

Report to: **Executive**
Date: **27 May 2022**
Title: **Contact Centre Service Review Update**
Portfolio Area: **Council Services – Cllr Hopwood**
Wards Affected: **All**
Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Executive:

- 1. Endorse the approach taken with the Contact Centre review, and the subsequent and ongoing Improvement Plan.**
- 2. To recognise the performance of the Contact Centre and how in recent months total calls answered, and calls answered within 5 minutes has improved.**
- 3. To note the timescales of the Contact Centre Improvement Plan as set out in Appendix A, with a further update on progress in six months' time recommended to be brought to the Executive.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the service review that was undertaken across the Contact Centre.
- 1.2 Within the Council's Better Lives for All strategy "Delivering Quality Council services" is a key theme and the purpose of the review is to improve this vitally important front facing service. It is important that we make contacting our Council as easy as possible, with clearly defined access options and in the most efficient way, whilst supporting those who can to access our services online.
- 1.3. The scope of the Contact Centre Service Review has been:
 - To review the overall aim of the Contact Centre and its purpose.

- To ensure that we are delivering an effective and efficient service that meets the needs of the council and its customers.
 - Ensuring emphasis on supporting operational delivery to achieve the Council's wider strategic priorities.
 - To be transparent to our customers about what they can expect when they contact us.
 - To consider service design changes to improve performance and the customer experience.
 - Consider, consult and implement policy changes to support delivery as necessary.
 - To support the formulation and implementation of the customer access strategy to support the above, including considering the best methods for consulting on service change and engagement.
- 1.4. As part of the review it was identified that there are some key operational areas which need development:
- The opportunity to increase training and coaching for Contact Centre staff so customers get the best opportunity of first point resolution.
 - How we can flex resource when needed from the wider teams to support call taking in busy times to allow a more flexible use of resource.
 - The increased complexity of calls coming through as a result of "simpler" activities being carried out online – increasing the average call time.
 - The planned reopening of reception with a staff force reduced from pre pandemic levels due to reallocation of staff.

