

Report to: **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
Date: **4<sup>th</sup> November 2021**  
Title: **Contact Centre Performance**  
Portfolio Area: **Customer First**  
**Portfolio holder: Cllr Nicky Hopwood**  
Wards Affected: **All**  
Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:

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## **Recommendations:**

- 1. That the Committee note the work of the contact centre over this financial year, and continue to support the work that will be undertaken to improve the contact centre and its performance.**
- 2. That the Committee note and endorse a comprehensive review of the contact centre to be carried out, to assess its performance and ability to meet customer demand.**

### **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 This report will provide a high level overview on the current performance of the Contact Centre since April 2021.
- 1.2 A formal review of the contact centre and its performance in its entirety, has not been carried out in upwards of 5 years.
- 1.3 In Overview and Scrutiny 07/21, it was requested a report be presented on progress being made on improving the Contact Centre performance.
- 1.4 The way in which resident's access council services has changed significantly over recent years, and how we adapt this, will be supported with the work being undertaken on the customer access strategy.
- 1.5 The outcome from this report is a recommendation that we undertake a review of the contact centre in its entirety, including

staffing, scheduling, IT, customer expectations and service requirements aligning the approach with the corporate strategy.

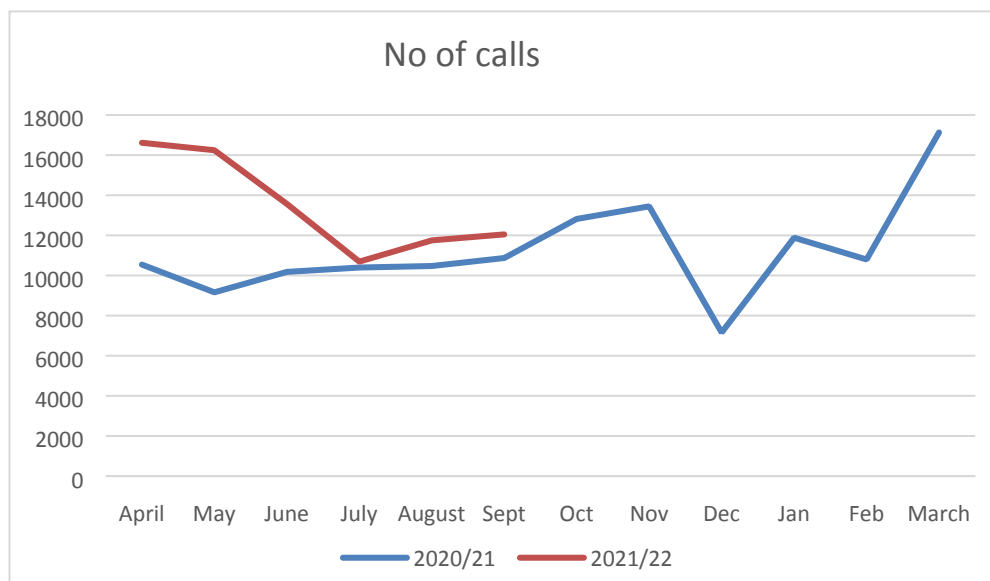
## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The contact centre take calls for most departments in the Council. They also directly manage and answer social media enquiries and web chats. Service requirements for all these lines vary in terms of how much detail and input is required.
- 2.2 The call centre aims to answer 80% of calls within 5 minutes.
- 2.3 Currently the call centre is fully staffed with 10.5 full time equivalents (There are 17 staff in total, many of whom are part time). There are currently 6 vacant posts in the establishment which are currently being filled by agency staff.
- 2.4 All staff report to the Case Management Team Leader, supported by the Business Manager.
- 2.5 In January 2020 a trial to move a small team of 5 staff from the call centre to handle only Revenues calls was started. The aim of this was to see if call wait times could be decreased when managed by the service. The call centre takes overflow calls to these lines when busy. The outcome of this is still being reviewed due to Covid related delays.
- 2.6 Training of staff and the inability to share information and best practice has been more difficult with staff working from home.
- 2.7 Retaining experienced staff within the call centre has often been challenging as it's often seen as a stepping stone to other roles, predominantly to case management.
- 2.8 There has been a large increase in new and complex calls in response to the business grant schemes as identified in the Pentana information, shared in the July Overview and Scrutiny meetings Performance Management report.
- 2.9 Increased demand in calls, particular with grants and waste, combined with reducing levels of experience and knowledge of staff has been a factor in increased call wait times.
- 2.10 Experienced staff have also been redeployed at various and key times this year, to help with processing of business grants to support the community in response to Covid 19.
- 2.11 Netcall, the new workflow software was introduced in 2016 and it functionality has been utilised year on year. This is allowing residents to contact us via multiple methods such as webchat, but there is still further opportunity to explore how we utilise this.
- 2.12 Queuebuster has been engaged on some lines to reduce call abandon rates and to offer greater flexibility to our customers. This allows the customer the option to leave their details and be called back rather than wait in a queue. 343 residents accessed this service in September.
- 2.13 The contact centre have experienced increased call volumes due to the challenges with the Waste services.

