CUSTOMER SERVICES

Report on Contact Centre Performance, Establishment Levels within the Call Centre and Removal of Cash Machines in 1st Stop Shop

PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

Contact Centre Performance

Currently the Contact Centre operates from two locations the 1st Stop Shop in New George Street for revenues and benefits calls and from Taylor Maxwell House for all other calls.

The Contact Centre has a robust performance management framework in place, in line with industry best practice and standards. We monitor call volumes, answer rates, abandoned rates and both team and individual performance including calls per hour, average call length, utilisation time and also carry out quality monitoring of calls against defined standards (welcome, customer interaction, technical knowledge (use of process) and close)) see Appendix 1.

The Contact Centre currently provides call handling for 14 services (including the enquiry line (the old switchboard)) for the Council. Staff are trained in a range of services dependant on experience to allow flexibility in answering calls across these services.
For most services we now utilise our new digital platform to raise service requests. This is designed to be used by customers through our website and therefore has reduced the training requirement for staff as both customers and staff now follow a prescriptive script.

We also carry out detailed analysis of peaks in demand in order that we can resource appropriately and ensure maximum utilisation of our staff. It should be noted that at some unpredictable peaks callers may have to wait to be answered albeit we do give messages in the queue to provide callers with alternative means to transact with us e.g. our new website with self-service (as supported by our Corporate drive to utilise digital transactions wherever possible).

Daily call demand is managed using wallboard information across sites by team leaders to address peaks in a particular service where staff can be moved to deal with these. Staff will be logged into a range of services at any one time to reduce manual movement of staff between services.

Staff are also given administration tasks for example e mail traffic and some casework when in available and waiting for incoming calls, this ensures all workload is managed in an effective and efficient way.

Current performance information can be seen in the below graphs:

### Customer call demand and percentage answered
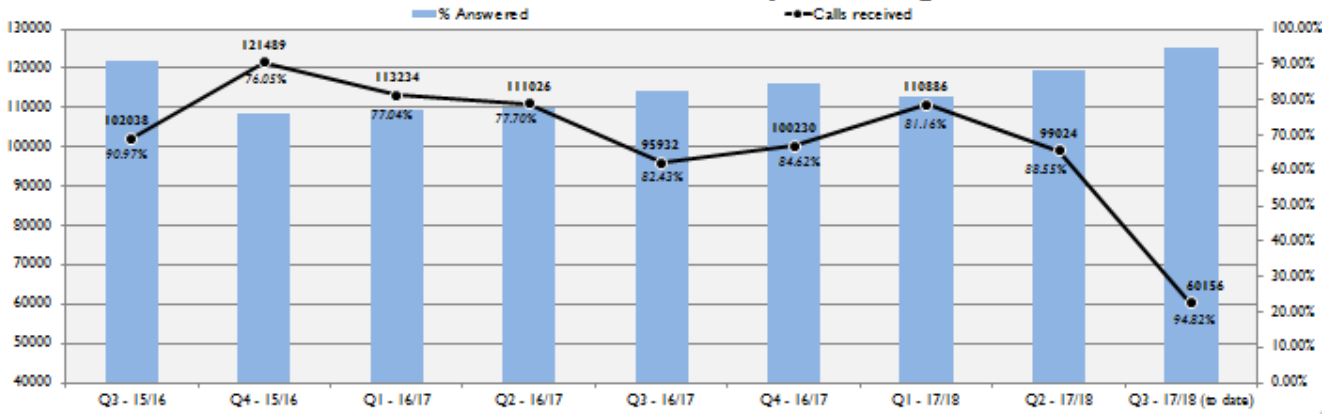
The above graph clearly shows that in the latest quarter we are seeing call demand reduce partly in line with our driver to get customers online utilising our new website and also some seasonal impact but also as a result of service response improvements in areas like Waste. Answer rates are just under 95% across all services.

