

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>CUSTOMER SERVICES UPDATE REPORT</b>
<b>DIRECTORATE:</b>	<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>JOANNE CROOKES, CUSTOMER SERVICES MANAGER</b>

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To update members on Customer Services performance following the meeting held on 4 November 2019.
- 1.2 To present an outline of the results and responses from the 'Customer Contact' elements of the recent Citizen Panel.
- 1.3 To seek a decision on a call answering target for the new year.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 On 4 November 2019 the Customer Services Manager was invited to attend the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting to provide an answer to why the percentage of calls answered within 90 seconds was below target.
- 2.2 A number of reasons for this were presented and in summary these reasons included:
  - An increase in the number of calls answered
  - Staff turnover
  - Training of new staff
  - Training of existing staff to deal with Housing Solutions calls
  - An increase in the length of calls due to complexities such as Universal Credit
- 2.3 In respect of the above, the Customer Services Manager also made the following points which the committee discussed.
  - Call waiting times compare very favourably with other public sector and private sector organisations
  - There have been no formal complaints recorded about call waiting times in the previous 12 months
  - Customers are told their position in the queue and are offered a call back after 5 minutes.
  - The priority was to deal with calls thoroughly and seek full resolution, rather than answer them as quickly as possible
  - Customers are encouraged where possible to report their issues on-line. This provides a cost-effective and 24/7 option for non-emergency calls.

### 3. Performance

3.1 Since the November meeting we have seen an improvement in the call waiting times but the outturn remains below the target.

3.2 In November the average wait to be answered was 2 minutes and 37 seconds.

In December this reduced slightly to 2 minutes and 13 seconds; and there was a further slight improvement in January to an average wait of 2 minutes and 7 seconds.

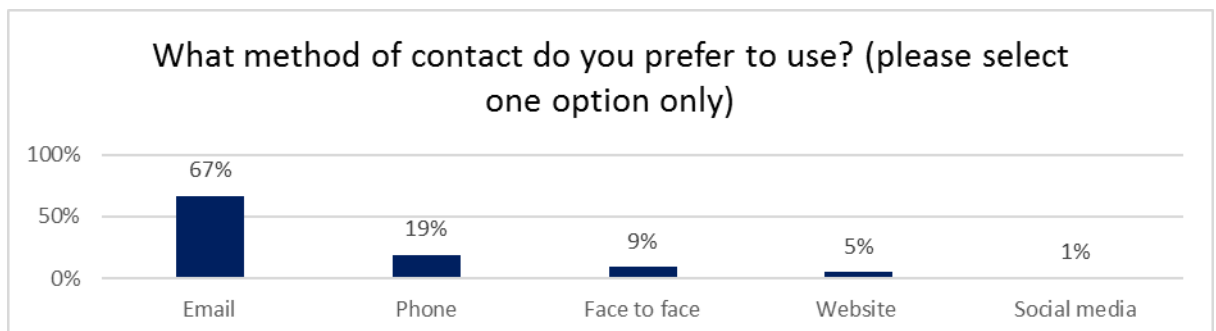
3.3 The percentage of Housing calls answered within 90 seconds reached 58.3% in December.

3.4 Customer Satisfaction levels remain high with a 96.05 % score for telephone calls and 100% for face to face visits.

### 4. Citizen Panel Feedback – Customer Contact

4.1 In January 2020 a Citizen Panel Survey was conducted. As part of this survey we asked questions designed to establish how important a call-answering target was to our customers.

4.2 The panel were asked which one method of contacting the council was their preference. 328 people responded to this question with the following results:



4.3 This is interesting as the panel is representative of our local population and this indicates that customers are increasingly moving towards email communication.

4.4 We asked a question specifically about call waiting times. After much consideration we decided to allow free text responses to this question so that customers felt able to express exactly what they thought was an acceptable waiting time. The question was “Our current average wait time for a call to be answered is around 3 minutes. How long would you be prepared to wait (in minutes) assuming your query was fully resolved during the call?”

