

---

**Report to:** Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services      **Date of Meeting:** 4 January 2017

**Subject:** Update on Customer Experience of Claiming Council Administered Benefits and Financial Support      **Wards Affected:** All

**Report of:** Head of Corporate Resources and Head of Strategic Support

**Is this a Key Decision?** No      **Is it included in the Forward Plan?** No

**Exempt/Confidential** No

---

### **Purpose/Summary**

To provide the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) with an update setting out progress made against each of the action and actions set out in Annex 1.

### **Recommendation(s)**

That Overview & Scrutiny Committee;

- note the actions achieved outlined in annex 1
- note the actions in progress outlined in annex 1
- note the additional actions identified and implemented, outside the original scope outlined in annex 1
- agree the format of the monitoring reports which will be submitted on a six monthly basis to update on progress

### **How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Objectives?**

	<b><u>Corporate Objective</u></b>	<b><u>Positive Impact</u></b>	<b><u>Neutral Impact</u></b>	<b><u>Negative Impact</u></b>
1	Creating a Learning Community		√	
2	Jobs and Prosperity	√		
3	Environmental Sustainability		√	
4	Health and Well-Being	√		
5	Children and Young People	√		
6	Creating Safe Communities		√	
7	Creating Inclusive Communities	√		

8	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening Local Democracy	√		
---	---	---	--	--

**Reasons for the Recommendation:**

To update Members on the progress made against each action outlined in annex 1

**Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:**

No alternative options were considered. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) established a Working Group to better understand the customer experience of claiming Council administered benefits and financial support with various objectives and the Working Group which was reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) in a final report in June 2016. Officers have been working to implement the actions outlined in annex 1.

**What will it cost and how will it be financed?**

**(A) Revenue Costs**

There are no financial implications arising for the Council as a direct result of this update. The implementation of actions that result in efficiency savings and any necessary financial investment will be the subject of separate reports.

**(B) Capital Costs**

As above

**Implications:**

The following implications of this proposal have been considered and where there are specific implications, these are set out below:

<b>Financial Nil</b>	
<b>Legal Nil</b>	
<b>Human Resources Nil</b>	
<b>Equality</b>	
1. No Equality Implication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Equality Implications identified and mitigated	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Equality Implication identified and risk remains	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Impact of the Proposals on Service Delivery:**

The implementation of the actions will support Sefton residents to receive improved customer services, not only in their engagement with Sefton Council but with partner agencies such as the Department for Work and Pensions and One Vision Housing.

Particular regard was given to the interaction between centrally administered benefits, such as Universal Credit, Job Seekers allowance and the locally administered Housing Benefit and Council Tax support.

The increasing demands on Customer services have been highlighted by the Government's Welfare Reform Agenda, Sefton Council with Partners have established a One-Sefton approach to the action plan and are encouraging all partners, the community and organisations to play their part by not only making our services more accessible to those most in need; but by joining up with partners from voluntary and advice organisations to make sure that the support we provide together can lift people out of poverty and mitigate, where possible, the impacts of the welfare reform programme.

### **What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?**

The Head of Corporate Resources has been consulted (FD4432/16) and notes the report indicates no direct financial implications for the Council.

The Head of Regulation and Compliance (LD3715/16) has been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

### **Implementation Date for the Decision**

Following the expiry of the "call-in" period for the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting

**Contact Officer:** Stephan Van Arendsen – Head of Corporate Resources

**Tel:** 0151 934- 4081

**Email:** [Stephan.VanArendsen@sefton.gov.uk](mailto:Stephan.VanArendsen@sefton.gov.uk)

**Contact Officer:** Jan McMahon – Head of Strategic Support

**Tel:** 0151 934- 4431

**Email:** [jan.mcmahon@sefton.gov.uk](mailto:jan.mcmahon@sefton.gov.uk)

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) established a Working Group to better understand the customer experience of claiming Council administered benefits and financial support.
- 1.2 The final report (June 2016) was developed from learning (case studies, interviews, site visits etc.) which helped formulate the recommendations. The Council recognises that the customer experience is critical to its role as a provider of the many services that it facilitates and delivers.
- 1.3 The working group acknowledged that lots of positive changes have been made but recognised that there is further opportunities to make improvements, simplify processes and address customer's concerns.
- 1.4 The terms of reference and objectives of the working group were approved as part of the scoping exercise; the objectives were refined and are as follows:
  1. To improve access by customers to consistent and high quality information
  2. To improve customer satisfaction with access to our services
  3. To improve the Council's relationship with its customers by changing culture throughout the organisation
  4. To ensure compliance with corporate standards associated with customer experience including improved internal communications
  5. To review the customer complaints and compliments system including iCasework and moving towards a 2-tier system.
  6. To simplify access to services by streamlining the whole process from first contact to resolution - thereby reducing the need for multiple return contacts and to increase the resolution of customers' needs with one visit or call.
  7. To reduce failure demand by ensuring robust processes and accountability between front-line hubs and service areas, and clear ownership of complex cross-service enquiries.
  8. To increase access to "self-service" information and automatic transactions where appropriate.
  9. To reduce costs through eliminating duplication.
- 1.5 It was agreed at its last meeting (23 June Cabinet) monitoring reports will be submitted to the Committee on a six monthly basis detailing what has been achieved to date. The next update will be due in June 2017.

