

Overview Select Committee

Customer Services – Performance Report 24/25

Date of meeting: 9th July 2025

Lead officer: Andrew Shilliam, Director of Corporate
Services



Leicester
City Council

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All Wards
- Report author: Andrew Shilliam, Director of Corporate Services
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- Report version number: V1

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Council continues to operate a multi-channel corporate customer services function, with people able to make contact face-to-face, by phone, by email/webform, and through an increasingly comprehensive digital offering made available by other Council services.
- 1.2. This report provides an overview reminder of the corporate customer service arrangements we have in place, update on the performance of the customer contact centre, and update on some of the improvements that have been made to the operational arrangements during the last 12+ months, particularly to the Customer Service Line operations.

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny

- 2.1. To note the 24/25 performance of the customer contact centre.
- 2.2. To note and comment on the improvements made to the operational arrangements.
- 2.3. To make any recommendations for further action and/or consideration regarding the customer services offer at the Council.

3. Supporting Information

- 3.1. The Council continues to operate a multi-channel Customer Service provision which enables citizens of Leicester to contact the Council by telephone, in person at the Customer Service Centre, and through numerous online platforms for those who want and can self-serve.
- 3.2. Providing citizens or customers with an open and accessible front door to services offered by public and private sector organisations continues to be an important opportunity to engage positively.

National Trends in Customer Contact
- 3.3. When considering how we perform and some of the changes taking place in our own contact centre environment specifically, it's useful to understand the wider context when it comes to providing customer contact services. The following few paragraphs outline some of the current challenges and trends when it comes to this provision.
- 3.4. Despite the increasing prevalence of digital channels and self-service, the preference for phone contact as the first port of call, particularly for complex and urgent matters, isn't going away. This preference, combined with the cost of phone

interactions being higher than digital and self-serve channels, means that we need to consider what we can do to make phone contact more effective.

- 3.5. Call recording continues to be one of the most widely used contact centre technologies, with many organisations regularly exploring improvements to their call recording solutions. These include real time and post call speech and sentiment analytics capabilities (classed as interaction analytics) to improve the quality assurance arrangements and the effectiveness of overall call handling. Public sector contact centre operations lag other sectors when it comes to the use of interaction analytics.
- 3.6. Many contact centre operations have compliance orientated teams who undertake call monitoring and analysis duties, and to look for identifiable business or service improvements and failure demand information.
- 3.7. One of the greatest challenges to managing performance and quality continues to be not having sufficient time to analyse and use call data and information, and therefore a greater level of automated analysis and insights would enable targeted and more productive quality and performance interventions.
- 3.8. The longer-term view of customer contact is one of a polarised arrangement that sees citizens choosing to use websites or self-serve mobile orientated apps for every day, mundane, and more straightforward tasks and enquiries, leaving contact centres to deal with interactions that are more complex or emotive for citizens. It's recognised also that there will be a demographic for whom contact centres will continue to be their channel of choice.
- 3.9. The use of voice Bot technology is increasingly appealing to contact centre providers. These applications are a combination of Artificial Intelligence and a natural language understanding model, and convert speech to text, analyse it, and respond accordingly using text-to-speech. These applications require training, and large volumes of appropriate and clean data from which to learn.
- 3.10. Although many contact centres still operate as single sites, commercial pressures and technical advancements have provided opportunities for organisations to work in alternative ways. The use of wholly virtual contact centres contact has become more normal, often because homeworking has been fully harnessed.
- 3.11. That said, it remains much more typical for public sector organisations to operate in-person contact centres. That said, making use of a hybrid arrangement is well used feature of these in-person contact centres.
- 3.12. Multi-channel contact centres are increasingly common, where inbound contact is made possible by webchat, mobile messaging, phone, social media, email, phone self-service, and letter. In ascending order, phone – live agent, email, and webchat represent the most significantly used channels of contact into organisations.

