

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE,
HELD ON THURSDAY, 3RD DECEMBER, 2020 AT 7.30 PM**

Present:	Councillors M Stephenson (Chairman), Scott (Vice-Chairman), Allen, Barry, Bray, Codling, Griffiths, Harris and Morrison
In Attendance:	Ian Davidson (Chief Executive), Anastasia Simpson (Assistant Director (Partnerships)), Keith Simmons (Head of Democratic Services and Elections), Mark Westall (Head of Customer and Commercial Services), John Higgins (Head of IT and Corporate Resilience), Carol Magnus (Acting Head of People, Performance & Projects), Karen Hardes (IT Training Officer), Emma Haward (Leadership Support Assistant) and Matt Cattermole (Communications Assistant)

103. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

An apology was received from Councillor Morrison (with Councillor Fowler substituting).

104. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on Monday 16 November 2020 were approved as a correct record and were then signed by the Chairman.

105. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

106. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 38

On this occasion no Councillor had submitted notice of a question.

107. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE. - A.1 - UPDATE ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF DIGITAL SERVICES

1. *'My Tendring'* Customer Self-Service Portal

The Committee heard that the application (App) purchased to provision and deliver the Council's My Tendring self-service offering was the Firmstep product. During 2019 the Firmstep product had been purchased by international application providers Grannicus.

The My Tendring portal works had been jointly developed and delivered through digital consultants Intergence and Amido, who had worked side-by-side with the Council's Customer Services Team and IT Team members - a mix of system support and website support IT specialists. From the outset of the Digital Transformation programme the adopted ethos had been one of external consultants working alongside and 'up-skilling' in-house IT specialists. However, as the programme had developed and evolved over time, likewise, the Council's in-house application developer skills had matured.

It was reported to Members that the Council's in-house Developer Team continued to go from strength to strength, in part due to hands-on engagement with the programme and direct consultant experience learning and in part due to benefiting from formal academic training through collaboration between the Head of IT & Resilience and the Human Resources Development Manager. By utilising the Government's Modern Apprenticeship scheme: 1 fte IT Systems Specialist had achieved a part-time IT under graduate degree (with honours), 2 fte were in their final year studying for a part-time IT under graduate degree (completion in 2020) and 1 fte had just commenced an Open University programming under graduate degree.

Utilising that new in-house Developer resource and new 'low code' Microsoft Power Applications the ongoing *My Tending Portal* works ethos had evolved to further optimise transformation efficiency and best use of resources, as followed:

1. Works undertaken solely by in-house Council App Developers and customer service experts working with relevant council service experts.
2. Works, as above, but with limited external consultant's support utilising Intergence experts.
3. Works delivered predominantly through Intergence consultants based upon a 'lift and shift then documented hand-over' ethos.

The Committee was directed to the report written by the Head of Customer and Commercial Services, outlining the progress of the *My Tending* Customer Access Portal from a customer services perspective.

The Members heard that the Council had approximately 198 different services to re-engineer and implement as fully self-service *My Tending* portal solutions. That work was anticipated to be ongoing for the next 3-4 years.

However, the digital transformation work had already started to fundamentally change the way the Council delivered its services and was already starting to change council service structures internally. Online self-service was increasingly the service choice for residents and customers with online digital capabilities. For those who chose to contact the Council using more traditional methods telephony was their primary contact method.

The Committee heard that the Covid-19 pandemic was a major factor for change with respect to how our residents and customers (and councillors and staff) engaged with the Council and our online and telephony contact volumes reflected that 'channel-shift'. It was not unreasonable to claim that the Council would have struggled to provide the level of services that it had continued to deliver throughout the COVID-19 pandemic had it not undertaken its Digital Transformation programme.

The Digital Transformation resultant in-house Developer Team and their key digital contributions to council transformation and COVID-19 business continuity warranted a separate section, namely -

1a) In-House IT Developer Team

Members heard that as the in-house IT Developer Team technical capabilities, knowledge and confidence had grown the Team were increasingly demonstrating their abilities in applying technology to transform Council services. The IT Developer Teams

reputation for quickly providing in-house solutions to existing and newly emerging problems was growing.

