

REPORT TO: Policy and Performance Review Committee

MEETING DATE: 12 June 2019

BY: Deputy Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services)

SUBJECT: East Lothian Council Customer Contact Centre

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to advise the PPRC on the performance of the Council's Contact Centre.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The PPRC to note the performance of the Contact Centre.
- 2.2 The PPRC to note the developments within the Contact Centre.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 East Lothian Council's Contact Centre was established at Penston House, Macmerry in October 2005. At that time, there were only 2 teams within the Contact Centre: the Housing Repairs Contact Team and East Lothian's Community Alarm Service.

- 3.2 The Contact Centre in 2019 is now made up of 3 teams:

- the Contact team where the staff answer all calls related to property maintenance, environment (roads, waste services, landscape and countryside services), public sector housing enquiries, payments, council tax calls, switchboard, adult and children wellbeing services
- the Community Response team where the staff provide: the 24/7/365 call service for community alarm/telecare customers for East, Midlothian and Scottish Borders residents; the out of hours emergency call service for those three Council areas; the call service for antisocial behaviour, town centre cctv monitoring and the locum supply teacher call service.

- the Digital and Systems team which provides the IT and development support to the Customer Services team as a whole, which includes the Libraries and Customer Services Team and the Museum Service.

3.3 Each team has a dedicated staffing establishment (see Appendix 1).

- The Contact Team has a current establishment of 17.73.FTE which comprises 2 Supervisors and 15.73 FTE call handlers.
- The Community Response team has a current establishment of 16.67 FTE which comprises 2 supervisors and 14.67 FTE call handlers

The Community Response team's establishment was increased in 2010 when the service took on the community alarm and telecare calls and out-of-hours calls for Midlothian Council and again in 2018 when the Scottish Borders work was commenced.

- The Digital and Systems team has an establishment of 5 FTE staff and this team provides the support to all the systems which the Customer Services Team uses.

3.4 Service calls and services now being provided through the Contact Centre are:

- Property maintenance calls related to Council Housing repairs (2007)
- Payments calls (2007)
- Transportation calls related to road repairs, street lighting faults, pavement repairs (2008)
- Waste service calls related to special uplift requests (2008)
- Property maintenance calls related to repairs in Council buildings (2009)
- Landscape and countryside calls related to grass cutting and ground maintenance, dog fouling and stray dogs (2009)
- Waste service calls related to recycling box requests, refuse bins requests and missed collections of waste (2010)
- Customer Feedback (2010)
- Adult social care calls related to all calls for social work/occupational therapy assistance related to adults (2010)
- Community Alarm and Telecare calls for Midlothian Council (2010)
- Emergency out-of-hours calls for Midlothian Council (2010)

- Childrens Wellbeing Calls and other Adult Social Care Calls (2011)
- Council Tax Calls (2013)
- Council House Property Maintenance Appointments (2013)
- Locum supply teacher requests (2013)
- Community care calls out-of-hours (2015)
- Community Alarm and Telecare calls and Emergency out-of-hours calls for Scottish Borders Council (2018)

3.5 An Election Line has been established in recent years to deal with many Election/Referendum calls on the run up to an Election.

Calls are also taken for major events such as the Edinburgh Marathon, the Open Golf etc.

3.6 Systems are regularly upgraded which means additional work for the Digital and Systems team and for one or both of the Contact Centre teams. In addition, changes in service (back-office) systems or services may also require new scripting and changes in procedure for staff which is undertaken by the Digital and Systems team.

3.7 Major work which has been ongoing for the past 6 months has been the work required to build the new Customer Services Platform. 2 FTE of Digital and Systems resource has been allocated to this work, with 1 FTE of backfill coming from within the Contact Team. Partial funding for an additional post to support this major project was approved from the Cost Reduction Fund (along with funding for Project Officer and IT staffing resource).