4.5 92.6% of responses gave a time of 3 minutes or longer as their version of an acceptable wait, with only 7 respondents or 7.4% of the sample stating that they would be willing to wait for less than 3 minutes.

4.6 In fact if we answered calls within 5 minutes over half of responses (55%) would feel that this was reasonable.

4.7 Table showing responses.



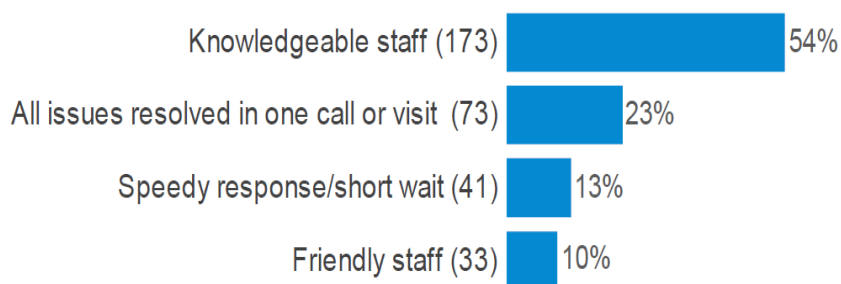
4.8 We asked respondents. How satisfied are you with the service you get from the Customer Service team when you call or visit the council?  
The responses were as follows:

Very satisfied	26%	(57)
Satisfied	69%	(152)
Dissatisfied	4%	(9)
Very dissatisfied	1%	(3)

4.9 These replies show that 95% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with the service directly supplied by the Customer Service Team

4.10 The final question that we posed restricted respondents to a single answer and asked: "What is the ONE thing that is most important to you when contacting the council?" Responses are at 4.9 below.

4.11 **What is the ONE thing that is most important to you when contacting the council?**



4.12 The Citizen Panel respondents were then invited to make any other comments, and these are reproduced below for your information. We have not included a

number of statements which said “All the above”.

1. But having friendly, knowledgeable staff helps!
2. Difficult to answer the question all five are important
3. And a speedy response
4. Keep up the good work. Stay positive
5. Not being left in the dark is important
6. Friendly staff, short wait and staff who know the job are needed
7. Clearly all these things are important but without knowledgeable staff the rest is window-dressing
8. Obviously you expect all personnel to be friendly and knowledgeable and then the call will be quick and efficient

## **5. Proposed Target 2020-2021**

- 5.1 The comments from respondents to the Citizen Panel questionnaire indicate that our residents do not expect telephone calls to be answered within our current target time of 90 seconds.
- 5.2 A fast response is not the most important thing to people when they call the council. They expect knowledgeable staff and would prefer that their service request or issue is resolved in one call where possible.
- 5.3 Resolving issues can require agents to be in conversation for several minutes while other calls are waiting to be answered. However each customer can be reassured that they are getting the best possible service; that any follow-up actions are completed and relevant notes have been made.
- 5.4 Removing the target altogether would not be acceptable and would not allow us to identify problems with our level of service or report our performance to members and customers. Nor would it allow for comparison or bench-marking with other councils and organisations.
- 5.5 A reasonable, acceptable and achievable target needs to be set. In consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer Experience and Review, we propose that the target be changed to: “Calls are answered, on average, within 5 minutes”

## **6. Organisational Impacts**

None from this report.

## **7. Finance**

No direct implications from this report.

## **8. Recommendations**

Members of this Committee are recommended to:

1. Note the improvement in call answering performance.

2. Note the results of the Citizen Panel and the content of this report.
3. Provide any views or comments on the relevance of a call answering waiting time target and consider the proposal for a target for calls to be answered within an average of 5 minutes.
4. Consider whether the Committee would wish to receive any further reports on this issue.

**Key Decision  
Key Decision Reference  
No.**

No

**Do the Exempt  
Information Categories  
Apply**

**Call In and Urgency:** Is the decision one to which Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

No

**Does the report contain  
Appendices?**

No

**If Yes, how many  
Appendices?**

Yes

**List of Background  
Papers:**

**Lead Officer:**

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