1.6 During the review it was recognised that a number of actions are repeated, it is therefore recommended to consolidate where appropriate the necessary into one action.

1.7 The progress report will be presented in the following format:

- Theme (for example Process, Information & Advice, Letters etc)
- Responsible Officer
- Action ( This will be the previous recommendation approved)
- Progress

Additional changes identified as a result of improving the customer experience will also be reported for information.

## **2. Approach**

2.1 An internal Customer Experience Board was established to respond to and implement the approved actions; the group consisted of officers from across the Council in liaison with partners to achieve the desired outcomes.

2.2 The recommendations described in the report will result in improved services for customers who access Council services such as:

- Improved access to consistent high quality information
- Improve customer satisfaction with access to our services
- Increase the resolution of customers' needs with one visit or call
- Simplify access to services by streamlining the whole process from first contact to resolution – reducing the need for multiple return contacts
- Reduce failure to demand by ensuring robust processes and accountability between front line hubs and service areas
- Increase access to 'self-service' information and automatic transactions where appropriate
- Reduce costs through eliminating duplication

2.3 A number of the actions result in changes that the customer will benefit from, it is recognised that we must continue to champion and motivate a culture of change in the workforce in order to maximise those opportunities and demonstrate the necessary behaviours in order to do so effectively, keeping the customer at the heart of what we do.

2.4 This programme of work is also being considered in the context of other major change agendas that are being implemented in the Council including:

- Public Sector Reform (PSR) Programme
- Digital Inclusion Agenda
- Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Agenda

2.5 Communication and engagement with key stakeholders in each of the reforms mentioned above will continue throughout this process.

2.6 Progress so far has been positive Annex 1 below details the key objectives set by the Committee, the action taken and the progress to date. The Annex goes on to highlight additional changes that have been implemented following the review.

## Annex 1

### Achieved Recommendations:

Objective 1	Action	Progress	Comments
To improve access to consistent and high quality information	Identify customer's preferred method and format of communication. Analysis and awareness across Council	<p>In line with Sefton's 'Accessible Communication Policy' the Benefit Service has ensured that customers are communicated with using the customers' preferred method.</p> <p>The following actions have been taken:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Housing Benefit application forms have been updated to ask the following question: <b><i>Please let us know how we can support you to contact our service and communicate well with us? This may be for example in text, email, large print, easy read or British Sign Language.</i></b></li> </ol> <p>The Benefit Service has identified named 'Benefit Champions' in the area of accessible communications that are both trained and knowledgeable in how to provide alternative communication formats.</p>	<p>Adult Social Care is now required to adhere to the NHS England Accessible Information Standard which states it needs to follow five steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ask</b> people if they have information or communication needs and find out how to meet these needs</li> <li>• <b>Record</b> those needs in a set way</li> <li>• <b>Highlight</b> on a person's record need and how to be met</li> <li>• <b>Share</b> information with other NHS or adults social care providers</li> <li>• <b>Meet</b> communication of information need</li> </ul> <p>Processes and systems are being adapted to reflect this.</p>
	Service user forum to be established to include	Service User Group established. Includes representatives from people who live in Sefton who are:	First meeting scheduled: 17/01/2017.

	<p>representative(s) with learning or sensory impairment to help Council quality check information being sent to service users.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Disabled</li> <li>• Visually Impaired</li> <li>• Hearing Impaired</li> <li>• Older people</li> <li>• Starting to have symptoms of dementia</li> <li>• Mental Health</li> <li>• Physically Disabled</li> </ul> <p><b>Aims</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure all public information is provided in a way that people understand</li> <li>• Make sure that people who do consultation do it in a way that includes everyone</li> <li>• Support people who work in public services to make information better</li> <li>• Raise awareness with people who provide public services of how people can access information and services</li> <li>• Share with other group members what the Improving Information Forum has been doing and bring information to the Forum on public information that needs to be looked at.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying Top 10 pieces of Health &amp; Social Care information and provide advice and guidance on how to make it more accessible</li> <li>• Develop a Top Tips Guide on how information can be more accessible</li> <li>• Develop a short video on why information needs to be in a way people can understand</li> <li>• Provide advice and support to officers who the Consultation and Engagement Panel has referred to the Forum.</li> </ul>	
--	---	--	--