### Waste only - customer call demand and percentage answered
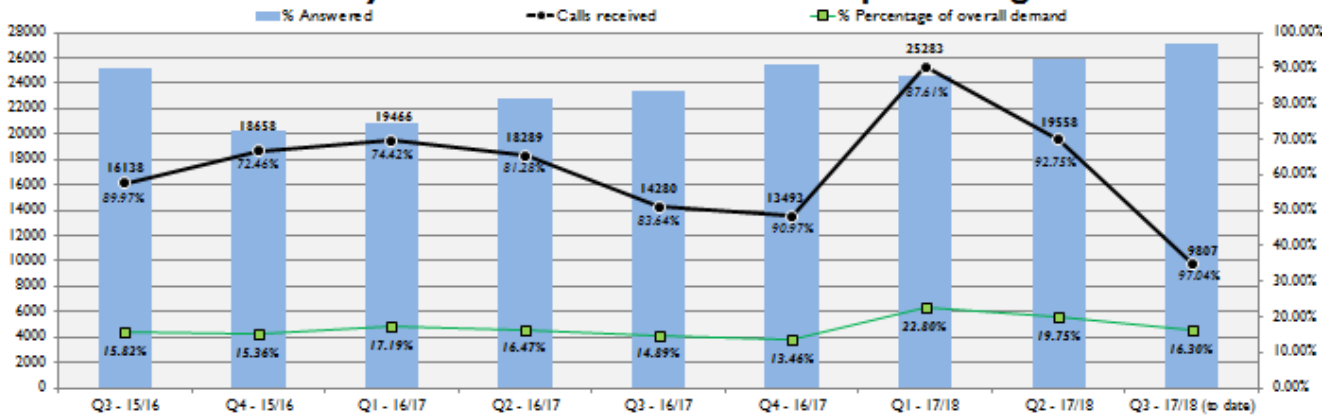
The above graph clearly shows the reduction in call volumes in this service together with improved answer rates that now stand at over 97%.
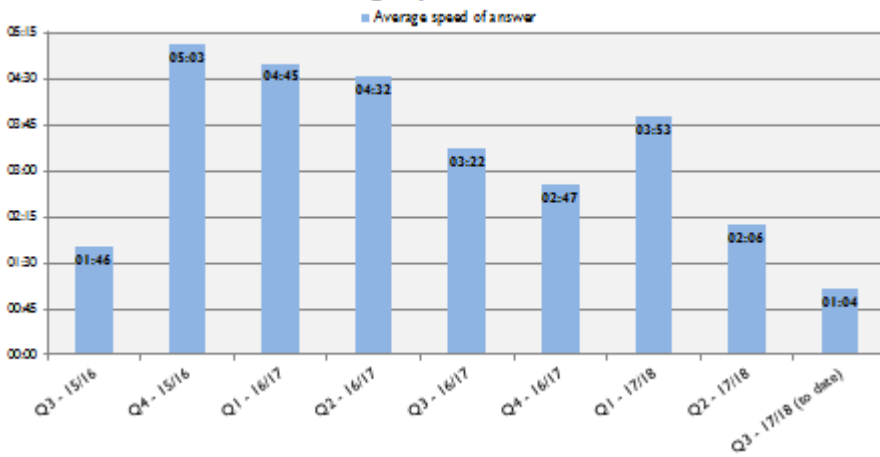
Abandoned rate (%)
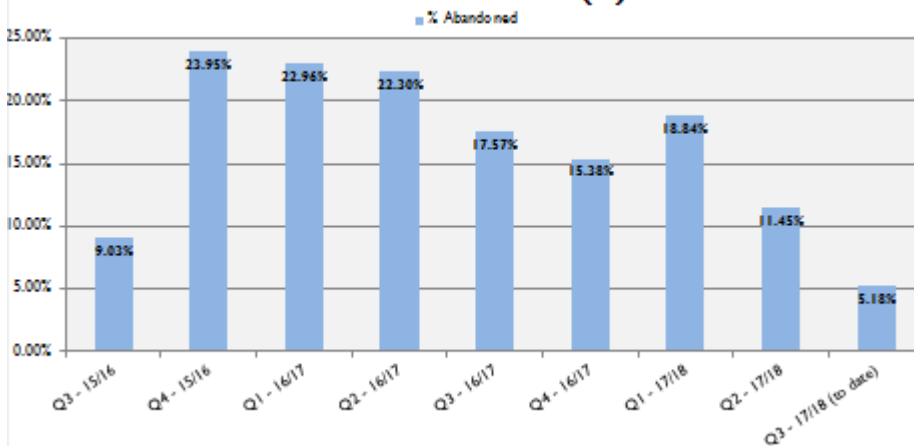
The above graph clearly show improvements in call abandonment which now stands at just over 5% which is in line with the industry norm.

