HALIFAX
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

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Item No.   5
Halifax Regional Council
June 15, 2010

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: _____

Brad Anguish, Director, Business Planning & Information Management
and Harbour Solutions

DATE: May 14, 2010

SUBJECT: **311 Service for Non-Emergency Municipal Government Services**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Request by Councillor Mosher at the March 3, 2009, meeting of Regional Council that staff prepare a report on 311 Service for Non-Emergency Municipal Government Services.

At the March 3, 2009, meeting of Municipal Council, the following motion was passed:

MOVED BY Councillor Mosher, seconded by Councillor Adams, that Regional Council request a staff report on the implementation of a 311 telephone number for non-emergency government services for the Halifax Regional Municipality.

BACKGROUND

HRM's Call Centre and Dispatch Service was established in July, 2000. At the time, the staff complement included 16 Agents, 1 Supervisor and 1 Manager. In the beginning there were mostly paper-based processes and hard copy manuals. There was no formal training mechanism and no formal relationship with internal operational clients. Service standards and performance measurements were non-existent.

The Call Centre has grown its operations and now staffing consists of 24 full-time and 4 part-time Agents, 1 Admin Support, 1 Training Lead, 1 Business Analyst, 2 Supervisors and 1 Manager. The volume of calls averages 600,000 per year, and the Call Centre measures its Grade of Service (GOS) at 80/25 (80% of the calls are picked up within 25 seconds or less) with an abandonment rate (caller hangs up before answer) of under 10%. Of the total yearly call volume, 80-85% of calls are closed on initial contact (Tier 1), meaning the citizen gets their answer or service in the one call. Of the 15-20% of "open" calls, 87% are closed within the service standard. The top citizen requests by volume are: Transit, General Information, Taxation, Parking Enforcement, and Solid Waste Collection.

The Call Centre number (490-4000) is the main intake number for many HRM services, and citizens can call anytime between the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. daily and expect to get answers on a wide array of questions. The Call Centre also provides after-hour urgent service requests call for Municipal Operations, Facilities, and Water Services from 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. Also, Call Centre and Dispatch Service has been available 24/7 during EMO events such as Hurricane Juan, 9-1-1 and the Swiss Air disaster.

Since its inception in July 2000, the Call Centre has grown. The service has expanded to serve most Business Units (or sections within Business Units) in HRM. Yearly customer satisfaction surveys indicate that citizens are satisfied by the service provided by the Call Centre and like the ability to call one number for service (survey snapshot can be found on Page 3 of Attachment). Over time, there have been incremental improvements to the types and services offered, with the intention of becoming ready for the introduction of a 311 service.

DISCUSSION

In November, 2004, the CRTC (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission) approved a joint application from the HRM, the City of Calgary, City of Toronto, Regional Municipality of Halton, la Ville de Gatineau and la Ville de Montreal to assign the 311 number for access to non-emergency Municipal Government services.

Why 311?
In the United States, the 311 dialling number was originally brought in to alleviate demand on 911 systems; however, the 311 service has proven to be a versatile management tool that helps

local governments deliver more effective, efficient, and accountable public services. A number of Canadian cities have adopted 311 call systems.

Citizens expect more from their government today; they want to contact and interact on their time and have higher expectations on when the service will be delivered. There is an expectation that they can check on the status of their request for service at anytime. The current call centre number of 490-4000 combined with the implementation of the Hansen customer relationship management software have largely delivered on these expectations.

Adopting the 311 number would make it easier for callers to connect with HRM. By providing and marketing an easy to remember three-digit number, citizens would be provided with a one-stop, simplified access to non-emergency municipal services. 311 would continue to help facilitate effective and efficient communication between the municipality and its citizens and would enable active participation in making HRM a better place.

During emergency events, 311 can play a crucial role in diverting non-emergency calls from the 911 system. It can provide a communication link between EMO and disaster response team to the citizens so that critical information can be relayed and communicated without tying up the 911 lines. This potential was clearly demonstrated through the 490-4000 number during Hurricane Juan and the most recent wildfires.

