

## **Telephony Update**

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**Portfolio:** Transformation and Organisational Development

**Ward(s) Affected:** All

**Purpose of the Report:**

This report provides an update and overview of the performance of our contact centre and call queue lines as requested by Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee.

**Recommendations:**

1. Committee to take note of the current performance and update provided.
2. Customer Experience and Insight Lead to ensure improvements to performance continues throughout the year.

## **1. Summary**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of our performance through our telephony channels. When reading this report it's important to remember that although this communication channel services most of our demand, we also serve customers through face-to-face visits, via email, post and social media.
- 1.2. The recent concentrated continuous improvement activity on our telephone channels, combined with better access to data has enabled significant improvements in our abandonment rates but also transparency of customer satisfaction. For example, we have seen a significant drop in overall abandonment on our contact centre lines, reducing from an average of 12% from February 2022 to an average of 7% to date and now have no service areas within the red RAG status for abandonment.
- 1.3. Since implementing our customer strategy, we have introduced a customer panel and have launched our customer satisfaction survey on the contact centre lines to better understand customer behaviour, demand and extract greater insight for further improvements.
- 1.4. The next stage of focus is our First-Class Customer Service transformation programme to support the Councils in baselining current customer experience, outlining what good customer experience could look like from a technology, people, process and financial perspective to form a programme of transformation for the benefit of our customers. As we continue to see demand grow driven by external factors the driver to do more with less enabled by technology will continue to ensure we can focus our resource on the customers who need our support the most.

