

## SCRUTINY PANEL

11 August 2016

### CUSTOMER SERVICES UPDATE

#### Report of the Director for Resources

Strategic Aim:	All	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Cllr O Hemsley	
Contact Officer(s):	Debbie Mogg, Director for Resources	01572 758358 dmogg@rutland.gov.uk
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Ward Councillors	N/A	

#### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Scrutiny Panel considers the contents of this report and provides feedback to the Director.

## 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report has been prepared at the request of the Resources Scrutiny Panel and describes the current performance within the customer service centre, the current customer service standards and also seeks a discussion on the panel's view of customer service provision in relation to channel shift.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report is presented in the following sections:

- The Customer Services Improvement Action Plan – providing detail on progress made to improve the Customer Service Team and what future plans are.
- Current Performance – providing detail on the current performance of the area against the agreed performance measures.
- Channel Shift – Background on approaches to channel shift that are adopted by the public sector.

- Customer Service Demand – Information on the current demands on the service based on existing data.
  - Customer Service Standards – the current customer service standards that are in use by the Council.
  - Local Benchmarking of Customer Service Standards – Background information on other authorities approach to customer service standards.
  - Options for Customer Service Standards – consider how customer service standards could be updated.
- 2.2 This report seeks to update members on progress that has been made in relation to the Customer Services Team, but also to seek feedback on future proposals.
- ### **3 CUSTOMER SERVICES IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN**
- 3.1 In April 2016 an improvement plan was developed for the Customer Services Team (CST). This plan was designed to improve the performance of the service as well as the quality of the service provided.
- 3.2 In addition to the improved performance for the key telephony metrics, the overall quality of calls has been improved.
- 3.3 Additional Customer Service Agents (CSA) resources have been provided, via temporary contracts and an external recruitment process is currently being completed for the medium term.
- 3.4 CST have introduced a standard greeting and ending to improve the consistency and good customer service:
- “Good morning/afternoon, Rutland County Council, Customer Services, my name is <First Name>, how can I help?”
  - “Is there anything else I can help you with? Thank you goodbye.”
- 3.5 Issues of training and consistency have been addressed. Using the approach of a formal service level agreement (SLA) meetings have been held between the Customer Services Manager and key back office areas to improve the relationship, ensure the services are being delivered correctly and to develop the SLA which documents in detail the responsibilities.
- 3.6 CST operate without a Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) software and use a model of directly accessing back office systems to enter data or the use of emails to the back offices. To aid consistency, CST are ensuring that for high volume service areas there is agreement on the information to be collected and logged.

### **4 CURRENT PERFORMANCE**

- 4.1 Overall the performance metrics of the service have improved significantly since April 2016. The performance is reported on a weekly basis and shows:
- Average call waiting times have reduced from an average of 118 seconds for the week ending 8<sup>th</sup> April to 33 seconds week ending 15<sup>th</sup> July.

- The percentage of calls answered within 15 seconds has risen from 31% to 58% for the same period.
- The percentage of abandoned calls has reduced, from 24% to 5% for the same period.

4.2 During the Q1 2016/17 the CST dealt with:

- 20,332 telephone calls, 52% of which were resolved without transfer to another department.
- 5,227 face to face visits, 98% of which were resolved.
- 2,479 emails, 32% of which were resolved.

4.3 During Q1 the top services that were requested on the phone were:

- Council Tax
- Waste
- Elections
- Adult Social Care
- Planning

4.4 These top 5 services accounted for over 50% of our contact with customers.

4.5 Whilst the sample size is only 634, customer satisfaction is collected and 83% of customer report as 'Good' their experience on the phone.

4.6 June 2016 was a very busy month for the Council, and CST, in the period to the European Referendum. During this period:

- 6,471 telephone calls were answered, which is 42 calls per hour. 945 (15%) were in relation to the referendum.
- 70% of customers were answered within 1 minute and 93% of all calls were answered within 4 minutes.

4.7 Further performance data is shown in Appendix A.

## **5 CHANNEL SHIFT**

5.1 Many local authorities are helping achieve improved customer service and cost savings by a 'channel shift' strategy. In general terms this refers to moving customers up the hierarchy of access channel, based on cost. So face to face customers are encouraged to use telephony or web services and telephony users are encouraged to use web and other automated solutions.

