

## Contact Centre working group

### SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



<b>DATE</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup> June,2023</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO</b>	<b>Finance and Performance</b>
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	<b>Working Group</b>
<b>TEL NO</b>	
<b>EMAIL</b>	

### PURPOSE

1. To report on the findings of the contact centre working group.

### RECOMMENDATION

2. That members:
  - a. note the findings of the working group
  - b. request an update at a future meeting on the impact of the agreed changes in the contact centre.

### REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3. The council's customer services provider, Liberata, has recommended a number of changes in the contact centre to help it manage demand and rising call lengths so that customers can be dealt with in a more timely fashion. The Committee established a working group at its meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2023 to look at how a voicebot, amongst other measures, could work in customer services and to make recommendations for their implementation.

### SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

4. Councillors Barton, Baker, Horrocks, S Kazmi, Launer and Wild volunteered to sit on the Group, with the Head of Policy and Engagement providing officer support.
5. The Working Group met with the Senior Operational Performance Manager and the Senior Operations Manager for Liberata on 11<sup>th</sup> July. The Working Group received a presentation and the following points were noted:
  - During 2021, members of scrutiny committee reported that calls via the contact centre were, on occasion, ending abruptly. Liberata and the council have both replaced their telephone systems in the last year which has resolved this issue.

- 33% of calls to the switchboard are requests for transfers and in the past Members have told officers that the recorded privacy message and switchboard menu options (known as the Interactive Voice Response or “IVR”) are too long. Greater automation is possible to save time for complex human interactions and to shorten the message and menu options.
- A voicebot could help automate the basic signposting service and would be able to provide a service 24/7. Currently 10% of revenues and benefits calls are resolved by sending self-service details to the customer. If the voicebot managed these interactions, it is estimated that 30 minutes a day could be saved within the contact centre for more complex call resolution by a customer services agent.
- A full transactional voicebot- one which would take customer details to complete an online form- is a future development. At this stage, the bot will signpost only.
- There is also an option to set up a call back feature in the contact centre. This involves offering to retain a customer’s position in the call queue. A customer service agent then calls the customer back when they reach the front of the queue. This system will tell people their position in the queue (but not the expected wait time as this is very uncertain depending on the needs of the customers in front) to help the customer decide whether to choose to wait or not. This feature is being used successfully in Hounslow.
- The Working Group discussed the quality of customer contact and the ability of customer service agents to help residents with complex needs; e.g. access to mental health services if the client is in crisis.
- The Working Group asked about data protection. It was confirmed that the voicebot does not store personal data in performing a sign posting task.
- Multi-lingual bots can be built, but this would be a future development.
- The Working Group discussed the importance of making it clear to residents when they are talking to a bot not a human.
- The Head of Policy and Engagement reported that he had met with an officer at North Somerset Council which has recently implemented the voicebot for revenue and benefits calls. North Somerset reported no negative feedback from residents or councillors.

## **Actions**

6. The Working Group had the opportunity to try out a test version of the voicebot. Feedback was as follows:
  - a. The bot’s ability to pick up what was said was satisfactory, however the voice was muffled. In response to this, Liberata say they have investigated and tested the available solutions and the council voicebot “voice” will be based on the Google Wavenet product which is considered to be a marketing leading product.
  - b. The speed of response was uncomfortably slow for one tester, however it was recognised that the speed may suit other customers. Liberata have advised that the response speed can be modified, so during implementation of the live version this will be adjusted.

7. Following consultation with the Working Group, the Head of Policy and Engagement agreed with Liberata that the Retain Position in Queue and voicebot feature should be implemented as soon as possible.
8. Following implementation, and in light of the above feedback following the testing period, the changes will be kept under review. Usage will be monitored to ensure the changes deliver a better experience for our residents, and Scrutiny Committee will receive an update at a future meeting.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND BUDGET PROVISION**

9. Not applicable

#### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

10. The council is committed to improving its self-service digital offering to residents. At the same time it will ensure that there is always an option for telephone and face to face contact.

#### **DETAILS OF CONSULTATION**

11. None

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12. None

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

**PLEASE CONTACT:**

**Rob Dobson, Head of Policy and Engagement**

**ALSO:**