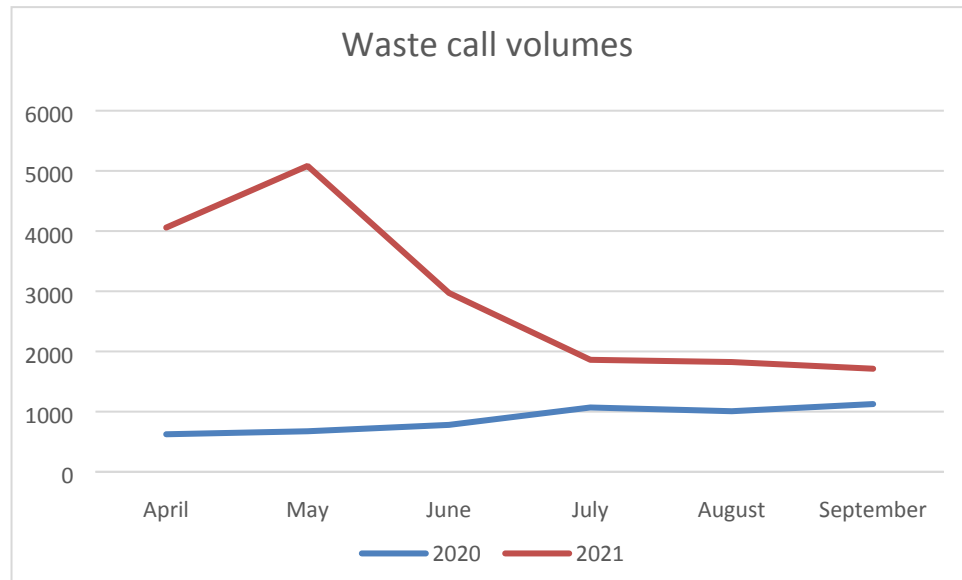
### 3. Performance

No of calls	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
April	27501	16478	19398	15040	10542	16614
May	26390	20874	19053	15981	9161	16243
June	29694	20427	15232	12471	10178	13568
July	25420	18745	16538	13897	10396	10691
August	27072	20480	16140	13271	10472	11749
Sept	24274	17439	14826	13430	10870	12048
Oct	21332	18123	16131	12134	12817	
Nov	18108	15750	13651	13958	13445	
Dec	11394	9546	7557	9037	7158	
Jan	18300	18810	14286	12098	11882	
Feb	15804	14431	10936	10439	10798	
March	21505	17544	14793	13483	17129	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>266794</b>	<b>208647</b>	<b>178541</b>	<b>155239</b>	<b>134848</b>	