- 5.2 Some authorities are simply trying to move customers by encouraging those that present face to face that they could have done their transaction online or via the telephony. Many Council's play messages to customers whilst they are waiting on the phone that services are available online – especially at peak times.
- 5.3 Some authorities achieve channel shift by providing a better service, so an always available website, with a customer account, access to online forms, making payments provides a better solution than available face to face and telephony methods.
- 5.4 An alternative route is to remove access channels at certain times to force customers into other channels. This could be reduction in opening times for the face to face offer but could also be a reduction in telephony offer. There is usually a need to ensure that alternative access to services is provided.
- 5.5 There is a key area where the Council can improve customer services and reduce costs of delivery. This is in the area of avoidable contact, situations where the customer makes contact but the contact could have been avoided either by the removal of the problem in the first place or proactive communication to avoid follow up contact. As an example poor quality letters that are not understood correctly by customers can lead to calls that could have been avoided.
- 5.6 The existing principles for RCC are:
- Channel preference is: 1. Online (digital), 2. Phone and 3. Face to Face
  - Triage approach – customers are met as they enter the building and directed appropriately.
  - Self Serve kiosks in CST with floor walker(s) to assist.
  - Waiting area for business visitors and customers requiring face to face support.
- 5.7 Whilst there is no formal 'digital strategy' the Council is seeking to:
- Increase digital take up – maximise the number of customers engaging with us via digital channels 'Anytime, anywhere, any channel access for customers'
  - Reduce avoidable contacts (information or service is available online)
  - Reduce failure demand (customers contacting us more times than they need to)
  - Remove waste from processes (only do what we need to do)
  - Have hands free processing (customer inputs data and it feeds directly into our systems)
  - Share customer data across One Council, improved customer insight

- Reduce demand from our more vulnerable customers by supporting them to live more independently
- Robust information management
- Reduction in the overall cost of IT
- Savings across the organisation through leaner, digital processes

5.8 There is currently a major project being delivered to provide a new website that is:

- Easy to use
- Good content that is helpful to customers
- Robust sign-posting to other agencies
- Provides access to functionality such as ‘find my nearest’, online forms, access to information in back office applications e.g. planning, Revs and Bens etc.

5.9 As part of the channel shift described above consideration has been given to the layout of the customer service centre and how the space can be maximised and the customer service improved.

5.10 There is a very limited customer offer for face to face visitors – mainly access to a CSA and posters/leaflets.

5.11 Discussions are expected to provide facilities for self service in the Customer Services area. This is likely to be provided by fixed desktop PCs that will be setup to have access to the Council’s corporate website.

5.12 A trial is planned for August 2016 looking at the use of staff to triage customers and see if their requirements could be dealt with simply and effectively, for instance using an online form on the corporate website, and to reduce any queuing to see a customer services agent.