	Review website to address the wider needs of some of our service users to include 'Browse Aloud'.	Every webpage page is now active with the 'Browse Aloud' option	The Communications team will continue to consider accessibility in future website development
	Promote self – serve/web chat etc. at all contact opportunities. Current web chat pilot to be extended.	<p>Promotion of social media and self-serve initiatives now being displayed on all automated email responses. In addition to this the newly implemented web adverts includes promotion of self-service.</p> <p>Web chat function available on internet homepage and specifically to benefits and parking services pages. Supporting this there are a number of how to videos available on the Council website <a href="https://www.sefton.gov.uk/miscellaneous-pages/how-to-videos.aspx">https://www.sefton.gov.uk/miscellaneous-pages/how-to-videos.aspx</a></p>	The Communications team will continue to consider this in future campaigns
	<p>Customers escalating matters to Elected representatives or other advocacy services -</p> <p>Identify where failures are occurring across all service areas and why.</p> <p>Input measures to address. Provide clear instructions/information to customers.</p> <p>Offer an appointment service and inform all information required for decision making.</p> <p>Make telephone call to customer to clarify what the issues are and to explain what is</p>	<p>Introduction of Record Sheet to record Elected Members Enquires</p> <p>Customer Service Advisors are spending 10 weeks in benefit back office improving knowledge and learning complex assessment skills. Experienced back office assessors located in One Stop Shops during this time. (Customer Journey Innovation Project – 10 Week Development Plan )</p> <p>Appointments now been offered to customers who are able to return with all evidence and information. New claim will be processed during appointment.</p> <p>Reduction in number of query letters being sent out. (faster processing times)</p> <p>Memo has been circulated to arvato</p>	<p>This is working well – a reminder has been issued to ensure that all such contact is recorded which will help build up a picture of why such escalations are made</p> <p>Outbound calls to claimants being made instead of sending out query letters. Workforce upskilling taken place.</p> <p>Q &amp; A on customer journeys to harness further efficiencies</p>

	required	workforce highlighting online facilities for appropriate signposting.	
	Identify customer's preferred method and format of communication.	<p>Additional question added to customer satisfaction survey from July 16 onwards.</p> <p>We provide a range of channels making our services more easily accessible. Please select from the choice below your preferred method of communication with the Council?</p> <p>The Council's preferred method of contact is our on-line services. What is the reason that you chose to visit us today rather than use one of our self-service on-line options?</p> <p>Self-serve feedback form being issued to customers who use the One Stop Shops (OSS) self-serve facilities.</p>	Being considered in the context of accessible information

**Objective 2**

To improve customer satisfaction with access to our services.	To consider widening the customer survey to all contact streams by Attach survey to web chat, letters, receipts, eforms and other communication methods to encourage customers to identify where there have been any gaps in service provision	<p>Surveys are sent out every quarter – latest version went out in July</p> <p>Whilst an additional question has been added to the survey that is used in the One Stop Shops, the surveys remain in the same format and have yet to be offered via different channels of contact.</p>	
---	--	---	--

	<p>Delays in processing causing hardship –</p> <p>Refund requests; interim payments; payment on account; ELAS to be considered whilst claimant awaiting a decision.</p> <p>Council Tax Reduction Scheme to be put in payment if only the rent information is outstanding.</p> <p>Require a process for officers to obtain underlying cause e.g. benefit delays, work coach support required.</p> <p>Customer should receive advice or escalation.</p>	<p>Significant increase in the number of customer who's visit or call has been resolved at first point of contact.</p> <p>Customers are being signposted to online services.</p> <p>Staff awareness has been raised across the service areas to ensure hardship is prevented where relevant</p>	<p>Meeting scheduled with DWP to issues regarding delays in processing</p> <p>ELAS Team – Created a spreadsheet to identify reasons why customers are making – analysis required in order to make any changes</p>
	<p>A more flexible, holistic approach to be taken where customer's circumstances are considered exceptional and fall outside the scope of normal procedures.</p>	<p>Lessons learned – Workshops have taken place with the appropriate officers that handle complaints etc; some of the complaints and an ombudsman complaint identified that we must respond for the whole of Sefton (holistic) not just a service area.</p>	
<b>Objective 3</b>			
<p>To increase the resolution of customers' needs with one visit or call</p>	<p>Measure the % of enquiries dealt with at first point of contact.</p> <p>Knowledge of front line staff to be improved.</p> <p>Key experienced staff to be located in front office.</p> <p>Knowledge of staff to be improved in order to resolve more complex issues.</p> <p>Review process to enable administration work to be undertaken</p>	<p>Percentage of enquiries <b>processed</b> at first point of contact measured.</p> <p>Percentage of enquiries <b>dealt with</b> at first point of contact would be significantly higher but very difficult to measure.</p> <p>Continuous improvement in staff taking place in relation to upskilling to deal with more complex types of queries and prioritisation of tasks which will have a positive impact on faster decisions and processing times.</p>	