3.8 **Performance**

Until recently we benchmarked our performance against a number of Local Authorities throughout the UK. These showed us to perform on a par or better than most with regards to calls answered, speed of answer, average wait time, average talk time and call handling time. At the end of 2016/17, the average % of calls answered for this group was 75% and ELC was 92% (excl callbacks). Call answered within 30 secs was 55% and ELC was 68%. The UK benchmarking group was disbanded around a year ago.

Contact Centre

	Calls offered	Calls answered	%Calls answered within 20 secs	Successful callbacks	% of calls answered and successfully called back
2016/17	248,669	228,415	61.72	4311	93.6
2017/18	254,494	229,006	57.41	15621	96.1
2018/19	290,199	252,285	49.86	14640	92.0

Over the past 3 years, calls answered within 20 seconds in the Contact Centre was as follows:

2016/17	61.72%
2017/18	57.41%
2018/19	49.86%

Fife Council have recently published performance statistics which indicate that their call answering info was as follows:

Calls answered within 20 seconds:

2016/17	59.60%
2017/18	49.60%
2018/19	42.20%

Since 2016/17, ELC Contact Centre has a call back facility where customers are offered to be called back if they don't wish to wait in a call queue.

In the past 3 years, the following % of calls have been answered or had a successful callback in the East Lothian Council Contact Centre have been:

2016/17	93.6%
2017/18	96.1%
2018/19	92.0%

Our target for calls answered is 90%.

Fife Council Contact Centres calls answered in the same period were:

2016/17	88.10%
2017/18	82.20%
2018/19	73.20%

Whilst targets require to be set, benchmarking is difficult as different Council contact centres don't all deal with the same type of call and service calls can vary in length of call and complexity.

