

**ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS –
UPDATE**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

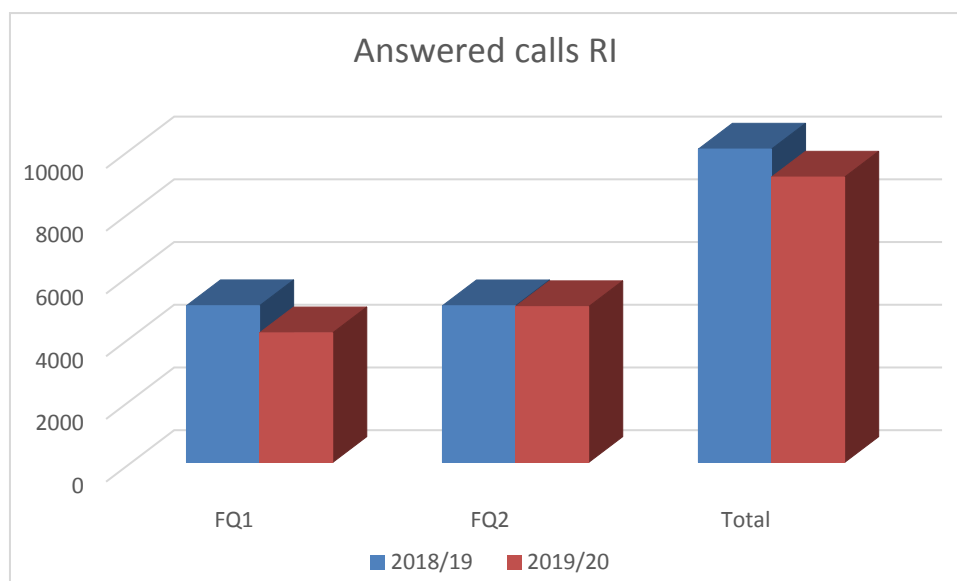
- 1.1 This report provides a brief update on the work to improve customer service in Roads and Infrastructure Services since the last update to the June meeting of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee. This work has focused on improving proactive information, making better use of technology and streamlining the procedures for handling enquiries.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to note this report.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The June report provided an update on the significant impact of the improvement works over time, showing an overall reduction in customer contacts relating to Roads and Infrastructure from a high (phone and digital combined) of over 50,000 in 2016/17 to under 40,000 in 2018/19.
- 3.2 A recent exercise undertaken by the customer contact centre and not available at the time of the previous report shows that Roads and Infrastructure in the past financial year was **no longer the service receiving the most calls** – 18.5% of the Council's total phone contacts, behind Social Work at 19.6% and Council Tax at 22.9%
- 3.3 The figures for FQ1 and FQ2 2019/20 compared to the same period in the previous year are shown below. Total calls have reduced by 893 this year compared to last year, or 9%:



	2018/19	2019/20
FQ1	4997	4995
FQ2	4132	4967
TOTAL	9992	9099

- 3.4 The improving trend **cannot be attributed to any single factor** or particular piece of work. Although a specific project delivered improvements in particular areas – road and lighting faults; winter; bin orders; missed bins; assisted collections; food waste; bulky waste collections and commercial waste – there is difficulty in assessing impact due to seasonal variances. While, for example, the statistics in relation to missed bin contacts are much better than they were, this cannot solely be attributed to the improvements on the customer service side. Other factors contribute to the overall improvement such as improved service delivery and robust vehicle maintenance, as well as seasonal variances e.g. milder winters mean fewer routes down which consequently means fewer missed bin reports.
- 3.5 One of the legacy benefits of the particular customer service project has been the embedding of new, fit for purpose procedures and a general focus on proactive information which is fast becoming part of the normal course of business, which is reflected in the continuing improvement trend.
- 3.6 The improvement process is largely a continuing journey rather than a finite project, with processes, procedures and the use of technology constantly evolving to meet current needs/demands.