	<p>by less experienced staff and lead to reduced waiting times and enable decision making.</p>		
	<p>To liaise with Trussell Trust to issue emergency foodbank vouchers</p>		<p>The aim of the Foodbanks is to support those who are in crisis, not to resolve the issues that have put the person into crisis.</p> <p>The Foodbank referral process is robust and ensures that the main causes of crisis are dealt with by the initial referral agency.</p> <p>There are over 150 agencies that include Social Workers, Citizens Advice, schools, Doctors, District Nurses, Health teams, Sefton @ Work and other council departments. Trussell Trust Foodbanks do hold and distribute vouchers for food to those who present directly to the distribution centre in crisis. The Team will support the person and refer them on to a support agency for further support.</p>

<b>Objective 5</b>			
To reduce failure demand by ensuring robust processes and accountability between front line hubs and service areas, and clear ownership of cross service enquiries	Customers not always being signposted to other partners, such as welfare advice when more assistance is clearly required – Awareness Training	Staff have been briefed to ensure clear Signposting information added to Sefton Webpages and Arvato workforce informed of changes for awareness.	In addition to this the Sefton Directory in the past 12 months was visited on 324,179 unique sessions. The 12 months prior to that there were 189,188 unique sessions.
	<p>Any issues identified to be resolved through service level agreement and protocol that is in place between Council and OVH and reviewed annually, or as required.</p> <p>Key staff in OVH to maintain link to Benefits Service systems and act quickly on any delays.</p> <p>Member of staff from Sefton Council's Benefits Service to continue to be located in OVH offices.</p> <p>OVH to ensure that links/referrals to Sefton CAB debt advice and other partner services such as foodbanks, ELAS are fully utilised.</p>	<p>Report submitted to recommend benefits service to continue in OVH offices</p> <p>The role OVH Liaison Officer has been essential in developing a closer working relationship between the Benefit Service and our biggest Registered Social Housing provider in the Sefton area.</p> <p>The work being taken on by the OVH Liaison Officer has really helped improved the relationship between both offices and I feel that going back to multiple enquires through different channels with not help the customers we are all trying to support.</p>	
	<p>Front line process to be reviewed in order to resolve at first point of contact.</p> <p>Monitoring and evaluation required.</p>	<p>Significant increase in the number of customer who's visit or call has been resolved at first point of contact. Customers are being signposted to online services.</p> <p>Initiative continuing - More staff are being trained. Monitoring is in place.</p>	

		Linked to Customer Journey Innovation project.(10 Week Development Plan)	
	<p>Front line staff to identify and record information, where known, which will assist in providing any additional support with communications. Including debt recovery enforcement/ DWP support.</p> <p>Care Leavers – process to be put in place to identify care leavers and alert their respective leaving care personal advisors to allow for earlier intervention and support with ELAS, benefits or revenues matters to avoid matters being escalated.</p> <p>Care leavers – personal advisors in Care Leavers’ team to have direct access to ELAS staff.</p>	Process reviewed by Care Leavers Manager and Revenues Manager, alert has been added to the system.	
<b>Objective 6</b>			
To increase access to self- service information and automatic transactions where appropriate.	Web chat to be rolled out across all transactional service areas.	Web chat live and available for customer use:	Number of web chats taken place from April until September – 1,296, with 57% of the chats being related to cleansing.
	Customer Portal opportunities to be identified and assessed.	Functionality added on Sefton Council Website: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homepage</li> <li>• Benefits Advice page</li> <li>• Parking Services Page</li> </ul>	
	Free Wi- fi locations across Sefton to be Identified and promoted.	Social Media and local radio promotion has taken place. Free Wi-Fi in libraries is actively promoted.	