HRM's 311 Readiness
In 2006, a consulting firm, AtFocus Inc. was engaged to assist in determining HRM's 311 readiness, and considered five key areas. These areas measure the maturity of development in the Call Centre and help to identify where on the 311 readiness spectrum HRM falls (See Attachment 1). Overall, the HRM Call Centre and Dispatch service meets many of the suggested readiness areas. There are a number of areas that would still be of benefit in a 311 implementation, and there are a few where there is much to achieve. Technology is the biggest area for development, but is also the most costly to implement.

Past and New Initiatives at HRM
Since the inception of the Corporate Call Centre in July 2000, there have been many initiatives and development that support a 311 implementation. A number of enhancements have taken place to improve service to citizens but also move HRM into a better position to enable the changeover to a 311 operation.

❏ The Call Centre moved into the new Integrated Dispatch & Telecommunications Centre where both emergency and non-emergency call-taking and Dispatch have co-located
❏ Launched on-line Customer Service Requests
❏ Launched On-Line Permitting
❏ Adoption of Integrated Service Contact Strategy for HRM
❏ Improvements to CRM (Customer Relationship Management)Tool (Hansen) through an Accountability Project

❑ Implemented Call Taking and Dispatch for Animal Control
❑ Implemented Call Taking and Dispatch for By-Law Enforcement
❑ Expanded Hours of Service to 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. 363 days per year
❑ Supported the Implementation of new Tax Module in Hansen
❑ Integrated the Dispatch function into the Call Centre Agent role

The Call Centre and Dispatch Service has been making gradual changes to the service for some time. However, these changes have been made with no new resources, and have started to show some slippage to both customer service response and Grade of Service in the Call Centre. It should also be noted that in May 2010 in response to extreme budget pressure, Regional Council reduced the Call Centre hours of operation by eliminating Holiday service.

The Call Centre business plan for 2010/11, as approved by Regional Council, is to complete a number of new initiatives that would:

1) Deflect recurring informational calls (ie simple bus calls) from live agents and create some capacity in the Call Centre to maintain the stated Grade of Service,
2) Generate more capacity by increasing the on-line service request presence and other self-service options, and
3) Implement the introduction of IVR and/or other technology that would assist in managing the current call volume and Grade of Service.

These initiatives should create some ability to maintain the current service levels, and increase capacity so that new services or increases to call volume can be considered without increasing staffing, and would better position HRM to consider a full 311 operation.

There are still areas that have gaps in what we are doing and what is considered advanced stage of 311 development. There are a number of services offered by HRM that are not currently handled through Call Centre and Dispatch Services. Some Business Units (or sections within Business Units) remain stand-alone and handle their citizen calls through separate individual phone lines such as Special Events Hotline, Recreation, Police non-emergency, to name but a few. The intention for this fiscal year is to examine what areas are not serviced by the Call Centre and prepare a plan for including (or not) the remaining services, along with a recommendation to Council on HRM's readiness to move forward with a 311 implementation.

Research has shown that 311 operations vary from municipality to municipality. There is a perception that if a municipality is 311, that they are all things to everyone all of the time. The fact is, that many of the 311 Centres in Canada do not operate 7 days a week, their hours of operation are standard or expanded business hours, and they offer a more narrow scope of service than HRM's 4000 Call Centre. One size does not fit all, and upon reviewing a number of municipalities that are already 311, HRM seems well-positioned to consider the next step.

The intention for HRM has been to make progressive changes over time (without new costs) that

would enable the municipality to simply "turn the switch" to become a 311 Centre. Making the switch could be as easy as citizens within the boundaries of HRM dialling 311 instead of 490-4000. Long distance dialling would be accounted for on the back end, so customers would not have to use the current toll-free number or incur long distance charges when dialling 311.

