

**WIRRAL COUNCIL****CABINET - 20 JUNE 2007****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE****CALL CENTRE – STREETSCENE SERVICES**

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**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 On considering a report on the Streetscene Environmental Service Contract performance review Cabinet on 24 May 2007 (minute 25) requested a report on the review of procedures and responses to customers by the Call Centre. This report details the impact upon the Call Centre of Phase 2 of the Alternate Weekly Collections (AWC) which commenced in April 2007. It highlights the issues encountered by the Call Centre in the weeks following the roll out and the action to mitigate the increased contact levels.

**2. ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES QUERIES AT THE CALL CENTRE**

- 2.1. The Call Centre provides a front line response to Streetscene enquiries by recording requests for services and setting customer expectations in terms of service provision. The Call Centre handles Streetscene calls with regard to Highway Maintenance, Waste and Recycling, Traffic Management and Drainage.
- 2.2. With regard to handling waste and recycling enquiries an agreed method of handling calls is in place with the Director of Technical Services. The Call Centre advisor takes the initial call and raises a request for services via the Oracle Customer Relationship Management System (CRM). This request then becomes the responsibility of the Client Team (within Technical Services Department) and BIFFA to resolve for the customer.
- 2.3. The Call Centre advisors are reliant upon the CRM system being updated with the actions taken by the Client Team and the contractor in order to respond to the customer should a further enquiry occur.
- 2.4. In August 2006 with the introduction of the new waste contract the Authority provided additional temporary funding for the Call Centre to establish additional staffing. Consultation was undertaken with other Local Authorities who had introduced a similar significant change. Based on this information eleven temporary staff were recruited to support the changeover of contractors and the subsequent introduction of the new recycling scheme.
- 2.5. In November 2006 the first phase of Alternate Weekly Collections (AWC) was introduced for 24,500 households. This was successfully introduced and its impact successfully handled at the Call Centre. Approximately

20,000 calls were offered to the Call Centre and almost 19,000 calls handled. This equated to 95% of calls being handled which is well within the standard of call response levels. The calls offered following this implementation proved to be little different to the average monthly volumes presented to the Call Centre following the change of contractor in August 2006. This indicated minimal service disruption for the customer.

- 2.6. In April 2007 Phase 2 of AWC began. This phase included two tranches (covering 35,000 properties each) which were introduced on 16 and 23 April. The type of enquiries generated, from experience within phase 1, related to general recycling information and confirmation of collection days. Had the type of enquiry been the same during phase 2, the additional volume of calls (due to the greater number of properties involved) would have proved challenging but manageable for the Call Centre capacity with the additional resource. However, due to the number of missed collections, and other service issues listed below, call volumes reached levels not experienced previously. In April, the Call Centre was offered a total of 66,500 Streetscene calls, only 21,700 of which could be handled, a 67% abandonment rate.
- 2.7. The introduction of phase 2 also co-incident with the traditionally busy period following the Easter Holiday. Newly introduced Bank Holiday collections also contributed to a significant number of additional calls being received by the Call Centre.