3.9 Staffing

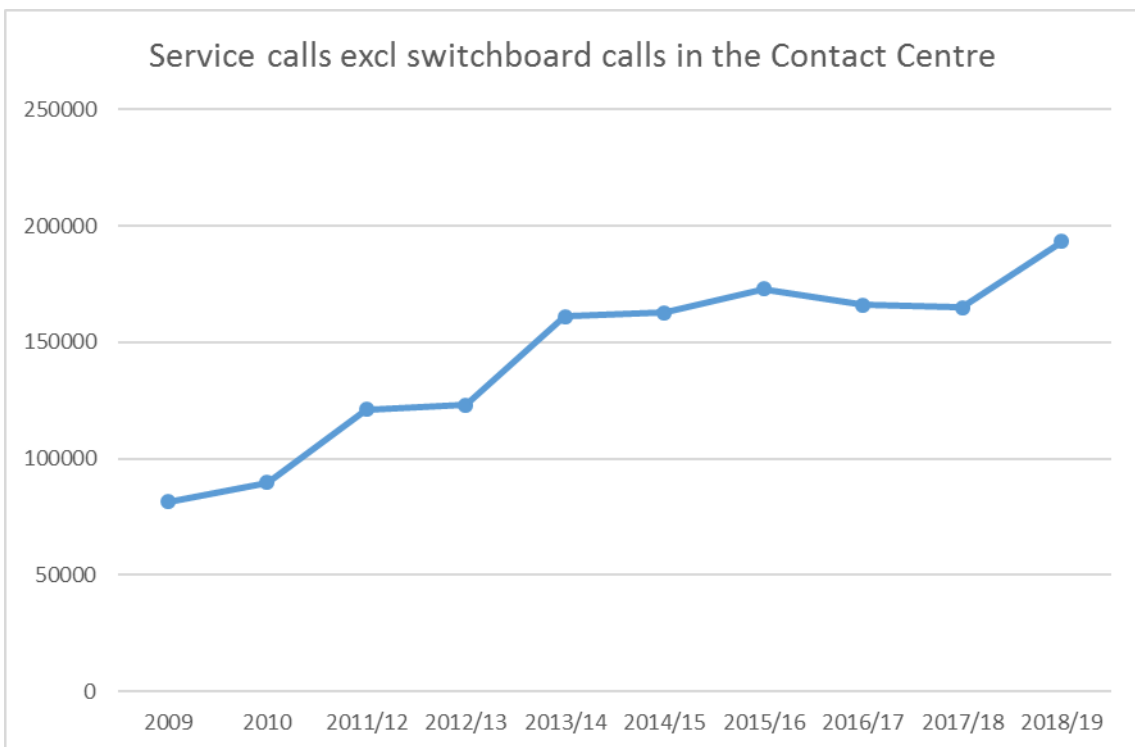
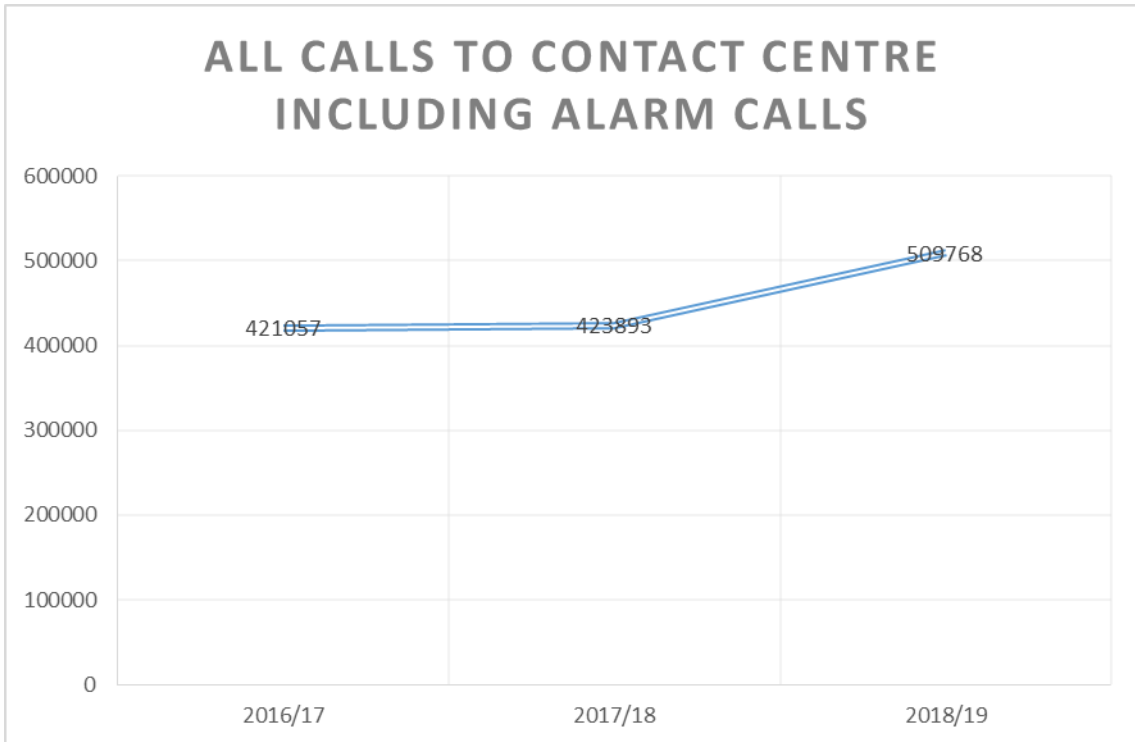
In the past couple of years, the Contact Centre has had a lot of long term sickness absence for a variety of reasons. Any long term absence has a significant effect on call handling targets. Whilst we are able to answer calls, sometimes it takes longer to respond than we would wish but all callers are given the option of being called back.

During 2018, the Contact Centre had 13 separate recruitment campaigns for 23 posts (some of which were duplicate campaigns ie no suitable applicants). In general, this was due to the need to recruit to additional staff in the Community Response team to accommodate the workload from Scottish Borders Council work. As we did not have the required staff in post prior to the work coming in due to the very short timescale between a decision being made by Scottish Borders Council in December 2017 and going live with work at the end of March 2018, this meant significant demand on the Community Response team and staff were co-opted from the Contact Centre teams.

