



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**



**Finance, Economic Development
and Corporate Services Overview
and Scrutiny Committee**

22 November 2022

Report of Councillor Annie Mason,
Cabinet Member for People and Safer
Communities

Telephony system call handling performance

Report Author

Claire Moses, Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service

 01476 406210 ext. 6484

Purpose of Report

This is an update for Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the current position for call handling and customer contact within the Customer Service team and high contact service areas.

Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 1. Notes the report and action plan and are invited to ask questions relating to the report and supporting documents.**

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	High performing Council
Which wards are impacted?	All

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

1.1 There are currently no Financial or Procurement implications to this report. This will be reviewed as the forward action plan progresses.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Chief Finance Officer and s151 Officer

Legal and Governance

1.2 There are currently no legal or governance implications to this report. This will be reviewed as the forward action plan progresses.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Human Resources

1.3 There are currently no Financial or Procurement implication to this report. This will be reviewed as the forward action plan progresses.

Completed by Fran Beckitt, Human Resource Manager

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 At the meeting of this Committee on 27 September 2022, an action was requested for the Committee to receive recent data on the calls handled within the Customer Service telephony system.
- 2.2 This report provides current calls handling performance to 31 October 2022 and forward plan actions relating to Customer Service and telephony solutions.

Call Handling Performance for high volume areas

- 2.3 The report provides analysis of call handling from January 2022 through to October 2022 for high volume service areas (where calls go into an agent queue) – which are:
- Allocations and Tenancy Services – lettings
 - Housing Improvements and Repairs
 - Customer Services – including:
 - Benefits - Processing
 - Benefits – Overpayments
 - Council Tax Billing
 - Housing Register
 - Switchboard
 - Revenues
 - Business Rates
 - Enforcement
 - Rents (internal queue only)
 - Elections
 - Street Scene, Green and Trade Waste Team (internal queue only) – this is a new queue for reporting since 3 October 2022.
- 2.4 Statistics are produced and issued by the Customer Service Co-Ordinator on a weekly and monthly basis to the relevant service areas. The information includes number of calls offered, handled, abandoned, average speed of answer and FTE time for call handling.
- 2.5 In addition, since 30 May 2022, the Customer Service Co-Ordinator has requested commentary from all service areas regarding any factors which could impact call handling.
- 2.6 Currently, the service areas detailed in paragraph 2.3 are averaging call answering of 79%.
- 2.7 The table below shows the total calls offered (total received), handled (total answered), and abandoned (total).

Period	Offered	Handled		Abandoned	
		Number	% of offered	Number	% of offered
October 2022	18,923	14,847	79%	4,076	21%
Quarter 2 – 22/23	20,111	14,327	71%	5,783	29%
Quarter 1 – 22/23	23,244	18,119	78%	5,129	22%
Quarter 4 – 22/23	22,957	18,778	82%	4,179	18%

- 2.8 The differences in number of calls offered can be aligned to the customer peaks and troughs throughout the year.
- Quarter 1 and 4 do see the highest level of customer contact due to significant activity during these months, which include:
 - Green waste enquiries – 7,654 (average over 3 years)
 - Issuing of over 65,000 Council Tax bills
 - Issuing over 6,500 Business Rates bills
 - Issuing over 7,000 rent increase letters
 - Issuing over 10,000 Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support letters
 - During Quarter 2, the Customer Service Team saw a reduction in staffing and took on the call handing for two additional service areas – Council Tax and Benefits (not including complex calls)
 - Since April 2022 over 54,000 Council Tax Energy Rebate payments have been made. There has been significant email and telephone contact resulting in this funding
 - October has seen the recruitment of 5.27 full time equivalents into the Customer Service Team. This is to replace vacant posts within the team and to ensure adequate resources for the additional service area contacts. The new members of the team have received training during October, and this has been very successful. The training is ongoing and will take time for them to learn all 16 service areas.