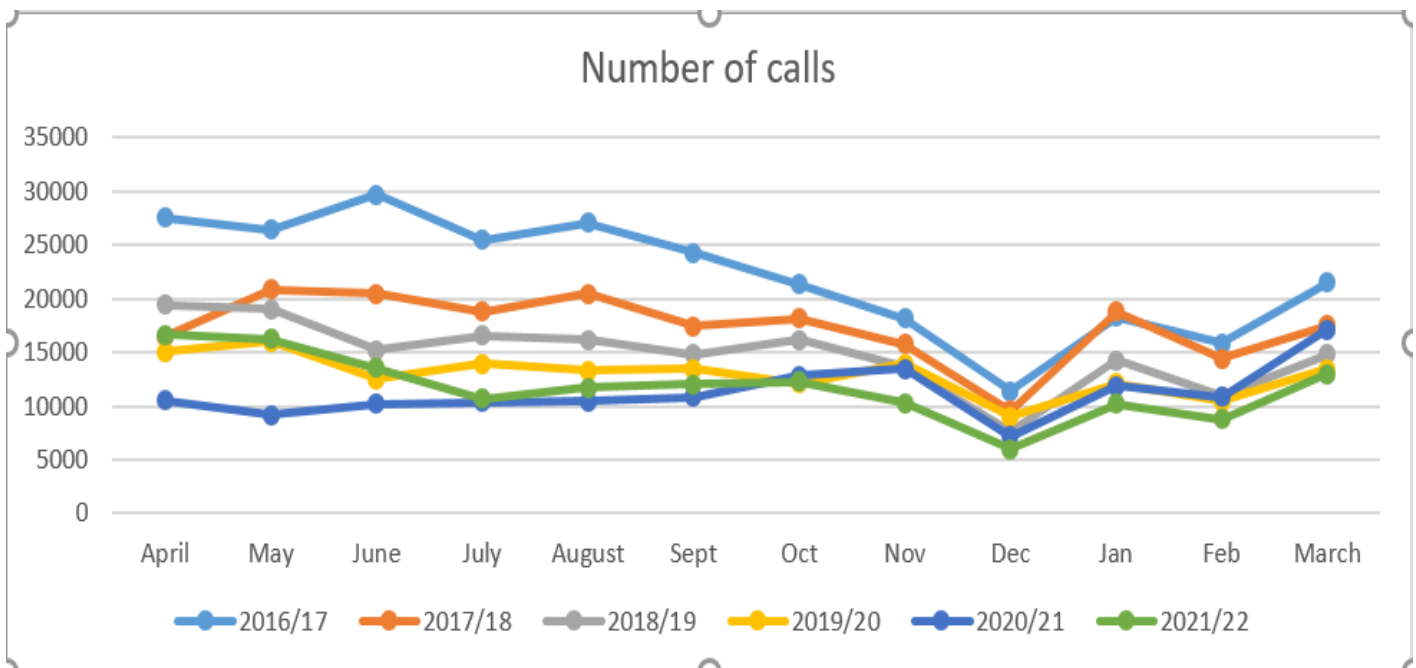
2. Background

- 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 Contact Centre aims to answer 80% of calls within 5 minutes but this has not been delivered consistently.
- 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 For South Hams the budget for this is £306,700 and for West Devon £158,300. The Contact Centre operates as a shared service.
- 2.5 Queue buster is available on all 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. 184 customers used this March and 94% customers then answered when the system called them back.
- 2.6 For the last two years reception has been closed through the pandemic and the majority of the staff who managed this have been redeployed to other areas to support other areas of work.

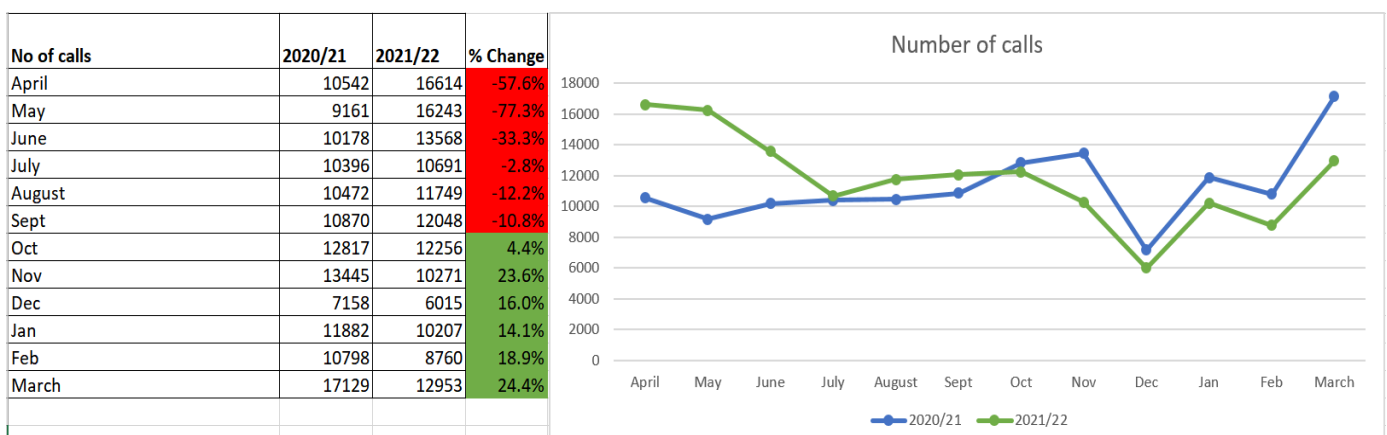
2.7 Overview and Scrutiny requested a review of the Contact Centre in November 21 namely to assess its performance, and ability to meet customer needs and look at how we could improve this moving forward.

2.8 Graph 1 below demonstrates the ongoing trend of reducing calls as seen over the last 5 years as people use alternative channels is visible below in green.

Graph 1



2.9 Performance continues to be challenging in the Contact Centre (set against the background of resourcing levels). The table and graph below shows the impacts of Covid and Business Grants caused large call volumes however, call volumes have reduced in the last 6 months comparative to last year also show as a % decrease in green.

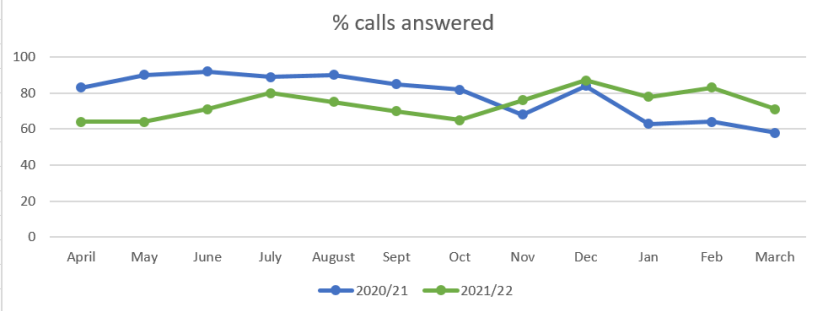


2.10 The reason for the comparative reduction in calls is likely as a result of:

- The reduction in calls for business grants following the pandemic.
- A reduction in SH Waste calls following suspension of Garden Waste.
- The reduction in Waste round review calls from residents following the roll out of new collection dates.

