
CUSTOMER SERVICE/CORRESPONDENCE UPDATE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides members with an update on the work ongoing in RIS to make improvements to customer service. This work is part of an overall improvement journey where we are seeking to more efficiently and effectively balance increased demand with significantly reduced resources as a result of year-on-year budget reductions.
- 1.2 In December 2018 the service underwent a restructure in both the operations and network and standards teams. Part of this restructure, which also yielded significant efficiency savings, removed from area teams a number of functions around works planning, programming, correspondence handling and back office support. These functions now being delivered by central teams who support the front line operations team in a more coordinated and strategic way than could be delivered remotely in the areas.
- 1.3 One of the opportunities that the new arrangements brought was a further focus on the correspondence handling. This was already part of an ongoing improvement journey and following a one off funding allocation made as part of the 2018 budget process a dedicated correspondence and information team has been established. This team has brought a number of improvements to date and the improvement journey continues in this area when forecast further reductions in revenue will result in a reduced ability to deliver front line services and an increased need to be able to effectively communicate to elected members and our communities the service standards we are able to achieve.
- 1.4 There has been a significant amount of work undertaken across RIS over the past three years to make improvements to the service provided to our customers. This report provides members with a short update on customer service/ correspondence activities in RIS during the COVID pandemic, and outlines some further areas for improvement in the next calendar year.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members
- (i) note the continuing positive work across the Service to improve customer

service and;

- (ii) note the improvement actions outlined for 2021 at Appendix One.

3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 Contacts into the department have reduced over time, from a peak of over 50,000 in 2016/17 to under 40,000 in 2018/19. Given the significant scale of changes to services as a result of COVID any comparison on statistics from this year compared to previous years would not be of any great relevance as showing a particular trend.
- 3.2 The statistical information is however useful in showing how enquiries during the COVID period have been dealt with.

Of the 13,158 enquiries received between 1st April and 30th September, almost 6,000 (44.1%) of these were able to be resolved at first point of contact via the Customer Service Centre, with the remainder being dealt with in the back office. See the following table for a detailed breakdown of enquiries:

Status	%age
Resolved at first point of contact	44.1
Resolved by service	41.1
In progress*	11.1
Future programme	0.2
With customer	3
Invalid	0.5
Total	100%

*In-progress are things like bin deliveries, lighting issues which are power-company faults, requests for speed surveys etc. e.g. tasks that can take some time to deliver

- 3.3 The WDM roads and lighting asset management system was integrated with the Oracle CRM system in order to provide customers who supply email addresses with automated updates as their enquiries progress, and to provide CSC agents with live works-related updates via the system [as opposed to the previous manual process of contacting individual officers directly]. This negates follow up enquires and allows any follow up calls to be dealt with more efficiently, ultimately providing a better service for customers. There has recently been an issue in terms of the flow of information from the lighting element of the WDM system into Oracle, which is currently being worked through. Thankfully the issue is not with the integration programme itself, rather how it is set up and what fields pull and push information through. This will be resolved in early course [and features as the first key action in the appended action plan].

Interim back office support functions

- 3.4 During the initial stages of the pandemic response all back office customer service functions were temporarily centralized through the RIS central correspondence team (part of the wider HUB model/concept).

- 3.5 Previously that team had been responsible for high-level correspondence such as MP, MSP letters, community councils, member enquiries, any unregulated (direct) correspondence, FOIs and corporate complaints for both RIS and DEG services. Only particularly complex customer enquiries had previously been administered via this team.
- 3.6 In an effort to free up resources and support the continued delivery of frontline services the interim changes were made and, given the above statistics, clearly worked well. Now that more normal service has been resumed the back office process has reverted to normal.
- 3.7 There was some worthwhile learning from the interim model, where it certainly freed up area operational resource, effectively working as a central departmental enquiry hub for Service specific enquiries that require technical input or job planning. Feedback from customers and operational colleagues was certainly positive. Administering all enquiries centrally does drive a consistent approach but aspects of local/operational knowledge are lost.

Winter arrangements

- 3.8 Taking on board the learning from the interim arrangements the central team will, as a pilot, administer all back office customer enquiries relating to winter maintenance this season. Given that the winter service is delivered consistently across the area to a strict policy this centralised process should work well and offer not only a consistent experience for members of the public, but be able to serve as a key pivot point/intelligent client function for other Council teams like the CSC and Corporate Comms who support the winter operation.
- 3.9 What is minor risk is if that team, at 2.6FTE, will have the capacity to deal with winter enquiries. It is expected that they will, but if necessary resource can be re-profiled from area teams to assist. Winter tends to generate a high volume of enquiries, although the overwhelming percentage of these are quite similar in nature and should be able to be dealt with or substantially dealt with via existing information contained with the team library on Sharepoint.
- 3.10 In previous years significant time and effort went into 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 winter information is available at: <https://www.argyllbute.gov.uk/winter-roads>
- 3.11 Following the winter season we will review how the revised back office process has worked and make recommendations accordingly. 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.