### **3. SERVICE ISSUES**

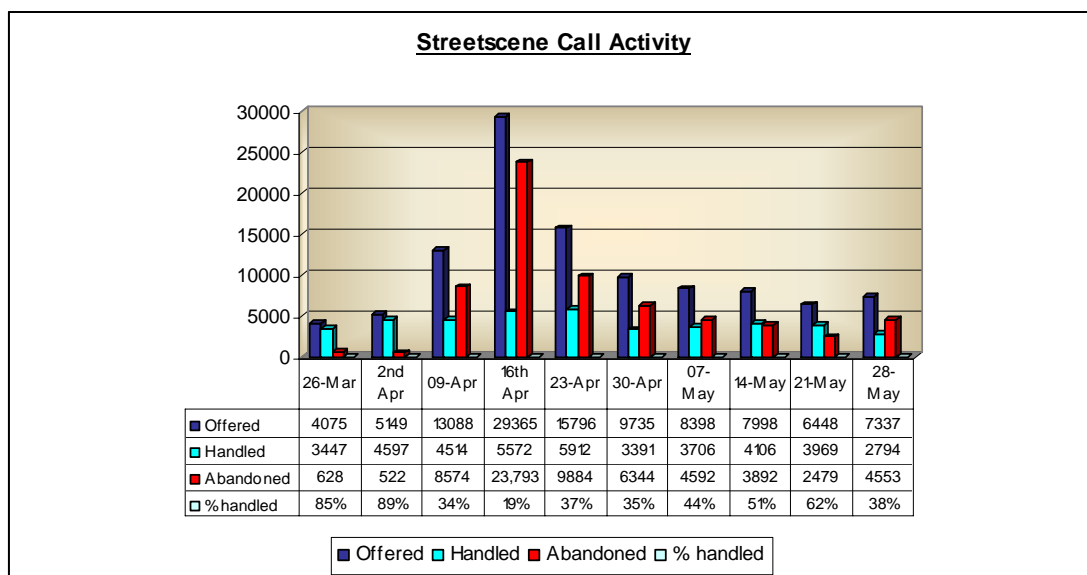
- 3.1. Call volumes began to increase substantially on the Tuesday after the Easter Holiday. This was due in the main to residents contacting the Call Centre whose collection days were the previous Friday and Monday. Historically, collections were not made on Bank Holidays however this was changed as part of the new contract. Easter was the first holiday where these arrangements applied and general feedback from customers was that they were not aware of the changes to collections. Therefore they had not presented their bins on the revised day and contacted the Call Centre for an explanation and resolution.
- 3.2. Call volumes regarding this issue were such, that the Call Centre needed to agree alternative collection arrangements with the Client Team as customers were unhappy that the next scheduled collection would be a fortnight away. In order to resolve the situation the Director of Technical Service took steps to have leaflets distributed to advise of an alternative collection day. However it was identified in subsequent calls that many of these leaflets were not delivered
- 3.3 Garden waste collection calendars detailing changes in collection days were issued. However certain areas did not receive these, prompting a further increase in calls recording a missed bin collection and this

situation also occurred with notification of changes to collection days due to streamlining of rounds.

- 3.4 The delivery of a significant number of grey bins was not completed by mid April which prompted an increase in calls from customers already included within AWC. We are still receiving calls from customers regarding this issue and enquiries relating to replacement brown and green bins remain constant. This information is recorded by the Call Centre and passed to the Director of Technical Services staff for resolution with the contractors.
- 3.5 Calls reporting a missed 'assisted' collection (customers requiring help presenting their bin to the kerb) although significantly less in number than for missed collections, present unique problems for the Call Centre to manage due to the vulnerable nature of the customer and this issue continues to be raised with the Director of Technical Services and the contractor.
- 3.5 In general, the Call Centre continues to receive a high proportion of calls from customers who have made previous contact to report a missed collection and continue to experience problems. I am currently investigating a more effective method of quantifying the volume of these calls via the CRM system to support the Director of Technical Services in addressing the scale of these issues.

#### 4. CALL CENTRE PERFORMANCE

- 4.1 The graph below shows a detailed breakdown of call activity for the period when the Phase 2 roll out occurred. Whereas the number of calls offered has reduced from 66,500 in April to 36,700 in May, this exceeds the capacity to respond. Call volumes prior to Easter were approximately 5,000 per week; and I am yet to see a return to these levels.



- 4.2 During the last nine weeks the Call Centre has worked diligently in an effort to mitigate the service issues in an attempt to stabilise call activity in preparation for phase 3 which is scheduled for 11 June 2007.
- 4.3 The Call Centre responded quickly once the increase in call levels was seen to be sustained. In order to respond to the continued increase in call volumes, I identified additional resource from elsewhere in the Call Centre to assist the Streetscene service. By moving staff to respond to Streetscene calls I have also had to try to ensure that the performance on other services has been maintained to an acceptable level. In addition I transferred resources from the One Stop Shops, with staff being located in the Call Centre at the peak of the call volumes. Utilising additional support during this period helped in responding to front line calls; however this also proved challenging due to some staff not having full training.
- 4.4 With limited knowledge of the whole range of Streetscene enquiries the additional staff initially generated paper referrals which then needed to be logged on the CRM system by an experienced member of staff when the telephone lines closed. To overcome this the telephony equipment was reprogrammed giving Streetscene customers the option to directly select if their enquiry related to a waste and recycling issue. This has enabled the direction of these enquiries to the additional staff resource trained in this area.
- 4.5 To help the Call Centre communicate updated information to customers the telephony equipment has been enhanced and now allows information to be given as the customer enters the queue. In a number of cases this information resolved the customer enquiry without them waiting to speak with an advisor.
- 4.6 In order to help resolution of missed collections for the customer and provide the Client Team and Contractor with this information, I instigated an internal escalation process within the Call Centre. This is used by Call Centre staff to contact the contractors managers and streamlines the process when service issues have not been rectified via the initial report on the CRM system.
- 4.7 I have explained to the contractor that where outstanding collections can not be resolved then if they provide updated information then the Call Centre will contact the customer to advise them of when collection will take place.
- 4.8 The Call Centre is also responsible for Streetscene contacts through email. As call volumes have increased, the number of emails received has also increased. As staff resource has been fully utilised to handle telephone calls the Call Centre has prioritised emails and staff have worked outside of opening hours to process emails and other administration work.