Customer Service

- 3.7 **Winter maintenance** – targeted improvements to the **winter maintenance** pages on the Council website, review of contact centre scripts and back office messages, all focused on managing expectations, as well as a video currently in

production to provide these key winter messages in a more interactive format. The revised winter information is available at: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/winter-roads>

- 3.8 It will not necessarily follow that improvements/refinements to winter messaging will have an immediate impact in terms of the overall number of enquiries as this can largely depend on the severity of the winter, and the fact that messaging and expectation management can take time to embed.
- 3.9 **Centralised correspondence** – the Council’s customer service system (Oracle) captures all contacts which come into the Council via webforms, phone, social media and face-to-face. Contacts which go direct to operational officers were not previously captured, so it has never been possible to have a completely accurate picture of the total contacts received. In July 2019 Roads and Infrastructure introduced a new centralised correspondence procedure designed to capture all enquiries in a central Roads and Infrastructure email account. Beyond just statistical purposes, this new procedure will allow correspondence to be dealt with centrally and is already reducing the amount of officer time committed to enquiries, as well as promoting a ‘one voice’ approach.
- 3.10 To date there have been just under 150 enquiries dealt with via the RI inbox. As with any significant change, this may take some time to fully bed in – the expectation is that the amount of correspondence dealt with through the central inbox will increase as staff become used to the new procedure. Work is underway to ensure that these enquiries can be automatically logged in the Oracle system, thus providing the complete picture of all enquiries. This will affect the reported trend at 4.3, and the next round of reporting is likely to see a graphical increase in contacts, although obviously not an actual increase, rather a centralisation of reporting on total contacts.
- 3.11 **Upcoming work** – improvements highlighted in the previous report in June – events review; bulky uplifts pricing and commercial waste – remain largely on track. Another critical piece of work which has emerged is the review and updating of customer service procedures relating to the revised warden service, which will be scoped out in the coming weeks. Another area of improvement recently identified is the analysis and collation of relevant information from historic freedom of information requests to be held on the Council website to make the most common requests quicker to deal with by referring them to already published pertinent information.

Councillor Casebook Improvements – Timeliness; Consistency; Quality; Balance

- 3.12 The below update follows the same format as previously reported to EDI in June, with high level commentary on specific themes. This work is supported by a more detailed improvement plan which is being used as a tool to improve the overall process of member interaction.
- 3.13 **Service redesign** – the customer liaison/correspondence element of the Control Hub is now fully resourced (see below). Two specific customer liaison posts were

identified and funded for a temporary period of two years in the 2018 budget round. These posts have been critical in progressing the overall customer service work. There have been recent changes to the office layout at Manse Brae, Lochgilphead, where these key staff are located, with a newly defined customer liaison/correspondence/Hub area. This provides the space to progress key tasks and the flexibility for the space to be used for regular conferences with operational staff. The space also utilises technology on large screens providing up to date information on service delivery, outstanding correspondence etc.

- 3.14 **Recruitment** – the one vacant post in the team has recently been successfully recruited to, bringing the team back up to its full strength of 2.5FTE (Two new posts mentioned above and one existing part-time post). As a result of this members should have noticed an improvement in the timeliness of responses they are receiving through the Councillor Casebook system and a reduction in the overall number of outstanding cases.
- 3.15 **Proactive briefings** – recent member briefings include rural grass cutting, updates on the successful roads capital programme, surface dressing and lining work, the feedback on which have been very positive. These are available on the member section of the Council's intranet system. Upcoming briefings will include winter maintenance, cemetery maintenance, footway maintenance, grass cutting and the waste strategy.
- 3.16 **Improved responses** – Commonly raised issues have a limited number of possible resolutions, so model answers have been developed which can be amended to suit particular issues. These provide well-structured responses which are comprehensive and sensitive in the information they provide, in a style suitable for onward transmission to constituents. This bank of information is available via a central library and future workshops with key operational staff have taken place to expand upon these. With the recent successful integration between the roads asset management system and the customer service system members should now see quicker responses to queries relating to physical works on the road network as the central team will have access to live information through the system, thus negating the need to contact operational staff, which can be where a bottleneck appears in the process from time to time.
- 3.17 **Quality assurance** – a quality assurance panel, separate from the day-to-day central team, has been established to independently scrutinise random samples of enquires, with a view to offering constructive feedback to help drive improvement and consistency. This group has increased the frequency of its meetings in order to ensure that adequate support and continuing training is provided. An external training provider is currently being sought via a procurement process in order to continue to upskill those key team members dealing with enquiries and to continue to improve the quality of information provided to members.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 A significant amount of work has been undertaken to make improvements to

customer service on high priority Roads and Infrastructure customer contacts. Although difficult to measure impact precisely, the information at 3.3 shows that overall contacts have reduced, with this work surely being a contributing factor to the positive statistics. As the Hub embeds, what is presently in place should be refined and built upon over time, and will continuously be monitored and improvements made where they will have the greatest impact.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Policy – none

5.2 Financial – no direct cashable savings

5.3 Legal – none

5.4 HR – none

5.5 Equalities – none

5.6 Risk – none

5.7 Customer Service - consistent with the Council's wider focus on customer service improvement, engagement and transformation

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November 2019

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