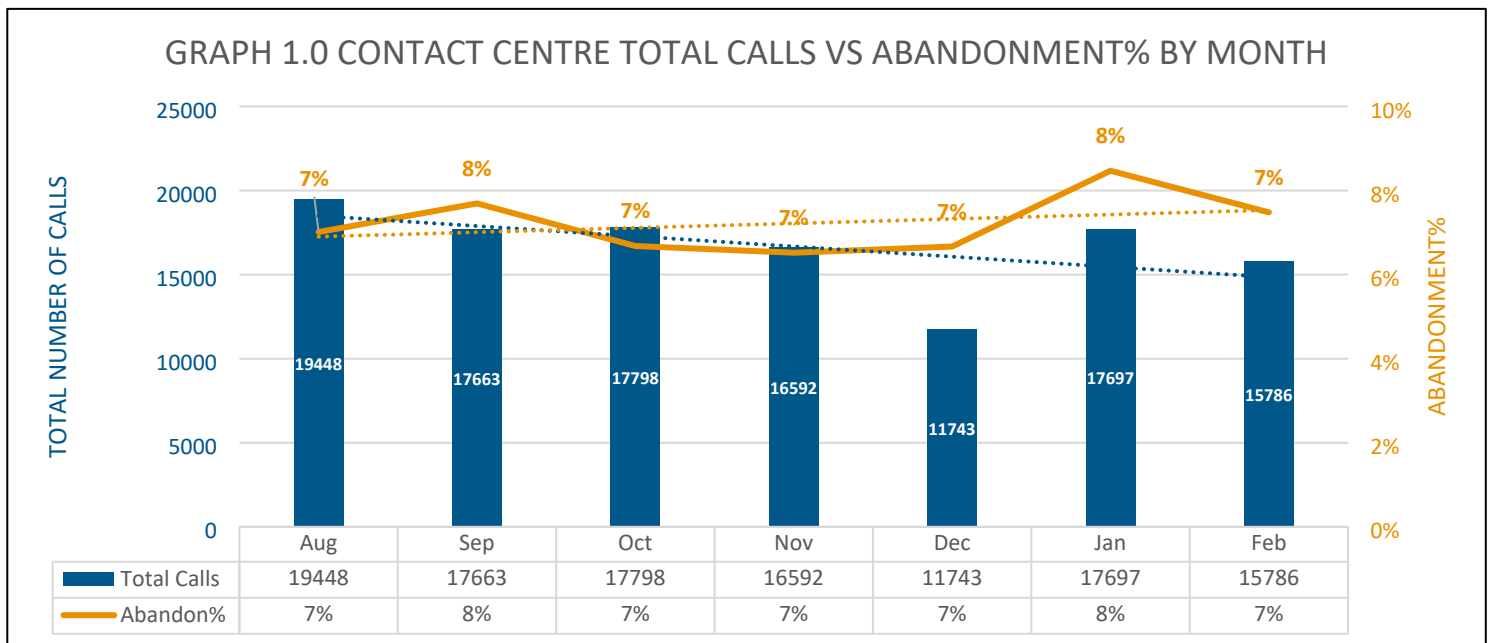
## **2. Background**

- 1.5. Telephony remains one of our highest used customer contact channels. However this is just one of the ways customers can contact us. We estimate that our telephony channels receive around 60% of our overall demand but this comes in peaks and troughs and is highly influenced by our own organisational communications, driven by service areas.
- 1.6. South Norfolk and Broadland District Council moved to a new telephony platform last year. The new platform provided several feature enhancements which we have taken advantage of for example, call tagging, call back queues and our customer satisfaction survey. As a result of this move, we now have greater visibility of performance than ever before. This coupled with the ability to track customer satisfaction on our high demand contact centre lines has led to the continuous improvement activity that has driven a far improved customer experience and can be evidenced in the performance data provided in this report.

1.7. A PowerBI facilitated dashboard our contact centre has enabled managers to access near-time operational KPIs to continually monitor their performance and adjust resource according to demand. We continue to measure and report performance of our telephone channels through strategic performance reports.

### 3. Contact centre demand

1.8. When looking at the total performance of all our contact centre lines collectively, as illustrated in graph 1.0 below. These lines tend to take the highest volume of customer calls. We can see a decreasing trend in the volume of calls received, indicating a decrease in demand. The decrease in demand could be attributed to the decrease in demand through the Energy and Council Tax Rebate Schemes.



1.9. Our contact centre lines continue to perform well with the abandonment rate consistently remain falling in the green RAG status. From August '22 to February '23 none of the abandonment rates on our individual contact centre lines fell within the red RAG status. However, compared to February 2022, three of our contact centre services areas were within the red RAG status and therefore, we have seen a significant improvement in performance.

1.10. Call tagging has been implemented in 7 out of 8 of our contact centre service areas to help us to better understand call demand. Service areas are analysing this data to identify where improvements can be made. This information will help us inform the website channel changes and will also feed into the First-Class Customer Service work.

1.11. Within customer services by enabling call tagging, we have identified a large volume of calls are for the licensing team who do not currently have an option on our main lines. To reduce demand in customer services and enable the

customer to get to the right service first time we are currently implementing a licensing option on our main lines.

#### 4. Contact Centre Performance by Service Area

1.12. The below table shows all contact centre teams and their performance in February this year.

Queue	Entered	Accepted	Total Abandoned	Total Abandoned %	Average Abandon Time	Average Wait Time	Average Handling Time
Council Tax	4270	3776	494	12%	00:02:37	00:03:14	00:04:39
Housing	2463	2234	229	9%	00:02:35	00:00:31	00:05:11
CNC	2075	1901	174	8%	00:03:15	00:01:57	00:02:46
Elections	262	247	15	6%	00:03:14	00:00:13	00:02:20
Reception	2277	2148	129	6%	00:01:50	00:00:39	00:01:58
ICT	272	259	13	5%	00:02:06	00:00:27	00:02:07
Planning Admin	970	926	44	5%	00:00:48	00:00:20	00:03:58
Benefits	1495	1458	37	2%	00:04:00	00:00:38	00:04:32
Waste and Recycling	1672	1640	32	2%	00:00:52	00:00:26	00:03:22

1.13. Looking at our individual Contact Centre lines in February, the following becomes apparent:

1.13.1. Council Tax continue to have the highest abandonment rates but do also have significantly higher call volumes. Call volumes did increase due to Energy and Council Tax Rebate schemes however, these calls have now reduced/ceased. As a result of high abandonment and demand, our Internal Consultancy team have been working with the service to map customer demand against staff resource and to identify areas for improvement and ways to manage the customer demand more effectively.

1.13.2. We have seen an increase in abandonment on our Housing contact centre lines, increasing from 4% in December to 9% in January and February, however, we have also seen an increase in their call volumes by 75% from December to February. The increase in call volumes, coupled with an increase in call handling times could be attributed to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

1.13.3. The abandonment rate on our Waste and Recycling lines has significantly decreased since August 2022 and fell to just 2% in February.

1.14. Average abandonment time; the average time of all calls in the queue wait before abandoning, can be an indicator of customer expectation. Looking across our Contact Centre lines in February the average abandonment times ranging significantly from 27 seconds to around 6 minutes. Indicating that the time a caller is willing to wait is largely dependent on the query type.

