



**EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW &  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:  
26 SEPTEMBER 2019**

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**Report of: Director of Housing and Inclusion**

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**SUBJECT: CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRE CALL HANDLING – PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

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Wards affected: Borough wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To provide feedback regarding the Contact Centres call handling performance targets.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

2.1 That the content of the report be noted.

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**3.0 BACKGROUND**

3.1 At the Executive Overview & Scrutiny Meeting in March 2019, an action was raised to provide information to Members on the level of resource required to achieve a 30 second average answered wait time for callers to the Contact Centre.

3.2 The Contact Centre currently has two performance indicators in place; WL108 is the indicator for the average answered wait time for callers to the Contact Centre and WL90 is the percentage of calls offered that are answered. The performance target for WL108 is 145 seconds (2 minutes 45 seconds) and the target for WL90 is 88%.

3.3 The Customer Services team are the first point of contact for all calls to the Councils main telephone number. The team are able to handle a wide range of customer enquires at the first point of contact, which includes booking and taking payments for bulky household waste collections and pest control appointments,

handling fly-tipping reports and street cleansing issues, processing requests for replacement bins and placing work orders for repairs to Council properties. They also act as a signposting/switchboard service, referring callers to back office teams for more specialist services or for those services that have not been transferred in to Customer Services. In addition to handling calls made to the Council via the Contact Centre, the Customer Services team also provide face to face services at two Customer Service Points and respond to web/email enquiries.

- 3.4 The team are committed to providing quality services to customers, where possible resolving queries at the first point of contact.

#### 4.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 There are currently 11.7 full time equivalent (FTE) members of staff within the team, that handle customer interactions and they are split across three access points – the contact centre, the customer service points in Skelmersdale and Ormskirk. The contact centre handles calls between 08.30am – 5.30pm Monday to Friday. The level of FTE varies on each day as work patterns reflect customer demand. Additional factors such as annual leave, absence and training evidence that on average 8 FTE handle calls on a daily basis during periods of normal call volumes.

- 4.2 The table below details the number of interactions the team handled during 2018/19:

Method of contact	Interactions	% of total contact
Telephone	95,263	70%
Face to face	22,501	16%
Web/email	19,196	14%
Letters	8	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>136,968</b>	

- 4.3 Call patterns change throughout each day with the majority being received between the hours of 9:00am and 11:30am. Calls reduce between 12:00pm – 1:30pm (however staff levels also reduce over this period) and rise slightly between 2:00pm – 4:00pm with the lowest point being around 5:00pm each day. The current working patterns within the team are arranged so that more staff are available during the morning periods and staff lunch breaks are also staggered across a three hour period instead of the usual two hours, to reduce the impact on callers during this time. .

#### 5.0 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- 5.1 Interaction volumes change throughout the year and resources are planned to manage expected peaks in service. There can also be unknown peaks in service which can be as a result of adverse weather conditions. Whilst the management team are able to predict the total future resource levels to meet

demand, peaks throughout individual days when a number of customers choose to call at the same time, particularly during service changes/new service launches is difficult to predict and can create challenges which can then impact on performance. The balance the management team always aim to achieve is a high standard of customer service against the cost.

- 5.2 Detailed assessments of calls from September 2018 – August 2019 have been made to estimate the level of resource required to answer calls within 30 seconds. This period has been used to provide a typical call handling level as Members will be aware that calls increased during the summer period last year whilst brown bins were introduced. This has identified that during normal periods of call volumes, it is estimated that 20 FTE would be required purely to handle telephone calls throughout each day to meet a target of 30 seconds. To manage peaks in service throughout the year, particularly around year end and the annual launch of garden waste subscriptions, it is estimated that a total of 30 FTE would be required. Details of the financial implications are provided at section 9 of this report.
- 5.3 Agency staff are currently utilised during known peak periods to manage the increase in calls. Agency staff are normally recruited approximately two weeks in advance of the changes being introduced to undertake training. However it is important to note that it takes time for new members of staff to achieve our required standard and the evidence demonstrates they handle less calls than experienced members of staff. In addition, average call handling times increase and they are only able to provide a limited number of services due to the level of training required.
- 5.4 To answer calls within 30 seconds will require an increase in additional permanent members of staff within the Customer Services team to handle calls, whilst also providing services face to face, responding to web and email enquiries.