Based around the Digital Transformation suite of services and related applications, the Developer Team's digital transformational work had included:

- ✓ working with Human Resources to quickly develop COVID-19 databases to record and manage staff redeployment and staff shielding/ self-isolating – estimated cost avoidance £12,000.
- ✓ working with the Council's COVID-19 Shielding Team to quickly create new applications to contact, record and manage (CRM) resident shielding support and connection with local volunteer services – estimated cost avoidance £8,000.
- ✓ the development of a COVID-19 vulnerable persons mapping tool – estimated cost avoidance £17,500.
- ✓ the creation of a new council enforcement application to better record and manage enforcement case actions and provide a 'single council view' of enforcement – estimated cost avoidance £1,100 per on boarded service.
- ✓ the development of a Northgate compatible replacement electronic document records management system - Northgate had quoted £110,650 capital and £34,500 revenue costs.
- ✓ on-going development of an IDOX replacement corporate electronic document records management system that will reduce corporate costs by £24,000 per annum.
- ✓ the development of a new application for scanning/ stock taking for engineering services - estimated cost avoidance of £17,500.
- ✓ the development of a new Tree Preservation application – estimated cost avoidance £8,000.
- ✓ the development of a Memorial bench and Play Areas fault management application – estimated cost avoidance £6,000.

2. Cloud Migration

It was reported to Members that throughout each of the Council's two Digital Transformation programmes of works (2013 – 2017 and the current 2017 – 2020 programme) a key strategic digital design thematic had been that of delivering/ further enhancing council digital business continuity.

A key strand of that work had been the migration of council applications from ageing on-site hardware to 'pay as you go' hardware in a Microsoft data centre(s) called the Microsoft Azure Platform. The Azure Platform was the platform of choice for a range of government sectors and partners that included the Ministry of Defence, a number of NHS bodies and at a more local level all of the Essex local authorities.

Members heard that the Council had evolved its systems architecture to reflect staff and councillors accessing Apps and data 'in the Cloud'. The Cloud also gave significant additional cyber security functionality which had further strengthened our cyber security defences.

That had been first put to the test when Tendring had been snowbound for 48 hours during the '*Beast from the East*' in March 2018 when around 290 officers had been forced to work remotely from home.

The Committee was aware that nobody could have predicted COVID-19 nor the effective closure of all council offices and a forced shift from “*work flexibly from home or office*” to a UK wide lock-down and “*Work from home if you can*”. It was undeniable that the Digital Transformation Cloud-first and Cloud-migration strategy had significantly enhanced the Council’s business continuity and had enabled the Council to deliver services throughout COVID-19 without any significant IT service outages.

The Council’s Cloud migration programme was predicted to take 2 years and over the period this had extended by around 10-12 weeks with an estimated completion date of June 2020. However, COVID-19 demands had required an urgent and sustained re-prioritisation of resources resulting in migration delays to the final 10% of applications.

The Committee was also informed that whilst the programme was on track from a budget perspective it was significantly behind schedule from a final completion perspective. The migration of the last few applications would not be complete until early in 2021.

That delay had not caused any operational issues of note with the last 10% of applications and the Council was benefiting significantly from having 90% of its applications in the Cloud, those included:

- ✓ Enhanced business continuity, resilience and data backup e.g. seamlessly moving from supporting office-based staff to staff operating effectively and efficiently from home during the pandemic.
- ✓ Using cloud-based Microsoft Skype and Teams to maintain operations and quickly introduce new ones e.g. virtual video staff meetings, committee and full council meetings.
- ✓ A move from periodic large capital IT server hardware outlay to more manageable ‘pay as you go’ monthly hardware revenue rental charges.
- ✓ A significant ‘carbon neutral’ reduction in on-site IT hardware power usage.
- ✓ The real-time ability to flexibly and quickly ‘spin-up’ additional Cloud hardware to deliver new services e.g. a new server for the Council’s COVID-19 activities; HR databases, Shielding databases and reactively in-house developed applications.
- ✓ Cloud efficiencies estimated at between 1 and 1.5fte with these resources re-deployed in supporting Members’ IT related works, additional remote worker support requirements and in Developer Team activities.

3. Tendring Leisure and Tourism App

The Committee was informed that the Leisure and Tourism App had been delivered in 2019 slightly under budget and with both the Prince’s Theatre and wider Tendring activities being promoted. The App had only just started to positively benefit our leisure and tourism industry (Theatre income was up and growing) before COVID-19 hit.