It is anticipated that if the number were switched from 490-4000 to 311, the call volume would increase by approximately 20-25%, although the call types would not change (unless HRM chose to offer more service through the Call Centre). People would want to "test" the system, and by marketing the 311 number, people would want to see how well the service works. Volume would increase as more citizens become aware of the new number.

The CRTC ruling indicates that the 311 number would require marketing to ensure that it is distinguished from other N11 numbers, and that the local telephone service provider (Bell Aliant) have six months notice to effect the dialling boundaries for 311. The current technology within the Call Centre can handle the call volume and distribution, and although the Hansen CRM tool and other technologies are not fully automated, the operation could potentially succeed in its current state; however, staff want to further investigate and ensure success can be achieved without significant financial investment. Once 311 is implemented, essentially there is no turning back.

Provincial Consideration of 211
There have been discussions at the Provincial level to implement a 211 system. The 211 number has been set aside and approved by the CRTC for information and referral of health, community, and human services and United Way has partnered with many cities across Canada to implement the 211 system. In some municipalities there are joint 311/211 Centres. There is growing support in moving forward with 211 by the Province, and there may be some partnership opportunities and benefits for HRM to review and consider in conjunction with a 311 implementation. Staff will continue to work with Provincial staff to explore the inter-governmental synergies and community benefits that may arise from establishing a combined 311/211 centre. Staff currently understand that a provincial decision on moving forward with 211 in Nova Scotia will be taken in the Fall.

What's Next?
The operational goals for 2010/11 of the Call Centre and Dispatch section are to increase the ability to become 311 ready without a great deal of additional cost. The suggested initiatives discussed above should enable HRM to consider a plan for future 311 implementation while being mindful of HRM's significant municipal budget pressures. Staff will be examining and bench marking municipalities that have 311 in place, and will return to Council in this fiscal year with additional information and recommendations for consideration. Once the Provincial government considers a 211 implementation in the fall of this year, it will give HRM the chance to determine any joint 311/211 opportunities and report on those as well.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

No budget implications at this time.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ATTACHMENTS

HRM's 311 Readiness - Five Key Areas

A copy of this report can be obtained online at http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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HRM's 311 Readiness - Five Key Areas

In 2006, a consulting firm, AtFocus Inc. was engaged to assist in determining HRM's 311 readiness, and considered five key areas. These areas measure the maturity of development in the Call Centre and help to identify where on the 311 readiness spectrum HRM falls.

1.   **Centre Structure: How the Centre Functions and Services Provided**

- **Services Provided at Intake:** Best practice for full 311 services suggest that 80-90% of business unit services are handled at the intake point without a transfer. It is estimated that the Call Centre is the main intake for approximately 50% of public-facing services at the Tier 1 level. 85% of those services do not require a transfer.

- **One number for intake of service requests**: The Corporate Call Centre has been in existence since July, 2000, and has been the "main" phone number for citizen requests. The "blue pages" in the phone book have been somewhat decreased over time, but there are still multiple phone numbers listed.

- **Multiple Service Channels**: Citizens want choice, and although the telephone channel is still the number one channel for service provision, the best practice is to provide the opportunity for citizens to contact the Municipality through the channel of their choice. The Call Centre does provide multiple service channels - telephone, fax, e-mail and on-line service requests through the web. However, the services in some cases, ie, on-line service requests could be more automated.

2.   **People - How the Centre Manages its Human Resources andTraining**

- **Job Descriptions and Performance:**   Job Descriptions of Call Centre Agents have been developed for this type of work, and are updated based on industry relevance. Staff's performance and proficiency are reviewed regularly and have been tied to developmental plans.

- **Orientation and Training**: The Call Centre has a dedicated Training Lead who prepares the training content and delivers new Agent Orientation and content training, as well as on-going, "just in time" training.

- **Workforce Management and Scheduling:** Workforce management is the ability to understand the staffing requirements and schedule appropriate resources to handle the incoming calls based on historical call volume and other data. Current workforce is manual and the Call Centre scheduling and resource management are somewhat restrictive by the collective agreement. The staffing model and schedule is based on historical call volume data, but is reactionary when unexpected events occur.