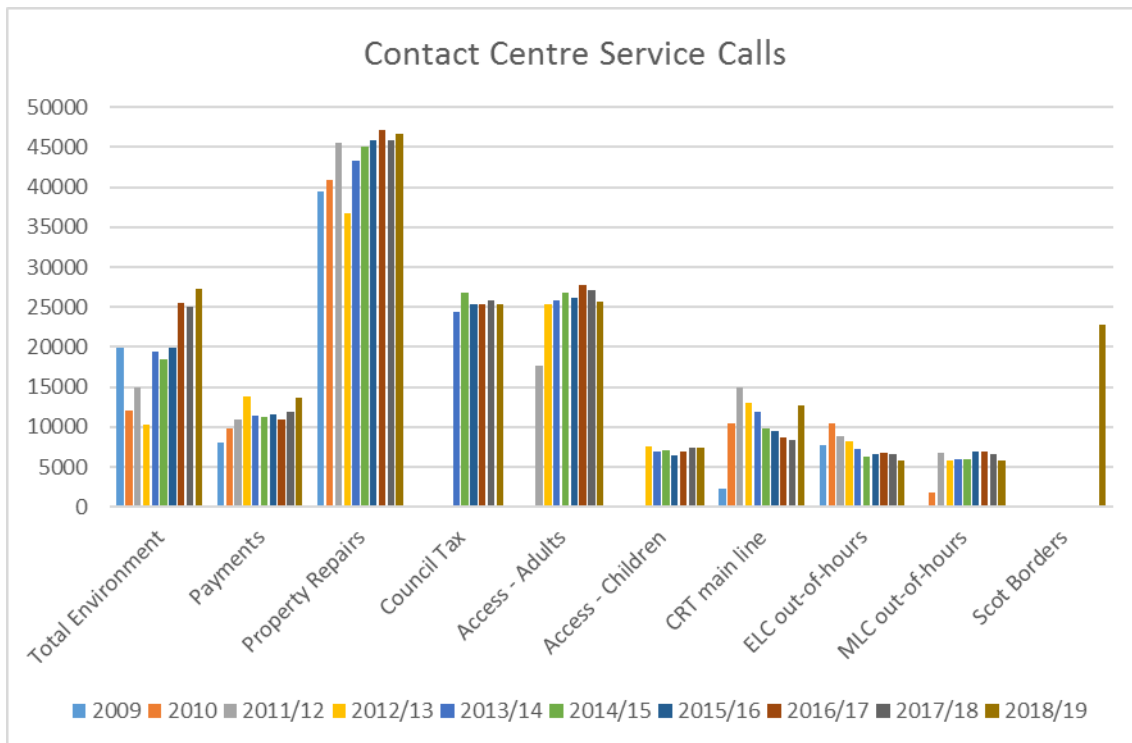
Once staff are recruited, they need trained so would not be up to speed on dealing with all types of calls for some months.

3.10 Whilst, workload is generally steady and predictable we have seen call volumes rise over the past few years. Identified below is the increase in Service calls over the years, mainly due to the Contact Centre taking on new services.

The Contact Centre dealt with nearly 510,000 calls in 2018/19 including Service Calls, Switchboard calls and Alarm calls.



The specific service calls over the years are in the table below:



	2009	2010	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Total										
Environment	19865	11995	14876	10357	19364	18464	19867	25571	25008	27309
Payments	8032	9812	10861	13794	11351	11179	11532	10901	11963	13623
Property Repairs	39511	40944	45490	36663	43266	45114	45796	47122	45855	46635
Council Tax	0	0	0	0	24434	26818	25297	25280	25824	25417
Access - Adults	0	0	17675	25346	25842	26727	26102	27764	27141	25649
Access - Children	0	0	0	7644	6967	7162	6492	6937	7486	7390
CRT main line	2298	10488	14978	13004	11868	9807	9498	8722	8416	12715
ELC out-of-hours	7765	10443	8901	8232	7283	6294	6598	6807	6655	5828
MLC out-of-hours	0	1866	6725	5880	5960	6037	6990	6874	6580	5731
Scot Borders										22874

Taking on call services for Scottish Borders Council in March 2018, has had a significant effect on workload. However, staffing was increased by 5 FTE within the Community Response Team to deal with that increase of work and funded by Scottish Borders Council.

