System (formerly Flare) and is the system that is used for the majority of back office functions within the service area. The system was adopted in April 2002 and allows service requests to be logged and allocated to an appropriate Officer for investigation. The system can be used to generate management reports and is also used to tag other information to service requests such as job sheets, documents and images.

To allow the required connectivity with other systems e.g. Lagan, some investment was made in the early days to allow customer service staff taking services requests to log onto Lagan

which then populated the Civica system automatically and allowed back office staff to pick up, investigate and respond to the request.

This model is still in place today although there has been ongoing developments to the process as new services have come online, software upgrades have been released and changes have been made due to service changes.

We have also provided additional information on our website which has reduced levels of calls asking when waste and recycling will be collected. For the last 5 years, our residents have been able to log onto our website to check their normal collection day for waste and recycling collections which, by making this information available and up to date, allows residents to check themselves without the need to make a call or send an e-mail.

Other areas worthy of note in terms of the use of technology in CFYA include:

GIS / Maps@Stockton

This is used regularly by many staff to check on land ownership, pinpoint specific locations when dealing with requests as well as providing an asset register for a range of assets that the Council maintain such as bins, road gulleys, light columns and salt bins to name just a few.

Handheld units

Our ongoing use of this technology has been extremely useful in increasing performance and efficiency in many of our frontline areas. Investment has been made in the last three years to allow seamless integration of the Civica system into a handheld unit which allow staff to access and update requests whilst they are on the ground. This required some development work and much of the functionality that we have didn't exist before the project commenced so, as has often been the case in the last decade, Stockton has been pioneers with some of the developments that are now available on our handheld units.

We successfully use handhelds for staff in our Street Cleansing teams as well as Civic Enforcement Service and there is an ongoing programme of review to identify other areas where further implementation would provide an improved level of service. The outcomes of using handhelds has made the process of dealing with customer requests much smoother as the information is available on the unit without the member of staff having to come back to the depot or take a call whilst trying to deal with other tasks that day.

Future Plans

We are committed to exploring the use of technology wherever possible across the service, whether this be the procurement of a bespoke software system to plot locations in our cemeteries or manage the music system in what will be our new Crematorium in 2019. The use of handheld technology is at the forefront of our plans and work is currently ongoing at present to adopt new handhelds within our Highway Maintenance teams which will allow a more efficient highway safety inspection process as well as generation of work tickets which, pending completion of the process, will then allow immediate transfer to a highway operative handheld which provides efficiency savings over current processes.

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Care for Your Area, and indeed all of Community Services, are committed to using technology wherever appropriate and where efficiencies can be obtained or service improvements delivered.