

Average Call Waiting Times

Background

The indicator measures the length of time it takes one of our Customer Services Team to answer a call once the customer has listened to the initial recorded options and selected an appropriate queue.

Our target is to answer all calls within 60 seconds. This is an ambitious target when compared with many other organisations where it is not uncommon to be waiting in excess of 5 minutes. Obviously there is a clear relationship between the number and length of calls and the levels of staff resourcing required to maintain an answer rate of 60 seconds or below.

We have largely managed to meet this target over the past 2 years since the current Customer Services team and approach was implemented. There are periods of the year when we are more busy. March and April in particular tend to see us receiving more calls because of the issue of things such as Council Tax and Business Rate bills, garden waste renewal letters etc.

The current position

This year we have missed the target of 60 seconds or below in April, May and June. The figures for each month are detailed below.

April 21	May 21	June 21
112 seconds	163 seconds	113 seconds

Call data analysis

We have undertaken detailed analysis of the call data we hold to try and understand why this is happening. This analysis indicates that:

- *Call volumes have increased* – call volumes in each month from April to June 2021 have been higher than at any point during the preceding 12 months. The overall trend of call volumes mapped over the past 2 years indicates that volumes are increasing.
- *Call duration has increased* – the length of calls during the period April to June 2021 is higher than the previous average. The average has increased from 265 seconds to 345 seconds per call. Whilst this change appears small this equates to an additional 22 hours of work per day.

We have identified a range of factors which we believe are impacting on call volumes, call duration and our capacity to answer calls within the target time. The key message is that there is no single reason or simple answer. The factors are summarised below:

- Organisation wide we are now operating again at pretty much full capacity following the Covid crisis. This means, for example, that we have recommenced things such

as our full recovery activities for Revenues and Benefits, miscellaneous income etc. In addition the public are now expecting us to be operating largely as normal. All of this generates calls and some services will be dealing with backlogs that developed as a result of the Covid restrictions.

- Waste collection issues – in April we received calls regarding the changes to the garden waste schedules, which were anticipated. However, we are now receiving calls regarding the problems with missed waste collection, which were not anticipated. Calls regarding the latter are increasingly taking longer to deal with as often the same caller is experiencing multiple collection issues and are frustrated.
- There has been a general increase in the length of calls. This is both a good and a bad thing. In some cases, as with waste, it indicates problems that are simply taking longer to deal with. However, this also indicates that our customer champions are increasingly able to deal with more at the first point of contact i.e. the calls are longer because they are sorting the issue for the customer rather than passing the call to the back office.
- Channel shift – we have, through necessity during the Covid crisis, channel-shifted many of our customers to the telephone who would previously have visited our offices. This is good news in respect of moving them to a more cost-effective way of dealing with them. However, our area offices are now starting to re-open which requires us to pull staff away from the phones to man the various front desks, which obviously reduces our telephone answering capacity. Footfall at all of our offices is low.
- Staff turnover – a number of staff within the team have moved on to other roles. We are in the process of replacing them, but it obviously takes time to recruit and train new staff. Again this reduces our capacity for short periods.

Actions being taken

We are taking immediate actions to alleviate the problem and also identifying longer term actions. Action is already underway through the Customer Experience Programme to identify areas for improvements and we are using some of the findings from the programme to identify changes.

We have a key risk relating to staff welfare. Ongoing high call volumes backed up by increasingly frustrated customers has an impact on the resilience of the staff. We are not currently experiencing any issues, but we could do if we do not take appropriate action.

In the short term we have recruited additional, temporary resource into the team. This is simply to increase our capacity to answer calls. Specifically these staff will be focussed on dealing with waste calls.

A further increase in waste related calls is anticipated when we go live with Recycle More in late September 2021. We are working closely with the other districts who have already gone live to identify the likely impact on call volumes in order to identify a realistic resourcing plan.

APPENDIX 2

We are also using the data we have collected in relation to the waste issues and more generally for the Customer Experience Programme to identify our longer-term approach and resourcing requirements. In part this involves reviewing our resourcing to ensure that we have sufficient staff with the right skills to answer the anticipated volume of calls. However, we are also looking at other changes we can make e.g. improvements to our website layout and web forms in order to increase the amount of self-service.