Operational changes to LCC Customer Service arrangements

- 3.13. Since 23/24, the service has made several changes to the staffing structure and the operational arrangements to improve the standards and efficiency of our customer service provision.
- 3.14. After several years of temporary arrangements, the Customer Service Manager role has been permanently recruited to. Doing so has removed a reliance on interim arrangements and means that a dedicated operational resource is now in place that ensures day-to-day service delivery is maintained.
- 3.15. Other changes at the Customer Service Team Leader level have allowed us to recruit two Team Leaders with customer service and contact centre experience from outside the Council, and we've added a further role that sits between the customer service agents and the Team Leaders that makes our leadership arrangements more resilient.
- 3.16. Recognising the negative impact on staff morale and wellbeing of operating the Customer Service Line from the 2nd floor of York House, mainly due to extreme heating related challenges, we took the opportunity to create an area on the 4th floor of City Hall specifically for our contact centre operation. This was well received.
- 3.17. A refreshed approach to the training of our customer service staff has been put in place, which provides a for a more focused approach on the knowledge and skills being trained. Staff are gradually introduced to handling enquiries related to the training they've received and are provided with better post-training feedback as we more regularly monitor their performance. The dedicated training team play a greater role in providing post-training support to the call handlers.
- 3.18. Prior to the beginning of 2025, the Customer Service Line used to operate between the hours of 8am and 6pm, Monday to Friday, with most full-time staff working a 7.5hr shift patten within those hours. Due to the limited availability of staffing resources between the hours of 8 – 9.15am and 4.15 – 6pm, the opening lines of the service were staggered.
- 3.19. Whilst this format of phased queue opening provided some benefits in managing staffing resources across an 8am – 6pm operation, it caused calls to be focused to within core hours when staffing levels were at their lowest.
- 3.20. It also created confusion for customers as opening times differed based on the nature of the enquiry. We were also unable to transfer calls within the service for areas in which they are not trained, causing repeat contacts. This resulted in a poor customer experience overall.
- 3.21. To improve things, the service operating hours were adjusted to 8:30-5pm Monday to Thursday, and 8:30-4.30pm on Friday, bringing the service largely in line with other council departments. Operationally, no new calls are now added to queues 30 minutes prior to the end of day. This allows call handlers to wrap up their working day without having to rush unnecessarily. So far, we've seen an improvement in call wait times across all lines because of these changes.

3.22. Feedback from staff about the changes that have taken place to our service operating hours and the shift arrangements has been positive and we think has improved their overall wellbeing. Though it's too soon to make a strong relationship back to this definitively, we've seen an improvement in the absence rates in the service in recent months. A fuller account of that will be able to be provided midway through 25/26, if required.

Customer Service Line

3.23. The Customer Services function relies heavily on our people resources to handle incoming contact in all forms. The sector contends with recruitment and retention challenges on a perennial basis, and our own service is no different.

3.24. Over the last 12 – 18 months, the service has experienced significant change at management level as 4 of our Team Leaders have left the service for roles elsewhere. In response, we've recruited to 2 FT Team Leader replacements, both of whom have proven to be strong appointments, promoted to 1 Team Leader position from within our most experienced staffing pool, and have created a temporary floor walker/supervisory role which we intend to make a permanent feature of the team.

3.25. Likewise, the contact handling staffing resource has seen some change over the last 24 months. In April 2023 the total number of contact handling staff across all grades was 47 FTEs. At the end of March 2025, that resource had reduced to 35.5 FTEs. Those reductions are the result of a combination of better absence and performance management of staff, and employees choosing a future outside of the service as they look to further develop themselves (or) choosing to leave the Council altogether.

3.26. Given our efforts to balance the Council's budget, and the Corporate Services division especially, in many cases those leavers have not been able to be replaced, and the resulting saving is being used to contribute to the overall savings required within the division of £2m by 2027/28.

3.27. Because all incoming enquiries into the Customer Services function are handled by the staffing team in one way or another, and we don't currently make use of any automated technology to handle any contacts coming in, not replacing these people would have had a significant and detrimental effect on overall performance if we didn't take action to improve things elsewhere. Many of those improvements have been covered earlier in this report already.

