REPORT TO: Policy and Performance Review Committee

MEETING DATE: 28 January 2014

BY: Depute Chief Executive, Partnerships and Community
                      Services

SUBJECT: Review of Voice Recognition Telephone System - ELC

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1   PURPOSE

1.1   The purpose of the report is to advise of the performance of the
Automated Telephony System used by East Lothian Council.

2   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   The Committee is asked to note the report.

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   At the end of October 2012 the automated call distribution system (ACD)
that manages telephone calls, including switchboard, in the Council's
Contact Centre was replaced with the Netcall Contact Centre 59R
solution.

3.2   This solution is widely used by many other public sector organisations
across the UK and was well established as a market leader in its field.
Furthermore, and crucially, this system also integrated with our Customer
Relationship Management (CRM) system – the system that helps us to
manage our customer contact not only in the Contact Centre but across
the Council.

3.3   Part of the new solution was the Netcall ContactPortal® which provides a
virtual switchboard operator facility to supplement the existing "human"
one. This allows a caller to say the name of the person or service that
they wish to contact and the system then connects them automatically.

3.4   The aim is to improve the effectiveness of the switchboard service that
we provide to callers, both internally and externally, by ensuring they are
put through directly to the right person/department without having to go
via the Contact Centre. In normal operation, Netcall estimated that the

ContactPortal® would automatically handle approximately 80% of all switchboard traffic which, based on our call activity during 2012, would be approximately 103,000 calls, creating an efficiency in the region of 0.75 FTE (at grade 4).

The remaining 20% of calls – those where the system is unable to recognise the caller's request – would then be routed to the Contact Centre where a member of staff will be able to provide further assistance.

3.5   The new Netcall ACD was implemented on 30 October 2012. To ensure that the virtual switchboard worked effectively the implementation process took just under 3 months to complete. The process was:

-     Once all the names on the Council's directory had been recorded a pilot was run internally for about 5 weeks. This started on 19 November 2012 and involved staff from Customer Services, IT, Legal and HR. During this period those issues identified were reported back to Netcall for correction.

-     Following the successful conclusion of the pilot, the Contact Portal was implemented on 24 January 2013 for all staff and elected members. Once again issues identified were corrected to help optimise the system for the full "go-live".

-     On 31 January 2013 the Contact Portal was implemented externally for all customers contacting us on 01620 827827.

3.6   Following the completion of this implementation it was decided to operate the virtual Switchboard during normal office hours only – this was to ensure that any callers who experienced difficulty using the new system could be directed immediately to a member of staff in the Contact Centre for assistance.

However, following a review of the system during late 2013 it was decided that as the system had become firmly established and was being used successfully by the majority of callers that the virtual switchboard operator would be opened to operate 24 hours a day, every day. This was to further improve our service and was of particular benefit for those staff and customers who need to contact Council Services that operate outwith normal office hours such as Libraries, Sports Centres and Community Centres. This went live with effect from 25 November 2013.

3.7   At each stage in the implementation process we communicated advice to users to help them make best use of the system and the following advice was included on both the Council's Internet and Intranet sites during the recent 24 hour implementation.

"With this system we have also found that it is very sensitive when trying to recognise a caller's request and in this respect we have drawn up some simple guidelines to help callers and which I have noted below for your information:

- *Dial 01620 827827 for the Council Switchboard. You will be connected to the automated switchboard.*
- *If you wish to use the automated switchboard, when prompted, say the person's name or service you wish to call. Speak clearly and at a normal pace.*
- *If you do not wish to use this please say "operator" and you will be redirected to Contact Centre staff during normal office hours.*
- *If the system recognises your request it will repeat the name to confirm before it starts to dial. If the name repeated is not what you asked say 'cancel' to stop the connection.*
- *If the system does not recognise your request you are then given the option to speak to an operator or try again. After 3 such failures, it will automatically route you to the Contact Centre. At any time however, or if you do not know the name of the person you wish to speak to, you can just say "operator" to be connected to the Contact Centre.*
- *The system is very sensitive and may detect background noise which could cause confusion so, where possible, try to call from a quiet place. Similarly, using a hands free connection can also cause the system to misunderstand your request. "*

3.8   Between April and December 2013 a total of 135,386 switchboard calls were received. The virtual Switchboard operator successfully transferred an average of 65% of all calls automatically with an additional 21% of callers requesting the operator. This gives a total successful transfer rate of 86% for the period.