During 2018/19, there has been an increase in Payment calls. This is likely to have been a result in the changes in dealing with cash payments in 3 of our Area Offices, plus Customer service staff and Service staff promoting Direct Debit and online payments.

Waste Service calls have also increased in 2018/19 which is likely to be due to the increase of Housing developments in the county.

The demand on the Contact Centre is entirely dependent on what the weather may be like and/or any changes to Services. So in periods of severe weather, there will be huge demand on the Contact Centre. And if there are any increases in charges, there will be more calls. If Services have specific campaigns, that may also result in an increase in calls. The aim is to have appropriate staffing for normal conditions rather than for times where demand spikes or to mitigate against sickness absence. This means that demand spikes or sickness or both simultaneously can have a large impact.

- 3.11 Whilst there is a need to set targets, unless there are significant delays in calls being answered, the performance target for calls answered within a certain period of time is no longer relevant as what is important is the customer gaining a service they have requested or speaking to the person they need to speak with.

Therefore, the more appropriate performance indicators for the Contact Centre are now:

- % of calls answered (including callbacks) – 92%
- % of Community Alarms responded to within 3 minutes – 99%
- Customer satisfaction with services provided from the Contact Centre – 90%
- Increasing proportion of customers self-serving through the Customer Portal in comparison with customers calling in to the Contact Centre or requiring face to face service

3.12 **Customer satisfaction**

Customer Satisfaction is measured in a number of ways.

In the past we have carried out an Annual Survey of our Alarm Service and the satisfaction responses from customers about the service provided were:

2015	128 responses	96.0 %
2016	128 responses	83.5 %
2017	137 responses	83.0 %

There was no survey undertaken in 2018 as the survey was generally undertaken in February each year and in Feb 2018, the Contact Centre was implementing a new Telecare Call Management system and taking on calls for Scottish Borders Council.

In 2019, we have now moved to a monthly survey, where we target customers who have required the help of the Alarm Service. Information will be provided for Q1 – 2019/20 during Q2.

With regard to unsolicited customer feedback, for **2018/19**, the Contact Centre received **1 Stage 1 complaint** which was partially upheld and there were **6 compliments**.

In **2017/18**, there were **15 Stage 1 complaints**: 7 upheld, 2 partially upheld and 6 not upheld. 6 of these complaints were related to the automated switchboard and 4 were related to staff conduct. Most of the upheld complaints were in relation to the automated switchboard and one complaint was upheld in relation to staff conduct.

Changes were made to the Automated Switchboard system in order to improving messaging and rerecording particular names on individuals/Services with the result that there has only been one complaint about the automated switchboard in 2018/19.

There were **6 compliments** for the Contact Centre during 2017/18.

3.13 **Staff qualifications**

All new staff within the Customer Services Team are required to study for a Customer Service Professional qualification (CSPQ).

31 CSP qualifications at either Award or Certificate Level have been gained by Contact Centre staff over the past 10 years which represents **27%** of the East Lothian Council's total CSPQ graduates. 7 staff are actively working on CSP qualifications currently. In addition, most of the supervisory and Management staff within the Contact Centre have either Management qualifications at SVQ Level 4 or CMI level 3 or CSP qualifications.

Two of the Digital and Systems Team are now qualified builders on the new Customer Service Platform. This allows them to create the required workflows and functions in the new system.

3.14 **Accreditation**

We are seeking accreditation for the telecare call handling service to indicate we are meeting industry standards for the service provided to our customers.

There will be an accreditation assessment taking place within the Contact Centre by CECOPS (Community Equipment Code of Practice Scheme) in **early June 2019**.

Part of the considerations for Scottish Borders Council to ask us to provide call services on their behalf was in relation to whether we were seeking Industry standard accreditation.

3.15 **Business Continuity**

As the Contact Centre is a 24/7/365 day operation and we are now providing services on behalf of three Councils and other smaller organisations, business continuity is absolutely critical.