3.   **Technology - How the Centre uses available Technology, Knowledge and Citizen Management**

- **Call Handling, Routing and ACD:** The Call Centre currently "rents" this technology through Bell Aliant and the service is charged on a per seat, per month basis. The ACD (Automated Call Distribution) system is a basic call distribution system based on the incoming calls and sending them to the next available Agent.

- **IVR and Call Queuing**: Best practice suggests that an IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system be utilized in successful 311 implementations. The IVR should be simple to navigate and could handle simple requests through self-service capabilities. Service requests can be routed to the next available Agent based on their skill sets and service level requirements. The HRM Call Centre does not currently have an IVR system in place.

- **Knowledge Management:** A single, automated knowledge management tool should be used to answer all inquiries and should have the ability to provide scripting for complex issues. Currently, the Call Centre has developed an internal tool through the intranet which provides subject matter content and some scripting for Agents. However, it is not automated and is somewhat limited in its searching capabilities. The Agents also utilize a number of other tools such as GIS, street directory, and the internet to provide information to citizens.

- **Citizen Management:** A centralized CRM (citizen relationship management) tool which automatically refers service requests to the appropriate Business Unit contact should be utilized. The Call Centre currently uses the Hansen Customer Service Module to enter information in service requests for distribution to the various Tier 2 contacts for action. However, there are further automation and efficiencies not realized with this CRM tool.

4. **Physical Plant - How the Centre is set up - Station Configuration, Workplace Amenities**

- **Workspace and Station Configuration:** In 2007, the Call Centre moved into the new Integrated Dispatch and Telecommunications Centre. The space was specifically designed for a 311 Centre and the work spaces are configured in "pods" to ensure a productive work environment. The Centre and work space meets all health and safety standards as well as internal ergonomic standards.

- **On-site Amenities:** The design of the Centre includes a lunch room with full amenities, lounge, quiet space, locker room, meeting and training space. The building also includes a work out room for staff and the lounge area has comfortable furniture and a place to enjoy offsite activities. There are snack and beverage machines on site. The Call Centre is a secure work site and swipe card access allows staff to feel secure as they work outside of the core hours of HRM.

5. **Performance - How the Centre Manages Performance, Quality Assurance, and Reports**

- **Citizen Satisfaction**: The Best practice for measuring citizen satisfaction is to perform regular satisfaction surveys based on citizen focussed metrics. The Call Centre currently conducts yearly citizen satisfaction surveys which are based on the "Citizen First" report from the Institute for Citizen Centred Service. The five drivers of service satisfaction and the most recent survey results follow:

Driver of Satisfaction	2008 Survey Results Rated Very Good or Excellent	2009 Survey Results Rated Very Good or Excellent	Change from Previous Year
Timeliness - satisfied with the time it took to get the service	73.90%	75.97%	2.07%
Knowledge - staff were knowledgeable and competent	71.99%	77.71%	5.72%
Courteous - staff were courteous and went the extra mile	77.16%	83.72%	6.56%
Fairness - was treated fairly	81.99%	86.43%	4.44%
Outcome - I got what I wanted	74.36%	80.77%	6.41%
Hours of Operation	86.51%	76.31%	-10.20%

- **Quality Call Monitoring:** Calls should be regularly monitored using call recording software that captures both voice and screen history. Quality monitoring is being completed by remote live and recorded monitoring and feedback on quality of the calls is given regularly to Agents.

- **Performance Reports:** The key performance indicators for Call Centre operations are based on industry standards. Weekly reports are produced in a scorecard that is shared with Agents and form part of their performance development plans.

Overall, the HRM Call Centre and Dispatch service meets many of the suggested readiness areas. There are a number of areas that would still be of benefit in a 311 implementation, and there are a few where there is much to achieve. Technology is the biggest area for development, but is also the most costly to implement.