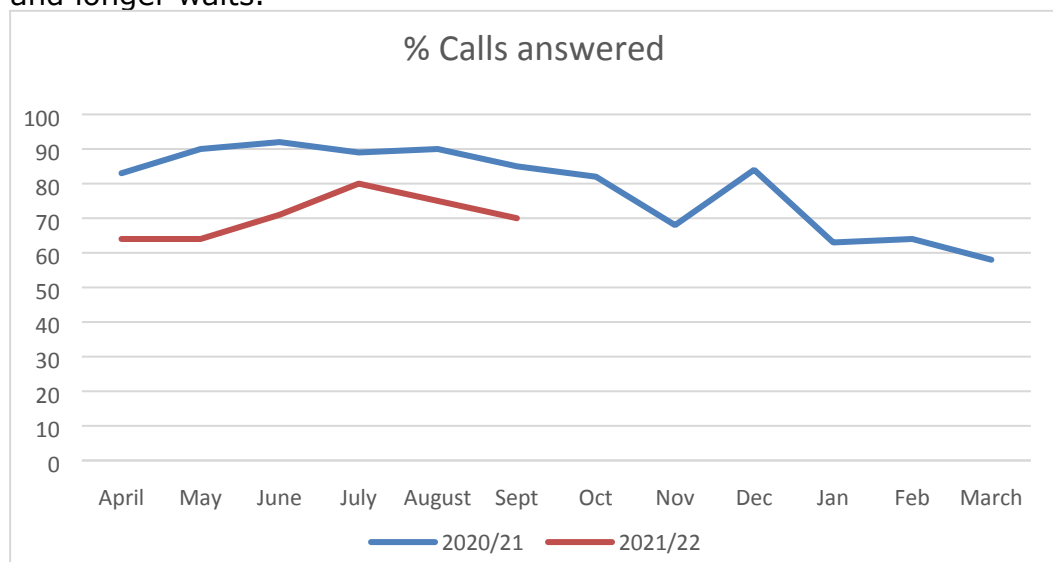
- 3.1 Emphasis in recent years has been placed on customers accessing our services through online methods via channel shift. We have seen an overall reduction in calls of 49.4% between 2016/17 and 2020/21 which indicates the changing needs of our customers and how they contact us and access our services.
- 3.2 However, the year (to date), an additional 19,294 calls have been taken compared to this time last year.



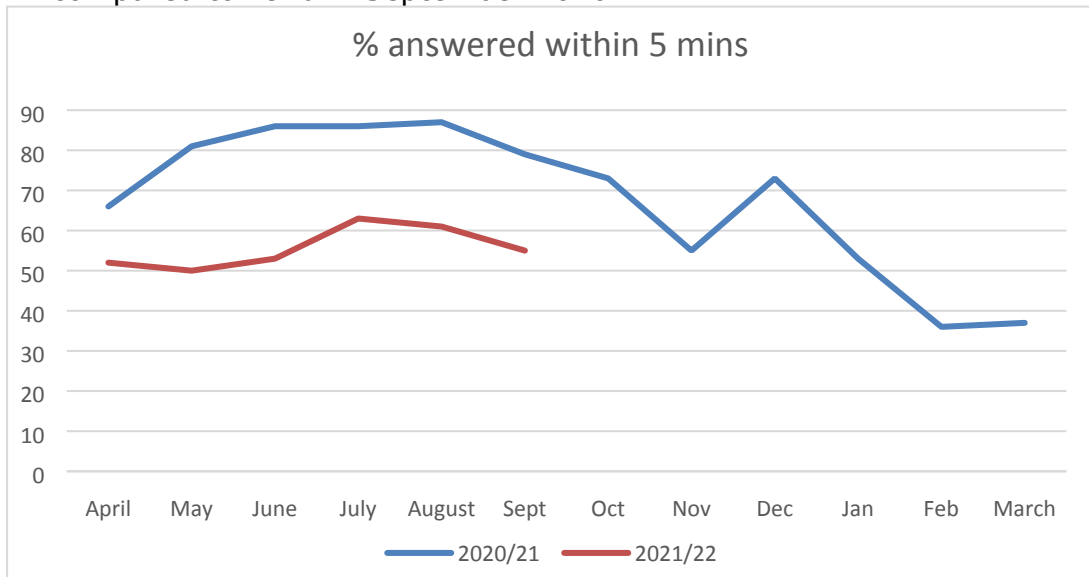
3.3 Waste call volumes were significantly higher between April and September compared to this time last year. In May 2021 we hit a high of 5083 waste calls. This was over 1000 calls a week more than the same time last year.