## **6.0 SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATIONAL REVIEW (SORP)**

- 6.1 Members will be aware of the decision made at Council on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019 to restructure the organisation to bridge the £1.9M budget gap and as a result current structures will be streamlined to help achieve the required budget reductions.
- 6.2 Part of the proposals include improvements to digital technology to improve access to services and make processes more efficient. A reduction in posts within the Customer Services section will come into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, to allow time for the digital technology to be implemented.
- 6.3 In addition to the changes referenced at 6.2, a requirement of the centralised Business Support Officer roles is to assist teams across the Council with peaks in demand. These roles will be based within the centralised Business Support Team, forming a new team. As a result, detailed analysis of these roles will be undertaken to assess the workloads of the team and the level of support that can be provided to the Customer Services team. It is expected that the Business Support Officers will be able to provide regular support throughout the year to

enable them to build and develop their knowledge and skills to support customer services during periods of high demand. This support should assist with the challenges highlighted at section 5, however it is important to note that the resource modelling has not been set up to accommodate a reduction in call handling targets.

## **7.0 CUSTOMER/DIGITAL SERVICE OFFER**

- 7.1 The year to date figure at the time of this report is currently at 2 minutes 50 seconds which is below the 2 minutes 25 seconds target. Whilst maintaining a responsive contact centre remains integral to our customer service, the resourcing of this needs to be balanced with the promotion of other access routes for services in line with key elements of the Council's Plan to encourage self-service and deliver ongoing service efficiencies.
- 7.2 Members will be aware that we have recently launched a new online customer portal ahead of the target delivery date and within budget, to improve the overall customer experience. Although still in its infancy, it has proven extremely popular with citizens – approximately 19,600 (40%) now have their own customer account with 86% of these being created directly by customers themselves through the Council's website. The Customer Services team actively promote the portal and also provide advice and assistance to customers to set up/access their account if necessary. Whilst recognising that not all customers can go online, this new service forms an integral part of our future customer service delivery.
- 7.3 Ongoing active promotion of channel shift and online services is also included as part of the Contact Centre's Interactive Voice Response (IVR) facility, which encourages customers to hang up their call and access services online instead of waiting to speak to an advisor.

## **8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no significant sustainability impacts associated with this report and, in particular, no significant impact on crime and disorder.

## **9.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 To answer calls within 30 seconds would require an additional 12 FTE to handle calls during periods of normal call volumes. Based on the bottom scale of the annual salary grade of £23,290 (including on costs) for a Customer Services Assistant, this would cost the Council an additional £279,480 per year. During peak periods a further 10 FTE would be required, based on current peak periods this resource would be required for approximately 18 weeks (this would be reviewed on a weekly basis to ensure agency staff were only utilised when necessary). Utilising agency staff for this period would result in an additional maximum cost of £89,000. The total annual cost for the increased levels of staff equates to £368,480.

- 9.2 The use of existing agency staff budgets within Customer Services would reduce the total cost to £363,480. Budget is also available to support the cost of agency staff during the roll out of each new subscription year for garden waste. The exact amount that could be utilised to support a further increase in staff would need further consideration. The current spend for this financial year totals £23,000. This would potentially reduce the total additional staffing cost to £340,480.
- 9.3 In addition to an increase in staffing budgets, additional funding would also be required to fund system licence fees and uniforms for permanent staff.
- 9.4 The current contact centre can seat 14 members of staff at any one time. An accommodation review would also need to be undertaken to accommodate the increase in staffing numbers, which will also likely have a financial implication in relation to office space, furniture/equipment.

## **10.0 RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 This item is for information only and makes no recommendations. It therefore does not require a formal risk assessment and no changes have been made to risk registers.

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*\* Please delete as appropriate*

### **Background Documents**

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

The decision does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

### **Appendices**

1. None