

Report of the Head of Customer Contact (Contact Centre)

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Citizens and Communities)

Date: 14th September 2015

Subject: Contact Centre Performance

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

1.0 Summary of main issues

- 1.1 Since the last report to Scrutiny, a number of changes have taken place within the Contact Centre, and further significant developments are taking place as we move toward a centre of excellence model. This model will allow us to better respond to customers' broader needs, where applicable, rather than just handling single issues.
- 1.2 The quality of call handling continues to be high, reflecting the considerable investment in recruitment and selection, and then in training and development. However, this has proved to be a double edged sword in that we have seen a high volume of staff leave for better paid jobs elsewhere in the Council due in part to the restrictions on external advertising for many council jobs.
- 1.3 In order to deliver efficiencies, the digital access team (website, web chat, social media) has been integrated within the contact centre. We are helping customers to serve themselves on the website, which can be much cheaper than a telephone call, and generally more convenient for those with internet access.

2.0 Purpose of this report:

- 2.1 To update Scrutiny Board on the centres of excellence development, the performance of the contact centre since April 2014, and to set out a direction of travel for future improvements.

3.0 Background information and main issues:

- 3.1 Three centres of excellence have been set up and are being developed to:
- focus on broader outcomes based on a single-view of the customer
 - integrate service delivery at first point of contact around a 'circle of need' framework
 - enable more customer queries to be fully dealt with at the point of contact
 - address greater complexity with regard to customer issues over the telephone
 - integrate with external partners, e.g. NHS, police.
- 3.2 The **care & safeguarding** centre of excellence (name not yet finalised) has brought together the following teams:
- Customer services
 - Multi-agency domestic violence unit (police, adult social care, children's social care)
 - Children's duty & advice team
 - Adult social care duty team
 - NHS gateway.
- 3.3 The care & safeguarding centre of excellence has been running for just four months so far, but partners report significant improvements in joint working, leading to better outcomes for customers. Customer services has seen its quality of referrals to adult social care improve considerably due to the closer working, saving time for professionals allowing them to focus on priorities.
- 3.4 The **welfare, benefits and revenues** centre of excellence brings together council tax, benefits and welfare support, and the team is working closely with staff based at Hough Top Court to provide a more streamlined service to customers. Sharing of resources and joint recruitment will allow better distribution of resource to manage peaks and troughs in customer demand and administrative workflow.
- 3.5 The **environment and community** centre of excellence brings together relevant services which are generally high volume and mainly transactional. Alongside these services is the digital access team which is working to improve the use of leeds.gov.uk and introduce self-service options, including the new customer portal. The team engages with customers via social media and web chat to assist customers who are already online to complete their queries via leeds.gov.uk.