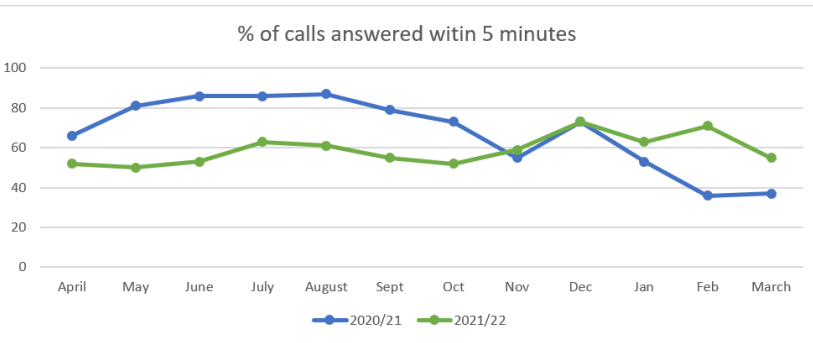
2.11 The reduction in calls has led to an increase in the % of the total calls answered compared to last year.

% Calls answered	2020/21	2021/22	% Change
April	83	64	-22
May	90	64	-28
June	92	71	-22
July	89	80	-10
August	90	75	-16
Sept	85	70	-17
Oct	82	65	-20
Nov	68	76	12
Dec	84	87	4
Jan	63	78	23
Feb	64	83	29
March	58	71	22



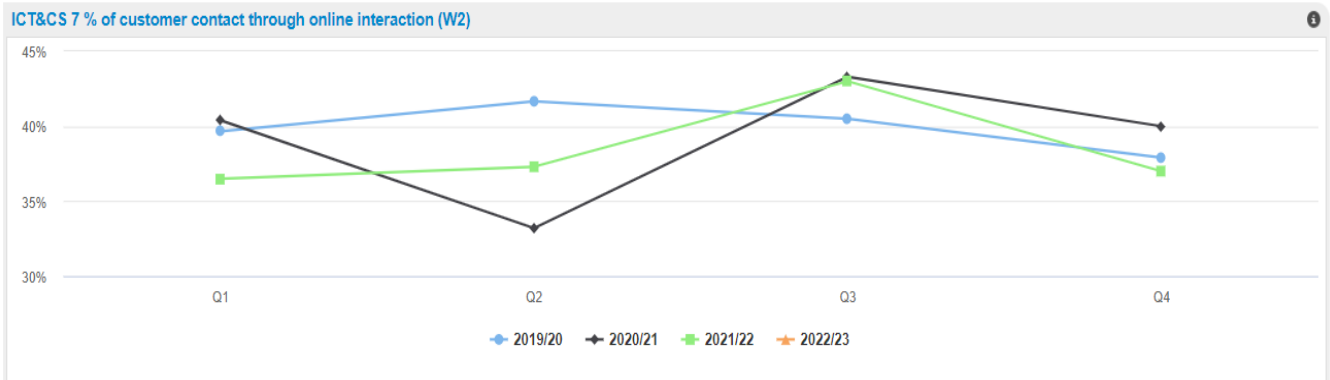
2.12 The reduction in calls has also supported the work we are doing in increasing of the % of calls answered within 5 minutes in the last five months compared to last year. Again the last five months have seen more calls answered within 5 minutes compared to last year.

% of calls ans within 5 minutes	2020/21	2021/22	Increase/Decrease
April	66	52	14
May	81	50	31
June	86	53	33
July	86	63	23
August	87	61	26
Sept	79	55	24
Oct	73	52	21
Nov	55	59	4
Dec	73	73	0
Jan	53	63	10
Feb	36	71	35
March	37	55	18



2.13 Moving forward we would expect call volumes to continue to follow the downward trend we have seen in recent months (and years) as the Council continues to improve its online services and more residents use this contact method.

2.14 Average handling time for calls and the average wrap time for calls (time spent after a call making notes and updating systems) have increased over the last 12 months demonstrating that the complexity of the calls being delivered is now higher. In essence more and more residents will go online if they can, but when they do ring us it is because it's a more complicated issue that they need support with.



- 2.15 The graph above shows how year on year we are seeing how much customer contact through online interaction is increasing, in line with calls reducing. The last quarter is skewed slightly due to the increased number of Council tax calls.
- 2.16 As part of the review, 9 key areas were identified as areas to be improved made up of 34 specific recommendations.