	<p>Self-service mentors and champions to be sited at all self-serve locations.</p> <p>Bootle OSS/Bootle library to promote access to additional self-service facilities for OVH tenants at the OVH office in Bootle Village Coral Drive Bootle.</p>	<p>In full operation in Bootle and Southport one stop shops, supporting customers with ELAS and Universal Credit applications.</p> <p>Champions are continuously promoting access to self-service facilities.</p>	
--	---	---	--

**Objective 7**

<p>To reduce costs through eliminating duplication.</p>	<p>Regular communication between the Council and DWP to continue and to include monitoring and reporting of debt and budgeting support being offered to claimants.</p> <p>DWP to provide claimants with signposting to debt advice via multi organisations funding in Sefton</p> <p><i>(This action is also linked to objective 4 – liaise with DWP over delays and evidence required)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting held 22/09/2016. DWP representatives, Sefton @ work, CAB and arvato</li> <li>• Looking at scope for collaboration work, options for co-location, improving data shared, communication channels and the YEG gateway</li> </ul> <p>Actions agreed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAB to share case studies to highlight issues raised by claimants. CAB to also revisit JCP and review process with staff regarding referrals for personal budget support whilst claiming UC.</li> <li>• Potential pilot with a benefit assessor in JCP undertaking co location work to improve service for customers. Data sharing being reviewed to move forward.</li> <li>• Exploring potential of sharing welfare rights team, Sefton @ work and JCP to improve customer overall experience by bringing together the relevant service areas.</li> <li>• DWP to be involved with Sefton to align with Health &amp; Wellbeing initiative. Work due to start January 2017. DWP also working with Head of Inward Investment &amp; Employment.</li> <li>• DWP attending work group hosted by Sefton Council for benefit cap implementation.</li> </ul>	
---	--	--	--

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DWP hosting Merseyside forums for UC implementation – Benefit Service and Welfare Rights representatives to attend.</li> <li>• DWP agreed to continue with meetings and drive up communication. Suggested to invite partners to next meeting who are connected to particular projects.</li> </ul>	
--	--	--	--

**In Progress Actions:**

<b>Objective 1</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Progress</b>	<b>Comments</b>
To improve access to consistent and high quality information	Make changes to the back of the benefit entitlement letters to capture recommendations.		<p>The Northgate official notification letters contain much detail that is statutory required to make it an official decision letter.</p> <p>There is minimal space for any additional information, but the notification is reviewed annually as part of the year end process.</p>
	Review letters to meet the needs of more service users, particularly those with learning difficulties or other impairments.	<p>There was a total of 22 system (Civica) letters reviewed.</p> <p>The Council Tax Reduction letter was reviewed and new draft is being quality assured by the Client Team – the new version should make such decision easier to understand for customers.</p> <p>One of the recommendations identified by this report was that there was a lack of independent support/ advice offered on any Housing Benefit overpayment decisions.</p> <p>When reviewing the letters only such independent advice was offered on one overpayment letter – the paragraph offering</p>	Easy Read training has been provided by the Communications team.



		<p>independent advice has been revised – this should increase the awareness that is available to customers that have been overpaid.</p> <p>Northgate was reviewed for an automated summary letter, but none available – only very limited to what can be done – Northgate does provide a statement of reasons but not fit for purpose and would add no value to this process.</p>	
	<p>Use bespoke summary letters to accompany decision notices where there are complex or numerous calculations created, particularly overpayment letters.</p>		<p>When creating Housing Benefit overpayments – benefit staff used to send a manual letter from Civica; this was in addition to the official notification from Northgate.</p> <p>A decision was made a number of years ago to only issue the Northgate decision.</p> <p>Based upon feedback, from the majority of customers it appears that the Northgate notifications are adequate.</p> <p>However, work now in progress to reintroduce the Civica bespoke letter.</p> <p>It is expected that re-introducing the manual letter will make the overpayment decisions more transparent for</p>

			customers.
	<p>Improve the content of all letters with Easy Read.</p> <p><i>(this recommendation is linked to identify customers preferred method of communication not just easy read)</i></p>	<p>Revenues and Benefits have changed procedures to meet the needs of the customer. Housing Benefit forms have been updated.</p> <p>Training has been provided by the Communications team.</p>	<p>Review of social care assessment form and associated correspondence</p> <p>Review of financial correspondence</p> <p>Review of Occupational Therapy correspondence</p>
	<p>Accessible Information (Easy Read) needs to become embedded as a way of routine working in the Council, and training to be rolled out and communicated across the Council</p>	<p>Policy Approved by Cabinet Member (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) and launched on Intranet 30/08/16</p> <p>Report to SLB to ensure policy cascaded and included in One Council Brief to all staff</p> <p>Revenues and Benefits have contacted software supplier with preferred wording for online claim and drafted new office procedures so that staff can update our core system accordingly</p>	<p>Training and Awareness session to be scheduled</p>
	<p>Utilise libraries and other Council and partner facilities for self-serve and raise awareness of same.</p>	<p>Meetings with arvato and libraries have taken place to discuss a way forward</p>	<p>Gap in provision between Arvato and Libraries has been identified. Opportunities to explore joined up working.</p>
	<p>Flags to be put on systems for customers with additional needs, where known, such as visual impairment or vulnerability so that our communication methods can be adapted to meet their specific needs.</p>	<p>The new procedures have been shared on the team and a number of officers have volunteered to become "Benefit Champions" to ensure that customers received their preferred method of communication.</p>	<p>The software supplier for the Housing Benefit form is in the process of updating Sefton's claim form so that the appropriate questions can be asked.</p> <p>The Adult Information Officer at Sefton will be</p>