The in-house IT Developer Team were re-using the existing application code whilst re-engineering the App in readiness for the 2021 season in order to not only promote leisure events but to create a more holistic suite of Tendring visitor information linked to digital mapping functionality, including:

- ✓ Car Park locations.

- ✓ Public toilet locations.
- ✓ Hospitals and public service delivery points.
- ✓ Linking real-time Council Beach Patrol visitor advice regarding beach crowd numbers and to generate a COVID-19 RAG beach visitor number status.
- ✓ As the App evolved further looking at the potential to add an area for businesses to advertise and promote themselves and any special offers etc.

The App would be supported in-house by the Council's IT Developer Team.

4. Re-Design of the Council's Data (and voice) Network

The Committee heard that office transformation works were at an advanced stage. From a digital perspective the Council had taken the opportunity to completely re-cable the Council's offices and further improve the office network resilience by creating a 'fibre ring' around the Town Hall (as opposed to areas served by separate cables).

At the same time the Council had further optimised its WiFi network and adopted a 'staff working wirelessly at all times' strategy. That had enabled staff (and councillors) to seamlessly move between locations with their devices. It had further enhanced staff and Councillors access to digital information at all times with a step-change reduction in reliance upon paper and printing.

It was reported to Members that the Council had also worked through an Essex Online Partnership (EOLP) joint initiative to roll-out GovRoam to each of the Council's offices. That meant that as and when things returned to a more normal working situation, officers and councillors would be able to use their Tending user ID and password to log into any participating GovRoam partner's WiFi network just as if they worked at home or at a Tending office location. Almost all of the EOLP partners intended to roll-out GovRoam and it was already available at Essex County Council and Thurrock, Maldon and Basildon council offices.

5. New Contact Centre Application (Five9s Application)

Members heard that as briefly outlined previously, Mitel had decided to stop supporting their contact centre's integration with Microsoft Skype (& Teams) telephony. With the Council's unified communications strategy (voice & voice recording/ video calling & virtual meetings/ email, instant messaging/ calendar/ availability & presence) firmly embedded and mature around Microsoft products the Council had had to replace its Mitel contact centre.

Based upon the Council's customer service team's functionality specifications, available budget and Cloud-first strategy, the FIVE9s product had been selected and purchased. The product had an excellent reputation for service, reliability and value for money and was completely Cloud-based.

The product was a relatively new one from a Council perspective and Officers were still learning about its functionality and architecture. Shortly after it became operational (February 2020) the COVID-19 pandemic situation had gripped the UK with resultant IT and information governance resourcing pressures across a whole range of existing, new, emergency and urgent Council activities.

The Committee was informed that the Council's contact centre had experienced a significant increase in call volumes that had resulted in an uncharacteristic drop in levels of customer service, caused by call congestion e.g. insufficient telephone lines to cope with escalating demand together with insufficient staff resources. Reactive remedial action had been taken and the situation had been resolved. Additionally, the Council was gaining a better understanding of the Five9s infrastructure and reporting and was moving from a position of reactive to pro-active reporting/ understanding.

It was noted that Essex County Council had just committed to migrating from their Mitel contact centre to emulate the same FIVE9s technology as Tendring. TDC Officers were assisting them through that process.

It was also noted that the Council currently had a hybrid application mix whereby the majority of officers and all Councillors were using Microsoft Skype and a minority of officers using (or testing) Microsoft Teams.

This hybrid mix was making fault-resolution extremely complex and there had been reports of some calls not properly transferring to/ from the contact centre. It was therefore imperative that the Council moved from that hybrid situation and migrate fully to Microsoft Teams as quickly as could be achieved and in any event by late January 2021 in order to avoid a large and unnecessary license renewal cost.

6. Members' IT

It was reported to the Committee that with Councillors having varying degrees of IT expertise the Council had identified an emerging picture whereby:

- × Some councillors were increasingly becoming disengaged - losing the ability to fully/ effectively engage with the range of digital information and services that the council operated.
- × Some councillors were struggling with their IT and asking Council Officers to fix their personal equipment – potentially creating an insurance liability issue.
- × The diversity of different Councillor Applications, all at different versions, was causing Councillors to experience different IT problems causing unnecessary stress and pressures for all concerned.