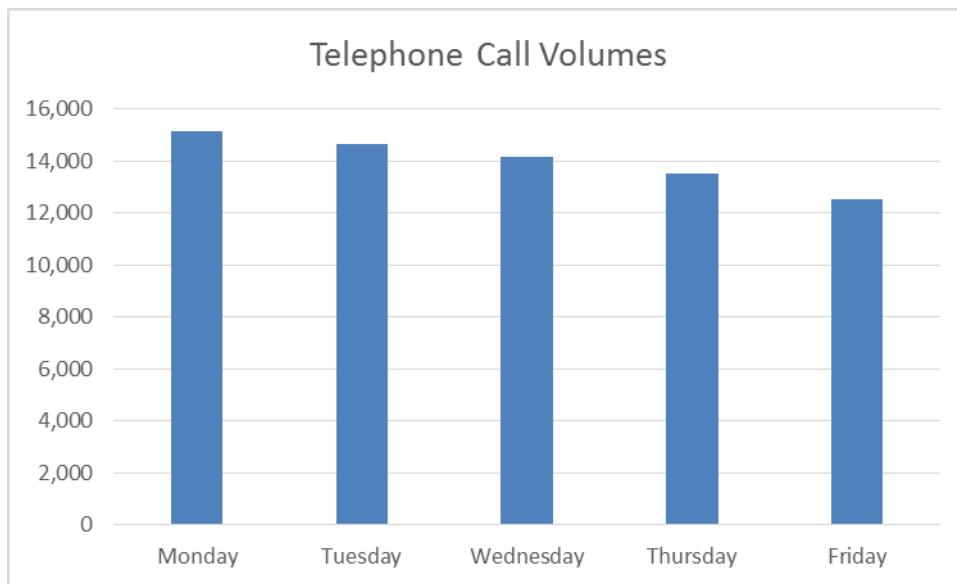
## **6 CUSTOMER SERVICE DEMAND**

6.1 Information on current demands on the service and patterns can be used as the basis for future decision making on the service offer.

6.2 Information is available on the telephone call volumes to CST for the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015.

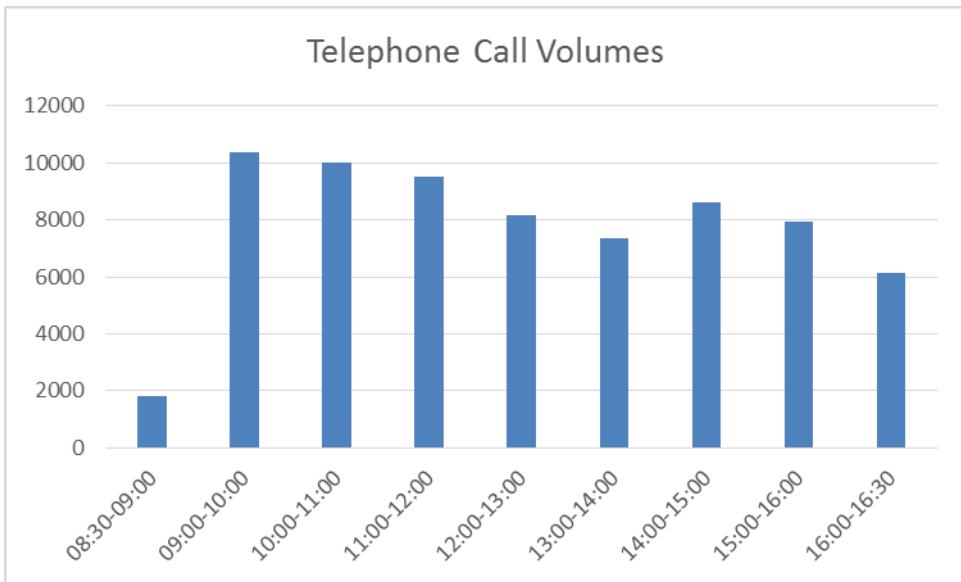
- 6.3 The table and chart below shows the breakdown of telephone calls per day and shows that demand reduces during the week.

	Call Volumes
Monday	15,156
Tuesday	14,667
Wednesday	14,146
Thursday	13,503
Friday	12,518



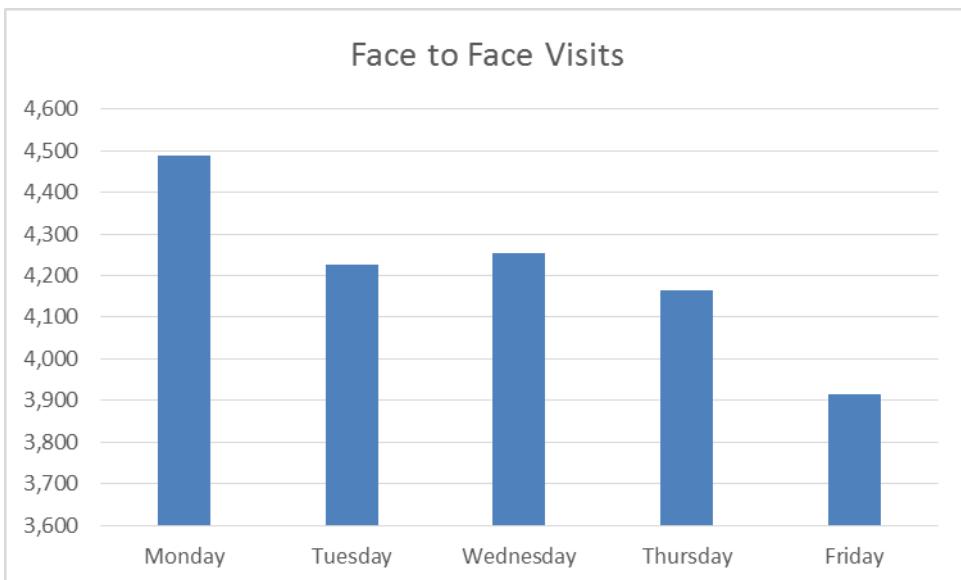
- 6.4 Over the same period the table and chart below shows the breakdown of calls by hour of the day. This shows the peak of calls is in the morning and then a reduction in calls over the rest of the day, although the period 2pm to 4pm calls rise.