Waste only - abandoned rate (%)
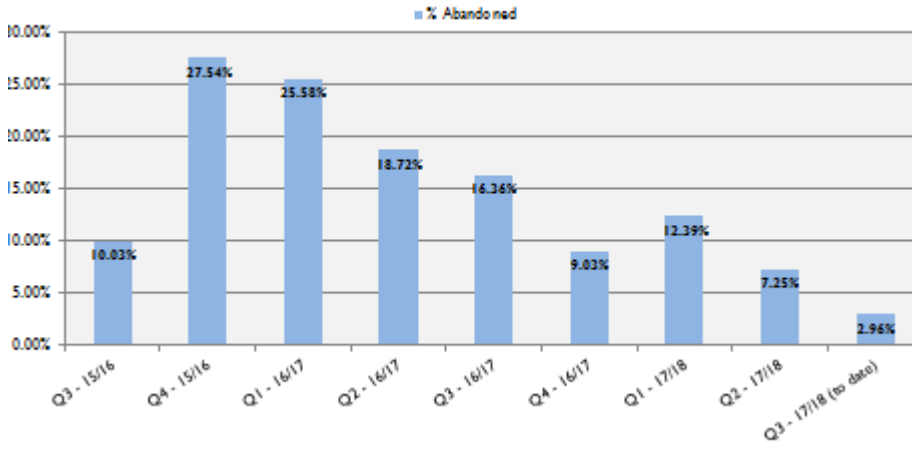
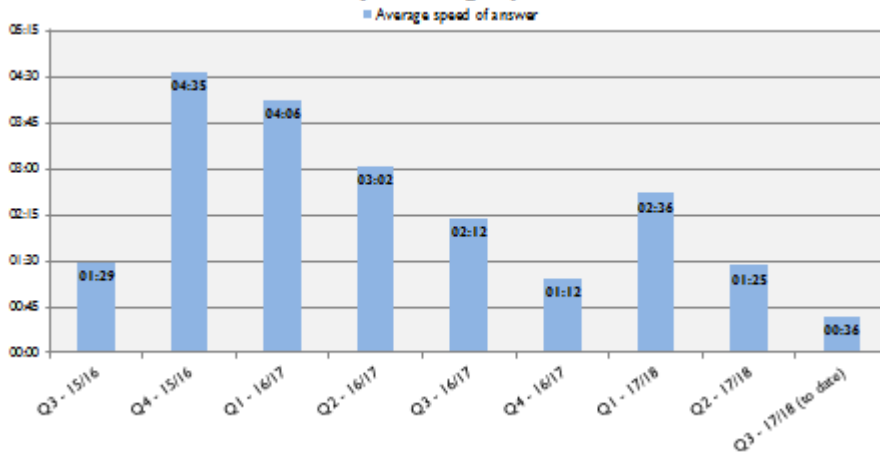Again this service shows an improving picture with abandonment rate just under 3%.

Average speed of answer

Average speed of answer is now the lowest since 2015 with the average call being answered in just over 1 minute.

