

EK Services Q2 Performance Report for TDC

Corporate Performance
Review Working Party

13 November 2017

Report Author

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Portfolio Holder

Cllr Derek Crow-Brown

Status

For Information

Classification:

Unrestricted

Key Decision

No

Ward:

N/A

Executive Summary:

This report will provide a summary of key performance indicators for the services delivered by EK Services for Thanet District Council, which include ICT, Customer Delivery (Income (Revenues), Payments (Benefits) and Customer Services) and it will also report on the services delivered by EKHR.

The report will cover service performance over the period July to September 2017 inclusive.

Recommendation(s):

Comments are invited from Members of the working party; Members are to note the report.

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 EK Services (EKS) and EK Human Resources (EKHR) have responsibility for certain delegated 'shared service' functions. These functions include the following services:

- ICT Services
- Face to Face & Contact Centre Customer Services
- Revenues (Council Tax and Business Rates)
- Benefits (administration of the Housing Benefit Scheme); and
- Human Resources.

1.2 EKS and EKHR monitor and report on performance monthly and meet with TDC lead client officer (Tim Willis) to discuss service performance and specific issues each quarter or as required. Performance is measured against agreed Indicators that are contained within Service Level Agreements (SLA); these agreements are subject to annual review and agreement between each of the three partner councils and EK Services.

2.0 Performance

- 2.1 The key challenge remains in Customer Services where Call Waiting times continue to fall short of target. There is a similar issue in Benefits where payment is not being made as quickly as target, albeit we are still providing a high standard and we believe this should come back towards standard as the new digital benefits solution is introduced.
- 2.2 The principal issue is staffing pressure, due to the number of vacant posts that have either been deleted or held vacant in order for us to achieve the savings required to meet the budget set by Councils. The situation is exasperated by an increase in sickness absence, worryingly including a lament of stress and anxiety, all of which added to the resource strain.
- 2.3 Further specific issues added to the pressure; the volume of calls from the public seeking advice on the new Council Tax Support scheme has been above the norm, although we expect this to settle down. Additionally Hackney Carriage relicencing meant we had to release staff from the phones for a temporary period to the Gateway to assist with the extra 130 customers that we received.
- 2.4 The issue is being addressed as best we can; firstly I have agreed to recruit two additional members of staff to plug some of the vacant posts that are held open and remain within budget. Secondly we are recruiting some more apprentices to assist; thirdly the closure of the Ramsgate District EKS office and other area offices across our locations will release staff to assist in the contact centre that will provide additional and much needed extra resource. Finally, the introduction of the new digital benefits system and risk based verification should help reduce the number of Benefits cases that we deal with on the phones.
- 2.5 The percentage of correct HB and CTS decisions is also below target but the figures have been skewed this month as we were unable to record this PI in September as staff were engaged on a subsidy audit. Our overall year to date figure is 95.35% which is still short of target but we believe this will come back on track as we move forward.

3.0 Key Initiatives/Outcomes

- 3.1 The decision to pursue contract negotiation to potentially contract out some of our services is excellent news; it will provide the platform to maintain a viable service for the District and our other partner councils as well as providing opportunity for jobs growth and new income for councils. If we do agree final contract terms and enter into the partnership arrangement it offers us the best opportunity to sustain high quality services for the Council.
- 3.2 The new Digital Revenues & Benefits solution is currently being deployed with an estimated go live at end of November. This will provide a much easier, faster and accurate method for customers to make claims, update on change in circumstances and submit information using smart phones, tablets, computers etc. It is a fantastic solution that is an end to end process from customer front end right through to back office system integration, which effectively means people can action claims etc 24 / 7 in a much easier way. It will also use Risk Based Verification which means many customers will no longer have to submit the same level of documentation and in some cases none at all. The introduction of this system should help reduce telephone contact and face to face queries.

4.0 Concerns/Risks

- 4.1 The ongoing financial pressure and budget reduction applied this year has now resulted in us having to reduce staff in order to maintain a balanced budget position. This has and continues to put strain on resources and service levels are being hit, particularly in Customer Services. The situation in regard to Performance Targets is exasperated because we agreed to amend our annual targets (tighter) and thus for example: Call Wait times target this year is 50 secs (last year it was 1min 30secs) so we are creating additional pressure by imposing what now appears to be an unsustainable target. Going forward these targets need addressing.
- 4.2 The whole sustainability of EKS provided services going forward into next year and beyond, is now in doubt, unless either additional funding is put in and no further savings achieved from EKS or we are able to innovate and do things differently. The recent decision by councils to potentially enter into a partnership contract will help this situation as well as provide a real opportunity to assist councils by creating a new revenue stream.

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Annex List

Annex 1	EK Services Q2 Performance for TDC
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