

Communities Scrutiny Commission

22 February 2022



Report of: Mike Jackson, Resources Executive Director

Title: Overview of Citizen Services

Ward: All

Officer Presenting Report: Rizwan Tariq – Head of Citizen Services
/ Darin Hedges – Citizen Services Manager

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Recommendation:

Members to note and comment the information contained in the report.



1. Summary

An overview of the contact volume dealt within Citizen Service has been provided.

2. Context

This Report sets out, as requested at the Communities Scrutiny Commission held on 20 January 2022, an overview of customer service provision through the council's Citizen Service Centre (CSC) and the Citizen Service Point (CSP).

2.1 Citizen Service Centre

The main purpose of the CSC is to primarily handle calls made by citizens on 30+ services including Benefits & Council Tax, Care Direct, Housing and Waste Management. Advisors are cross trained to handle up to 10 different services depending on complexity of the services. The CSC is open between 0830 and 1800 Monday to Friday (except for Wednesday when the CSC is closed for training between 1200 - 1330).

When citizens call, their calls are automatically routed to the correct advisor based on the options selected. The telephone system will inform the caller of how long they are likely to wait and then put them through to the next available advisor. If there is a queue, the caller will be offered the option of having a call back. If they take this option, they can hang up and wait for the system to call them back and automatically connect them to the advisor who can help.

On connection to an advisor, the citizen is greeted by the advisor who will establish the reason for the call and will either offer self-serve options or aim to resolve the query at the first point of contact. If the query is complex or it requires input from the service area, then it will be referred to the relevant teams. If the citizen's needs suggest that a face-to-face appointment is needed, this will be booked in for the CSP.

Advisors use a range of systems during the call, the initial contact is logged within the Microsoft Dynamics system, for some services the advisor will also use other line of business systems to raise a task or submit a request. The aspiration is to integrate the line of business systems with Microsoft Dynamics to reduce the number of systems advisors currently use to introduce more efficient processes.

Work is currently underway to develop a knowledge database within Microsoft Dynamics to improve the consistency of advice provided, enable further cross skilling, and reduce hand offs for the citizen thus increasing the first contact resolution.

At the onset of the pandemic, the CSC was able to switch from working from the office to home working overnight, enabling the telephone service to be maintained throughout the pandemic. The calls and emails through We Are Bristol were and continue to be handled by CSC advisors, working very closely with Public Health and Community Engagement teams.

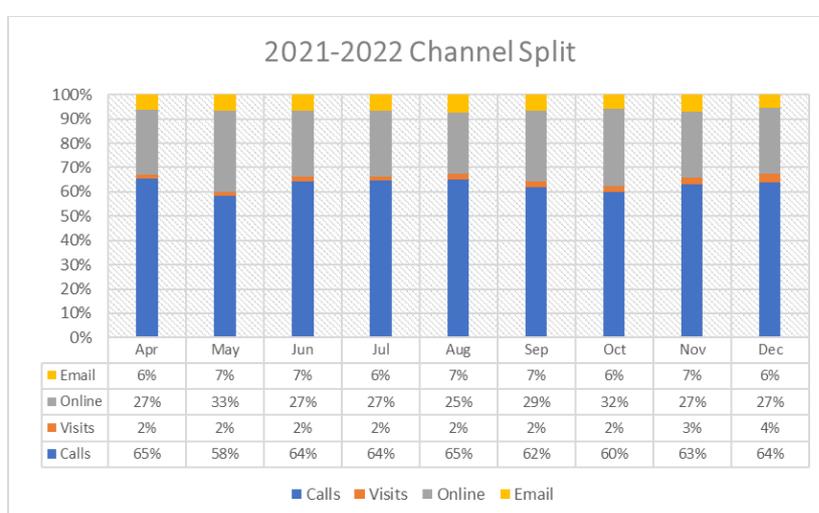
2.2 Citizen Service Point (CSP)

The face-to-face service operates a triage system which enables citizens to be seen by an advisor who can assist them or to self-serve at various self-service terminals located within the CSP. Before the pandemic the CSP would see over 500 citizens on busy days and ensure they all receive the best possible service.

During the pandemic, the face-to-face service was restricted to priority services (such as homelessness and financial crisis) and vulnerable citizens. Screens were installed and number of visitors and appointments were limited to accommodate social distancing, enabling the service to continue functioning (unlike several other local authorities who closed their face-to-face provision during the pandemic).