	Call Volumes
8:30 – 9:00	1,801
9:00 – 10:00	10,383
10:00 – 11:00	10,015
11:00 – 12:00	9,536
12:00 – 13:00	8,183
13:00 – 14:00	7,335
14:00 – 15:00	8,628
15:00 – 16:00	7,959
16:00 – 17:00	6,150



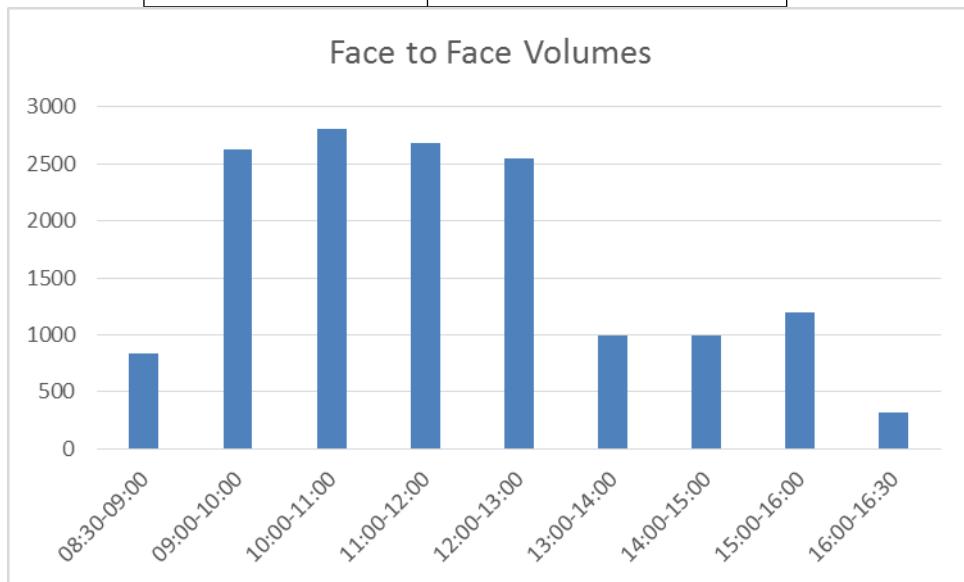
- 6.5 Information is available on the face to face volumes to CST for the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015.
- 6.6 The table and chart below shows the breakdown of face to face visits per day and shows that demand reduces during the week.

	Face to Face Volumes
Monday	4,489
Tuesday	4,226
Wednesday	4,254
Thursday	4,166
Friday	3,916



- 6.7 Over the same period the table and chart below shows the breakdown of face to face visits by hour of the day. This shows the peak is in the morning from 9am until 1pm and then a significant reduction for the rest of the day.

	Face to Face Volumes
8:30 – 9:00	838
9:00 – 10:00	2,630
10:00 – 11:00	2,809
11:00 – 12:00	2,679
12:00 – 13:00	2,550
13:00 – 14:00	990
14:00 – 15:00	994
15:00 – 16:00	1,193
16:00 – 17:00	317



- 6.8 To put these figures in context, 15,156 which is the number of telephone calls on a Monday is an average of 330 calls each day. This is around 40 calls per hour so 1 call every 1½ minutes. Similarly, the 4,489 face to face visits on Monday is 100 visits a day and on average 1 visit every 5 minutes.
- 6.9 One area of consideration is repeated calls by the same customer. This might indicate demands across a range of services or specific issues with a specific service area. Either scenario would perhaps lend itself to an intervention to help the customer.
- 6.10 However the lack of a formal CRM makes this analysis complex and subject to error. Analysis of repeated calls over a period of time from the same number (and local numbers) might provide some data on which decisions could be made.
- 6.11 Work has commenced to look at the percentage of customers ringing from '01572', '01780' or '01664' and making repeated attempts to call for Q1 2016/17. Whilst there might be customers that have a set of complex needs and are calling the

Council on a frequent basis, there is no robust system to identify these customers and analysing incoming telephone numbers is not precise. It is expected that as part of the cost/benefit analysis of a CRM system that the opportunity to identify these customers will be included.