Waste only - average speed of answer

Again this service shows an improving picture with the average call being answered in 36 seconds.

Establishment Levels within the Call Centre

Customer Services operates a flexible approach to staffing across the service taking advantage of generic role profiles with the ability to move staff between sites when required. The majority of staff in the Contact Centre are grade C staff and over the years we have seen that many staff move to higher grade roles within the department and the Council as job opportunities arise.

Since April 2017 the average monthly spend on agency staff in Customer Services (this is the whole service not just the contact centre) stands at 7.87%, however it should be noted that this is within our current budgeted structure. The use of agency staff does come with the key benefit of flexibility of hours, testing performance (qualitative and quantitative) and ending contracts at short notice where demand does not justify the spend. It also allows us to fill gaps at short notice without impacting on performance.

We also have a programme in place for a rotation of work placements with candidates from Job Centre Plus and PLUSS, these provide additional resource to help with peak demand but also valuable experience that can assist in the employability of the individuals. To date we have successfully recruited a number of candidates through this process and have also provided references to enable employment opportunities elsewhere.

Customer Services currently have 39 staff (35.22 FTE) across both sites that take calls (albeit some staff will rotate between phones, face to face and casework in 1st Stop Shop), during the last year only two staff have resigned, 4 staff have been promoted or taken temporary higher grade roles within Customer Services and 3 have transferred within the council (2 being promoted). This equates to a true attrition rate of less than 5.1% for those actually leaving the Council's employment.

Removal of Cash Machines in 1st Stop Shop

Two Payment Kiosks have been in 1st Stop to take both cash and card payments for Council charges/services. One Internal, one External.

Since March 2017 the Kiosks have not taken any cash payments. This was due to a dispute over the additional charge to enable the Kiosks to take the new £1 coin, (initially quoted at over £1000). This charge was on top of the Annual Maintenance Charges, (see below).

We found that during this time the majority of customers via promotion by the teams switched to Debit or Credit cards or took the opportunity to set up an automated payment method – particularly for ongoing payment obligations like Council Tax.

Comparison data for similar periods in 2016 and 2017:

01/05/16 – 04/06/16

Payment Method Code	Payment Method Description	Credits	Records
01	Cash	125,914.45	2603
11	Kiosk Card Payments	163,489.25	1513

01/05/17 – 05/06/17

Payment Method Code	Payment Method Description	Credits	Records
01	Cash	339.06	11 ***
11	Kiosk Card Payments	197,132.63	2671

***There were a small number of cash payments taken at the beginning of the period by the External Kiosk which had been upgraded

All customer PCs in 1st Stop have now been upgraded so debit and credit card payments can be made on those PCs (via PCC website) plus full web access is now available so customers can access their own online banking with digital assistance if required from Customer Service staff.

Cash Payment options for customers still include:

Post Office, (there is one next-door to 1st Stop co-located with WHSmith)

At any PayPoint terminal, of which are there numerous across the city.

Other payment methods include:

Direct Debit, (depending on bill/invoice)

Standing Order, (depending on bill/invoice)

Bank Transfer, (one off or regular payments)

Debit and Credit card for all bills / invoices payments via PCC website

Chip & Pin card readers (x3) at 1st Stop assigned to specific staff PCs.

There has been no detrimental impact to the income level for Plymouth City Council. In respect of Council Tax, collection rates, this year match expectations.

Issues

Since cash ceased to be taken at the 1st Stop Shop, there have been six formal complaints, none of which have been upheld. Two related to people wanting to pay by cash as opposed to not being able to pay by any other means. The remaining four complaints were related to the quality of the "Out of Order" signs and when staff interaction/explanations could have been better.

However, there have been many positive interactions mainly surrounding the opportunity to help vulnerable customers and those with mobility issues set up Direct Debits or Standing Orders resulting in them paying on time without having to physically visit various locations. The kiosks being out of order has also allowed for discussions between staff and customers around their costs and the financial challenges faced by the Local Authority.

