Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme Joint Committee

SPT

Travel Card Unit – Update on Performance and Progress on Digital Enhancements

Date of meeting   12 March 2021   **Date of report**   16 February 2021

Report by Treasurer/Secretary

1. Object of report

The object of this report is to update the Committee on performance of the Travel Card Unit (TCU) and to advise the Committee of progress regarding digital enhancements to support TCU administrative processing.

2. Background

The update provided at the previous Committee described the background for TCU workloads as the team continued to operate remotely through the pandemic. It highlighted the impact of lockdown and ongoing restrictions on expected administration and call volumes, and the resultant backlog. National entitlement card production was suspended, the anticipated flow of enquiries reduced as cardholders were largely following the stay at home message, new applications dropped and replacement cards and renewals were not being requested in normal numbers.

As restrictions eased through the summer and card production resumed the team were faced with an unprecedented volume of work that had built up during the preceding weeks. This pent-up demand resulted in a significant backlog, leading to processing delays for new applications, renewals, responding to emails and handling postal enquiries. Daily call volumes peaked at over 700 calls per day as clients chased progress. These issues, particularly with mail, were exacerbated by the challenges of operating with appropriate social distancing leading to significantly reduced on site working, again in line with the government messaging of work from home if you can and limiting numbers working from the normal base.

This was a difficult period for the team as they endeavoured to reduce the resultant backlog.

Revisions to operating practices, the implementation of a new contact centre system, ongoing development of digital solutions and a restructuring of resource enabled a focussed and planned approach to clearing the administrative workloads.

It became clear certain tasks had to be managed in the office and there was a requirement for a small complement of staff to be working at Buchanan Bus Station. A small dedicated team, was selected to support this, with all due considerations for health and safety. This involved planned prioritisation of workload by type and age, with a focus on reducing customer need for direct contact (removing non-value add calls) to allow prioritisation of backlog reduction.

At the time of the previous update SPT had implemented Noble Systems Limited's contact centre solution and were working though the initial phase to include smart interactive voice response (IVR) to promote customer self-service and automated solutions.

3. Digital Update

Phase One of the Noble System project is complete the new IVR system, capable of handling specific high-volume enquiries without the need for human intervention. The next stage of this project is to further develop the solution and integrate with the National Entitlement Card system. This will enable further automation and reduce the volume of tasks requiring manual intervention. The team can then focus on more complex activities that are not suitable for an automated approach, and better direct resource to the needs of some of our client group.

The previous update advised the IVR system was able to batch replacement card enquiries, which account for 50% of all call volumes, to be processed offline by the team. This is a more efficient way of working and it removes those calls from the contact centre.

The IVR is now also able to handle specific types of renewal enquiries within the system by providing automated responses based on the callers needs.

Further to the above initiatives, SPT has supported The Improvement Service to implement "getyourNEC.scot". This new online service is available to NEC applicants and existing cardholders' resident in council areas that have signed-up and implemented the live system. It provides options to apply for and administer membership to the scheme through the web and will further enhance the offering to concessionary travel users. Currently six authorities across Strathclyde are using the system, with five others in the pipeline. This compares with the national picture with 17 of the 32 local authorities having implemented. Those authorities currently onboarding need to return associated forms to The Improvement Service. The final authority in the Joint Committee area has expressed interest but has not yet requested the appropriate documentation. SPT is encouraging and working together with partner authorities to get access to this development for users across Strathclyde.

"getyourNEC.scot" is a phased programme that provides an online facility for over 60s and disable residents of Scotland to apply for and renew, as well as manage various other aspects, i.e. change photograph, address, of their membership. It also includes functionality for Young Scot cardholders. User benefits include the ability to manage their NEC membership online, at any time, without the need to contact SPT or their local authority. In turn this reduces the administration required within local authorities and SPT. In addition, it provides a safe method of managing user enquiries without the need for travel and person-to-person contact.

4. Performance Results

- Administrative Processing

    o Administrative processing times are currently between one to two days from receipt. This is an outstanding achievement and a significant improvement from the height of the backlog, where processing times were extended to six weeks. The team have worked exceptionally hard to clear the workloads resulting from the pent-up demand from the first lockdown. This has resulted in a considerable reduction in calls and enhanced customer service. All performance metrics for call handling are very positive.

- Call Handling Performance

    o Call volumes reduced as the team cleared the backlog from up to 2800 calls per week and are now maintained at between 600-700 calls per week.

    o Average speed of answer is currently around 60 seconds.

    o Abandoned call percentages, where the caller hangs up before we can answer, are now in the low single digits, 1%-2%.

    o The team are now maintaining exceptional call handling performance levels.

5. Next Steps

In the next phase the Noble System will interface directly with the card management system and remove the requirement for manual intervention.

This is reliant on Transport Scotland procuring a replacement card management system which we can interface with via MySQL or an API. This process is under way, being led by the National Entitlement Card Programme Office, and scheduled for a Summer 2021 implementation.

SPT is finalising the implementation of web forms to standardise online and email enquiries to enable further efficiencies and streamline processes.

6. Committee action

The committee is asked to note the contents of this paper, the progress made with digital enhancements and further future integration to improve the service further.

7. Consequences

Policy consequences	*None directly*
Legal consequences	*None directly*
Financial consequences	*None directly*
Personnel consequences	*None directly*
Equalities consequences	*Improved customer experience achieved via efficiency gains and performance improvements*
Risk consequences	*Mitigations to minimise the risk to card holders*

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