- 3.12 It will not necessarily follow that improvements/refinements to winter messaging and back office processes 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.

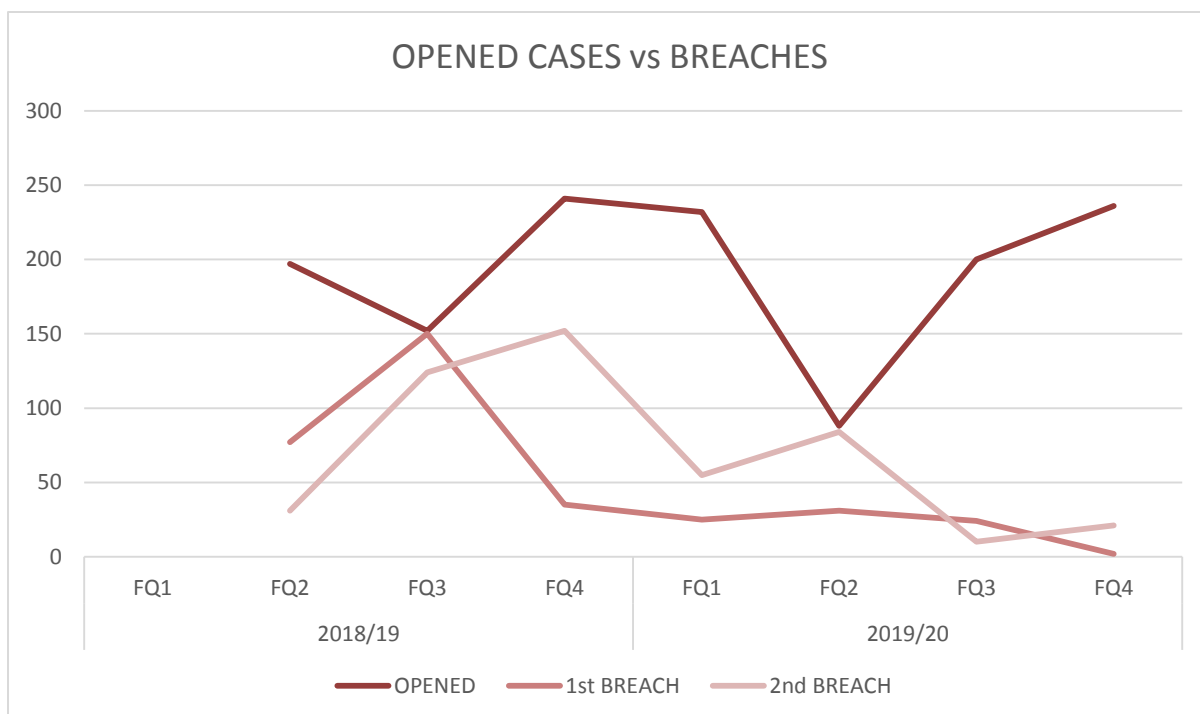
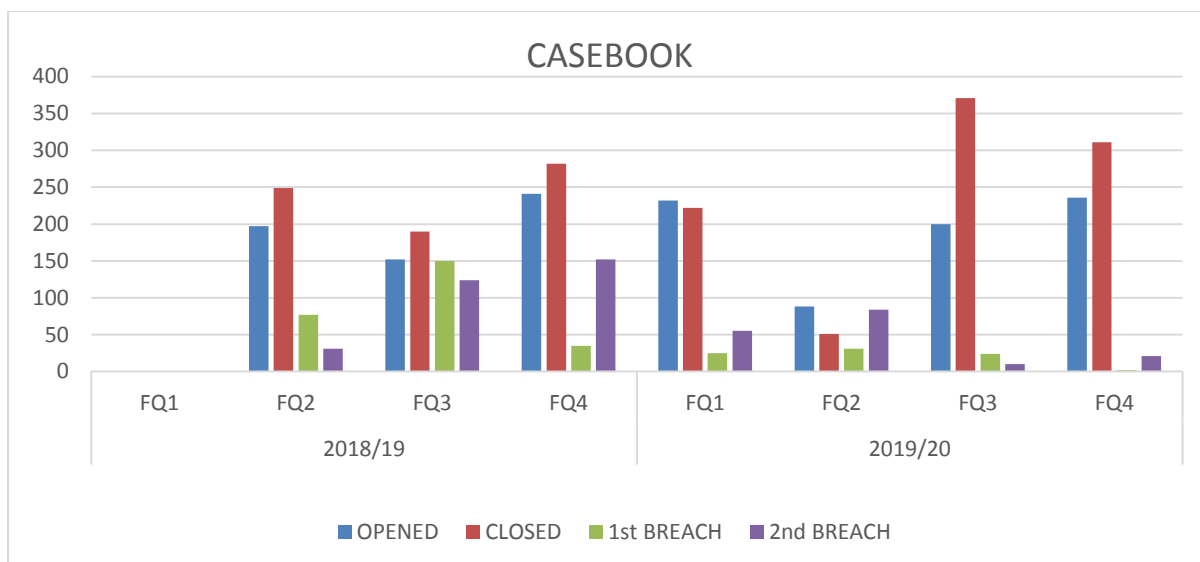
Central correspondence team