The emerging digital picture was therefore perceived as an opportunity to assist councillors in their community leadership role. Through providing each councillor with a standard, managed device backed up by IT training and supported via the Council's IT service desk intended benefits and improvements were, and remain, as followed:

- ✓ To assist Councillors to improve their efficiency and access to stored digital information.
- ✓ Strengthen cybersecurity (and cybersecurity awareness) and further reduce any possibility of a data breach and Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) data loss.
- ✓ Enhance Councillors' digital engagement.
- ✓ Enhance mobile working and flexible working capabilities and thereby work/ life balance
- ✓ Further reduce reliance (and the costs) of printed information.

- ✓ Councillor IT equipment standardisation would in turn enable officers council-wide to standardise the range services that they provide which would achieve efficiency savings for both Councillors and Officers.

Members heard how the strategy had been to purchase high quality Microsoft Surface Go tablets during 2019 and at the beginning of 2020 for Councillors to undertake their council-related duties. With some Councillors struggling with the tablet screen size Officers had additionally offered Councillors: connection hubs, full size keyboards, 24" screens, cabled mouse. This gave Councillors a blend of home-based digital access with the ability to go mobile with their tablets when required.

As a result of COVID-19 and an emerging understanding as to its longevity, officers had become conversant with new face-to-face restrictive working arrangements and the use of virtual Microsoft Skype meetings had become a key 'new working norm'. Likewise, virtual meeting MS Skype capabilities had needed to be extended to Councillors to enable them to perform their duties, which was not an intended original use of the previously purchased tablets.

The Committee was informed that the Council now had a pressing financial, technological and support need to migrate fully from Microsoft Skype to Microsoft Teams. Teams offered a range of additional meeting business functionality benefits over Skype but it was far more demanding in terms of computing processing power. As such, it was close to the limit and was very likely to become beyond the processing capabilities of councillor tablets as Microsoft invested in further enhancing Teams functionality.

With a view to giving Councillors the very best experience possible during multi-party video conference calls, the decision had now been taken to allocate funding to quickly replace Councillors' tablets with the same Lenovo laptops that officers used. Those laptops were tried and tested, high specification devices that had enabled officers to perform the full range of council business demands.

The Committee was also informed in addition, and based upon approaches from several senior Councillors, that providing Members with a council tablet had unintentionally been seen as an 'imposition' by some Councillors, despite Officers' best intentions. Likewise, Officers had now acknowledged Councillors' desire to be increasingly involved in their use of digital technology and how they worked and engaged with council business.

With engagement firmly in mind but reflecting the need to standardise equipment across Officers and Councillors as far as was possible, Councillors would now be asked on an individual basis whether they would benefit more from having a smaller, lighter more portable 13" council laptop, or a larger 15" laptop with a bigger screen and near full-size keyboard. Council provided ancillary devices – keyboards, screens, mice, hubs – would continue to be offered to Councillors and those who already had them would be able to connect and continue to use them with their replacement laptops.

It was the intention to engage with Councillors and roll-out the new laptops during December and early January. Following a period of Microsoft Teams training on virtual meetings the Council would migrate to Microsoft Teams on or around January 18th 2020.

6a. Members' Tablets and 'Laptops for Children' Re-use

The Committee heard that once returned to the Council, the tablets would be donated to the 'Laptops for Children' re-use programme to benefit local Tendring school children without access to IT.

After some discussion it was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson, seconded by Councillor Scott and **RESOLVED** that the Cabinet be informed that this Committee endorses the principle that Councillors be consulted on the IT kit that is to be provided to them to fulfil their roles as Members.

108. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE. - A.2 - UPDATE ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF DIGITAL CUSTOMER SERVICES

It was reported to the Committee that the Customer Service provision at Tendring District Council had undergone significant change in the last two years. Three Teams from different services had been brought together to create the physical customer service team and a new reception area had been created at Pier Avenue in order to give residents a welcoming place to visit. The reception area included a number of digital kiosks whereby customers could self-serve if they chose.