			meeting these “champions” in January 2017 to update them accordingly.  The process will become active from that time.
<b>Objective 2</b>			
To improve customer satisfaction with access to our services.	Assemble a customer panel to assist with shaping the service.	The internal Customer Experience Board will be extended in 2017/18.	
	Use feedback from survey to enhance existing and develop new digital capabilities.		Ongoing commitment
<b>Objective 3</b>			
To increase the resolution of customers’ needs with one visit or call	Information about customer’s circumstances not always shared across service areas- Require holistic, generic view of customer and services to be more joined up with flexibility depending upon issues. Need escalation processes in place.		Limited sharing takes place between arvato and services such as adults, children’s etc. in the Council, approach to be developed in January.
<b>Objective 4</b>			
To simplify access to services by streamlining the whole process from first contact to resolution thereby reducing the need for	Co-location opportunities (e.g. DWP, CAB, ELAS, Education support, Blue Badge) to be identified at One Stop Shops)  Education, Blue Badge, ELAS process	Ongoing discussions are taking place with DWP regarding co-location of Benefit Advisor to Job Centre Plus Office (Bootle).  Blue Badge Process – ‘As is’ mapped and documented  Development workshop has taken place which identified ‘quick wins’ and ways to simplify and improve the service.  Action Plan agreed, reporting back to	

<p>multiple contacts.</p>	<p>handed off to back office –</p> <p>Review processes to streamline services.</p> <p>remove duplication and to avoid repeat visits.</p> <p>Enable more decision making and processing to be done at the front office.</p> <p>Experienced assessors to be located at front line to support/mentor advisors.</p>	<p>Customer Board in January re: progress</p> <p>ELAS Workshop to review current process has been scheduled for January.</p>	
	<p>Joined up approach to dealing with corporate debt, taking the customers overall financial means into account and making affordable and sustainable repayments.</p>		<p>This is linked to the review of letters – all overpayment letters will contain the independent advice/ support paragraph for customers dealing with overpayments and recovery issues.</p> <p>It will ensure that all customers are aware of their options and to whom they can go for support etc.</p>
<p><b>Objective 5</b></p>			
<p>To reduce failure demand by ensuring robust processes and</p>	<p>Council to consider seeking more investment from Government to support Council</p>	<p>As part of the Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Action Plan (2016 – 2018) The Performance &amp; Intelligence service have been tasked with identifying target groups and populations most affected by the Welfare Reform changes and the and risks of potential poverty by using and sharing data</p>	<p>To continue as part of the Welfare Reform Agenda</p>

<p>accountability between front line hubs and service areas, and clear ownership of cross service enquiries</p>	<p>and its partners to provide welfare advice at Food Banks.</p> <p>Service areas and partners to undertake and share root cause analysis to determine what is causing demand and how mitigating action can be put in place.</p> <p>Promote/build up resilience on both a personal and community level and empower people to take ownership and help themselves more.</p> <p>Work more strategically with partners, using a multi-agency, intelligence led approach, to better understand how financial support and benefits are being delivered to households across the Borough.</p>	<p>more effectively and securely between partner agencies.</p> <p>SSNA and Sefton Ward Profiles will be updated to include the 2015 qualitative study of deprived areas in English local councils (IMD) and the latest 2016 figures on social issues and poverty published by the Joseph Rowntree foundation.</p> <p>In development is 'location insight' and identifying how local citizens live, behave and spend their money, developing a Sefton profile using the Experian Mosaic customer segmentation toolset.</p> <p>Alongside the work described above, the team are also overlaying Council and other data sets (Emergency Crisis Support, those in receipt of working age benefits – Income support/SA/ESA, qualifying disability benefit – DLA/PIP, Housing benefit, Discretionary Housing Payment, Council Tax Reduction, Free School Meals, NEET, etc.) to produce a more detailed summary of geographical areas and groups likely to experience severe hardship or potential poverty.</p> <p>An initial draft performance dashboard (attached) has been developed, which will serve as a key set of proxy indicators to monitor the overall impact of the action plan and subsequent multi-agency activities in response to Welfare Reform and tackling potential poverty. There is a direct correlation between the performance plan quantitative stats/metrics and the co-ordinated multi-agency work that is happening 'on the ground' across the Borough; If the partner agencies deliver their interventions then the qualitative impact of their efforts should reflect positively in the quantitative performance data.</p>	
<p><b>Objective 6</b></p>			
<p>To increase access to self- service information</p>	<p>Testing on Web chat/website with People First to identify</p>	<p>People First representative met with arvato co-ordinator re: demo for benefits related web chat.</p>	<p>Testing required and continuous improvement with People First</p>