2.3 Demand

Citizens use a number of channels to request services, the most popular channel between April 2021 and December was telephone (63%), followed by fully integrated online (28%), email (7%) and face to face (2%). The biggest shift has been the reduction of face to face which has reduced from ~12% to ~2% due to changes made in the CSP to enable services to be delivered during and since the pandemic.

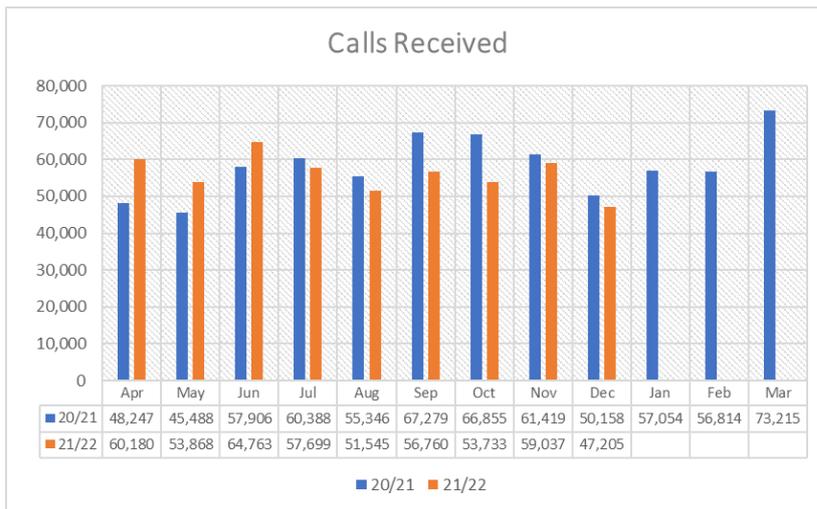


2.3.1 CSC volumes

The CSC received 700,169 calls during 2020-21, whilst there are some variations between individual months, the call volumes between April and December for both years are very similar:

April to December	2020 – 21	2021 – 22
Calls received	513,086	504,970

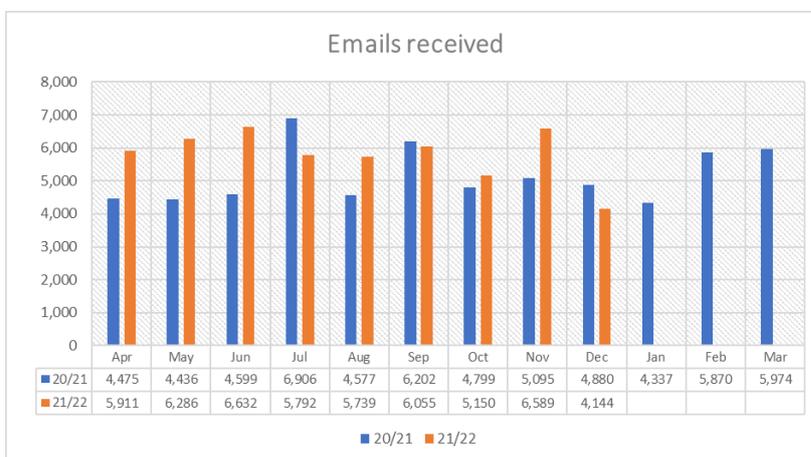
Call volumes will vary from month to month and between services for several reasons e.g., garden Waste and Waste Management tend to be busier during the summer whereas services such as Housing Repairs will receive more calls during the winter as often the query is weather/temperature related. Services such as Council Tax tend to be busier before and after annual billing.



Emails for several services are dealt by advisors working in the CSC. Last year 62,150 emails were received. For comparison the emails received between April and December were:

April to December	2020 – 21	2021 – 22
Emails received	45,969	52,298

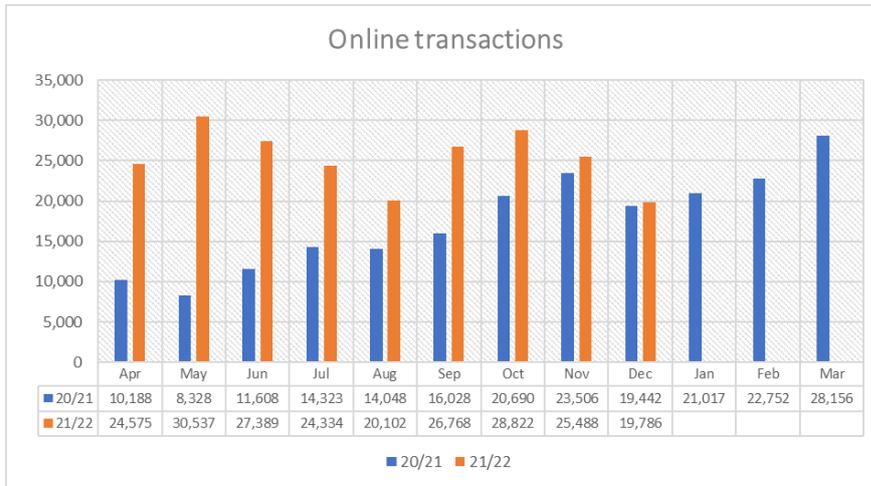
There has been a steady increase in email this year. The service is currently analysing emails to establish why citizens are using email, where there is an online form available on the website, they are signposted to the correct page so that they can log the request directly. The main benefit of this is that for some services the citizen will be able to track their request directly without having to contact an advisor in the CSC.



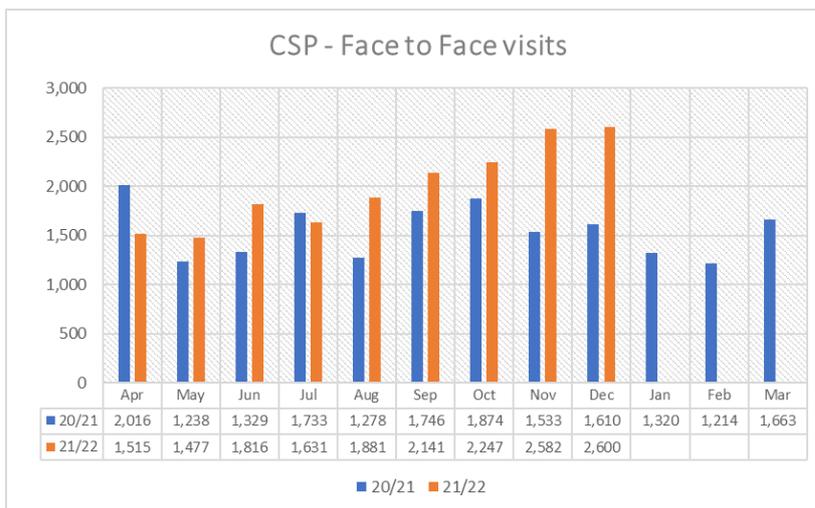
Where there isn't an online option and citizens do have to email, the CSC team is looking at introducing webforms which may still be received as an email in the CSC but will ask the citizen to complete mandatory information required to complete their request. The CSC has noticed that where citizens send a free form email there are usually number of transactions between the advisor and citizen before the complete information is received to allow the advisor to fulfil the request.

Online requests make up 33% of the requests year to date, this has been increasing month on month as citizens become more aware of what is available online. There was a slight dip in online services for a period of time last year where some service areas suspended their services temporarily during the

pandemic e.g., the ordering of replacement waste boxes online was put on hold to prioritise weekly collections whilst there was a national shortage of drivers.



2.3.2 CSP volumes



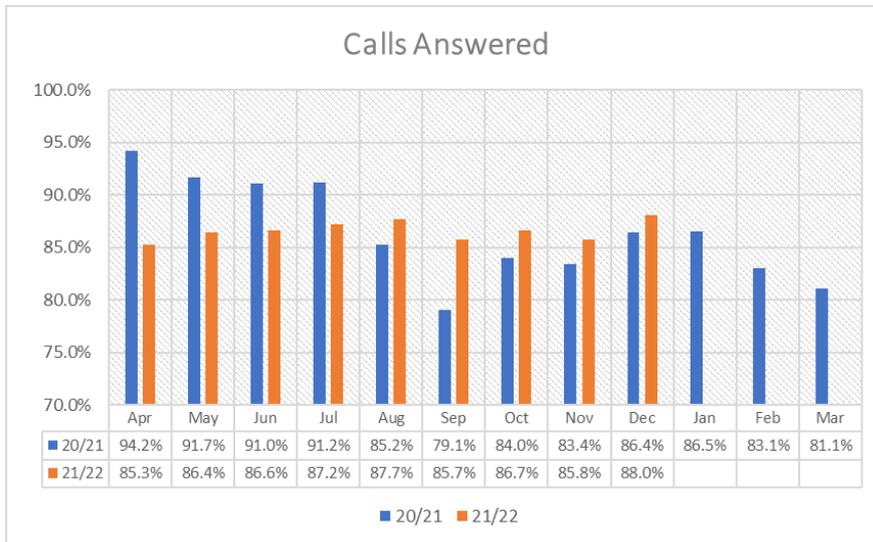
Whilst CSP volumes are significantly lower than the pre-pandemic, the volumes have steadily been increasing since June 2021. The CSP is now dealing with more complex queries and an average transaction is significantly higher than previously. Homelessness triages continue to be the most complex service delivered through the CSP with some transactions taking up to 2 hours.