You can see from the appendix, the information for each quarter from 1 April 2013 – 31 December 2013.

As customers get used to the system, more calls are going through automatically to service areas or individuals and the number of callers requesting the operator is slowly decreasing.

3.9   Of the callers who speak with a Contact Centre member of staff, either because they have requested an operator, or the system has automatically transferred them to an operator, 79% of all calls are being answered within 20 secs or 7 rings. We set a standard of 70% for calls to be answered within 20 seconds.

For Quarter 3, October to December 2013, 86% of all calls were answered within 20 secs. The response rate has improved because all members of staff within the Contact Centre are now able to deal with switchboard calls. This was not possible with the previous telephony system.

3.10   As the average talk time for those callers speaking with an operator is approximately one minute, the caller has clearly needed to speak with someone.

3.11   As part of the upgrade of the telephony system, we added a survey module on so that we could gain feedback from our customers who had just called us for any service.

The feedback has been generally positive and we have received very few complaints in relation to the switchboard service,

Prior to 2013, the switchboard abandon rate was 17%.   In the last quarter, approx 7% hung up at the automated stage and a further 3% hung up before speaking with an operator with an average wait time of 15 secs which is approximately 5 rings of the telephone so the overall abandon rate is 10% and decreasing.

3.12   We will be undertaking a Mystery Shopper survey in Spring 2014, and so it will be interesting to see how the system performs through this analysis as the main Council telephone number will be tested as part of the survey.

3.13   The benefits of the system are that callers are getting through to staff directly without going through the switchboard and there is no need for a member of the public to remember any number other than the main Council tel. no. 01620 827827 where they can either ask for a name or service and be put straight through.

This is also of significant benefit to staff who are working outwith their main base and wish to call a colleague and don't know their number.

4   POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1   There are no policy implications

5   EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1   There is no impact on equality groups.

6   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1   Financial - The telephony system was purchased within the Customer Services budget of 2012/13 and was necessary to ensure PSI compliance.

Ongoing revenue costs per annum are budgeted for within the customer services budget and replaced the existing revenue costs for the previous system.

6.2   Personnel - Freeing up of staff time to answer other more complex calls.
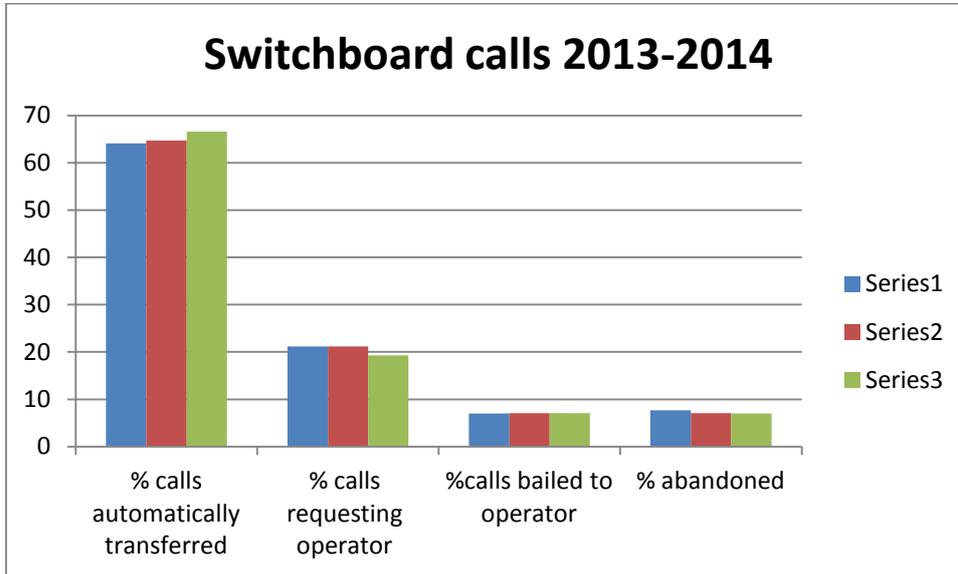
6.3   Other - None

7   BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1   None

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Appendix 1

Switchboard calls 2013-2014

East Lothian Council Netcall Contact Portal (Switchboard)
2013/2014

Quarter	1	2	3
% calls automatically transferred	64.1	64.69	66.59
% calls requesting operator	21.21	21.16	19.29
%calls bailed to operator	6.98	7.08	7.08
% abandoned	7.68	7.07	7.04