

**Members are reminded that they must declare all relevant pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests relating to any items of business to be discussed at this meeting**

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2015 AT 14:00 HOURS**  
**IN COMMITTEE ROOM 6, COUNCIL HOUSE, VICTORIA SQUARE,**  
**BIRMINGHAM, B1 1BB - INQUIRY SESSION: CUSTOMER**  
**JOURNEY, [VENUE ADDRESS]**

**A G E N D A**

**1 NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST**

The Chairman to advise the meeting to note that this meeting will be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site ([www.birminghamnewsroom.com](http://www.birminghamnewsroom.com)) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs. The whole of the meeting will be filmed except where there are confidential or exempt items.

**2 APOLOGIES**

To receive any apologies.

**3 INQUIRY - THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY**

- (a) Terms of Reference
- (b) Session Plan
- (c) Fleet & Waste
- (d) Council Tax

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## Work Outline

# The Customer Journey

## Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Our key question:	What further work is needed to increase citizen satisfaction when making enquiries to, or requesting services from, the City Council?
1. How is O&S adding value through this work?	<p>Improving Customer Services remains a priority in the Leader's 2015 Policy Statement. It is also recognised within the Future Council as an important strand of work.</p> <p>The former Governance, Resources and Customer Services undertook work to support the improvement of customer services – most recently with the development of the Birmingham Promise.</p> <p>Nonetheless, when Customer Services commissioned independent analysis into citizen satisfaction during March/April 2014, it produced results of 49.4% satisfaction for contact centre services and 43.2% satisfaction for end to end delivery. BCC benchmarked these results against the Institute of Customer Service annual customer satisfaction survey that shows satisfaction with local councils at 62% compared to 72% for local services in the public sector.</p> <p>The Corporate Resources O&amp;S Committee is therefore seeking to investigate how these satisfaction scores can be increased.</p>
2. What needs to be done?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To explore the "end to end process" of the customer journey that Birmingham citizens go through to understand what can be improved, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Reporting</li><li>○ Processing</li><li>○ Actioning</li><li>○ Reporting back</li><li>○ When things go wrong – complaints / referring to elected members</li></ul></li><li>• To understand what the data the City Council collects tells us<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Customer satisfaction data with both calls and the end to end process</li><li>○ Sample ticket data (to choose, at random, a small number of enquiries logged by the Contact Centre and other receivers, and follow the progress of each enquiry through the process in the Council, but also (where possible) to engage with the customer)</li></ul></li></ul> <p>That this is done by looking at two service areas in detail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Waste management</li><li>• Council tax</li></ul>
3. What timescale do we propose to do this in?	<p>Scoping Session: 14<sup>th</sup> July 2015</p> <p>Evidence gathering: October to December (to include visits and 10<sup>th</sup> November</p>



# The Customer Journey

	public session) Reporting to City Council: Tuesday 2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2016
4. What outcomes are we looking to achieve?	Recommendations to the Executive to increase customer satisfaction

## Member / Officer Leads

Lead Member:	Cllr Waseem Zaffar
Lead Officer:	Emma Williamson/Jayne Power

## Time Frame for Core Phases of the Review

Meetings and evidence-gathering sessions:	October – December 2015
Drafting the report:	w/c 16 <sup>th</sup> November
Consideration of the draft report by the Committee:	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2015
8-Day rule: Executive Comment:	14 <sup>th</sup> December - 8 <sup>th</sup> January 2016
Reporting to the City Council:	Tuesday 2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2016



# Customer Journey

## 10<sup>th</sup> November Session Plan

### 1 Introduction

1.1 In September 2015, the Corporate Resources O&S Committee agreed the terms of reference for an inquiry into the "Customer Journey", asking:

What further work is needed to increase citizen satisfaction when making enquiries to, or requesting services from, the City Council?

1.2 Improving Customer Services remains a priority in the Leader's 2015 Policy Statement. It is also recognised within the Future Council as an important strand of work.

1.3 The former Governance, Resources and Customer Services O&S Committee undertook work to support the improvement of customer services – most recently with the development of the Birmingham Promise.

1.4 Nonetheless, when Customer Services commissioned independent analysis into citizen satisfaction during March/April 2014, it produced results of 49.4% satisfaction for contact centre services and 43.2% satisfaction for end to end delivery. BCC benchmarked these results against the Institute of Customer Service annual customer satisfaction survey that shows satisfaction with local councils at 62% compared to 72% for local services in the public sector.

1.5 The Corporate Resources O&S Committee is therefore seeking to investigate how these satisfaction scores can be increased.

1.6 Today's session includes:

- Visit to the Contact Centre, 1100 – 1300 hours;
- Inquiry session (Committee Room 6), from 1400 hours.

### 2 Visit to the Contact Centre

2.1 The visit to the contact centre will take place from 1100 hours to 1300 hours.

2.2 The contact centre is situated at 10 Woodcock Street, B7 4BL. The agenda is attached.

2.3 The focus of the session is to enable Members to listen to calls and see the operation of the contact centre. There will also be a presentation and Q&A session, where members can explore:

- What the data the City Council collects tells us;
- Customer satisfaction data with both calls and the end to end process.