3.28. In terms of operational performance, call volumes in 24/25 (357,000) were higher than 23/24 (336,000), despite being unable to handle incoming enquiries during the service closure resulting from the cyber-attack in Spring 2024.

3.29. And though we've had to reduce staffing, we continue to answer 72% of all calls presented, which is the same answer rate as the previous year. That call answer performance has increased more recently too, as we answered over 80% of calls presented from Nov 24 – March 25, a direct result of the changes to our opening hours and adjusting our resource scheduling.

- 3.30. Average time to answer (the length of time spent in a call queue) increased from an average across all lines of 7m 19s in 23/24 to 12m 52s in 24/25.
- 3.31. Encouragingly though, and again because of the changes to the opening hours and adjusting our resource scheduling, the average time to answer between Nov 24 – Feb 25 dropped significantly, to nearer the 6-minute mark and which is an improvement on the previous year. We expect that trend to continue but will monitor arrangements closely over the coming months.
- 3.32. As we approach the start of the new financial year, we almost always experience a significant increase in calls to the Council during the months of March and April every year. This is very much down to the new Council Tax billing cycle beginning and other financial assessments taking place which typically drive-up contact. March '25 was a busier month as a result.
- 3.33. Feedback from the service also continues to highlight the increasingly complex and difficult nature of some of the calls coming in. Despite that, handling time (the time from the start of the call to moving on to taking another) has remained at about the same level as 23/24, at 6m 10s. This performance compares well to benchmarkable information available, and that suggests the average call duration for service-based contact centres in the UK is 6m 56s.
- 3.34. In terms of incoming telephony contact, the following table shows how this contact is distributed across our lines/services for the 24/25 period.

| | YTD | % of Total |
|------------------------------------|-------|------------|
| Housing Repairs | 67462 | 19% |
| Council Tax Tier 1 Calls | 65266 | 18% |
| General Switchboard | 34998 | 10% |
| Housing Benefits Tier 1 Calls | 27287 | 8% |
| Housing Management | 27000 | 8% |
| Housing Options | 29242 | 8% |
| Social Care Switchboard | 20898 | 6% |
| Parking Bus Passes and Blue Badges | 15374 | 4% |
| Payments and Rent Enquiries | 13592 | 4% |
| Waste Management Service Line | 15239 | 4% |
| School Admissions | 11747 | 3% |
| Electoral Registration | 6827 | 2% |
| Environment Service Line | 8066 | 2% |
| General Enquiries | 7303 | 2% |
| CSG General Enquiry | 4902 | 1% |

3.35. Overall, the following is a summary of the current 24/25 position:

- We received more calls than the previous year
- Call handling time is broadly the same as the previous year
- Our intelligence suggests many incoming calls are complex in nature

- We've further reduced the level of Team Leader and call handling resource to help balance the Council's budget
- Average time to answer over the whole year has increased significantly
- We've changed our opening times and staff scheduling, which has made us more resilient
- These recent changes have seen an increase in the time it takes us to answer calls, bringing us below 23/24 levels

Customer Service Centre

- 3.36. We continue to operate our face-to-face customer service centre on Granby Street and between 09:30 – 16:30, Tuesday to Thursday. That involves dealing mainly with walk-in enquiries from members of the public, and often by triaging their needs and signposting appropriately to services across the Council.
- 3.37. We also enable other service led activities to take place from the centre, including Housing Options advice, Licensing & Regulatory services interviews, providing private rented sector housing advice, making support payments for those with challenging life circumstances, and we have a crisis room for people fleeing domestic violence and that present as a walk in.
- 3.38. Payment kiosks are available for those who prefer to make payments in person and/or in cash, though the use of that function has diminished significantly in recent years. There are also a small number of self-service computers that members of the public can access, and which the Customer Service team can assist with.

