

Housing Customer Service – Channel shift, Contact and Performance 2017/18:

For consideration by: Housing Scrutiny Commission

Date: 4th January 2018

Lead director: Alison Greenhill

- Ward(s) affected: All
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1. Purpose of report

1.1 To provide the Housing Scrutiny Commission with a brief summary of the progress achieved through Housing Services channel shift programme and how this has enhanced, and changed the customer experience.

2. Current Customer Service delivery summary

2.1 The Customer Services offer consists of the customer service line for telephony call handling plus face to face contact at Granby Street along with seven geographically based multi service hubs. Those hubs have been introduced in tandem with the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme which delivers an on-line offer in key locations, in areas of deprivation (predominately housing estates), where possible, across the city. A wide range of contact not just housing is handled via these channels.

2.2 The way customer contact is handled is subject to major change now and in the coming months as a result of the channel shift programme where the vision is:

- On-line is the primary contact channel and channel of choice (for us and our customers)
- Make it easy for our customers to transact on-line
- 100% routine and high volume transactions on-line by 2018
- Automated back office processes behind all on-line transactions
- One main contact phone number
- Face to face the exception for most complex transactions / vulnerable customers
- Harnessing and using the data we gather
- Delivering significant cash savings

2.3 This vision will result in contact handling significantly changing particularly telephony handling. We want tenants to primarily move to using on-line channels which means they can contact us 24/7 and for this experience to be easy and positive. The aim is for telephony volumes to reduce and for this channel in the longer-term to be retained for the more complex transactions and vulnerable customers particularly. It also means that we will need to rethink what sort of performance indicators and service standards are appropriate in future as the way contact is handled changes.

2.4 The customer service line for 2016 received on average approximately 58,000 calls a month for 15 Council services of which Housing is just one service; approximately 37% are Housing related. The call centre takes calls from 8am to 6pm every week day. The first 6 months of 2017 saw the average number of calls received per month reduces by just over 8,000 calls to approximately 50,000 calls per month. Housing related calls represented 39% of the call volume this was an increase of 2% compared to 2016.

2.5 Calls are charged at a local rate with free phone access at the Customer Contact Centre on Granby Street, 5 library locations and a further 4 housing offices across the city. A tenant can call to book a housing repair, report an estate management issue (e.g.

Anti-Social Behaviour), or request a tenant initiated improvement (Housing management), make a payment to or manage their rent account (Rent Enquiries) Housing Options general enquiries and initial homelessness enquiries (tier 2) for Housing Options. All these call lines are handled by Revenues and Customer Support's customer service line.

2.6 The Customer Contact Centre has in the past carried out face to face interviews for TARS (Tenant's Advice and Repairs) enquires at Granby Street. TARS enquires were channel shifted to an on line offer from April 2017, moving 600 contacts on-line.

2.7 If tenants present at the Customer Service Centre on Granby Street they will be offered the opportunity to use the MyAccount facility if appropriate; or sign posted to the free phones for all other transactions. There are 8 PC's (for Leicester HomeChoice applications and TARS enquires) and 12 phones which are free to use. An assisted self-serve scanning facility for Housing Option service (HOS) application document verification is also available. Tenants can pay their rent by card at any PC, or card and cash at our three payment terminals. Payments at these machines have temporarily increased by approximately 68% more in quarter 2, 2017 in comparison to quarter 1 2017. This increase was anticipated as payments have gone up in general in the centre as cash payment are no longer accepted at Post Offices but are expected to decrease again when tenants adjust to paying through other methods. Should a customer wish to see a Customer Service advisor to query an outstanding rent issue, our target is to see customers within 10 minutes.

2.8 Since the 8th August 2017 Housing Advice such as HomeChoice guidance and Housing register enquiries (tier 1 enquires) is available on our Housing Options webpages. Prior to August enquires were handled over the telephone, this means we have ended taking 3,500 contacts a month; this advice can now been accessed through an on-line offer. The webpage can be found here: <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/housing/homelessness/>

2.9 Customer Support handle 74% of the initial Tier 2 calls for homelessness enquires with the remaining 26% being transferred to Duty Officers in the Housing Options Service.

2.10 Housing Options offer pre-booked appointments within the centre to deal with duty assessments and on-going housing applications (non-emergency). They saw 708 applicants in 2016/17 by the end of September 2017 they had seen 490 applicants. The average waiting time was 22:38 minutes.

2.11 Housing verification is now facilitated by Customer Supports Front of House (FOH) team. This means that once a customer is greeted and we have established they have documents for Housing they will be assisted to self-scan and upload their own documents.