- 6.12 A local Council efficiency study found that the average cost of interaction with the Council was broken down to £8.62 for face-to-face, £2.83 over the phone and 15p online. This is something that councils across the country are trying to achieve and the CIPFA Benchmarking Club results show that through channel shift, 50% of councils that participated achieved improvements to the user experience, 58% delivered quantified efficiencies and 65% realised cashable savings.
- 6.13 The Council have recently participated in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Benchmarking Club. These results compare Rutland County Council results to other Councils across the country. The analysis showed that the average call duration was 150 seconds. It also showed that the average time taken to answer calls was 52 seconds across the benchmark club.

## **7 CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS**

- 7.1 The current customer service standard was introduced in 2011.
- 7.2 There are a number of factors that lead towards a review of these standards:
- Increasing expectations of customers.
  - Ongoing financial climate and a need to review service provision
  - Increasing use of social media, emails and web.
- 7.3 The current service standards are based on the following principles of customer care and that the Council will:
- Be welcoming, polite and helpful
  - Be open, honest and fair
  - Respond quickly and efficiently to enquiries and requests for service
  - Use plain language in any contact we have with you
  - Only ask you for information that is relevant and explain why it is needed
  - Tell you what we can and cannot do so you know what to expect from us
  - Work hard to meet the needs of all our customers as individuals
  - Ask for your views about services and act on any comments you make
  - Make sure that when we are not able to help you we will try to find out who can

7.4 The specific published standards for phone calls are:

- Provide service options and enable customers to speak to a member of staff within 15 seconds
- Respond to telephone messages or voicemails within one working day
- Tell the customer who they are speaking to.

7.5 The specific published standards for emails and letters are:

- Aim to respond as quickly as possible and definitely within 5 working days
- If the customer's query cannot be resolved in this time, acknowledge the email within one working day or two working days for letters and provide a full response within 10 working days.

7.6 The specific published standards for face to face are:

- Deal with customers promptly, aiming to keep waiting time to a maximum of five minutes
- Make a private interview room available
- Offer you an appointment if preferred

7.7 Published performance measures are:

- Percentage of telephone calls answered within 15 seconds – target 75%
- Percentage of abandoned calls – target 8%

## **8 LOCAL BENCHMARKING OF CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS**

8.1 The following table shows the relevant service standards from other public sector organisations, where there is specific information in relation to their central customer services team:

Organisation	Service Standards
Leicester City Council	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Answer calls within 20 seconds (6 rings). This means:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. The call is answered within 20 seconds by a member of staff where there are no automated facilities OR</li><li>B. The call is answered within 20 seconds by a member of staff without an automated telephone system kicking in OR</li><li>C. The call could be answered by an automated telephone system within 20 seconds with an automated message telling the customer how long the wait is going to be/they are in queue and the call will be answered shortly.</li></ol></li><li>2. Seen within 15 minutes from arrival and kept informed of any delays.</li></ol>
Leicestershire County Council	There is a published service standard but this is not specific
Nottinghamshire County Council	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. At the customer service centre 80% of calls within 30 seconds</li><li>2. Respond to telephone messages within 2 days</li><li>3. Respond to emails within 2 working days, with a full reply within 5 working days</li><li>4. Face to face aim to deal with the enquiry with 20 minutes</li></ol>
Northamptonshire	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Answer calls within 20 seconds</li><li>2. Welcome face to face visitors within 2 minutes of arrival</li><li>3. Respond to letters within 3 working days</li></ol>

## **9      OPTIONS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS**

- 9.1    The current service standard and the associated performance metrics lead to concentration around answering calls within the first 15 seconds and do not ensure that all calls are dealt with appropriately.
- 9.2    There is an opportunity to review these standards and to get input from stakeholders on a more balanced approach that ensures that demands across all access channels are met appropriately.
- 9.3    As an example of a different approach, the Council could measure the percentage of calls answered within a minute and the percentage of calls answered within 5 minutes of waiting.
- 9.4    New performance measure will seek to ensure that there is a focus on all the calls that are in the call centre including new calls and also calls that have been waiting for some time.