- 4.9 In an attempt to give customers an alternative method of accessing information, the Call Centre has encouraged customers, through telephone messaging and via the Call Centre Switchboard, to utilise libraries and One Stop Shops for assistance. This has resulted in over 1,000 enquiries being handled via the network of One Stop Shops. Those requiring more general information have been recommended to use the internet.
- 4.10. The combined effect of the transfer of One Stop Shop staff to the Call Centre and the increased number of customers at the One Stop Shops has impacted in particular on the delivery of the Benefits service at the One Stop Shops. This has significantly affected performance for this quarter and as a result may impact on the Benefits Subsidy receivable.
- 4.11 As a result of the ongoing issues with waste and recycling collections, customer frustration grew which led to a higher proportion of calls being escalated to managers within the Call Centre. In an effort to respond to these customers Team Leaders responsible for other services within the Call Centre assisted in responding to these calls. As call levels remain high the receipt and resolution of calls of this nature continue to dominate the Call Centre management. Ongoing issues that arise from these escalated calls are highlighted to the Client Team for investigation.
- 4.12. Call Centre involvement with daily liaison meetings with the Director of Technical Services has been crucial in highlighting the nature of the enquiries the Call Centre has received and for the Call Centre to gain updated information from the Client Team. In addition the Call Centre meet with the Client Team and the contractor to gain a full understanding of issues affecting these areas and how these have impacted and may continue to impact upon the Call Centre.
- 4.13 As collections were made on Bank Holiday I ensured the Call Centre was open on the statutory Tuesday and over 600 calls were handled on this Spring Bank Holiday. This has been done informally with staff attending on what is a statutory day of leave. Following such a period of intense and challenging call activity it was pleasing that so many staff volunteered to respond to the ongoing level of queries.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 The increased volume of calls is directly attributable to the level of ongoing service disruption. Whilst the Call Centre does what it can to maximise response levels, resolution will only come with service delivery being normalised. It is clear from contacts with, and knowledge of, other North West local authorities that no other Call Centre has had to tackle this scope of change in the waste collection service. I continue to work with Director of Technical Services to help achieve service normalisation as soon as possible.

- 5.2 The next roll out (phase 3) is scheduled to take place in June and covers a smaller number of residents. However due to the greater number of terraced properties included, this may result in its own challenges and again I am working with the Director of Technical Services to be able to respond to the queries this roll out will produce.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are none arising directly from this report that can be identified at this stage.

## **7. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The staff in the Call Centre, including the Switchboard team, who have picked up many more calls during this period, have done exceptionally well to cope under the obvious and ongoing pressure.
- 7.2. Under the circumstances and with no tangible end to the current situation staff have displayed great resilience and loyalty with sickness levels remaining low. Staff have volunteered to work outside core hours to reduce outstanding emails and administration work. In addition I was able to provide a service on Bank Holiday Tuesday due to staff willingness to respond to the ongoing situation.
- 7.3 However the ongoing pressure of consistent high call volumes coupled with callers returning where re-collection has not been completed has had a negative impact upon temporary staff with five resigning during this period. I recruited in early June to fill these posts and after a period of intense training the staff have been able to deal with waste and recycling issues. In addition more Call Centre staff are being cross trained in this area to maximise the capacity to respond to the anticipated increase in call volumes as Phase 3 commences.
- 7.4 In August 2006 with the introduction of the new waste contract the Authority provided funding for additional Call Centre staff. The funding for these temporary staff is limited in 2007/08 and at the current rate will likely be used by October / November by which time it is vital to be back to pre-new contract call levels. I will further review the position in September on what may be required to meet acceptable service standards.

## **8. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. There are none arising from this report.

## **9. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. There are none arising from this report.

**10. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are none arising from this report.

**11. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are none arising from this report.

**12. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 There are none arising from this report.

**13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

13.1 There are none in relation to this report.

**14. RECOMMENDATION**

14.1. That the report be noted.

IAN COLEMAN  
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FNCE/150/07