



Briefing Note

To: Bedford Borough Council - Budget and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

From: Anna Robbani (Head of Housing, Homelessness and Customer Services)

Subject: Update on Customer Service Performance

Date: 5 December 2024

1. Introduction

1.1 This report provides an overview of Customer Service performance with a focus on telephony, face to face and email customer contact channels.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Member of the Committee are requested to note the contents of the report

3. Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 This report is for information purposes only.

4. Background and Context

4.1 Customer Services provide a corporate 'front door' service facilitating resident access to a wide range of services across the council. This includes handling service requests and transactions as well as providing complex advisory information to support residents.

4.2 The customer service team continues to expand its' offer and range of services to residents. Over the last 2 years the team have taken additional responsibility for the following:

- Election enquiries
- Corporate Mailroom Services
- Customer feedback (corporate, adult services and children's services complaints)
- Freedom of Information Requests, Subject Access Requests and Environmental Information Requests
- Flood line (including out of hours service)
- Emergency Helpline (most recently providing 24/7 support to residents impacted by the evacuation at Cleat Hill)
- Cycle store bookings

4.3 On September 12th 2024, the Bedford Borough Hub in Horne Lane had it's official opening to provide residents with face to face support for general enquiries on all council services alongside specialist support for those accessing housing and homelessness services. Working with partners, the hub now also provides regular drop in support from the Citizens Advice Bureau and the local IDVA specialist domestic abuse service.



- 4.4 Residents are supported to access Council services by digital channels and online forms which is often the quickest route for the customer. The digital assistance offer at Horne Lane has also recently been expanded to include basic introductory courses which can be accessed for those wanting help to use computer's 'from scratch'.
- 4.5A new and upgraded phone system was implemented in the summer of 2024 which includes various new features enabling customer service management to supervise call handling more effectively. Work to configure detailed reporting functionality is in progress.
- 4.6 Customer services provide support with the following services face to face at the Bedford Borough Hub, over the phone or by email.

- Switchboard
- Blue Badges
- Civil Registration
- Council Tax General Advice
- Elections
- Emergency Helpline
- Environment
- Financial Assessment for Adult Social Care.
- Flood line
- Highways
- Housing Benefit
- Housing and Homelessness
- Occupational Therapy Helpline
- Parking
- Planning
- Public Transport
- Regulatory Services
- School Admissions
- School Transport
- Test Trace
- Ukraine Helpline

4.7 Residents that require specialist support, such as Children's social services, Adult social services or complex enquiries relating to Council Tax are handled by those respective teams across the Council rather than the Customer Services team. Performance information for these services may be available upon request. This has not been included in the scope of this report which focuses only on Customer Services.

5. Performance Details

- 5.1 Demand for services has been high with 106,335 calls offered from April – Sept 2024 which is a 36% increase in demand as compared to the previous year with 78,097 calls for the same period.
- 5.2 High volume service phone lines include Housing and Homelessness which is experiencing exceptional demand pressures currently along with high volumes for council tax and housing benefit enquiries. Additional demands on the team have been providing support for residents in the case of flooding and emergency which has required out of hours and weekend cover over recent months.
- 5.3 Despite these challenges, the latest Customer Satisfaction Feedback Survey in July 2024 demonstrated high overall levels of customer satisfaction with the service provided as shown below.

Telephony Satisfaction Survey

99% satisfied with the overall level of service received

(selecting 6 or above on a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being extremely unsatisfied, 5 being satisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied)

98% satisfied with the time taken to answer their query:

(selecting 6 or above on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being extremely unsatisfied, 5 being satisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied)

Face to Face Service Satisfaction Survey

98.5% satisfied with the overall face to face service offered

(selecting 6 or above on a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being extremely unsatisfied, 5 being satisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied)

5.4 The customer service team handled 83,316 calls (April – Sept 2024) which is a 25% increase in calls answered than the previous year for the same period (67,140 calls answered April – Sept 2023)

5.5 The average waiting time to speak to switchboard is 2 minutes and the overall average across all lines is 7 minutes.

5.6 A new feature was introduced to the phone system to enable customers to request a call back rather than waiting in queue and the system automatically makes this outbound call as soon as the next adviser is available. The average time to receive a call back is 20 minutes and under. This is a much improved offer since prior to May 2024, call backs were arranged manually with spreadsheets capturing customer details with a call back made within 2 working days.

Phone Line (Customer Services)	Calls Answered (April to Sept 2024)	Avg. Time To Answer
Switchboard	19959	00:02:03
Benefits	6241	00:08:28
Blue Badge	3375	00:06:56
Civil Registration	2055	00:06:49
Council Tax	17882	00:08:37
Elections	82	00:01:14
Emergency Helpline	Volume data not available	00:01:37
Environment	11908	00:12:00
Financial Assessment for Adult Social Care	1984	00:13:37
Floodline	Volume data not available	00:01:38
Highways	2109	00:06:53
Housing and Homelessness	9431	00:14:01

Casework		00:04:01
Occupational Therapy Helpline	927	00:05:51
Parking	4696	00:15:11
Planning	1732	00:13:15
Public Transport	106	00:02:42
Regulatory Services	2299	00:10:40
School Admissions	1937	00:11:46
School Transport	463	00:12:38
Ukraine Helpline	47	00:04:52
Waste Permits	864	00:08:20
Total/Average	106735	

6. Conclusion

Customer services retain a firm ambition to continually improve performance and reduce waiting times on the phone to ensure residents have good levels of access to support and services at Bedford Borough Council. Further analysis and configuration is required within the new phone system reporting functionality in order to provide further detailed reports to follow on customer service performance.

Report Contact Officer: Anna Robbani (Head of Housing, Homelessness and Customer Services)