3. Key Deliverables

3.1. Following the review these are the key outcomes can be summarised as the below.

- 3.1.1. **Corporate Ownership.** Improve the involvement and support from all the services that the Contact Centre supports in regards to capacity planning, training and provision of supporting staff. This needs to be improved via the Contact Centre Team Leader and Head of Operations & Support Services. There is also the need to define the requirements of these services as “users” of the Contact Centre.
- 3.1.2. **Training and Development.** Technical training of staff must be delivered by the service areas to improve quality and engagement with the obvious improvement in customer experience and first point resolution. ‘Soft skills’ development such as call control and call management, would remain within the Contact Centre.
- 3.1.3. **Customer Excellence.** The Contact Centre needs to be more of an area of professional excellence rather than a stepping stone for officers to new roles. Working closely with the Institute of Customer Service to deliver a place of work that encourages pride, ownership and teamwork where the customer is at the heart of what we do and this forms part of us delivering the impact behaviours.
- 3.1.4. **Performance Management.** Training, quality checking and coaching of the team all needs improvement in terms of frequency and structure which needs to be delivered by the Contact Centre Team Leader as defined by the Head of Operations & Support Services. This complements the mandatory training we do and forms part of a plan for professional development.
- 3.1.5. **Proactive management.** Day to day running of the Contact Centre needs more active involvement from the Contact Centre Team Leader to

drive these changes and take a more progressive approach in managing of call and agent performance and overall performance monitoring.

3.1.6. **Utilising Technology.** Continuing to explore ways in which technology can improve our performance both in how we utilise what we have, and how we can add to this. For instance we took 35,133 switchboard calls in the last 12 months which required officer involvement that could be automated.

3.1.7. **Workflow.** Proxy teams (an additional group of officers outside of the call centre) are required to flatten out call arrivals by residing to call peaks and must be provided by all the relevant service areas. This will require a cultural change to so that calls are seen as a priority by all officers.

3.1.8. **Resourcing.** Service measures and staffing levels need formally reviewing and the impact of the Revenues and Benefits ring-fenced calls needs to be reviewed.

3.1.9. **Delivery and Transparency.** Change the way we report on stats to a more clear and transparent approach, and feedback on customer satisfaction and overall quality. Proactively share with customers our performance and how long it will take to contact us depending on what day/time they call us. Use the website to make this more visible.

3.2. It is expected that delivery of these changes and the requirement for the support of other services to deliver them, will take 6-12 months but will continue to be something to review on continual basis.

3.3. Success should be measured both by a comparison of SLA's against resourcing levels but also by the encouragement of a peer review.

3.4. Contact Centre staff will start a hybrid approach to working from June where groups will return to the office for a few days a week to support team working and training. It is expected they will retain the flexibility to also partly work from home where appropriate.

4. Progress to date

4.1 A implementation plan and timeline has been drafted which incorporates the recommendations from the Review

4.2 A Project Team has been initiated comprising the Head of Operations & Support Services, Contact Centre Team Leader and the Service Improvement Manager along with Cllr Hopwood as Portfolio holder.

4.3 Communications and staff engagement have already seen some improvement through monthly face to face team meetings with the Contact Centre, which has the outcome of improved team morale and given consistent & timely messages.

4.4 The completion of a service delivery plan setting out the key aims and objectives for the Contact Centre supporting the thematic delivery plan has been completed.

4.5 Initial meetings have been held with some services leads around training delivery and support of call taking with more scheduled over the coming months.

- 4.6 A business case is being prepared for additional technology to deliver further performance improvements.
- 4.7 Meetings with Netcall (who provide the telephone system) have been set up to see how we can further utilise our existing technology as well as learning from their best practice.
- 4.8 The ICT service desk staff management has moved from the Contact Centre Team Leader to the Head of ICT to free up management capacity.

5. Key Outcomes

- 5.1 To reduce call waiting times and increase our speed to answer to be consistently hitting the calls answered within 5 minutes KPI. This will support delivery of “Delivery Quality Council Services”.
- 5.2 To improve the customer satisfaction results.
- 5.3 To support the delivery of the Customer Access Strategy.

6. Proposed way forward

- 6.1 To adapt the improvement plan as per the Contact Centre Review.
- 6.2 To review staffing levels and the impact of reopening receptions and what impact this may have with staff moved from phone lines to manage this.
- 6.3 To bring a follow up report in 6 months to update on the progress.

7. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	The Contact Centre Review supports the strategic aims of maximising and making the best use of the Council's resources to enable delivery of the strategic aims and, at the same time, enhancing the customer experience, access and engagement.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money		There are no expected cost savings as a result of this review.
Risk	Y	That the Council fails to implement the recommendations of the Contact Centre Service Review. That the Council fails to deliver a Contact Centre that meet the expectations of Members and our customers
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	N	

Consultation and Engagement Undertaken or Proposed		
Safeguarding Equality and Diversity Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	Y	By reopening receptions and by adopting the hybrid working approach for the Contact Centre, staff will be required to travel to work more frequently.
Other implications: Health, Safety and Wellbeing and Community Safety, Crime and Disorder	N	

Supporting Information

Appendices:

A – Contact Centre Improvement Plan

Background Papers:

None