2.12 The council's self-serve portal My Account was officially launched at the beginning of October 2016. Since then customers with housing enquiries have been encouraged to move from traditional phone contact. My Account transactions relating to Housing enquires (2,973) represent 1% of the telephony contact up to the end of September 2017. We still have a long way to go to channel shift this contact.

2.13 The on-line offer has strengthened the opportunity for tenants and customers to transact with the council via computer, tablet or mobile device 24/7. There are free to use PC's situated across the city, their locations and that of our free to use phones to contact us, scanning opportunities and payment facilities are detailed in a table in appendix A.

2.14 As of 1st August 2017 the Customer Support Service (Granby Street and Telephony) is funded utilising a combined budget with contributions from both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

3 Delivery performance

3.1 Housing calls performance April to the end of September 2017:

We received 116,489 calls for all four areas of housing business (being Housing Repairs, Housing Management, Rents and Payments, and Housing Options). This represents 39% of all the calls the call centre receives.

Although the total number of housing-related calls fell by approximately 8% compared to the same period for 2016, calls to customer services across all lines also fell. This has led to an increase of 4% of total call volume taken by housing-related enquiries.

3.2 Average call performance between April and September 2017 was:

- we answered 96,971 of the calls,
- the caller waited approximately 04:15 minutes for the call to be answered,
- we take on average 03:53 minutes to handle a call and;
- callers abandon in 20% of calls after the welcome messages have ended primarily because the message promotes how to resolve their enquiry on line.

Abandonment rate 2017/18			
	New target Jan 2017	Performance 2016/17	April – Sept 2017/18
Housing Options (Tier 2) High Priority	2%	11%	2%
Housing Repairs	5%	21%	19%
Housing Management	5%	16%	24%
Payment and Rent Enquiries	5%	22%	14%
Housing Options (Tier 1)	10% Corporate	21%	Channel shifted contact to webpages

3.3 The Housing Options Tier 2 calls (homelessness and duty to house enquires) are deemed a high priority call, callers wait an average of approximately 1 minute to get through to customer support, and 98% of call are answered. The abandonment rate has reduced from 9% to 2% in the last 10 months.

3.4 Should the caller's enquiry require transferring to the Housing Options Duty line the caller waits on average a further 10 minutes for their enquiry to be answered. Housing Option Duty line abandonment rate is 15% for Q2/2017.

3.5 Housing Options (HO) offer pre booked and same day appointments for duty assessments. In November 2017 HO introduced a waiting time target was and we do not expect customers to wait longer than 15 minutes for a pre booked appointment and where a same day duty assessment is required customers should not wait longer than

an hour. For same day duty this is a longer wait as the service is reactive to the needs of customers and the immediacy of the need.

3.6 A number of channel shift projects have been successfully implemented within the Customer Service arena over the summer delivering an improved customer journey. There have been some challenges to achieve these improvements and these are described below.

Challenges:

- The call centre had an establishment of 2 managers, 4 team leaders, 53 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) call agents, 27 customer centre staff. This is a total establishment of 86 FTE members of staff.
- An organisational review commenced in January 2017 across Customer Services as a whole. This has meant resources had been stretched from February 2017 onwards while consultation meetings for 70+ members of staff took place. The new structure is now in place with an overall staffing resource of 58 officers, 5 team leaders and 1 manager, total 64 FTE establishment. This review has achieved savings of £270K.
- Staff retention for temporary members of staff has been a challenge during the review period which is not unusual in a review.
- The planned IT infrastructure improvements went ahead over the summer with a temporary fix which delivered some improvements to the IT systems call handling capacity.
- The general election on 8th June further increased call volumes across the centre by 30% from April to 8th June due to a campaign to promote electoral registration and electoral matters (where is my polling station etc).

Solutions

- The channel shift programme has shifted contact from face to face to telephony; the programme for 2017/18 is to shift this contact from telephone to on line transactions from summer 2017.
- No new services have joined the centre since January 2017
- The new delivery structure is in place from 1st August 2017.
- Staff morale has begun to improve as the new structure settles in.
- The permanent fix to the IT infrastructure issue should be installed late autumn 2017.
- Procurement of the Automatic Call Distribution system (call handling system) has commenced. This should conclude winter 2017.
- Attendance levels are good and remain stable. This means more staff are at work.
- New starters are trained on the high demand lines which includes Housing Options to ensure this contact has resilience in the centre.
- The improvement plan which came into place from November 2016 has been updated and can be found in appendix B.

