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**OS/150/14 ACTION POINTS FOR PREVIOUS MEETING**

There were no outstanding action points. S Flynn confirmed that an action to advise members of a list of emergency numbers had been completed by J Doyle by e-mail.

**OS/151/14 SHARED AND OUTSOURCED SERVICES UPDATE  
CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE AND GATEWAY CONTRACT (CSCG)**

M Housden introduced the report and said that there had been a number of positive improvements recently. M Housden explained that Northgate had appointed a number of new staff and that staff levels would be reviewed in a few weeks following the recent change of the housing management contractors. More calls were expected in light of this but that so far things appeared to be running smoothly. M Housden said that three Northgate staff members had transferred to Osborne to deal specifically with maintenance enquiries.

M Housden said that the implementation of the new CRM system had been delayed due to issues with the firewall but that these issues would soon be resolved. M Housden said that once the CRM system was implemented it would be a significant step forward for the CSU as it would enable call handlers to have more information in front of them and so less calls would be transferred to back offices and this would increase efficiency of the call centre.

M Housden said that other options were being explored in relation to dealing with customers on a face to face basis and that also the possibility of offering an automated service during the weekend. This was being looked at as part of the transfer of the library to the civic centre.

M Housden said that in addition, proactive steps were being taken to minimise the workload on the CSU by ensuring that the right communications were reaching residents ahead of changes that would be affecting them, such as individual electoral registration (IER) that was soon to be implemented nationally.

M Housden said that the customer focus group were still meeting and discussing the issues surrounding the channel shift and that they had identified that there was a joint responsibility to ensure that information flowed successfully from the back offices to the CSU.

Councillor Collins said that it was reassuring to see that there had been improvements to the CSU of late but that he had concerns that residents were still not having their calls answered properly. Councillor Collins said that he had been approached by a resident in his ward who had attempted to contact the planning department. Councillor Collins said that when the resident initially called up they were number nine in the queue of waiting callers and that they waited on the line for twenty minutes and fourteen seconds before they were cut off. Councillor Collins said that he understood that there was an automatic cut off after twenty minutes but said that this resident's experience was unacceptable and that no one should be waiting longer than five minutes. Councillor Collins did add that once the resident was able to get through to planning they were given good service. Councillor Collins also pointed out that it was resident's taxes that were paying for the call centre and so Dacorum Borough Council

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had a responsibility to get it right. Councillor Collins asked what steps were being taken to rectify this issue and were call-back options being looked at as a possibility.

M Housden said that he could not comment on individual cases but assured Councillor Collins that there were ongoing negotiations with Northgate around KPI's to ensure that circumstances like this were not being overlooked and that the issue of how calls were being answered was looked at and that the KPI in relation to this could be altered to reflect the time in which callers actually received a satisfactory resolution.

The Chairman added that he was also aware of a Markyate resident who had similar issues with waiting on the line for a long period of time and that the individual in question was elderly and the inconvenience of this plus the cost of being on the line for a substantial period of time was unacceptable and that the council had a duty to ensure that this was not happening.

Councillor W Wyatt-Lowe said that he was aware of resident who had called three times in one day and had not got an answer at any point. Councillor W Wyatt-Lowe asked if it was possible to look at prioritising the calls of those who had tried and failed to get in contact with the Council.

M Housden said that numerous practical steps had been taken to ensure calls were being answered including increasing the number of lines into the call centre and increasing the number of call handlers. M Housden said that providing a call back option was difficult as it was resource intensive to implement and there was the additional issue in that some people requesting call backs would not necessarily pick up once they were called back.

Councillor N Hollinghurst said that he failed to understand why the issue of accurate KPI's was not looked at during the procurement period of this contract so that these issues around performance could have been avoided. Councillor N Hollinghurst asked why the service had to be outsourced, if Inform 360 was such useful software why could Dacorum Borough Council employees not have remained responsible for the CSU.

S Flynn said that the KPI's in place had replicated the existing arrangements so that comparisons could be made and that explicit arrangements had been made in to contract so that if change was necessary negotiations would happen subsequently. S Flynn added that Dacorum Borough Council did not have the in-house experience on Inform 360 and that additionally Northgate provided customer service and channel shift expertise. S Flynn pointed out that in addition Northgate were financially investing in the CSU and saving the Council money and that this, along with the specific expertise they brought in, provided the rationale for outsourcing the CSU.

Councillor Harden pointed out that it was worth bearing in mind that the majority of the Northgate call centre staff were Dacorum Borough Council call centre employees who were TUPE transfers to Northgate. Councillor Harden said that any additional members of staff taken on by Northgate were extensively trained and were usually local people.

Councillor Organ said that in relation to the factors that were affecting performance and the solution to these issues he wasn't sure about employing temporary staff as

surely once the temporary staff finished their contracts the issues would reappear if the Council was suddenly to have an exceptional number of calls. M Housden said that he shared Councillor Organ's concerns and that he was having weekly meetings with Northgate's operations manager to stay on top of issues. M Housden added that the inclusion of temporary staff would be part of a forward planning strategy which would see more staff taken on at times that were expected to have peaks in the number of calls received, such as the implementation of IER or changes regarding bin collection.

M Housden said that Northgate recognised they needed to build up relationships with back offices and that changes needed to be better communicated to residents via other channels such as the websites.

Councillor Collins said that the KPI regarding calls being answered in three seconds was misleading because it gave the impression that residents were getting their calls answered by a call centre employee instead of which they were merely having their calls answered by the automated system after three seconds and that the KPI should reflect how long that it took for their enquiry to be solved.