A back up hub has been established within the Library and Museum HQ to support the Contact Centre in the event of any emergency.

In the past 15 months, this back up has been tested on a number of occasions, most recently when the Fire alarm system was activated at Penston House.

Staff within the Community Response and Digital and Systems team routinely operate out of this Hub so that all are familiar with the area in the event of a requirement to evacuate the Contact Centre

3.16 **Developments**

The Contact Centre is constantly updating or upgrading its systems or processes and reviewing how it provides services. In addition, the Digital and Systems team have also supported the rest of the broader Customer services team. In the past 4 years, the following systems have been updated or replaced:

Library Management System – November 2015

Queuebuster (Call back system) - 2016

Call recording system – Community Response team – 2017

Upgrade of Netcall Call Management System for PSN compliance 2017

Replacement of the Security Card Management System – now part of the National NEC system - 2017

Jontek Telecare call management system implemented - 2018

In addition, all Public Network Computers in the 12 Libraries were replaced in Dec 2015 and will be replaced again at the **end of 2019**

The Customer Platform is due to be implemented in **June 2019** and then the Corporate Booking system will be replaced.

These system replacements are on top of the normal system support provided to the Customer Service Team by the Digital and Systems team.

In the next few years to come, there will be constant development in terms of digital innovations.

3.17 **Upgrading systems for PSN compliance**

In 2018 we replaced our Telecare Call Monitoring and Management system. The previous system had been in place since 2010 and was no longer PSN compliant. The new system gives us a foundation to begin our preparation for the move from analogue signalling alarms to digital signalling alarms. This is necessitated by the switch-off of analogue telephony which is due to be completed by 2025. It also puts us in a good position in regards to a national desire to see the number of Alarm

Receiving Centres decrease over the next few years and our desire to act as one of the new Hubs that it is hoped will come into being.

East Lothian Council had expressed an interest to the Scottish Government some time ago, to be involved in Wave 2 of the Scottish Government's Technology Enabled Care (TEC) Programme. The aim of this programme is to prepare for the transition of analogue telecare to a fully end to end digital service by trialling digital equipment and share learning with other authorities.

To be involved in this programme, ELC needed to have a digital platform and replacing our telecare call monitoring and management system in early 2018, gave us this platform.

East Lothian Council's Telecare service successfully bid for funding from the Scottish Government (around £110,000) to trial new digital alarms and peripherals this trial is due to commence shortly.

3.18 **Online Customer Platform**

The new Customer Platform will, amongst other things, replace the existing Customer Relationship Management System which we have had in its current form since 2005.

This Project has significant importance for East Lothian Council as a whole as we will have a platform to create a customer account, allow services to be requested or provided online and allow integration to other legacy systems.

There is a Project team working on implementing this Platform consisting of staff from Transformation, IT, Customer Services, Revenues with involvement from specific Service Depts.

The benefit to the customer should be that it will be easier to request or gain services online.

This should reduce calls for certain services and allow integration to other systems. It is also likely that ELC can reduce the no. of separate systems it is supporting.

It is hope that the first phase of this project will go live in **June 2019**.

3.19 **Netcall Telephony Management system**

The Netcall telephony system is due to be updated for a nominal sum under the terms of the existing contract. This will be done once the Windows 10 rollout is carried out in the Contact Centre.

3.20 **Scottish Borders Work**

In April 2018 we commenced with the provision of a call service for Scottish Borders. This comprises Telecare Alarm Monitoring, Homecare calls, Social Work Emergency (out of hours) calls, general Council Emergency (out of hours) calls and emergency (out of hours) repair calls

for Scottish Borders Housing Association. This work, as with the work already done for Midlothian Council, Castle Rock Edinvar and ELHA, brings in income to the council.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 There is no requirement for an equalities impact assessment on the work being undertaken as systems are being improved or replaced.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial – None