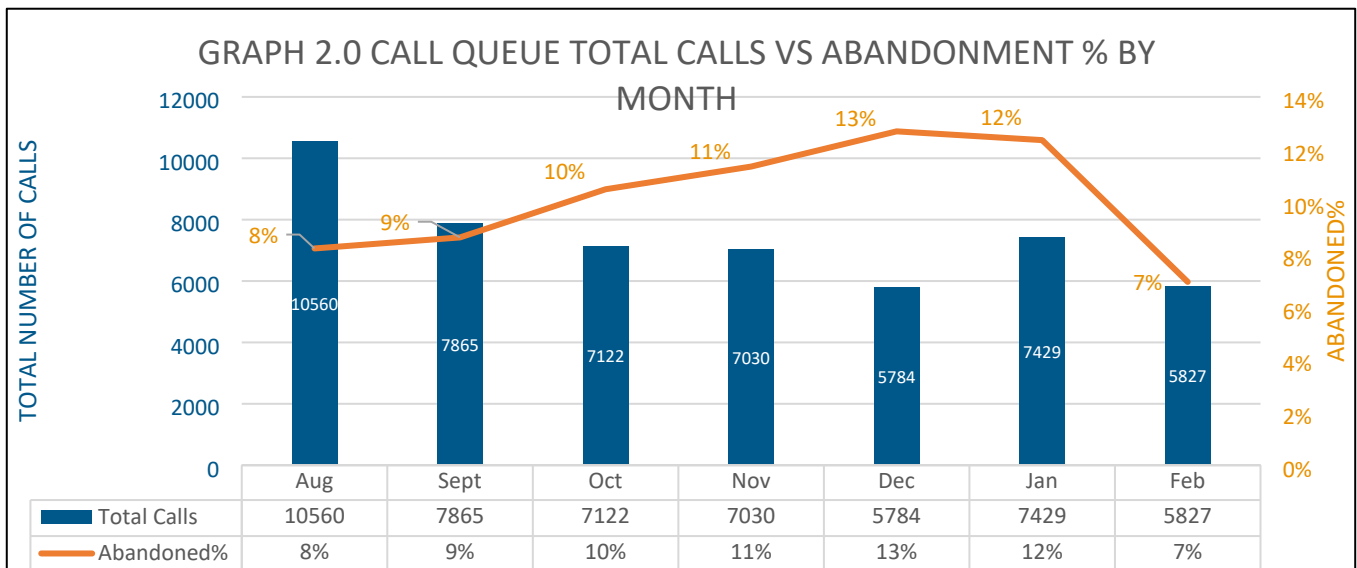
1.15. When callers are waiting in our contact centre queues, the experience they receive is that of what you would experience when calling many business call centres. At intermittent periods the customer will hear:

- Our wait messaging – this prompts customer to visit our website
- Their position in the queue – this gives them their position in the queue and updates as they move through the queue so they can make an informed decision about whether they wait or call back later
- Hold music – generic music supplied on the system that plays between the above to messages

## 5. Call Queues

1.16. Graph 2.0 provides an analysis of the total calls to our call queues, this shows that despite call volumes decreasing from August – December the overall abandonment rate continued to increase up until January resulting in an amber rating overall.

1.17. Focused improvements on the planning department call line specifically such as moving from a call queue to a ring group, has resulted in a significant drop of 24% in February’s abandonment rate. This improvement activity can be seen in the overall call queue abandonment rate figures below bringing the rating in February back to 7% and a green rating.



1.18. When looking at our individual call queues by service area in February, the areas with the highest abandonment rates are Active NoW coordination centre and Tots to Teens. However, all call queue lines abandonment rates were less than 20% and falling within either the Amber or Green RAG status.

## 6. Continuous Improvement

1.19. From August to December 2022, we had seen a significant increase in the abandonment percentage in the planning department specifically. Rising from

14% in August to 34% in December. As a result, a deep-dive exercise was completed, and the following agreed recommendations were implemented:

- Planning's internal only call queues were converted from a call queue to a ring group. These were queues that were used internally by officers to forward their calls and had no direct external number or option on our main numbers to be accessed by customers. For the customer, this means that their call is being distributed directly to another available officer and whilst their call is being distributed, they hear ringing so they know that they are waiting their call to be answered. Previously, they were being diverted to a call queue which when no officer was available, was playing holding music which we believe may have been providing a confusing experience.
- Planning Compliance calls are now being taken by Planning Admin and therefore their call queue and external numbers have been redirected to the Planning Admin contact centre line. This was done due to the Planning Compliance team being relatively small and often out on site. For the customer this means that their query if possible, can be answered by Planning Admin, but if not a message is taken and passed through to the Compliance team to deal with as soon as possible.
- Staff members are now utilising voicemail. The reason for this change is that their calls are generally for them and the queries cannot be answered by a team member. They can then pick up their own voicemails and call the customer back as soon as they are available.