Customer Service function – further improvements

- 3.39. We're currently working towards the introduction of a digitally transformed contact centre, which will mean better use of self-service technology like chat bots or automated voice agents for routine enquiries, chat/email functions for enquiries that need a live agent but don't necessarily have to be done by phone, and which allows us to use our phone contact for the most complex enquiries.
- 3.40. With changes to the way we provide services in our neighbourhoods and communities elsewhere in the Council in mind, we're about to start a review of options for the preferred future model of face-to-face customer service provision at the Council and expect to report our initial findings to CMB in September for review.
- 3.41. That review will look specifically at whether and how we can move towards providing focused elements of our customer service offer in Council operated community buildings/assets across the city in some way or another, and that might be targeted towards the needs of areas as we understand them.
- 3.42. Many Councils have made very clear statements about and plans setting out how they will improve their citizens experiences of good service at all stages of interacting with their Council. As a Council, we could be clearer about our positive commitments towards treating our citizens when they are trying to access and

receive our services, and like many other places that is often captured in an action orientated Customer (Citizen) Experience Strategy.

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1 Financial implications

As an update on the performance of Customer Services, there are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations in this report. As noted in the report, staffing vacancies within the service will assist in contributing to the Corporate Services division's £2m savings target by 2027/28.

Signed: Stuart McAvoy

Dated: 1st July 2025

4.2 Legal implications

In reviewing different models/delivery of services - officers should seek support from the relevant internal departments as part of scoping options, out including Procurement and Legal in terms of any procurement activity required, consideration of any data protection related policies/issue to reflect any new proposed model and any proposed amends to operational elements of service delivery will need to be managed internally through DDaT with escalations being supported by the Council's Procurement Team.

Signed: Mannah Begum, Principal Lawyer, Commercial and Contract Legal

Dated: 16 June 2025

4.3 Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The report provides an update on the performance of the corporate customer services function. Our customer service function is often the first point of contact for city residents, and we need to ensure it is inclusive and open to all and considers people's needs and not exclude people because of their protected characteristics. The council can be contacted in a number of ways, such as face to face, telephone and online, all these need to continue to ensure we are meeting the aims of the PSED.

Signed: Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer

Dated: 11th June 2025

4.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no climate emergency implications arising from this report.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext: 372246