The CSP continues to prioritise those that are vulnerable or are at risk of harm providing a wraparound support covering a range of services including benefits and local crisis support.

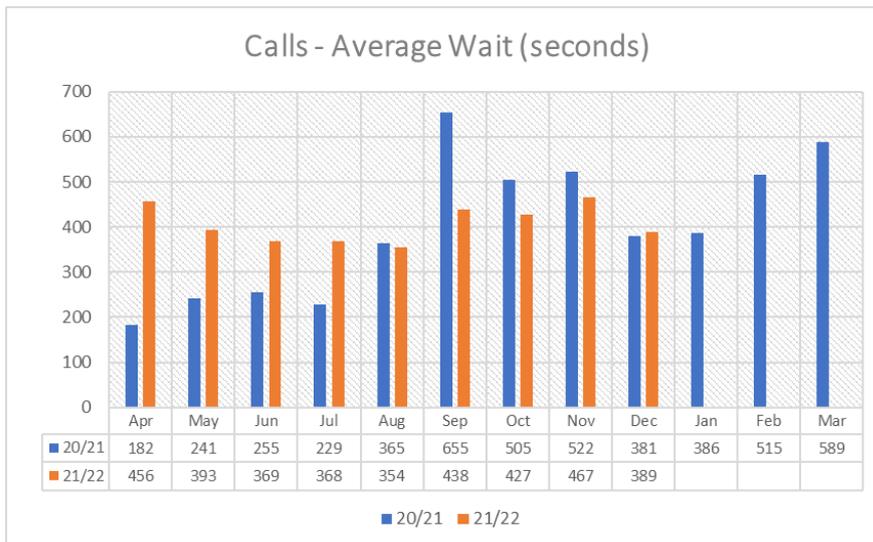
The CSP advisors are also trained to take calls and will log into the telephony system to support the CSC during any downtime in volume.

2.4 Performance

The two main quantitative performance measures for the CSC are percentage of calls answered and the average wait time.



The CSC has a target of answering 85% of calls or more and was able to achieve 86.0% last year and has answered 86.5% of calls between April 21 and December 21.



The CSC aims to answer calls within 120 seconds, the average wait time has been significantly higher over the last 2 years due to the nature of calls. The average handle time across most services has increased which does mean that during some periods of the day the average wait time is significantly higher than 120 seconds.

The CSC is able to analyse the busy periods and where possible schedules more staff during the busier periods, there are however, still times where the demand for service far exceeds the available resource.

During busy period, citizens are offered a call back or are signposted to online services which are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

2.5 Challenges

The main challenges for the CSC and CSP have been adapting to the Covid arrangements, whilst the CSC and CSP were able to function through the pandemic, several adaptations need to be made such as the installation of protective screens in the CSP.

Recruitment and training of staff was also difficult during the pandemic, the services delivered by the CSC and CSP are complex and training before the pandemic took place in phases – classroom training followed by taking calls followed by classroom training etc., however replicating this virtually was not always as effective and, some newer staff took longer to become proficient in the new services.

The CSP has seen an increase in more vulnerable citizens presenting at the CSP, the advisors spend longer with these citizens than previously which means they are unavailable to see other visitors during this time.

2.6 Looking forward

The CSC will be procuring a new telephony system to improve the citizen experience when they call. The new telephony will also allow newer features such as chat bots and more self-serve options to be introduced which citizens now expect when they call a contact centre.

Subject to approval of the Digital Transformation Programme 2 (DTP2), the Citizen Services team is looking to improve the online offering for citizens for those that can self-serve as part of the programme as well as integrate more services into the current Microsoft Dynamics CRM. Both of these initiatives will not only improve the customer experience but will also improve the efficiency of advisors so that they can focus their time assisting more vulnerable citizens.

From February 2022, changes are being made to the Microsoft Dynamics CRM to allow accurate measuring of first contact resolution and avoidable contact to facilitate process improvement.

3. Policy

Not applicable

4. Consultation

a) Internal

Not applicable

b) External

Not applicable

5. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 5a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under

the Equality Act 2010.

- ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.

5b)

Appendices:

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None