

North Somerset Council

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REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY SERVICES POLICY & SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 7 NOVEMBER 2017

SUBJECT OF REPORT: SWITCHBOARD AND COUNCIL CONNECT

TOWN OR PARISH:

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING:

SIMONE DAVEY, CUSTOMER SERVICES MANAGER

KIERAN WARREN, CUSTOMER SERVICES OFFICER

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the panel consider and review the information offered regarding the switchboard and Council Connect.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

Switchboard and Council Connect – to include: qualitative and quantitative performance measures; impact to service of the waste and recycling contract; training programme for contact centre staff; the process for recording and assessing waiting times, including use of the 888888 telephone number, the interactive voice response system (IVR), the contact centre, and the future use of online-chat

2. POLICY

n/a

3. DETAILS

Switchboard

The automated switchboard was introduced in March 2016. The switchboard number is 01934 888888 and it used to direct callers to the right place within North Somerset Council. We have an average of 16,000 calls going through the switchboard every month.

A manned switchboard has existed for many years within the council, but common with many organisations the council moved to an automated switchboard in March 2016. This was to reduce operating costs by automating a high percentage of simple calls which could be directed easily to the right department.

To achieve this, all staff and councillors were required to update the details we held for them electronically, and we programmed over 360 team numbers and over 1000 “utterances” into the system. An example of programmed utterances are the following for waste bin queries: Bin Collections; Bin Timetables; Domestic Bins; Food Waste Bin Liners; Food Waste Bins; Food Waste Kitchen Caddys; Litter Bins; Missed Bins; Recycling Bins; Recycling Centres; Refuse Collection; Refuse; Rubbish Collections; Wheelie Bins; Recycling; Recycling Department; Dustbin Collection; Ordering Wheelie Bin; Ordering Wheelie Bins; Wheelie Bin Order; Picking up Rubbish; Public Bins; Recycling Box; Rubbish People; Waste; Waste Disposal; Wheelie Bin Not Emptied.

If these words are spoken into the IVR, the call will go to council connect.

We now have over 75% of calls going straight through the IVR, without the need to involve an operator. We have had very few complaints about the functionality of the switchboard, and customers who do not like such automation can opt out within 25 seconds.

Calls into the switchboard can go to many individuals, teams or departments. Most calls relating to D&E services are directed to Council Connect and are dealt with by this team.

Council Connect

Council connect deal with D&E enquiries on behalf of the services. Customer requests or reports are logged onto a system which delivers the request to the services’ back office systems. For example, if the customer reports a pot hole, the team will ask a set of questions provided by the service to establish the right information. This is then logged onto a database and electronically transmitted to the pothole team who will action it. The Council Connect team also have a knowledge base and use the website to offer any additional information or assist with enquiries.

Council Connect takes an average of 9,700 calls per month. This number includes some of the 16,000 being received via the switchboard.

Link between the switchboard and council connect.

Externally, we advertise the switchboard number as this supports all council services. We would only offer the council connect number externally if it is clear that the issue relates to a D&E service which can be dealt with by the team. We do not assume that residents and customers would understand what “Council Connect” means.

The process the customer would go through in order to, for example, report a pothole is:

- call 01934 888888
- automated switchboard says “Thank you for calling North Somerset council. Please say the name of the person or department you wish to contact”.
- You say “pothole”
- Switchboard says “calling potholes unless you say cancel”. The call is now being transferred to Council Connect.
- Message says “Thank you for calling to Council Connect. At the end of the call, you may be asked to take part in a feedback survey. Please be aware all our calls are recorded. You can log many request for services on our website at www.n-somerset.gov.uk. Please listen to the following options: for waste and recycling please press 1, for environmental protection issues such as nuisance, dogs and pollution please press 2, for licencing issues such as pubs, taxis and street trading also press 2, for planning and building control please press 3, for highways please press 4, for food safety or trading standards please press 5, for all other council connect enquiries please press 6. You can select your chosen option at any time.

- Message: "You are through to NSC highways, please hold for an adviser.
- Above process takes just over 1 minute until the phone is ringing for an adviser.