Our conclusion is that the outdated Payment Kiosks come with associated costs that cannot be reasonably justified given the alternate payment methods we offer and our ongoing funding pressures. They are also contrary to our aim to help citizens become more digitally engaged.

Current Situation

Two Payment Kiosks. Annual costs circa £14,692.00

Annual Maintenance Costs:	£3000.00 (based on most recent contracts)
Fee for Card Payments:	£1320.00
G4S Collection and Change delivery:	£1500.00
Non-value Staff Assistance:	£4872.00
Kiosk depreciation:	£4000.00

Options considered

Option 1:

Immediately renegotiate maintenance contracts to bring both kiosks back into service @ circa **£3000.00**. Plus continue to pay monthly fee for card payment usage, equivalent to **£1320.00** per year. Would have to set aside up to £40,000 for their replacement based on cost of internal kiosks, (£20,000) in 2010. Re-instigate G4S collections, paying for this via a drawdown fund.

Option 2:

Physically remove both Kiosks. Make good the outside window, £2k. Continue to assist with setting up automated payment methods using PCs at 1st Stop. Work with other Departments to ensure they signpost correctly and promote non-cash options.

Recommendation implemented

The kiosks should be removed. There is no longer a significant requirement for cash to be taken at 1st Stop. Debit and Credit Card payments can continue to be made at 1st Stop on PCs or via 3 'Chip & Pin' devices. This presents an opportunity to avoid expenditure and continue to increase the uptake of more efficient payment methods in the city.

This recommendation *only* relates to the Payment Kiosks at 1st Stop and does not refer to any other cash/kiosk operated by Plymouth City Council.

Equality Impact Considerations

There is no duty to carry out an EIA although in most cases of major change it will be necessary to do so, to ensure we are aware of what the impacts are so we can take them into consideration. However in this particular case we had direct knowledge of the impact of the removal of the kiosks from discussions with customers in the shop, and experience of the outcome of the kiosks not working since May. We have taken these into account including the one complaint we were able to successfully resolve and the other options available to customers including the ability to continue to pay by cash next door at the post office and in other stores and post offices across the city as well as by card and DD.

Due regard has been paid to any potential impact on our customer base in relation to the decision to remove the out of action kiosks from this location. We have worked extensively with the DWP and other partner agencies through our customer service network to promote the use of digital channels and ensure our customer have the skill sets and access needed to be able to interact with us and our partners. We have significantly increased the volume of on line and DD usage. This is in line with our

customer services strategy and we continue to work with the hard to reach groups via our library network and partner agencies. All DWP benefits are paid into bank accounts and the Council has worked closely with the DWP for many years in order to ensure that the majority of people who did not have bank accounts, now do.

Appendix 1

Quality Monitoring Guidelines - Contact Centre and F2F (longer queries)

Name:	Monitored by: Sophie Chiswell	Date:		

Date & Time of Customer Interaction:

Welcome	Score			
Greeting applicable for the time of day			Best Score = 0 - 29	
Introduction of self			Good = 30 - 39	
Upbeat and friendly			Average = 40 - 49	
Invitation to offer of help made			Poor =50+	
Apology for wait (if applicable)				

Customer interaction	Score
Acknowledges the reason for contact and responds accordingly	
Repeats information to customer to confirm the customers understanding of request/query	
Active listening - sounds interested and engages with the customer	
Advisor controls the call/visit	
Appropriate use of empathy	

Technical knowledge - use of process	Score
Were your systems used correctly, scripts followed etc.	
Uses appropriate questions to gain relevant information	
Was the correct resolution and information given	
Diffuses the situation without talking over the customer, if applicable	
Data quality check	

Close	Score
Summarise	
Next steps explained	
Offer of more help	
Use of customers name	
Was Govmetric/customer survey offered	
	0

Positives	Things to work on

Quality Monitoring Guidelines 2016.pdf