1.19.2. As a result of these changes, we have seen a significant reduction in abandonment percentage which has reduced from 34% in December, to 10% in February.

1.20. Since providing the call queue data to CLT in January, we have seen a reduction in abandonment rates overall and now have no service areas within the red RAG status for abandonment.

## **2. Customer Satisfaction**

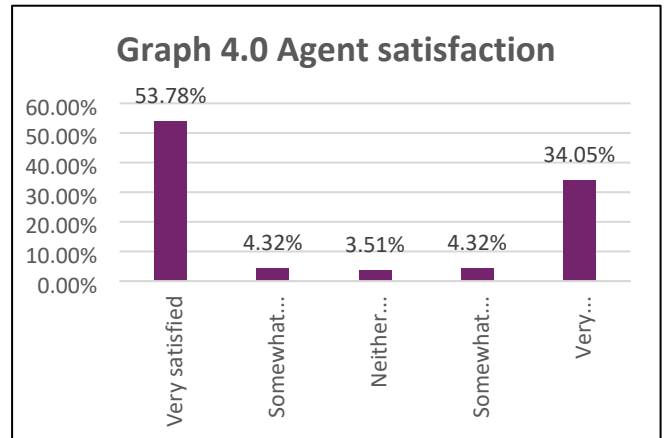
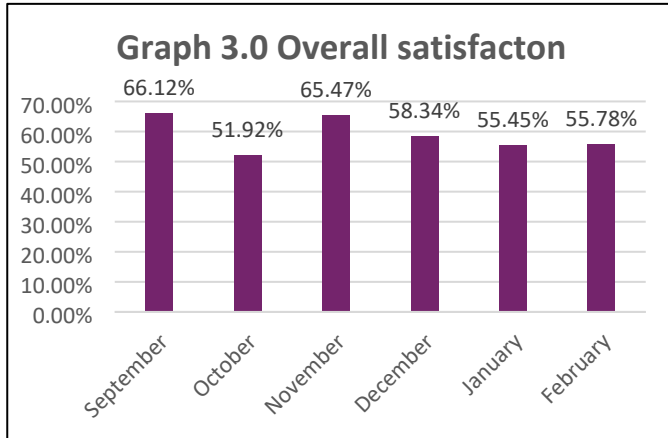
2.1. As part of our commitment to better understand customer need, we have introduced the following metrics:

2.1.1. Overall Customer Satisfaction rating

2.1.2. Online customer satisfaction and;

2.1.3. Telephone satisfaction (only on our contact centre lines) Graphs 3.0 to 7.0 highlight the performance to date.

## Phone Survey Results

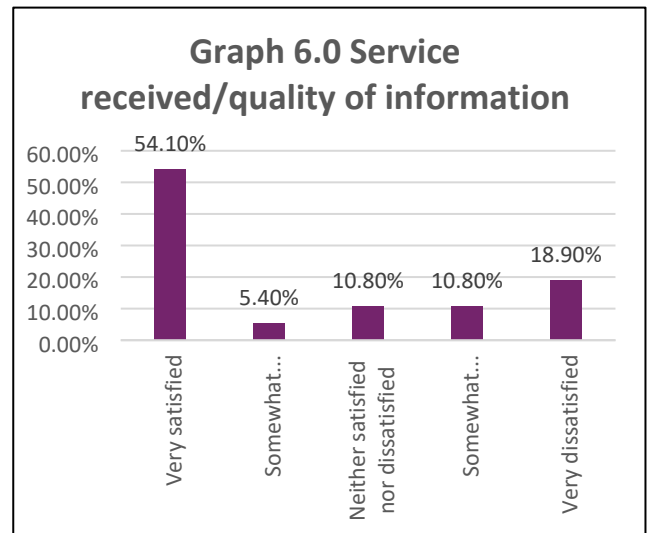
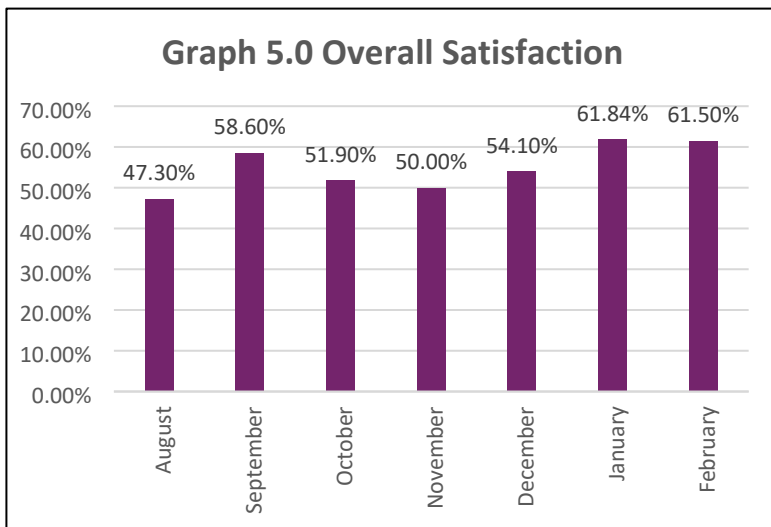