The digital offering for customers had also seen significant changes. Originally online services had been delivered through forms that then needed massive intervention from back office staff. They were only useful for gathering information and were not a true end-to-end digital solution. Now customers had just one place they needed to visit online, 'My Tendring', where the aim was to allow customers to complete transactions at the time of their choosing from the comfort of their own homes, without the need for any intervention from TDC staff. It was the very fact that the Council had made such progress in that direction that had stood Tendring in good stead during the Covid-19 pandemic when our residents had been more insecure and the number of incoming enquiries had more than doubled.

The Members heard that although work on the My Tendring platform would be ongoing as the Council continued to add services and processes, it had already generated savings in terms of Officer time.

The Members also heard that during 2015 it had become clear that there was an ever increasing demand from customers that TDC should endeavour to provide a myriad of services online, 24 hours a day. That would benefit both those customers that worked and so could not access other customer contact channels, and those that preferred the convenience of digital access. Therefore a Channel Shift Strategy had been devised and adopted by the Council on 22 January 2016 with the statement that:

"In order to meet the needs of customers, Tendring District Council had to provide services that were:

- *Easily accessible*
- *Simple to use*
- *Streamlined*

- *Convenient*
- *Cost effective*
- *Robust”*

In essence the Channel Shift Strategy was the roadmap to delivering services with little or no interaction from TDC staff.

The Committee was informed that in early 2016 the process of looking at the range of options available to TDC began. It was evident that there also needed to be a Customer Service Strategy that would inform the way the Council interacted with its customers; though the Council would not stop providing other contact channels such as telephone and face-to-face.

The Committee heard that the Customer Service Strategy had been adopted on 16th December 2016 with the vision statement:

“Tendring District Council will deliver an excellent service to all of its customers, both internal and external, from all of its points of access and across multiple channels. Staff will be well trained and motivated, and excellence will be measured against key performance indicators”.

To create the Customer Service team to handle telephone, email and face-to-face enquiries the Council had drawn together members of Environmental Administration, Housing Repairs, Telephony and the Revenues & Benefits front office. External consultants, Intergence, had been employed to further assess the marketplace with regards to self-service portals. After an evaluation the product from Firmsteps had been selected.

Members were informed that the Digital Transformation project, which included the Customer Service element, had been initiated on 16th February 2018 *“to provide greater online services for customers, making it easier and more efficient for them to interact with the council”*, and the My Tendring self-service platform had been installed during August of the same year.

The Transformation project set out a number of key deliverables that had included:

- Environmental services report-it functionality (missed bins, garden waste)
- Council tax enquiries
- Benefits enquiries
- Licensing applications and renewals

It was reported to Members that the Customer Service project and the funding, originally £306,000, had been broken up into three smaller pieces (worktrains) which would pause for a “time for learning reflection” between each phase.

Worktrain 1 = focussed on understanding the Firmsteps platform, looked at some of the component blocks that would be in many of the processes such as calendar integration and payments, creating the My Tendring accounts, and beginning to develop the garden waste process.

Worktrain 2 = continued those themes and the Council began to use their newly learnt in-house capabilities to create more simple forms and processes.

Worktrain 3 = which was nearing completion, would see the final key services delivered, and in addition, a suite of analytical and reporting tools. Those reporting tools were not originally in the scope but it became clear that they would provide a valuable insight into customer behaviour and service performance. The cost for this extra piece of work would be £35,000 and would come out of the original budget.

It was reported to Members that the Covid-19 pandemic had had a detrimental effect on the Customer Service element of the Transformation project. Timeframes had slipped as valuable IT resources had been refocussed onto projects with more immediate need such as the track and trace power app. In the meantime though the team members had continued to learn, and to release more useful forms for customers (both external and internal). In terms of deliverables 74% of the original specification that was detailed at inception had been completed.

Current situation – My Tending portal

The Committee was informed that over the past 18 months the Council had seen telephone calls into the Customer Service centre rise dramatically. Firstly in the summer of 2019, with the roll-out of 70,000 wheelie bins and the associated changes in the recycling service and then more latterly with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. Undoubtedly the option for many residents to use the My Tending self-serve portal had been of great benefit to them.

