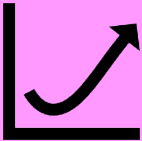


Appendix 1 – Customer Services Improvement Plan Update, September 2023

		Urgent Performance Challenge: Customer Services					
		Strategic priority: A good council					
Issue title: Customer Services						It is too difficult for our customers to get through to the Council by phone and we resolve too few calls at first contact. Our focus has to be improving our whole customer experience.	
Accountable Officer: Director of Operational Services						Accountable Committee: Strategy and Resources	
Performance picture	Baseline (for year 2022/23)	Target	Apr 22 – Jan 23	Feb 23 – Aug 23	Direction of travel/Commentary		RAG
Total number of calls received	1,075,441	N/A	958,743	422,898	Some elements of channel shift are beginning to feed through to the numbers of calls received. Within the Housing strand, callers can now use voice recognition technology to be put through directly to Housing offices and rent balances can now be obtained online or via phone.		N/A
Total number of calls answered	752,552	N/A	660,277	314,033			
Percentage of calls answered (target 85%)-	70%	85%	69%	Overall 74%	The spread of % of calls answered across the different Contact Centre threads varies		

				<p>Breakdown: Corporate 72% Housing 82% Revs and Bens 63% Repairs 78% Out of Hours 83%</p>	<p>considerably. As the commentary below highlights, our key challenges remain across the Corporate and in particular the Revenues and Benefits strands. The % of calls answered across Housing, Repairs and Maintenance and Out of Hours is encouraging.</p>		
Average time of wait	00:21:12	Under 5 mins	00:24:22	<p>Overall 00:17:43</p> <p>Breakdown: Corporate 00:10:17 Housing 00:12:53 Revs and Bens 00:28:09 Repairs 00:22:30 Out of Hours 00:03:38</p>	<p>Overall improvement, though can still be adversely impacted by turnover and staff sickness. The current figure is impacted by issues caused by staff sickness on the Revenues and Benefits strand.</p>		
Longest time of wait	02:46:42	Under 20 mins	02:52:54	<p>Longest overall wait: 03:24:41</p> <p>Breakdown: Corporate 02:46:03 Housing 02:08:21 Revs and Bens 01:57:40</p>	<p>We believe that some systems issues have impacted this figure, in particular the longest overall wait shown (in Repairs and Maintenance).</p>		

Repairs 03:24:41
Out of Hours 01:40:03

What are the issues underlying current performance?

- **Customer contact centre** – the number of calls received by the Contact Centre remains high and performance remains below target. Staff turnover within the Contact Centre remains an issue and some strands of activity have higher than average sickness levels. However there have been marked and sustained improvements across the Housing and Repairs strands in particular, where over recent months performance has been close to and sometimes exceeds the 85% calls answered target. Performance within the Corporate strand can vary depending on e.g. Elections mail-outs and other seasonal trends; in addition this strand has had some issues with staff sickness. The Revenues and Benefits strand saw considerable improvement when an extra eight staff were taken on in Summer 2022. However, in May 2023, a section of calls which had been outsourced (with very poor performance) were brought back in-house and this impacted on performance figures. This strand of activity also sees variations as various Council Tax reminders and summonses are issued. Since July high sickness levels have been an issue across this strand. The performance of the Out of Hours Contact Centre remains very strong with calls answered frequently exceeding the 85% target.
- **Customer services** – as noted in previous reports the customer Contact Centre only handles around 40% of SCC's customer contact, the other 60% is direct to services. Work continues to better understand customer experience outside of the Contact Centre to seek to improve citizens' overall experience of our services. The key drivers to enhance the experience of our customers include work to quickly enhance the Council's online offer. We know that many people who call the Contact Centre would rather simply go online to order services, report issues or make payments. By allowing people to do that, the callers needing to contact us by phone will be those who can't or won't use online facilities or those with more complex queries. Work around greater use of web chat, live chat and use of natural language is continuing. Other planned enhancements include the ongoing development of an online portal whereby in the longer-term customers can – in effect – have one account for all of their business with the Council. Customer Services management also remain committed to seeking to solve people's queries or issues the first time they call, and without any need for them to call again. Allied to this is the need for greater responsiveness and flexibility amongst those services on whose behalf Customer Services works. The ongoing work around the

		development of a Customer Experience Strategy – planned to be presented to S&R Policy Committee in March 2024 - will incorporate all of these strands.			
		<p>What does success look like in 2023/24?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Services remains a key element in the Council's ongoing work around agreeing and implementing an effective Customer Experience Strategy. • We remain focused on designing services so that most customers can resolve their query online, allowing our Customer Services teams to be there for those who most need to contact us by phone. • Our end-to-end customer journeys must be designed across the organisation – customers should not have to worry about the process, they should just get the service they need. • How customers interact with and transact with the council needs to better meet their needs and expectations – whether that be online, by phone, in person or email and webchat. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 85% of calls answered (as a starting point, corporate expectation) ○ Sustained improvement in the proportion of calls answered and average wait time ○ Quality of, and support structures around calls meaning we get it right first time and people don't have to call back or make complaints ○ improved online functionality to reduce call volumes • We continue to ensure that our services are fully accessible for everyone in our communities • We continue to develop the First Point in-person access facility, to ensure that this a location for those who need to come in to access services physically, thereby enabling others to have a good service online. • We will continue to find ways to reduce staff turnover across Customer Services and in particular within the Contact Centre. This includes improvements currently being made to grading and development structures. 			
Key milestones		Milestone/action	By when		RAG* Related to improvement not call centre KPIs above

1		Agree a Cross Cutting Customer Experience Strategy so all local and programmed work is aligned and delivers on the overarching Strategy	March 2024		
2		Implement and appoint to the new Advanced Customer Service Advisor grade (replacing some Customer Service Advisor positions) across Customer Services	Phase 1 Oct 2023 Phase 2 Jan 2024		
3		Implement and complete full review of back-office processes related to the Contact Centre to ensure that they are supporting efficient and effective customer service	Implement Oct 2023 Complete Mar 2024		
4		Continued improvements to Customer Access Programme – improving our customer web capabilities including further development of webchat and live chat facility, online forms, natural language, corresponding with the Council, introducing MyAccount.	Review Oct 2023		
5		Customer Strategy Review (including customer contact points) to decide what we want from our physical customer contact offer.	March 2024		
6		Agree Customer Service Standards to support council wide improvement	March 2024		
Risks				Other issues	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact Centre turnover of staff, recruitment, and grading. Staff come in on a low grade and receive good training so progress quickly making retention difficult. Being mitigated by the introduction of a number of grade 4 Contact Centre posts; live by Oct 23. Main risk area remains SCC not hitting Key Performance Indicator (KPI). This means not having organisational engagement in the approach, customer expectations are not met and customers are not engaged in the design of the services. Mitigation might include emphasis shifting from 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call handling taking longer because staff are unable to hand-off to colleagues in other areas of the Council, improvement approach needed in end-to-end processes. Overall challenges facing partner services are reflected in Contact Centre performance. Testing of developing technologies; as we work with IT and other colleagues to seek to introduce further technical enhancements, the piloting and testing of 	

numerical evaluation towards a greater emphasis on getting things right first time.			these can sometimes have a short-term impact on day to day performance.
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