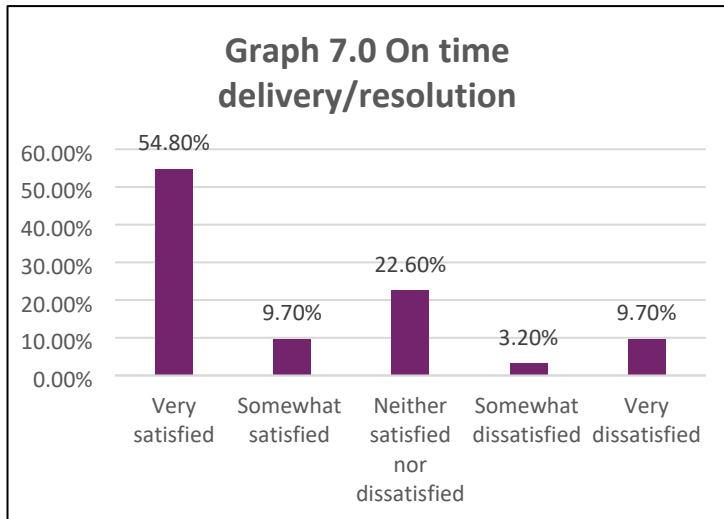
2.2. 1,223 customers completed the phone survey between September and February.

2.3. 579 customers gave us an overall satisfaction rating of either satisfied or very satisfied on the phone survey.

2.4. Aside from October, satisfaction ratings on our phone survey remain above the target of 55%.

## Online Survey Results





2.5. 610 customers completed the online survey between August and February.

2.6. 327 customers gave us an overall satisfaction rating of either satisfied or very satisfied on the online survey

2.7. On our online survey, our satisfaction ratings have mostly been below the target of 55% but have risen above target in January and February.

### **Satisfied and Dissatisfied Customers**

2.8. The service areas that received the most overall dissatisfied customers across both the online and phone survey are Waste and Recycling (138) and Council Tax (177).

2.9. The service areas that received the most overall satisfied customers across both the online and phone survey are Waste and Recycling (267), Council Tax (149), Housing (67), Benefits (102), CNC (52) and Reception (93).

## **7 Issues and risks**

**7.1 Resource Implications – N/A**

**7.2 Legal Implications – N/A**

**7.3 Equality Implications – N/A**

**7.4 Environmental Impact – N/A**

**7.5 Crime and Disorder – N/A**

**7.6 Risks – N/A**

## **8 Conclusion**

8.1. Overall performance on our contact centre lines has improved and most lines are operating at an improved consistent level.



- 8.2. The next stage of focus will be our First-Class Customer Service transformation programme which will commence in Q1 23/24 to support the Councils in baselining our current customer experience and outline what good customer experience could look like from a technology, people, process and cost perspective to build a programme of transformation for the benefit of our customers.
- 8.3. We will also be looking at how we can utilise our customer panel more to gain insight from our customers and their feedback regarding some of the changes and improvements to ensure we are making improvements which deliver a First-Class Customer Service.

## **9 Recommendations**

- 9.1. Committee to take note of the current performance and update provided.
- 9.2. Customer Experience and Insight Lead to ensure improvements to performance continues throughout the year.

### **Background papers**

No background papers.

## Appendix 1

### Key Performance Indicator List:

**Abandonment Rate (%)** - an indication of the number of calls that are 'unanswered'. An abandoned call is counted when the caller hangs up once they are within a queue. Calls that are abandoned within the options/messaging are not counted within this measure.

**Average Handling Time** - an indication of complexity of queries and team efficiency.

**Volume of Calls Received** – an indicator of demand and helps us understand peaks and troughs to allow us to staff accordingly.

**Average Wait Time before Accept Time** - the average time that a customer waits in a queue before the call is answered by an officer.

**Longest Wait Time** – the time of the individual longest wait before a call was answered by an officer. However, this is likely to be an outlier in the data set.

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