- 3.13 Members may recall a previous budget allocation for two temporary customer liaison posts to assist the department in dealing with its customer service requirements.
- 3.14 Feedback from colleagues across the service is universally positive, with comments around how beneficial the team is to them, how it frees them up to focus on service delivery, and how it provides the service with a key resource to track and monitor correspondence and to ensure it is dealt with timeously. Anecdotal feedback from Members has been positive. In particular Members have highlighted positive aspects of customer care like providing regular updates on cases even as and when there has been no ultimate resolution.
- 3.15 Given the positive progress to date, the significant savings in Officer time in dealing with enquiries, significant improvements in quality, and the desire to continue to make further improvements, these posts have since been made permanent and successfully recruited to through a competitive recruitment process. These posts are now funded within existing budgets.

Councillor Casebook

- 3.16 Similarly to the customer contact statistics and their comparative relevance, given the use of the interim COVID19 member inbox for COVID specific enquiries, the statistics on recent performance via the Casebook system may not be of great relevance.
- 3.17 Pre-COVID statistics may be of more relevance in showing the improving trend

CASEBOOK PERFORMANCE AS FIGURES									
DIS [all]	2018/19					2019/20			
	FQ4	FQ1	FQ2	FQ3	FQ4	FQ1	FQ2	FQ3	FQ4
OPENED			197	152	241	232	88	200	236
CLOSED			249	190	282	222	51	371	311
1st BREACH			77	150	35	25	31	24	2
2nd BREACH			31	124	152	55	84	10	21
BREACHES TOTAL			108	274	187	80	115	34	23
CLO POST	CREATED								
CLA POST	CREATED								



- 3.18 Overall this system has proven to be far more effective than the previous system of contacts to individual officers. The central inbox and the RIS cases in the Councillor Casebook are monitored continuously by specific officers who pick up enquiries and liaise with the relevant colleagues as required. This system allows enquiries to be effectively tracked and monitored.
- 3.19 Proactive briefings are a key part of the Hub strategy, to build positive relationships with Members, empowering them to be advocates for the service, giving them the information they need to answer constituent queries etc. These are stored on the Member Casebook system for ease of reference. The effectiveness of this is difficult to measure in a tangible way other than to point to highlight anecdotal feedback on this as a positive and helpful approach. Members who attended the EDI development session in March may recall a forward planner of briefing subjects being presented. Matters were obviously

overtaken by COVID and recently what Members may have seen are specific briefings issued ad hoc relating to local issues. Clearly given the sheer breadth of services and tasks which are delivered across Roads and Infrastructure, it would be almost impossible to proactively update on everything. Feedback from Members is important to allow us to develop plans for what they as an audience would like to see information on, and undertaking an exercise to gather that feedback is one of the improvements actions for 2021.

Improvements planned for 2021

3.20 With the impact of COVID the service is moving more towards a virtual R&IS HUB which will provide front line teams with vital information to enable services to be delivered as well as providing information to Members and our communities. Some of the initiatives on the wider work plan include:

- Route optimisation
- Environmental Land Management (ELM) – works ordering, scheduling and asset management system (records activities against assets to provide a detailed history).
- Building of dashboard management information system.

Specific customer-focussed improvements are outlined in the table at Appendix One.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 There has been a significant improvement in correspondence/customer service in RIS over recent years. This report provides a current position and outlines future improvements/efficiencies for 2021.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Policy - none

5.2 Financial – there is a financial risk to the Council in terms of officer and senior management time if enquiries are not effectively dealt with and information is not provided proactively to avoid contact

5.3 Legal - none

5.4 HR - none

5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:

5.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics - none

5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – none

5.5.3 Islands – none

5.6. Risk – none

5.7 Customer Service – further improvements

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: RIS CS improvement plan 2021