The screenshot shows the 'My Tending' portal for Tending District Council. At the top, there is a dark header with 'My Tending' on the left and 'Welcome to My Tending Barbara Pole' on the right. Below the header is the 'Tending District Council' logo. A navigation bar contains four buttons: 'Home', 'MyTending Services', 'My Requests', and 'Report it'. The main content area is titled 'My Tending' with the subtitle 'Access council services and get updates on issues you've raised and more...'. Below this is a grid of 12 service icons, each with a label: Benefits, Community, Council and Democracy, Council tax and business rates, Crime, Housing, Jobs, Leisure and Tourism, Licensing, Planning, Rubbish and recycling, and Travel and parking.

On the portal, the resident could find access to a whole range of other services in one place as shown above. It made it very easy for the customer to navigate and that had proved to be very popular.

Self-serve stats dated end October 2020 (since May 2019)

Customers with a My Tendring account: 10524 (24.2% of all Tendring households if one account per household).

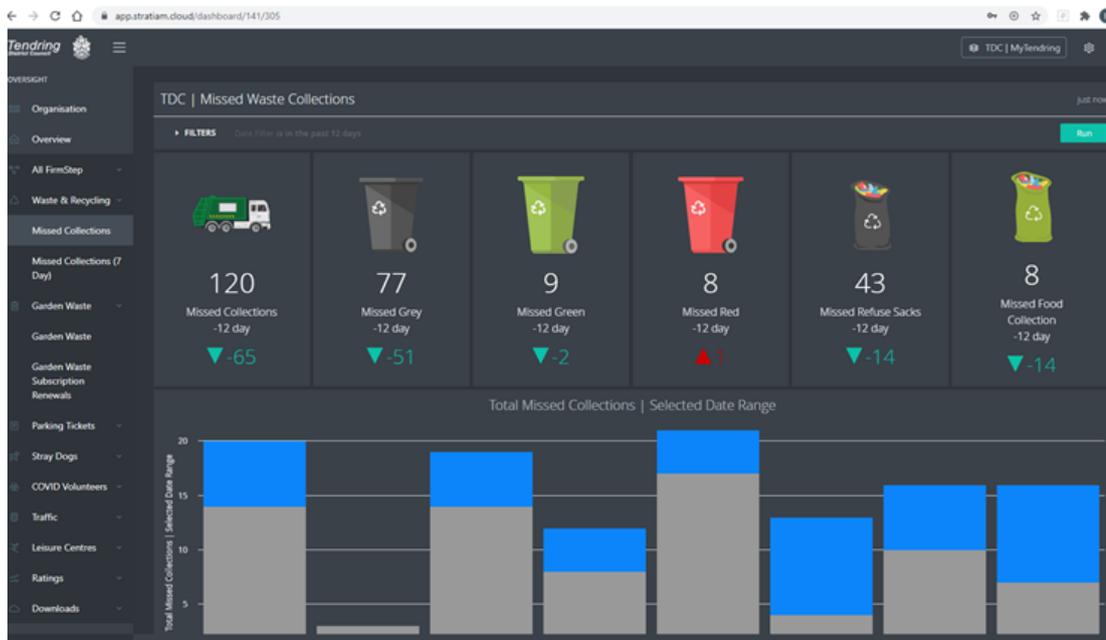
Forms produced: 16,361

Satisfaction from May 2019:

5 stars	63%
4 stars	20%
3 stars	8%
2 stars	3%
1 star	6%

Members heard how all users of My Tendring were asked if they would like to rate the portal and leave a comment. It was shown that since its inception in May 2019, 83% had rated it as 4 or 5 stars. Upon interrogating the data it was discovered that of the 6% 1 stars, many people were actually commenting on the recycling frontline service rather than the portal. All negative comments regarding the self-serve process were used as a learning tool so that the Council could improve the offering.

In terms of budgets, of the original £306,000 that was set aside for the production of the My Tendring portal, the Council had spent £281,000, however £30,000 of this had been spent on producing the suite of analytical and reporting tools.



Members also heard in relation to the above graphic, that the platform was very flexible and the Council had the ability to drill down into each incoming form that was filled in, so for example, in the case of missed bins the Council could look at instances by town or

even by road to see if there were recurring problems. That flexibility of interrogation was available across the whole suite of forms.

Savings to date

It was reported to the Committee that the spreadsheet below illustrated the efficiency saving that the My Tending portal had made within the Customer Service Environmental team. A total of 1924 hours had been saved in the year October 2019 to October 2020 as residents had self-served. That equated to 1.14 FTE that would otherwise had needed to be staffed.