3.3 The total percentage of calls answered, has dropped by 18% compared to this time last year. In September 2021 it was 70% compared to 85% this time last year due to increased call volumes and longer waits.



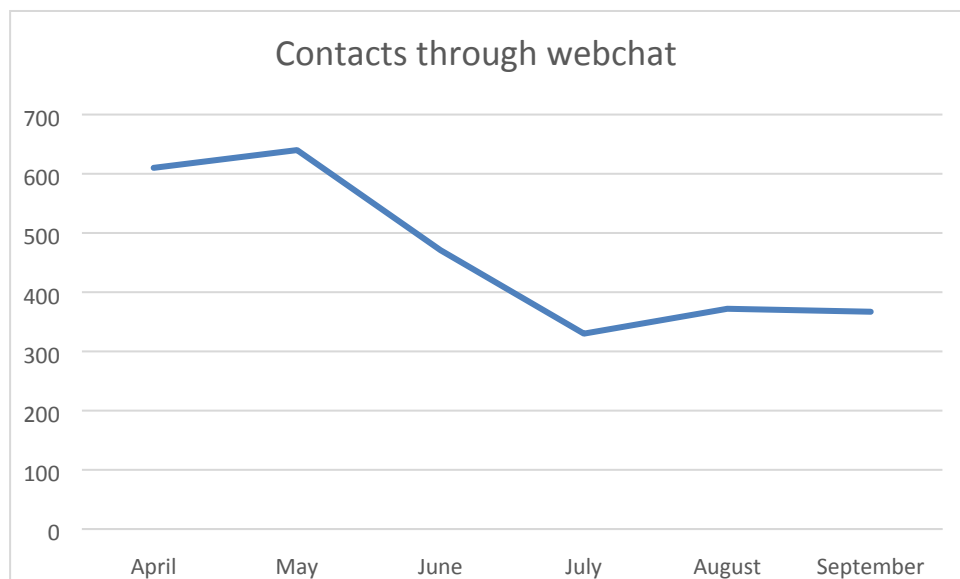
3.4 The percentage of calls answered within 5 minutes, is also lower than this time last year, sitting at 55% in September 2021, compared to 79% in September 2020.



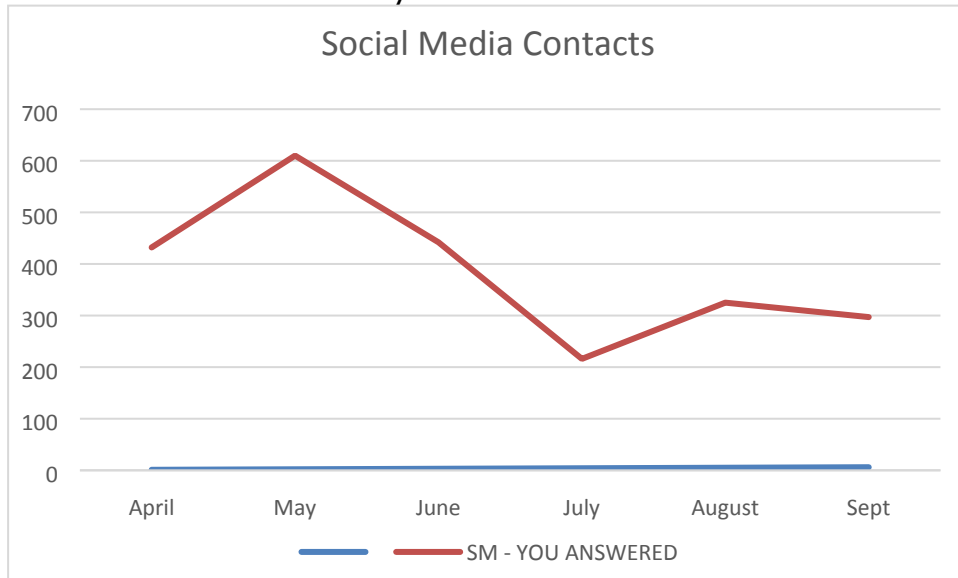
3.5 Staff sickness is running at an average of around 5% in the call centre which is within expected levels.