## **10     DISCUSSION AREAS**

- 10.1   This report has provided information on the current performance of CST, the current activities to improve the service, the statistics around demand as well as the potential changes that might come from the channel shift strategy.
- 10.2   The Resources Scrutiny Panel is invited to provide feedback on this report and to consider:
  - How could customer service standards be refreshed and brought up to date.
    - i) For instance measure the percentage of calls answered within a minute and the percentage of calls answered within 5 minutes of waiting. If so what would be acceptable targets.
  - How can the Council balance channel shift and the quality of the customer offer
    - i) Close the face to face offer at certain times
    - ii) Move to appointment only for certain services
    - iii) Use self-serve stations

## **11 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The development of a new web site and channel shift programme does have financial implications; however, funding has already been agreed for this development therefore there is no pressure on existing budgets

## **12 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no implications as this report is to seek early views from the panel on policy direction.

## **13 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 13.1 There will be an impact when the Digital Strategy is developed; those affected will be consulted as part of the Council's approach to developing its digital services.

## **14 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

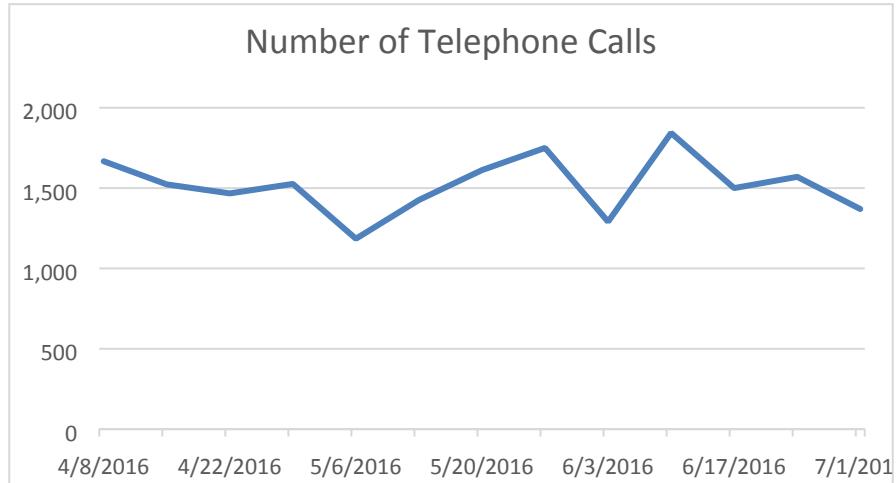
- 14.1 Customer Service Performance and Strategy – Report 192/2015

## 15 APPENDICES

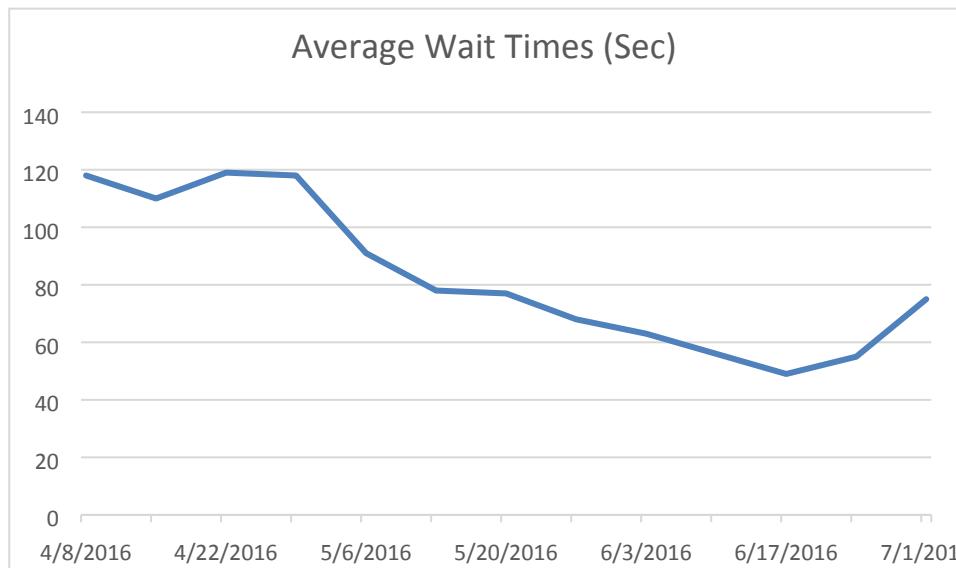
### Appendix A - CST Performance Details