Dated: 17 June 2025

4.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

N/A

5. Background information and other papers:

N/A

6. Summary of appendices:

Appendix A – Leicester City Council Customer Services Annual Performance 24/25

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

No

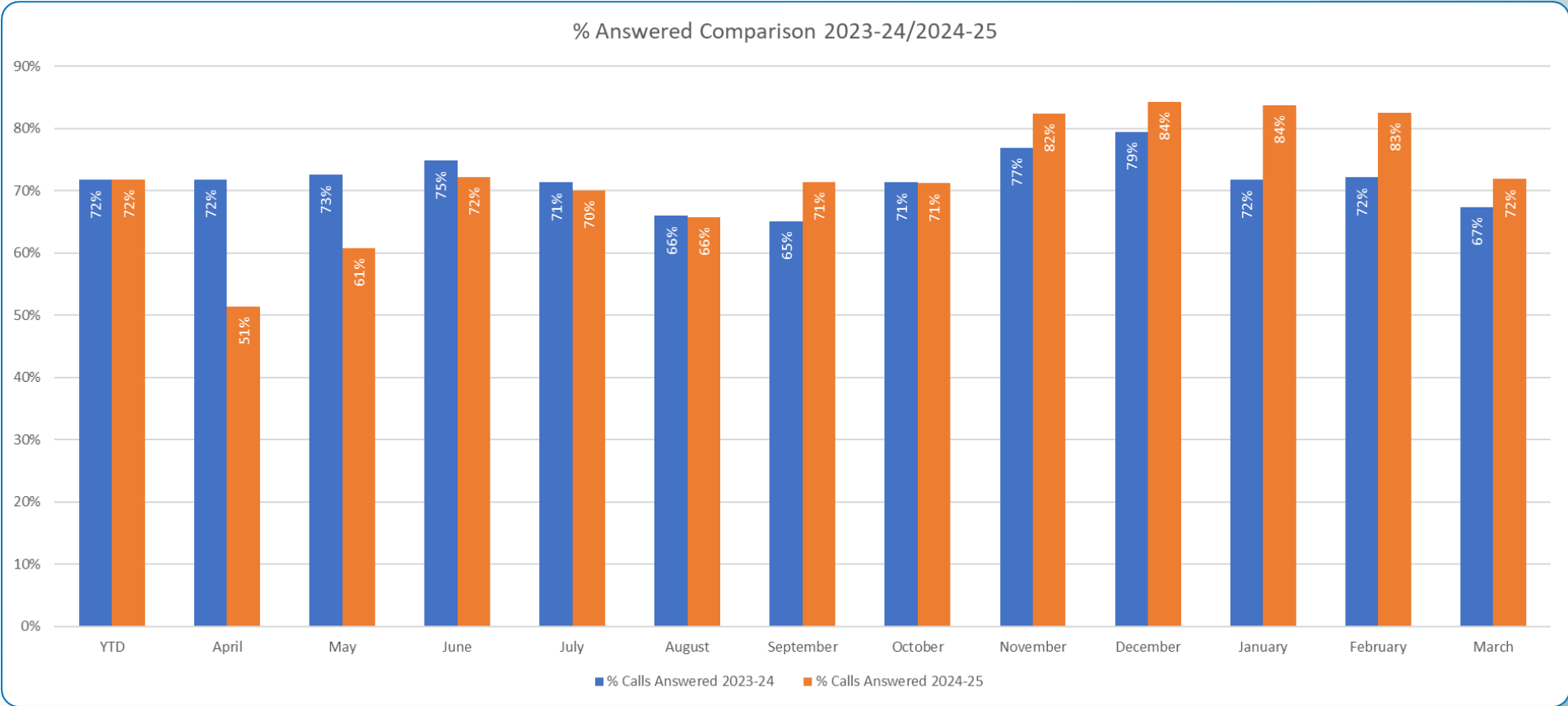
8. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?