3.7 In order to continue to improve and meet revised performance targets for call handling it is imperative to move contact onto an integrated on-line solution. There are two initiatives, these are:

- a) Through Northgate self-serve portal. From the New Year tenants will be able to view their rent account details.
- b) At present a customer can via MyAccount :
 - Housing repairs
 - Request an update on an outstanding repair
 - Report a new repair

- Report a problem with a completed repair
- Housing management
 - Notice to terminate a garage or parking space licence
- Housing Options
 - Tell us about a change of address
 - Add a partner to an application
 - Report a change of circumstances
 - Enquire about housing applications (general advice and contact form)
 - What proofs are needed (Advice and submissions)
- Council Tax and Housing Benefits
 - Apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment

However the process remains manually intensive in the back office as call centre staff continue to upload the information onto the Northgate system. This process although appears to be on line for the customer is integrated into the back-office system.

- c) The aim is to implement a self-service portal so that when customers report a repair/change on line the data auto populates the Northgate system without the need for a human intervention. This change should be in the public domain by the end of 2018.

3.8 All of these changes have been through a managed process with equality impact assessments completed where appropriate with procedures in place to identify those who may find it difficult to access the service after the change has come in. Where we are able we do monitor the impact upon our customers, currently the methods we use to monitor impact are complaints and service comments, customer satisfaction surveys and system satisfaction ratings. We do act upon feedback such as improving signage and information in the centre. It should be noted however where a hard stop is adopted our customer self serves and therefore may 'disappear' from our performance recording and customer insight (where it exists) as they predominately use an on line offer such as Housing Options webpage. Currently our customer insight opportunities through MyAccount and the FirmStep Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform are limited. It captures name, address, date of birth, as mandatory with gender, email address and telephone as an option. It does not have the facility to capture equalities monitoring data and installing this will be at a cost to the authority. The previous CRM did not capture this data either, therefore we have no capability through this system to evaluate the any negative equalities implications arising from the changes (such as hard stops) we introduce. The R&CS undertake customer satisfaction surveys across both face to face and the telephony provision and these help us understand the impact these changes we implement.

- a) Granby Street customer satisfaction surveys results are as follows:

2600 surveys were collected as customers exited the centre, all of which were face to face customers accessing 15 services delivered at the centre.

We asked:

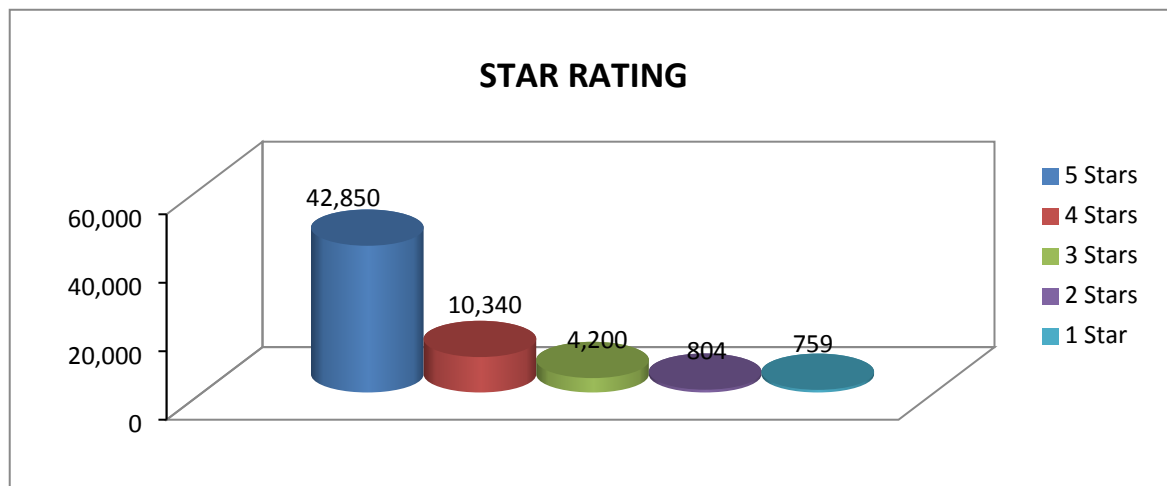
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|---|--------------------|
| • How did you access the service today? | 100% Face to Face. |
| • Has your query been resolved? | 100% |
| • Were you happy with the service you received? | 100% |

b) Callers to the council are all offered the opportunity to complete a telephone survey at the end of the call. This is an automated survey. Customer rate the service from 1 being poor to 10 being excellent. The results of choosing this option for housing related calls are:

- What did you think of the length of wait time?
64% of responders rated the service between 8 – 10
- Was the enquiry resolved?
97% of responders rated the service between 8 – 10
- How satisfied were you with the Officer's service?
88% of responders rated the service between 8 -10

c) The council's webpages offer an insight tool called Google Analytics to review headline usage eg number of visits to a page and how the page is navigated. Therefore Housing could use this tool at key timeframes (possibly every 3 months) to identify if the visits to the HO advice page have increased in number after 8th August 2017 than before. This will not offer qualitative data.

d) MyAccount has a customer satisfaction star rating. The average rating since October 2016 is 4.3 with the total number of people responding to survey of 58,953.



Here is a sample of the comments we have received

- 5 Stars** *No queuing, or taking the bus. No hanging on the phone for ages - quick, easy and convenient*
- 4 Stars** *You are aiming high every moment of time keep it up*
- 3 Stars** *Easy to register however not found what I thought would find 2017*
- 2 Stars** *Very difficult to input dob*
- 1 Stars** *bog standard*

My Account has the facility for customers to feedback on their experience. This is really important to us. Not only does it tell us when things are working well but highlights when we should look at our offer and improve it.

3.9 The next steps are:

- Housing and Customer Service management continue to work to achieve improvements through the improvement plan.
- Housing Services, supported by the Customer Contact Transformation Team, work closely to deliver an integrated on-line offer at the earliest opportunity.
- Now the channel shift programmes are beginning to influence customer behaviour Housing will review the Service Level Agreements, agree priority focus of resources and set SMART targets for call handling for all 4 Housing Service calls and ;
- Work with tenants groups to effectively communicate the customer offer and improve the customer experience and consequently the Customer Service performance, where customers choose the on line channel and retain the telephony and face to face support for our customers who need extra help.

4. Recommendations

4.1 The Housing Scrutiny commission are invited to comment on the channel shift programme, its achievements and customer contact performance for the face to face and call handling service to tenants.

Financial, Legal and other implications

4. Financial implications

The 'channel shift' agenda towards greater use of on-line self-service (or otherwise telephone contact) is key to delivering efficiencies and cost savings to the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund budgets

Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, ext. 37 4081

5. Legal implications

There are no implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report.

Emma Horton, Head of Law (Commercial, Property & Planning) etc. 37 1426

6. Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

Through the use of Channel Shift the environmental impact of customer contact will be reduced, particularly by reducing the need to travel.

- Mark Jeffcote, Environment Team (x37 2251)

7. Equalities implications

Our Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to pay due regard to any negative impacts arising from our decisions (and this would include decisions on how we deliver our services) and put in place mitigating actions to reduce or remove those negative impacts. There is free phone access at the main Customer Contact Centre on Granby Street in the city centre, 5 library locations and a further 4 housing offices across the city.

The report discusses volume of contact and abandoned calls, but does not comment

on adverse impacts experienced by callers because of these statistics – what was the impact of all those abandoned calls? There is a lack of evidence to determine whether there are any negative equalities implications arising from service performance.

The evidence presented in the report does not consider such implications. A broader perspective, collecting evidence on outcomes as well as performance indicators, would enable us to consider our Public Sector Equality Duty implications.

Surinder Singh, Equalities Officer, ext 37 4148.

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

9. Appendices

Appendix A - Housing Service Contact Locations and Self Service Multi-Hub sites.























Appendix B - Improvement plan (separate document)

10. Is this a “key decision”?

No

Appendix A – A table showing the Housing Service contact locations and Self-Serve Multi-hub Sites

HOUSING SERVICE CONTACT LOCATIONS AND SELF-SERVE MULTI-HUB SITES				
CURRENT LOCATIONS	Telephone	Payment Kiosk	Online Self-Serve	Housing Support

Granby Street Customer Service Centre		£		x
St Matthews Centre		x		✓
Pork Pie Library & Community Centre		£		x
New Parks Library		£		✓
Beaumont Leys Library		x		✓
The BRITE Centre		x		✓
Humberstone Housing Office		x	x	x
Rowlatts Hill Housing Office		x	x	x
Eyers Monsell Neighbourhood Community Centre		x	x	x
St Peters Hydra Walk		x	x	x
PROPOSED SELF SERVICE LOCATIONS				
Hamilton Library		x		x
Belgrave Library		x		x
SELF SERVICE LOCATION YET TO BE DETERMINED				
East location TBC		x		x