Below are graphs that detail the performance of CST since April 2016.

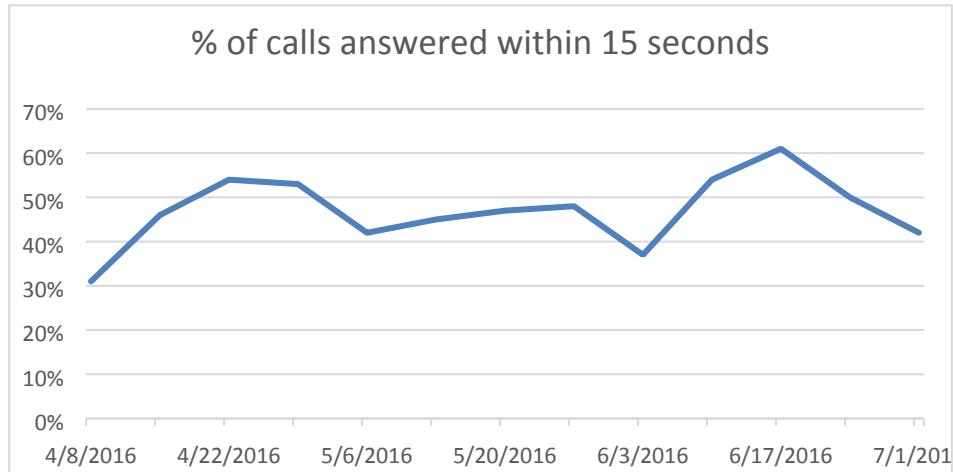
#### 1. Volume of calls



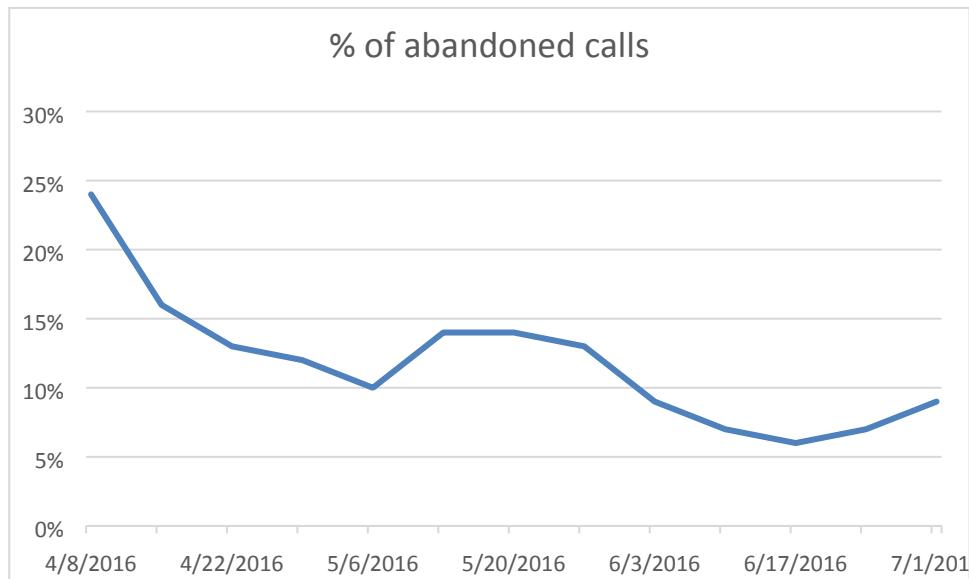
#### 2. Average Wait Time



### 3. % of calls Answered within 15 seconds



### 4. Abandoned Rate



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