No

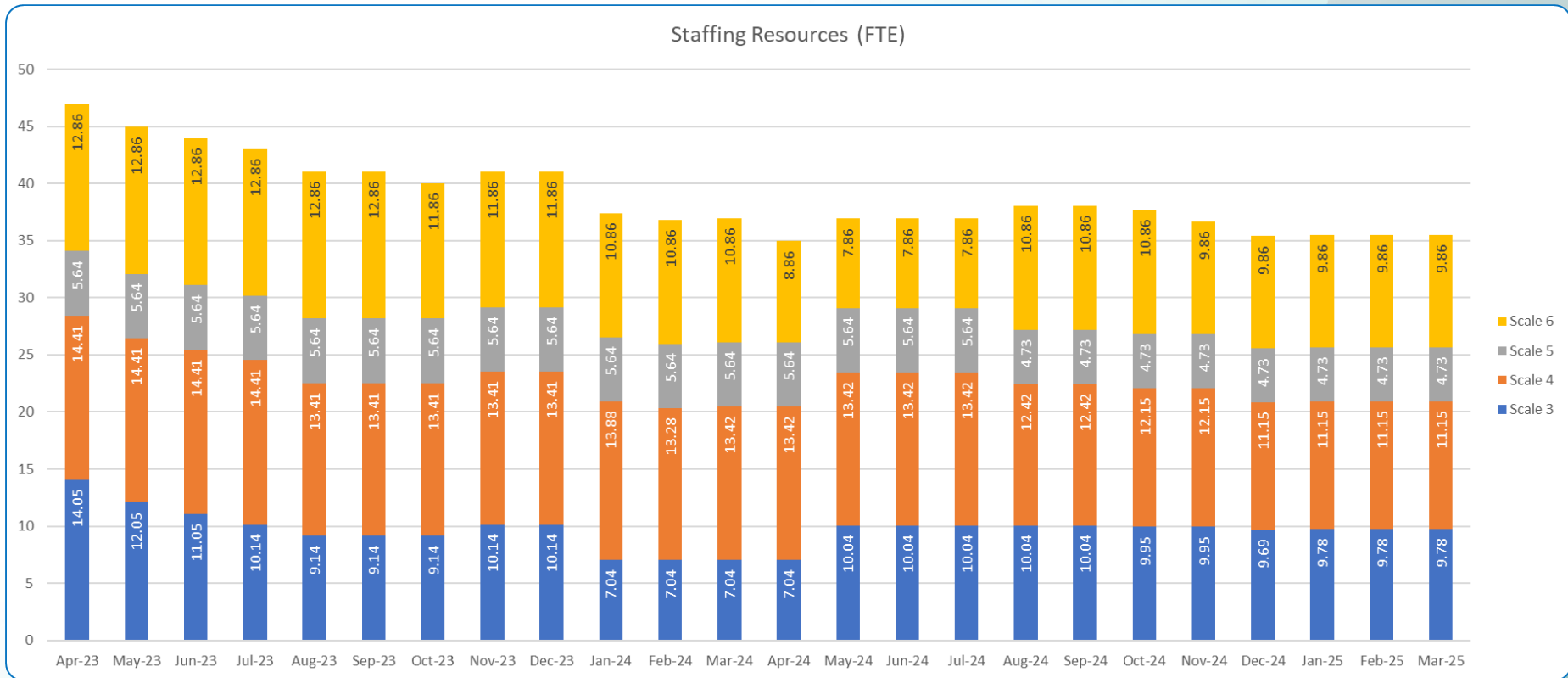
Appendix A

LCC Customer Services – Annual Performance 24/25

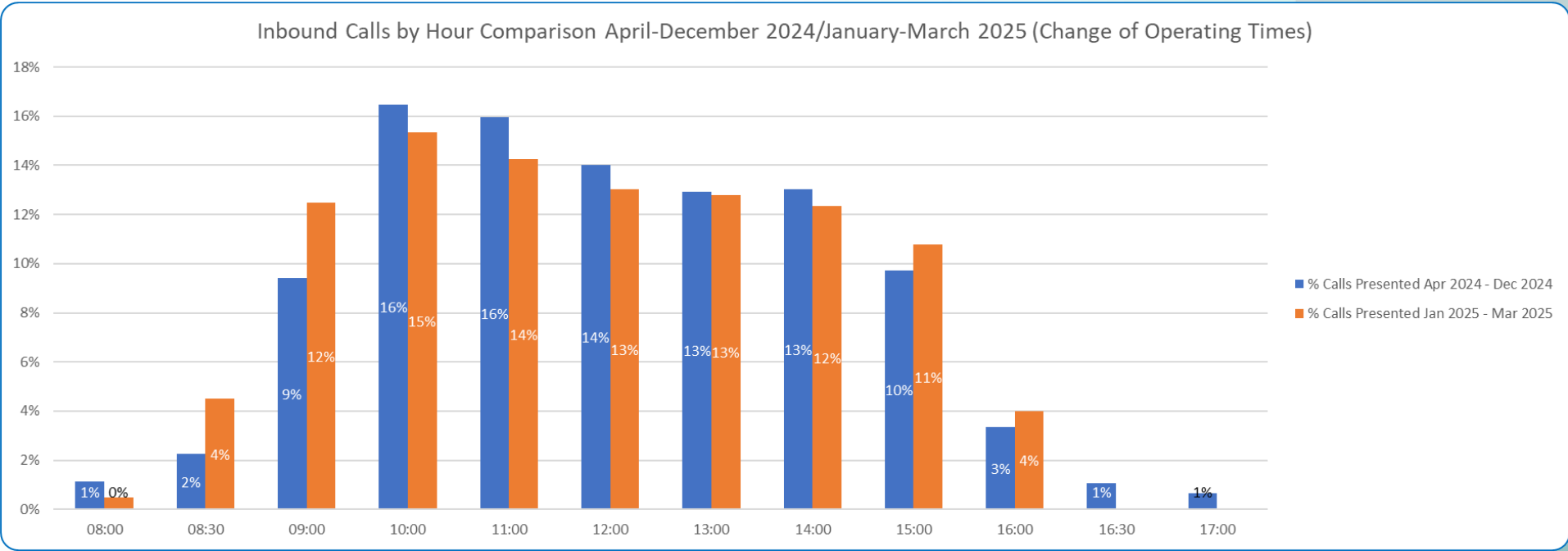
Customer Contact – Performance Snapshot



Customer Contact – Performance Snapshot



Customer Contact – Performance Snapshot



Line by Line Performance

23/24 – 24/25

| | Calls Received | | | Queue Time | | | Handle Time | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-------|-----|------------|----------|-----|-------------|----------|-----|
| | 23/24 | 24/25 | +/- | 23/24 | 24/25 | +/- | 23/24 | 24/25 | +/- |
| Electoral Registration | 5669 | 6827 | ↑ | 00:01:15 | 00:01:31 | ↑ | 00:08:29 | 00:07:49 | ↓ |
| Environment Service Line | 7837 | 8066 | ↑ | 00:10:45 | 00:16:22 | ↑ | 00:08:04 | 00:07:40 | ↓ |
| General Enquiries | 6531 | 7303 | ↑ | 00:16:01 | 00:21:27 | ↑ | 00:05:56 | 00:06:02 | ↑ |
| General Switchboard | 39122 | 34998 | ↑ | 00:14:19 | 00:16:02 | ↑ | 00:01:36 | 00:01:33 | ↓ |
| Housing Benefit | 21943 | 27287 | ↑ | 00:18:36 | 00:24:05 | ↑ | 00:07:39 | 00:07:28 | ↓ |
| Housing Management | 27440 | 27000 | ↓ | 00:15:45 | 00:20:10 | ↑ | 00:07:13 | 00:07:21 | ↑ |