3.6 There has been very little growth this year in the amount of residents accessing webchat– 367 contacts last month (all answered). This is an area of opportunity.

3.7



3.8 However, there is a clear increase in demand for social media and web chat contacts, when call volumes increase. May 2021 being the busiest month for calls in waste, also was demonstrated in in being the busiest month for social media with 610 contacts in May and 640 via webchat.



3.9

3.10 Despite the challenges within the call centre, the team have worked hard to improve staff knowledge and welfare to ensure that whilst working from home regular contact is still maintained.

3.11 Since August 2021, the team have been working on improving knowledge through additional training of call centre staff.

3.12 Particular focus has been on improving Council Tax knowledge which was one of the longest wait times in the contact centre averaging over 20 minutes. Three additional staff now have this skillset.

3.13 Continuing efforts around integration of Queuebuster and Liberty Create (Performance Management Report 07/21 4.1) has also been identified as a way to reduce wait times as this will be considered as part of the review

3.14 It is clear that when call waiting times increased that customers access our services through different methods. This demonstrates an opportunity to focus on promoting these services moving forward.

#### **4. Proposed Way Forward**

- 4.1 A full review of the contact centre to be carried out independently, to assess current ways of working and call management to ensure we are delivering the best service possible.
- 4.2 The review to include;
  - Current staffing levels and retention of staff
  - Contact centre opening times and availability of staff.
  - Remote working vs office based working
  - Call arrivals and call volumes
  - How we forecast and staff for calls at peak times. I.e. Council tax mailings.
  - Reviewing staff occupancy (available time), utilisation (% of time actually on calls) and skillsets (which lines they can take).
  - Reviewing how we train and develop our staff.
  - The technology that is used in the call centre and how its utilised
  - Quality checking and coaching and how to get things right first time.
  - Service Level agreements (how long to answer the contact).
- 4.3 The acting Business Manager, has over 12 years' experience in managing call centres and call centre analysis, and will lead on this review.
- 4.4 Its expected that the acting Business Manager working closely with the Customer Service Improvement Manager and call centre staff, will complete the review within 3-6 months.
- 4.5 The review will take into consideration the outputs from the recently completed Revenues and Benefits review.
- 4.6 To identify and review and share internally and externally details of our SLA (service level agreements such as how long it takes to answer the phone) and our customer service charter.
- 4.7 That we shape the call centre into a service to be proud of that delivers against customer expectations linking in with the wider customer access strategy.

## Options available and consideration of risk

### 5.

- 5.1 The panel are asked to consider and agree the recommendations as set out in the report.
- 5.2 There is reputational risk of not adopting the proposals in particular for our most vulnerable residents if call wait times and abandon rates remain high, and our residents are unable to contact us.

## 6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance		No direct impact
Financial implications to include reference to value for money		No direct impact
Risk		No direct impact



Supporting Corporate Strategy		
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact		No direct impact.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		No direct impact
Safeguarding		No direct impact
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		No direct impact
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		No direct impact
Other implications		No direct impact

**Supporting Information**