3.6 Contact Centre performance

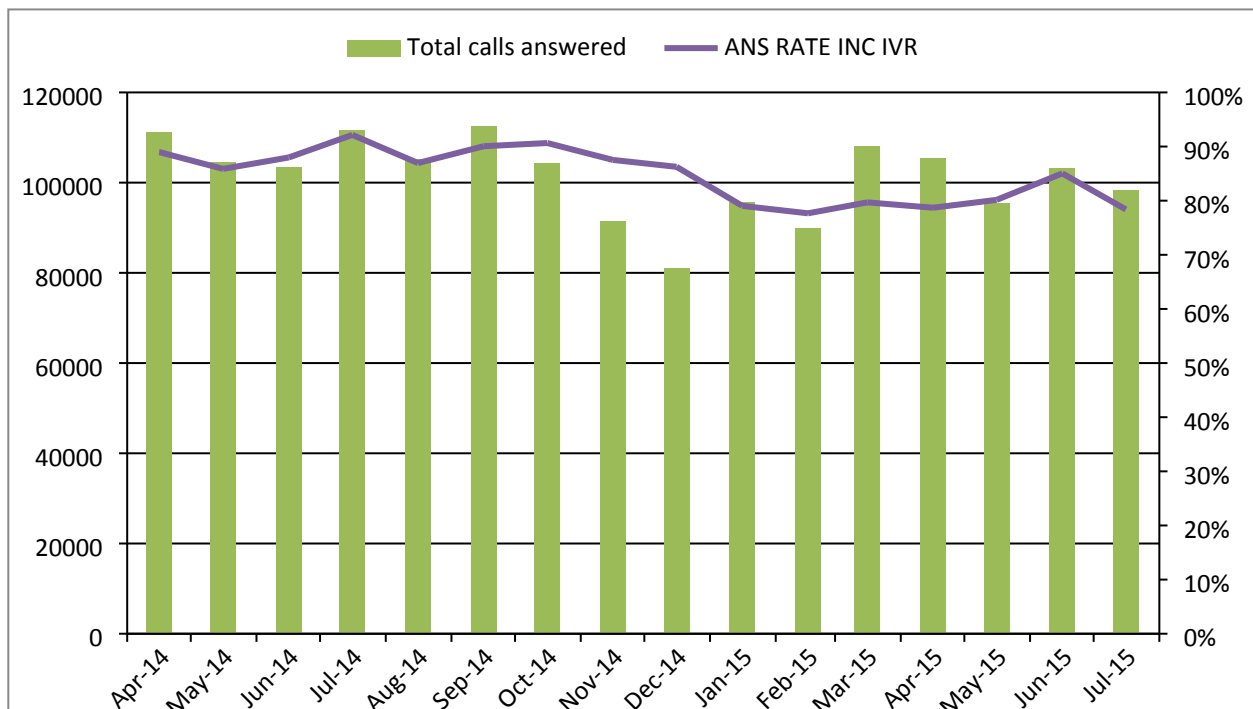
- 3.7 The contact centre and digital access handle high volumes of contact for a range of services (see appendix 1). We have made significant progress in terms of digital access, hosting visits from a number of other councils and central government agencies who want to learn from how we manage social media, web chat, and self-service.
- 3.8 A number of high profile campaigns and initiatives have been managed very successfully within existing resources: tour de France Grand Depart; individual electoral registration; waste new recycling service; introduction of the Care Act. Our staff are exceptionally well trained and provide a professional and customer-focused service.
- 3.9 High performance is measured in a number of ways, but traditionally we have presented performance in terms of the % of calls that are presented that have been answered, and the average speed to answer. Our targets are: 90% calls answered and average speed to answer of 3 minutes or less.
- 3.10 Performance against these targets is influenced heavily by a number of factors:
- Level of staffing
 - Increased demand for services, or service degradation leading to more complaints or follow-up

- Unexpected peaks of demand, e.g. bad weather, flooding
- Expected peaks of demand, e.g. elections – even though planned, it is difficult to staff up for short periods of time
- Communications / media interest
- System slowness, downtime, or new system upgrades.

3.11 The graph below and data in Appendix 2 at the end of this report shows that we are not managing to hit either target, and in many ways this becomes part of a vicious cycle – as calls take longer to answer, the length of call increases, customers are more likely to complain, and then there is less time available to deal with new calls, and the cycle begins again.

Calls answered and call answer rate against target

The call answer rate has declined since October 2014, and while there was a slight recovery in May and June, a further fall in July



Source: Avaya call data

3.12 Key factors influencing our performance are as follows:

- **Staff turnover has been exceptionally high** during the first half of 2015. Council restrictions on external recruitment has meant that many internal jobs have been filled by contact centre staff who are highly trained. The time between someone leaving and being replaced (after training) is approximately 2-4 months, which is a significant stress on current resources. During 2014 we had 40 leavers, and from January to July 2015 we had 33, or annual equivalent of 57, an increase of 42.5%.
- **System slowness** with existing and new (e.g. CIS) systems has lengthened call handling times, coupled with having new starters getting to grips with new systems.
- **Improved job market** has meant it has been more difficult to attract the right quantities of recruits with the right aptitude.
- **Moving to 9-5 hours** has brought about savings, but has also been a challenge as some staff have reacted to the change in hours by moving elsewhere, and we have had to re-calculate the resource requirements for the changed hours.

- 3.13 We are taking steps to address the above, including developing a recruitment business case to justify rolling external recruitment for grades B1-C1 (we currently have exemption for B1 grades only). We are also having more regular meetings with staff in the high recruiting areas such as housing management and housing options to give us notice of impending recruitment exercises. We are also planning to visit other contact centres between Sept and Dec this year with our executive member to ensure we are keeping up with industry best practice.
- 3.14 We are working closely with ICT to closely monitor a number of systems to identify specific slowness issues which contribute to poor performance, and have recently received new PCs to assist with general performance.
- 3.15 The service is reviewing its existing recruitment practices and evaluating jobs and grades to ensure we are competitive within the jobs market.