and automatic transactions where appropriate.	Improvements, for those with impairments. Scale up efforts to engage with a broad customer base to identify needs of users and where digital initiatives, training and further opportunities can be realised.		representatives required.
	Digital is not always the customer's first choice when accessing our services - To form part of the Councils digital inclusion initiatives.		Included as part of Digital Inclusion Agenda
	Service areas to review back office work to identify what can be done on-line, to include Adult and Children's Financial Assessments, Blue Badges and Education services.	Blue badge workshop identified areas to improve information we share with customers, online information and advice is being updated to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to apply online easy read guide</li> <li>• How to apply for a blue badge video</li> <li>• FAQ's and Top Tips</li> </ul> Opportunities are being explored in relation to customer having the ability to upload documentation which is currently sent via the post.	Adult and Children's Financial Assessments, And Education services to be reviewed.
	Measure success rate and speed of processing of customers making requests through self-serve as opposed to email.		Analysis to be completed
	OVH to identify opportunities for digital inclusion for its tenants.		To be completed
	OVH to allow access to its tenants for self-serve at the OVH		To be completed

	office in Bootle Village, Coral Drive Bootle.		
<b>Objective 7</b>			
To reduce costs through eliminating duplication.	Education services/Blue Badges – require joining up of information gathering – can be addressed at One Stop Shop. Will require review of process.  Linked to objective 4	Blue Badge Process – ‘As is’ mapped and documented  Development workshop has taken place which identified ‘quick wins’ and ways to simplify and improve the service.  Action Plan agreed, reporting back to Customer Board in January re: progress	Education Services Mapping workshop to be scheduled
	Co-location with DWP opportunities need to be further explored and developed in Sefton.		Opportunities will be developed in line with PSR and Welfare Reform agendas.
	Service areas and partners to undertake and share root cause analysis to determine what is causing demand and how mitigating		To be completed

### Continuous Improvement

<b>Objective 2</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Progress</b>	<b>Comments</b>
To improve customer satisfaction with access to our services.	To consider widening the customer survey to all contact streams.		Ongoing - no firm arrangements have been put in place at present to customer survey other contact streams.
<b>Objective 3</b>			
To increase the resolution of customers’ needs with one visit or call	Offer to visit, appointments, more use of telephone calls to customers rather than	4 experienced customer service advisors now returned to one stop shop following 10 weeks in back office. CSA’s will act as mentors to their colleagues.  There are dedicated numbers for support and	Due to the impact of the Welfare Reform many benefit customers have faced difficulties – home

	<p>writing to them.</p> <p>Require holistic, generic view of customer and services to be more joined up with flexibility depending upon issues.</p> <p>Need escalation processes in place.</p> <p>Key experienced staff to be located in front office.</p>	<p>clear signposting to ensure that the customer receives the appropriate support.</p>	<p>visits have been used to support our customers, for example a decision was made to carry out authorized home visits when dealing with appeals regarding the “bedroom tax” this was so that Benefit officers could make an informed decision on appeals based upon actual evidence gathered during the home visit.</p> <p>The impact of the latest round of Benefit CAP reductions is causing some families great hardship – surgeries have been arranged to support the customers that have been identified who will be affected.</p>
<b>Objective 5</b>			
<p>To reduce failure demand by ensuring robust processes and accountability between front line hubs and service areas, and clear</p>	<p>One Council awareness training to be put in place for front line staff.</p>	<p>A one council approach is being adopted across the workforce and will continue to be actively promoted. The vision engagement will also contribute to the awareness and accountability across the workforce.</p>	
	<p>Customer advisors not always picking up other information that may affect claimant’s entitlement or</p>	<p>A more generic approach to the customer is being encouraged as part of workforce development.</p> <p>Data sharing initiatives to encourage single view of customer. Data sharing agreements now in place with registered social landlords regarding the benefit cap.</p>	