TIME COMPARISONS FROM 9TH OCTOBER 2019 UNTIL 9TH OCTOBER 2020					
New Process	Time to complete (Minutes)	Processes since 09/10/2019	Savings per process	Saving (seconds)	
Garden Waste New Subscription	00:03:00	807	Saving of 17 minutes per process	823140	
Garden Waste Renewals	00:02:02	149	Saving of 12.58 minutes per process.	11622	
Missed Waste	00:01:19	4025	Saving of 41 seconds per process	165025	
Old Process	Old time to complete (Minutes)	Total time to complete	Comments		
Garden Waste New Subscription	20 minutes	00:20:00	CSA's only took the customers details and sent them through to the back office.		
Garden Waste Renewals	15 minutes	00:15:00	This was all back office.		
Missed Waste	2 minutes approx	00:02:00	All CSA's		
Customers who Self Served	Amount	Savings per process			
Garden Waste New Subscription	4171	20 minutes			
Garden Waste Renewals	730	15 minutes			
Missed Waste	2214	2 minutes			
Total of self serve	7115				
				Total savings (seconds)	6927667
				Total savings (Hours)	1924
				Total savings (FTE)	1.14

Current situation – Customer Service Centre

The Committee heard that the telephone calls into the Customer Service team had more than doubled in the last 18 months. At one point during summer 2020 each customer service agent needed to complete the work relating to 80 enquiries every day. There were also telephony issues relating to Skype meaning that some calls were dropped if all agents dealing with Environmental issues were already on a telephone call.

As the Council was not able to deliver the customer service excellence that we would expect to, action had been taken. The Council had increased the number of customer service agents by 3 FTEs (1 permanent and 2 temporary). Performance continued to be monitored in order to ascertain if there was enough resource now to handle the demand, and also to try to understand if the current high levels of incoming calls would become the new normal.

Officers had also installed a completely new telephony system, Five9s. Originally unavailable to all customer service agents extra licenses had been purchased and all incoming calls now went through that system rather than Skype. Five9s also allowed customers to request a call-back rather than hold for an agent to become free. That had the effect of reducing call wait times and also allowed customer service agents to manage call volumes successfully. Again, Five9s came with a raft of reporting tools and

the Council would be able to understand trends in volumes and staff the customer service team accordingly.

The Future

Members heard that within the next few months the Council would complete the roll-out of self-service processes relating to Council Tax, Benefits and Taxi Licensing. Along with Recycling, those were considered as having the biggest impact for residents. When those services had gone live the Council would commence a media campaign so that it could channel shift more people away from the customer service centre and towards the self-serve portal, thus looking to reduce the need for human resources.

The Council would also begin the process of seeking permissions to correspond with customers via digital means rather than by hard copy which was far more expensive. The Print and Post hub had the technology to be able to send digital correspondence to email addresses rather than produce letters which would generate savings.

Members also heard that the Council would look at implementing customer service excellence standards for both its staff and the online self-serve portal and roll-out the satisfaction surveys to both face-to-face and telephony contacts. By benchmarking the Council against both other local authorities and commercial organisations the Council could set itself some 'excellence' targets.

The Committee was presented with a look at other technology, such as Chat Bots, to see if other efficiency savings were available. The Council would fully explore the capabilities of the Five9's call handling platform in order to release other technology and processes that would increase the productivity of the customer service team. Officers were aware that many local authorities were utilising Artificial Intelligence to provide responses to their residents without the need for additional staffing.

Following a detailed discussion it was **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that:

- the development time frames and future services to be made available on *My Tendring* be shared periodically with Councillors, together with volume of customer services calls and email contact information, including call numbers, durations of call waiting and abandoned calls, with appropriate benchmarking information from other organisations.
- the prospect of creating a seamless link between *My Tendring* and my permit for parking permits is actively explored.
- council tax billing and other services be asked to deliver those services in a way that avoids overloading the customer services team incoming call capacity, e.g. by spreading the dispatch of council tax bills.
- the development of the leisure app be urgently addressed.
- the Council look at joining the Institute of Customer Service.
- the progress of the transformation agenda and how the Council has responded to the COVID19 pandemic in its ability to work from home be noted and applauded.

109. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE. - A.3 - TRANSFORMATION AGENDA OF THE COUNCIL - STAFFING.

It was reported to the Committee that throughout 2019 a significant focus had been placed on preparing staff to work more flexibly and with greater autonomy. Two programmes had been key to this: InDependence and Managing Remote Teams. All courses were delivered by external providers who had worked very closely with the Organisational Development Manager and HR Operations Manager on design, development and content.

The InDependence programme had been designed and developed by the Organisational Development Manager with input from an organisational psychologist. The workshops had been delivered by a team of six internal managers who had been trained in how to deliver the programme. In total 273 staff had attended that programme. The Managing Remote Teams course had been attended by 52 managers and team leaders.

In addition, a booklet entitled Modern Working, Your Guide had been circulated to all course attendees.

Members heard how a number of policies had been updated to support flexible working; including the Allowances Policy (2018) and the Remote Working Policy (2019) which also included the Flexi Hours Scheme.

To further support the move towards greater flexible working and staff personal accountability online training had been overhauled. The Council had used a specialist online provider (iHasco) for all health and safety awareness training. That shift had resulted in greater compliance as staff could plan their own training schedule according to their work patterns. Compliance rates were in excess of 90%. Face to face delivery was still used for those requiring additional support or greater detail.

The Committee heard that during 2018/19 a new in-house online learning platform had



been designed and developed.

Learning Zone could be accessed by all staff via a laptop and other mobile devices. Member access had also been facilitated. That platform hosted a number of mandatory courses, Careline specific courses and personal development learning opportunities. The majority of the courses on iHasco and Learning Zone included an assessment before learners could be marked as 'complete' and receive their certificate.

It was reported to Members that flexible working had been rapidly accelerated as a consequence of Covid, especially since March 2020 when 'Lockdown' had resulted in the vast majority of office based staff working from home. The flexi-hours scheme had been extended in order to enable staff to work even more flexibly and to take regular breaks away from the screen. Managers and staff had been supportive and appreciative of that approach. It was noted that the vast majority of staff had continued to work their standard hours with only a few variations, most notably around child care whilst schools were closed.

The Committee was aware that Government guidance remained that all employees who could work from home should continue to do so. It was therefore anticipated that in the short to medium term the majority of office based staff would continue to work from home.

In order to improve the sustainability of remote working arrangements a staff survey had been undertaken by Human Resources in order to gain further insight into the experiences and challenges of staff working from home, as well as those staff who had continued to work within the District and on site throughout the Pandemic. This had enabled the organisation to identify areas of concern and implement the necessary support.

Following over 300 responses, headlines from the staff survey were as follows:

- 75% of respondents agreed they had achieved the correct balance between work and home life, with 50% of respondents reported a better work/life balance;
- 72% of respondents agreed their role makes a difference to local residents;
- 75% of respondents got a sense of personal fulfilment from their job;
- 84% of respondents felt proud to work for the Council;
- 92% of respondents felt as productive or more productive working at home;
- 90% of respondents reported that the Council had kept them well informed during the Coronavirus Pandemic;
- 80% of respondents felt supported by their line manager; and
- Almost 60% would like to maintain their current working arrangements indefinitely.

In addition, the following priorities had been identified by staff completing the survey:

- Prioritise return to the workplace for those who will benefit most (when it was safe to do so);

- Prioritise continued working from home for those most ready and able to continue;
- Balance preferences with organisational needs;
- Provide support for those who were most in need; and
- Identify what lessons we could learn for the future

The Committee heard that Covid had accelerated the Council's plans for increased flexible working and had caused it to have a greater degree of home working than was originally envisioned. However, the early work that had been undertaken in 2019 had prepared managers and staff in advance. It was to be hoped that it would be possible in 2021 to have a successful blend of home and office based working so that flexible working ~~was~~ could be fully embedded within the organisation.

After some discussions it was **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that the adaptability of the staff and Councillors in relation to the restrictions introduced for COVID19 to continually deliver success, be formally recorded and appreciated.

110. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting was adjourned whilst the Committee made its deliberations.

111. EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE RESOURCE AND SERVICE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Exempt Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on Monday 16 November 2020 were approved as a correct record and were then signed by the Chairman.

The meeting was declared closed at 9.55 pm

Chairman