Performance measures

The formal KPIs relating to Council Connect are:

KPIs	Minimum Performance Standard (MPS)	Target Performance Standard (TPS)	Exceptional Performance Standard (EPS)
KPI 3 - contact centre satisfaction	85%	90%	95%
KPI 4 - call quality	85%	90%	95%
KPI 5 - abandonment rate	7%	5%	3%

The KPIs run across all contact centres and provide a cumulative view: Switchboard, Council Connect, Care Connect, Revenues and Benefits contact centre

Council connect performance:

KPI 3 - contact centre satisfaction – in the last year it has never scored below 85%.

Average score 95% (EPS)

KPI 4 - call quality– in the last year it has never scored below 85%. Average score 91% (TPS)

KPI 5 - abandonment rate – in the last year the score was below MPS five times. Average score 6% (MPS)

Abandonment rate has been the most challenging KPI to achieve in the last year due to the introduction of garden waste bins and performance issues with the new waste contract. We were not able to forecast volumes as this was unprecedented, and therefore had to respond as the call patterns became clear. Four additional staff were employed temporarily in order to address the increased demand.

The qualitative measures in place to aid contract performance are:

- Call Quality
- Support Services contract management reports
- Govmetrics comments reviewed daily
- Complaints received
- Weekly meetings with Agilisys
- Twice daily calls with Biffa operations, waste team, Council Connect, customer services

All calls into the automated switchboard and Council Connect are recorded. We are therefore able to listen to any complaints and provide feedback to the customer and training for the agent, if needed. We are also able to identify why the switchboard may have failed, and take any preventative action. To do this we would need the time and date of the call, and ideally the number being called from.

Waiting times

Average wait times are calculated from when the customer enters the Council Connect IVR. It takes approximately 45 seconds to be offered a queue to an advisor when calling Council Connect directly. This is due to messaging around call recording, survey and online services.

The average wait time for the last year is 3 minutes 22 seconds. The monthly minimum was 1 minute 58 seconds (summer holidays), and the maximum was 6 minutes 22 seconds (just after the new waste contract went live).

The contact centres have call limiters set up which allow 10 calls at any one time, in order to manage capacity within such a small team. The 11th caller will receive a message to say that all agents are busy, please call back later.

Staff and training

The Council Connect team have many years of experience between them:

Staff member	Specialism	Experience	Years CC service
Agent 1	Planning Champion	All aspects of CC	7
Agent 2	Senior Officer	All aspects of CC	7
Agent 3	General CS Officer	All aspects of CC	7
Agent 4	General CS Officer	All aspects of CC	7 (23 overall inc NSC)
Agent 5	General CS Officer	All aspects of CC	2
Agent 6	General CS Officer	All aspects of CC	1.5
Agent 7	General CS Officer	All aspects of CC	1
Agent 8	Also Clinical Waste / BB/ Assisted Collections Back Office	All aspects of CC	8 months
Agent 9	Waste Officer	Currently training on all cc	1
plus 4 fully trained 4 contractors covering waste only			

The training programme undertaken by contact centre staff:

- New starters – shadowing
- Regular meetings from services to update on changes – update Knowledge Base with process documents
- 6 weekly supervisions and appraisals – Agents’ performance is linked to Govmetrics feedback

Web chat

We have been live with web chat on the waste pages for over a year and average 75 web chats per month. We have recently launched web chat on the Council Tax and Benefits pages. We plan to extend web chat across the website very soon, and will soon be pointing customers to our enquiry form when web chat is offline in order to capture the enquiry/issue more effectively.

Channel Shift

The council has a Customer Access Strategy which promotes a Digital First approach. This means that when we build a new service or develop an existing one, we would always ensure that Digital is the preferred offering. Having said that, we do recognise that not everyone is digitally savvy or capable, and ensure that alternatives are possible.

With this in mind, the contact centre encourages customers to go online to make their reports, and set up an account wherever possible. In addition, in order to make cost savings, we reduced contact centre hours from 08:00-18:00 to 09:00-17:00 from 3.7.17. There is an intention to further reduce hours when appropriate.

4. CONSULTATION

N/a

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

None

7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

N/a

8. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

N/a

9. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

N/a

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Previous reports and presentations to CCO Panel