Calls handled by the Customer Service Team

- 2.9 It is not widely understood just how many service areas the Customer Service team handle calls for – a total of 16 service areas.
- 2.10 The Customer Service Advisers are multi-skilled in the service areas and will answer and handle calls in various queues throughout the day. The service areas where the Customer Service Team handle calls are:
- Benefits – Processing
 - Benefits – Overpayments
 - Box Office
 - Council Tax Billing
 - DC (Planning)

- Environmental Health and Neighbourhoods
- Green Bins
- Grounds Maintenance
- Homelessness
- Housing Register
- Land Charges
- Payments
- Rents (Income Recovery)
- Switchboard
- Tenancy (Estates)
- Waste

2.11 In addition to handling all calls for these service areas, the customer service team also respond to emails and support residents face to face, who come into our Bourne and Grantham offices. The different types and volume of customer contact are shown below for week commencing 24 October 2022:

Contact Type	Contact Volume
Calls handled	1,797
Face to Face – St Peters Hill	83
Face to Face – Bourne (inc library)	508
Emails – Customer Service	280
Emails – Housing evidence	167
Emails – Green Waste	21
Housing Processing	5
Housing Register applications	35
Total customer contacts	2896

Performance Clinics with service areas

2.12 Since 5 October 2022, the Head of Service and Customer Service Co-Ordinator have undertaken performance clinic meetings with all agent queue areas (as detailed in paragraphs 2.3 to 2.6).

2.13 The performance clinics have been positive, with the following outcomes:

- The Customer Service Team are unable to understand the pressures teams are facing – predominantly reduced staffing – minimal FTE within teams and vacancies. It is clear absences (planned leave and sickness) do have an impact on call handling.
- The weekly performance information has been updated to include:
 - Average speed of answer
 - Average handling time
 - FTE required (by handling time)

- This information will continue to be monitored and analysis undertaken with regards to tracking call handling % against FTE available. We will then be in a position to determine what additional FTE would be required, should the number of calls handled need to be increased.
- The Customer Service Team have a platform to be able to advise of upcoming changes – most prevalent currently is the customer service move to the Arts Centre.
- Service areas have been able to advise of pressures experienced in the previous week and explain these, along with clarification as to whether these are one off, or likely to be ongoing. Discussions have taken place as to:
 - Ongoing pressures: Service Team to advise how the pressures will be addressed – such as review of staffing, increased staffing, change to working practices etc
 - Ad hoc pressure: Service Team to advise if this is expected in coming weeks/months i.e. mail out created surge in customer contact, annual leave etc
- Service areas understand the importance of advising customer service of peaks in customer contact – positive conversations have resulted in all teams having a mutual understanding of the impacts
- Meetings have been arranged with service areas and the Customer Service Manager – to have a walk around of the offices and to get an understanding of what the team do.

Forward action plan

- 2.14 There are a number of forward actions associated with this area of work and as a result, a forward action plan has been developed.
- 2.15 The action plan is managed by the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service and the Customer Service Manager. The action plan forms the basis of all current and future Customer Service improvements, to achieve improved performance and ensure positive changes are sustained by all service areas.
- 2.16 The key actions are:
- Call handling reporting for all extension numbers for transparency across the organisation
 - Telephony Solutions Roadmap - to clearly show the direction of travel to improve call handling across the Council and for all calls received into the Council to be monitored, either direct or to extension numbers
 - Virtual Operator Service - Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service, along with Customer Service Manager to work on invest to save bid and submit

- To consider a review of the different levels of customer service support available for all other service areas (where it is not already in place) and for options to be put forward for centralisation of call handling
- Service Standards to be developed and adopted by all customer facing teams
- Service Level Agreement (SLA) to be in place for all customer facing teams - to be published internally and externally for customer transparency and performance to be measured against SLA

3. Key Considerations

3.1 These are set out in the report.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1 All options for improvement are included within the action plan

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

5.1 At the meeting of this Committee on 27 September 2022, an action was requested for the Committee to receive recent data on the calls handled within the Customer Service telephony system.

6. Background Papers

6.1 Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 September 2022 (Action 1 – That the Committee receive call data as requested at the 22 November meeting). The report can be accessed here: [Printed minutes 27th-Sep-2022 14.00 Finance Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview .pdf \(southkesteven.gov.uk\)](#)