| Housing Options | 28485 | 29242 | ↑ | 00:02:05 | 00:02:07 | ↑ | 00:06:50 | 00:06:08 | ↓ |
| Housing Repairs | 61360 | 68030 | ↑ | 00:09:46 | 00:08:22 | ↓ | 00:07:20 | 00:07:23 | ↑ |
| Council Tax | 55658 | 65266 | ↑ | 00:14:56 | 00:19:45 | ↑ | 00:06:55 | 00:06:45 | ↓ |
| Parking, Bus Passes, and Blue Badges | 14013 | 15374 | ↑ | 00:17:56 | 00:23:44 | ↑ | 00:06:43 | 00:06:22 | ↓ |
| Payments and Rent Enquiries | 13243 | 13592 | ↑ | 00:16:25 | 00:18:26 | ↑ | 00:07:40 | 00:06:48 | ↓ |
| Social Care Switchboard | 19933 | 20898 | ↑ | 00:01:54 | 00:01:28 | ↓ | 00:05:30 | 00:05:03 | ↓ |
| Waste Management Service Line | 15037 | 15239 | ↑ | 00:13:46 | 00:16:25 | ↑ | 00:06:43 | 00:06:42 | ↓ |
| School Admissions | 13985 | 11747 | ↓ | 00:13:10 | 00:12:58 | ↓ | 00:06:29 | 00:06:04 | ↓ |

Customer Contact – Improvements

23/24 – 24/25

Other immediate work:

- CSM recruitment
- Review of management team roles + Team Leader structure
- Relocation of the Customer Service Line team to City Hall
- CSL opening hours review + amend
- Refreshed Training Programme
- Refreshed Quality Monitoring arrangements
- Digital Contact Centre
- Future of face-to-face customer service provision – options