ownership of cross service enquiries	liability - Knowledge of front line staff to be improved.	Knowledge of front line staff to be continuously improved.	
<b>Objective 6</b>			
To increase access to self- service information and automatic transactions where appropriate.	Website and links to be reviewed to ensure that they are active and fit for purpose and to meet the needs of more service users, particularly those with learning difficulties or other impairments.	Communications Team review website content and links twice a month to ensure they are fit for purpose.	
	'Digital by default' to be promoted at every opportunity.	Direct customers online as first point of contact to use online services.  In addition to this the newly implemented web adverts includes promotion of self-service.	Continuous 'push' and promotion of online services.
	All services to Promote/signpost to self- serve.	This is a continuous throughout the year depending on the activity of when the campaign to promote online services is required.  There is active use of social media and the recent introduction of web advertising is also promoting the go on line message.	
	Customers are sending emails rather than submitting a self-serve form - Reduce the number of emails being received.  Increase number of self-serve forms which go directly into back office processing systems	Email address have been removed from documentation webpages as appropriate	Continuous promotion and drive to online forms.

## **Additional Changes Implemented:**

In addition to the recommendations achieved or in progress, the working group have also identified further changes which will enhance the customer experience, they are listed as follows:

### **Email address process – e-form**

Arrangements have been put in place for e-mails to be directed to the relevant service department, rather than awaiting action from a generic e-mail mailbox. This will drive improved response times.

### **0845 Number Change**

In order to reduce the cost for customers to contact Sefton Council, our main 0845 telephone number was decommissioned and replaced with the cheaper 0345 option.

The Communications team has issued a number of internal reminders to other service areas to ensure that all numbers of materials are up to date

### **Self Service**

Web Chat was implemented in March 2016 and is predominately used to promote a number of self-serve options on the website.

Customers who contact by e-mail via the Council's Contact-us facility now receive an automated response which promotes all self-serve links.

All customers who contact customer services, irrespective of the contact channel, are advised and encouraged to self-serve.

Social media is also actively used to promote the go on line message.

### **Web Adverts**

Go Online is one of the key web adverts for December and beyond. The current key messages are e-billing and primary school admissions; however this will change depending on the time of the year and ongoing campaigns.

### **Online Vote Registration**

Online voter registration is now promoted as the main method of registration for customers. This has been supported with a full marketing campaign, including innovative taxi top advertising.

### **Council Tax Envelopes**

It is proposed that all annual Council Tax demands that are sent to every household in Sefton will include an informative messages, such as, explaining how residents can vote or what is available on-line and promoting Sefton's Directory.

## How to Videos

We will be creating simple how to videos for customers to follow when using online services, the first services to be published will be e-billing and blue badges, which will be created once we have updated processes.

## E-Billing

As part of our Go Online drive we are in the process of developing a push for Council Tax e-billing and payment by direct debit over the next few months. The objective is to have a structured approach to get as many people as possible to sign up.

## Press Releases

All press release footers will direct customers to go online where appropriate. This will help reinforce the Go Online message across local media editorial.

## Signposting

We have added a new signposting page to the website. This will help customers find the right contact details for both Council departments and partners.

<https://www.sefton.gov.uk/advice-benefits/where-to-get-advice-from>

## School Admissions

Following improved on line take up for senior school applications driven by an active digital marketing campaign the number of calls to the Contact Centre has significantly reduced this year. Confidence levels are high that the same will be achieved in January for primary School admissions.

## Contact Centre- Children's Social Care

The Contact Centre Customer Service Advisors now have access to LCS in order to deal with customer calls more effectively and efficiency. The table below shows a breakdown of Children's Social Care calls since we went live in the contact Centre with LCS on the 01.11.2016 up to the 18.11.2016.

Dates	Signpost caller to other Organisations	Non Transactional (advice given)	Non Transactional signposting using LCS	No Scat Case (form) Directed to online form	Non Professional and Prof cases for team to contact back	Total calls
1.11.16 - 4.11.16 (4days)	6	3	37	8	33	87
7.11.16 - 11.11.16	8	4	66	9	34	121
14.11.16- 18.11.16	8	2	56	10	35	111

## Sefton Directory

Bootle and Southport One Stop Shops have updated content on the Sefton Directory in terms of services, contacts and offer.

In addition to this the Sefton Directory in the past 12 months was visited on 324,179 unique sessions. The 12 months prior to that there were 189,188 unique sessions.

### **Staff Spotlight (Internal - Intranet)**

Arvato featured in a spotlight which was published on the intranet, content included current work programmes for one stop shop and contact centre.

### **Gov Radio**

Arvato have signed a 2 year contract with Gov Radio to promote “benefit related” initiatives in the One Stop Shops and Leisure Centres.

### **Sefton4Good**

Promotion of Sefton4Good via Sefton web adverts and Sefton intranet, encouraging local people to support good causes by wearing their Christmas jumpers and donating a £1.