6.2 Personnel - None

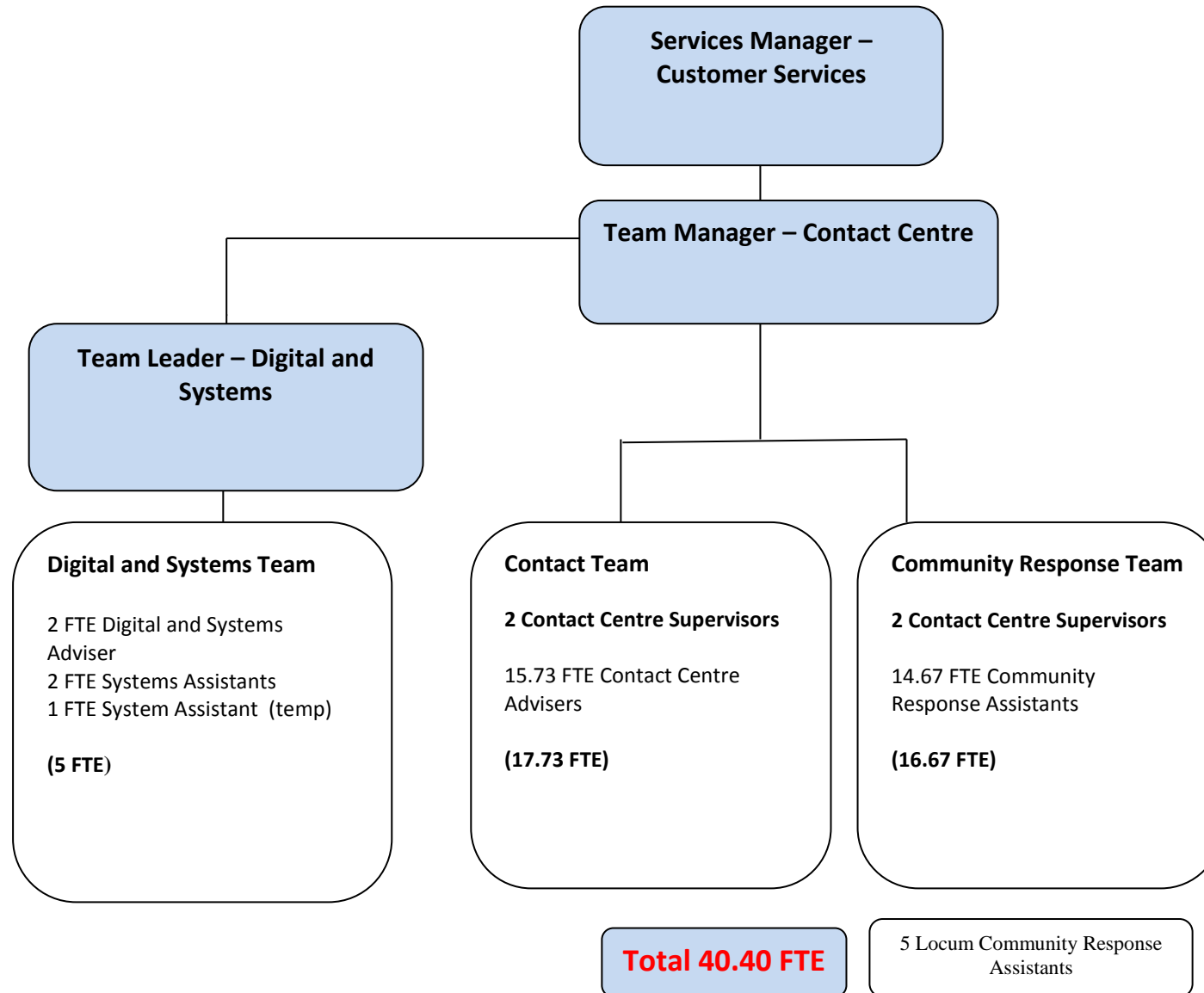
6.3 Other - None

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Appendix 1 – Contact Centre structure

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DATE	29 May 2019

Contact Centre Structure – May 2019



100918 – Est excludes 1 temp post and includes Team Manager