3.16 Successes in 2014/15:

- 3.17 During 2014/15 we have undergone a number of significant changes to improve the overall running and infrastructure of the contact centre:
- Integrated digital access into the contact centre
 - Brought the emergency out of hours service back into the contact centre and improved performance at a reduced cost
 - Undertook a significant technology upgrade to our telephony system to increase functionality and resilience
 - Opened the 4th floor and introduced the centres of excellence across all 3 floors

3.18 Initiatives for 2015/16

- 3.19 A new customer portal has been developed to allow customers to register with the council and then report / request / pay for services online at any time of the day and night. The first services (environmental action and highways) have already gone live, and other services will follow. The forms on the customer portal integrate with other council systems, eliminating any double keying and providing customers with helpful updates.
- 3.20 The centres of excellence are developing and over the coming months are establishing a vision of what they plan to achieve and action plans to get there. The Council tax admin function is integrating with the customer service function and this will bring about efficiencies and improved customer experience. Partnership working continues to improve within the Care & Safeguarding centre of excellence.
- 3.21 The website is the most used channel for customer contact and improvements are being made to make it a best council website.

3.22 Conclusion

- 3.23 The centres of excellence approach is taking us to the next level of contact centre development and links with the community hub approach. As we see more simple enquiries move to self-serve, queries handled in person will be more complex around the needs of the customer, cutting across traditional service boundaries, e.g. debt and money worries which potentially link to housing, worklessness and a range of other issues. Our staff are being developed to be able to respond to this changing agenda.
- 3.24 Performance, in terms of call answer rate and speed to answer, has been hampered by exceptional levels of leavers, due in part to external recruitment restrictions. We are working with HR and other partners to even out the impact of staff leaving, and are working on ways to improve staff retention. In spite of these challenges we have made

significant progress in terms of digital access, and we have coped with a number of high profile initiatives within existing resource. The coming year will see further developments as we expand the range of services available via self-serve and provide customers with a more comprehensive service at point of contact.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 Members of the Scrutiny Board (Citizens and Communities) are asked to note this update on the Contact Centre and make appropriate comment and or recommendations.

Background papers¹

None used

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

APPENDIX 1 Customer contact (handled by CSO), by service 2014/15 and 2015/16 (estimated from data to end of July)

Service	Calls / emails / chat / admin 2014/15	Total handled by CSO 2015-16 est.	% +/- handled by CSO
Care & safeguarding (4th Floor)			
Adult Social Care	45,341	46,986	4%
Child Social Care	14,957	14,166	-5%
Customer Relations	9,025	9,522	6%
LHO	23,625	19,641	-17%
Registrars	60,562	58,704	-3%
Schools Admissions	23,991	24,783	3%
4th Floor Totals	177,501	173,802	-2%
Welfare, benefits & revenues (5th Floor)			
Benefits	92,615	85,551	-8%
Benefits Landlords	30,714	25,332	-18%
CTax General	186,350	154,593	-17%
CTax Reminders	40,738	35,955	-12%
Welfare Support	19,354	15,036	-22%
5th Floor Totals	369,771	316,467	-14%
Environment & Community (6th Floor)			
ASBU	9,334	9,372	0%
Blue Badge	18,486	24,561	33%
CBL	2,858	4,773	67%
Elections	24,149	24,990	3%
Gold Number	110,706	70,956	-36%
Highways	44,387	23,634	-47%
Highways Private	3,338	2,337	-30%
Housing Leeds	130,776	143,385	10%
Housing Leeds Repair	91,885	79,830	-13%
Large Collections	32,612	33,888	4%
Environmental action	17,950	14,778	-18%
Refuse	91,269	97,494	7%
6th Floor Totals	577,750	529,998	-8%
Out of hours (6th Floor)			
OOH	8,245	7,314	-11%
OOH Contractors	6,495	10,017	54%
OOH Housing	23,621	37,638	59%
OOH Noise Nuisance	11,936	12,537	5%
OOH Registrars	21	120	471%
OOH Totals	50,318	67,626	34%
Totals	1,175,340	1,087,893	-7%

APPENDIX 2

Contact Centre Performance Tables 2014/15 – July 2015

	Calls offered	Total calls answered	ANS RATE INC IVR	Average speed to answer (mins: seconds)
Apr-14	124,954	111,172	89%	03:20
May-14	121,699	104,514	86%	04:06
Jun-14	117,457	103,339	88%	03:07
Jul-14	121,162	111,654	92%	02:00
Aug-14	120,953	105,175	87%	03:19
Sep-14	124,893	112,481	90%	02:54
Oct-14	115,012	104,258	91%	02:41
Nov-14	104,486	91,451	88%	03:50
Dec-14	93,834	80,938	86%	04:20
Jan-15	120,886	95,547	79%	07:22
Feb-15	115,785	89,925	78%	07:03
Mar-15	135,551	108,015	80%	06:34
Apr-15	133,801	105,301	79%	06:09
May-15	118,969	95,354	80%	06:36
Jun-15	121,250	103,111	85%	05:54
Jul-15	125,364	98,260	78%	06:53