M Housden said that Inform 360 was designed to answer more common queries and that hopefully efficiency could be improved if the call centre staff were able to resolve queries using the CRM software rather than referring to the back offices. S Flynn pointed out that the back offices and how calls directed there were handled was very much Dacorum Borough Council's responsibility and that Northgate and Dacorum Borough Council had to work together to ensure information was exchanged smoothly between the two. S Flynn said that by September there would be a new KPI in place to monitor the issues raised. S Flynn also pointed out that waiting times were dropping.

Councillor W Wyatt Lowe asked if there was a measure for how much time the back offices at Dacorum Borough Council spent answering calls from the public. S Flynn said he would look into this. Councillor N Harden asked S Flynn what percentage of calls coming into Dacorum Borough Council were dealt with effectively by the CSU. S Flynn said 98% of calls were.

## **OS/152/14                      STAFF SURVEY RESULTS 2013 AND ACTION PLAN**

S Flynn said that following a request by committee the report provided information on the 2013 staff survey and the resulting action plan draft. S Flynn said that the results of the 2013 survey indicated that people appeared to have a much greater understanding of their role within the Council than previously and that the majority of staff were happy in their work. S Flynn did highlight that there was a slight contradiction with the results in that there was some criticism of internal communications.

S Flynn said that the resulting action plan had six areas of focus; appraisals, communication, leadership, resources, 'moving on' (originally related to the proposed Civic Centre decant) and behavioural change.

Councillor Organ asked a question in relation to the statistic that only 50% of staff agreed that they knew what was going on at the Council. Councillor Organ wanted to know what this was related to in terms of what exactly staff were unaware of; was it current work being undertaken, the financial position of the council or was it something

else. S Flynn said that there were a range of responses in relation to this question and that staff focus groups would be analysing these responses to get to the bottom of the issues raised.

C McKnight also added that the Council did aim to provide employees with as much information as possible and did this via a number of different ways such as Yammer, The Review – the staff newsletter, the Intranet, Lync, and staff update meetings.

The Chairman said that in the past the Mayor had held meetings with staff from all different areas in the council and that this had proven very useful as it provided a space for staff who didn't normally interact to discuss the different areas of work that they were involved in. C McKnight said that they were looking at the possibility of holding staff led scrutiny meetings to provide staff with more information.

Councillor Marshall said that there seemed to be some disparity in terms of what staff members worked from home. Councillor Marshall said that the higher grades appeared to work from home more often than those staff members who were of a lower grade. Councillor Marshall acknowledged that the nature of some roles meant that working from home was not feasible but she queried whether there was a monitoring system in place to ensure that the working from home option was readily available and was being equally utilised by all. Councillor Marshall said that it may be advantageous to see what proportion of women vs men were using flexi time. S Flynn said that homeworking/flexi-time was down to individual manager discretion and that there were no formal monitoring processes in place to enable comparison but two measures had been introduced: the number of desks in use as a proportion of the number of staff in each service area and a productivity measure which would enable the Council to measure the impact of flexible working on a department by department basis..

Councillor Marshall said that overall the 2013 survey appeared to be very similar to previous survey but that questions about bullying appeared to be missing as did questions on staff morale within the Council and leadership by Members. Councillor Marshall said that responses to these questions were previously very poor and so she did not understand why these questions were omitted from this survey as surely they should be prioritised as specific areas for improvement. C McKnight said that the bullying questions were part of the HSE stress survey that were included in the last staff survey and that stress survey questions had been omitted from the last survey with a view to keeping it as brief as possible. S Flynn said that the morale theme were tackled in the more recent survey but that the questions had been phrased in a different manner to provide more detail on why staff morale was at the level defined..

Councillor W Wyatt-Lowe asked if there were subsidiary questions to some of the key issues raised in the survey to check its validity and he also commented that he thought it would be of value to have a glossary of terms to ensure that people had a consensual understanding of some of the key terms used. S Flynn said that there were a number of focus groups that analysed the questions and responses to ensure the validity of the survey.

Councillor Taylor agreed with Councillor Marshall and said that there should be a male/female split in terms of the responses to see if any of the issues raised affected one gender more than the other. Councillor Taylor also highlighted that he was aware from knowing staff members well that there were still instances of bullying within the Council and so these issues should be carefully monitored. The Chairman and Councillor Collins both agreed with this point, Councillor Collins also pointed out that if

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left to develop, issues of bullying could potentially have serious ramifications for the council if bullied individuals chose to take legal action as a result of the treatment they had received by other staff members.

Outcome:

The committee noted the report.

Actions:

The results of the most recent HSE stress survey to be circulated to the committee.

**OS/153/14 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

To consider passing a resolution in the following terms:

That, under s.100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12A Part 1, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded during the items in Part II of the Agenda for this meeting, because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, that if members of the public were present during these items there would be disclosure to them of exempt information relating to: the financial and business affairs of a number of private companies. (Agenda item 10).

**OS/154/14 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE AND PROJECTS  
PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT 2013/2014**

See Part II minutes.

**OS/155/14 WORK PROGRAMME FOR FINANCE AND RESOURCES  
OSC**

There were no amendments to the work programme. However, S Flynn advised that future items under his name needed to be amended as he would be leaving Dacorum Borough Council in September. The Chairman and Committee thanked him for his hard work at Dacorum Borough Council and wished him all the best in his new role.

The meeting ended at 9.50pm.