# Customer Journey

## 3 Inquiry Session

- 3.1 The inquiry session will take place at the Council House to look at the customer journey, with reference to waste and council tax. Attendees will include:
- Chris Gibbs, Service Director, Customer Services
  - Paula Buckley, Assistant Director, Customer Services Centre
  - Georgina Foxwell, Head of Business Change and Service Improvement
  - Jacqui Kennedy, Strategic Director – Place (interim)
- 3.2 The aim of the session is to explore the “end to end process” of the customer journey that Birmingham citizens go through to understand what can be improved, including:
- Reporting;
  - Processing;
  - Actioning;
  - Reporting back;
  - When things go wrong – complaints / referring to elected members.
- 3.3 The session will focus on two areas: fleet and waste management, and council tax.
- 3.4 Key questions include:
- What improvements have been made to the customer experience since the contact centre was brought in-house last year?
  - What measures have worked to improve customer satisfaction?
  - Where are the main areas of dissatisfaction for customers/citizens?
  - How is data and feedback from customers used to improve performance?
  - What are the blockages to improving customer satisfaction?
  - What can councillors do to support measures to improve customer satisfaction?

## 4 Survey

- 4.1 An electronic survey has been made available, for anyone who has used the City Council web, contact centre or neighbourhood offices to let us know about their experiences. This link will be published and emailed round.
- 4.2 The survey will remain open until the 20<sup>th</sup> November.

## **Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee Contact Centre Visit**

**10<sup>th</sup> November**

**Location: Woodcock Street, Room 312**

**Time: 1100-1300**

### **Attendees:**

**Councillors:** Waseem Zaffar, Randal Brew, Marje Bridle, Tristan Chatfield, Matthew Gregson, Jon Hunt, Changese Khan, Narinder Kaur Kooner, Chaman Lal, Yvonne Mosquito, Gary Sambrook, Ken Wood

**Officers:** Chris Gibbs – Service Director Customer Services, Paula Buckley – Assistant Director Customer Services, Phil Doherty – Head of Client Services, Georgina Foxwell – Head of Business Change and Service Improvement, Geraldine Collins – Head of Operations, Brian Hogg – Relationship Manager, Shona Adams – Relationship Manager, ***FWM colleagues TBC***

### **Agenda**

#### **1100 – 1130:**

- Introductions
- Update on the transition of the Contact Centre over the past 12 months
- Culture change
- Improvements that have been implemented to improve the end to end process

#### **1130 – 1230:**

Call listening and introduction to the role of Resolution Champion

Split into two groups of six – Group A and B

- **Group A** – Council Tax
- **Group B** – Fleet and waste

#### **1230- 1300:**

Working lunch

- Q & A session
- Wrap-up

Close





# **A Joint Report from Customer Services Division and Fleet and Waste Management – Birmingham City Council**

## **Scrutiny Report – Fleet & Waste**

**October 2015**

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### **1) Current Service Offering**

The Fleet and Waste Management Service is responsible for collection and appropriate disposal of the domestic and some trade waste produced by its citizens. In addition to this it runs and maintains the Fleet service for all council departments. Currently the service offering can be quantified as:

- 426k residential homes with an asset base of c660,000 wheeled bins
- 60k customers using the Green Waste Service ( a paid for service)
- 500 citizens using the Clinical waste service
- 6,788 Trade Waste customers
- Average of 300 bulky waste collections per week ( a paid for service)

In addition the Service runs a large garage at Montague Street, and a closed but very active landfill site at Queslett covering approximately 55 acres, with waste-filling at the site beginning during late 1982 and ceasing in 1992 with capping of the site being completed in 1994.

Since January 1994, the waste disposal contract for Birmingham's municipal waste has been contracted out to Veolia Environmental Services Birmingham (VESB) – an international recycling and waste management company. As part of the contract Veolia manage the 5 household recycling centres, 3 waste transfer stations and the Tyseley Energy from Waste (EfW) plant. This is a 25-year contract (with a number of contract variations), and will terminate in January 2019.

### **2) Recent Service Changes**

**Introduction of Wheelie Bins** - In August 2012 a programme of work was started to replace the sacks and boxes with wheelie bin collections, introduce mobile technology into a new fleet of collection vehicles and other associated service improvements. This programme of work is in its final stages and all bins will be delivered by December 2015.

**Garden Waste Charge** - In the autumn of 2013 in response to the need to make further and significant budget savings, FWM were required to introduce a charge of £35 (£33 on line) for the collection of garden waste. A significant channel shift was made with over 60% of customers ordering via the web. In 2014 over 50,000 customers subscribed to the service and in 2015 nearly 60,000 customers have subscribed. A 10% increase in customer base is expected in 2016.

**Introduction of Mobile Technology** -The introduction of a mobile technology ('slab in the cab') system allows for a more reliable system for ensuring collection of waste. This technology is in the process of being installed in all collection vehicles and together with software to ensure the optimisation of routes and rounds the result should be more reliable performance and customer information. The driver is reminded of all the collections due on the route and as they are collected highlights any properties where the waste is not presented for collection. This should allow for increased reliability of missed collection data for the contact centre and performance data for the collection teams.

**Bulky Waste Charges** - Charges for Bulky waste were introduced in 2010/11 with the currently charging policy at £25 per collection (maximum of 6 items per collection). This compares to the previous system of 3 free collections per year, with a maximum of 6 items per collection. The new charge is in line with fees charged by other councils (that typically range from £15 to £44). Online bookings attract a £2 discount.

### **3) Current Service Contact Routes**

Currently the citizens of Birmingham make contact with the Fleet and Waste Service through the following channels:

- Telephone call to the contact centre
- Telephone call directly to the Depots
- Web based on line transactions
- Smart Phone App
- Emails to the contact centre through 'Customer Contact' link ( av. 200/300 per month)
- Letters directly to the service (average of 32 per week)

### **4) Call Volumes**

The following 2 graphs report on the volume of calls offered and answered at the Contact Centre by month from January 2013 to September 2015. The line graphs demonstrate the variation in call demand created by garden waste orders and the ongoing roll out of wheelie bins across the city.

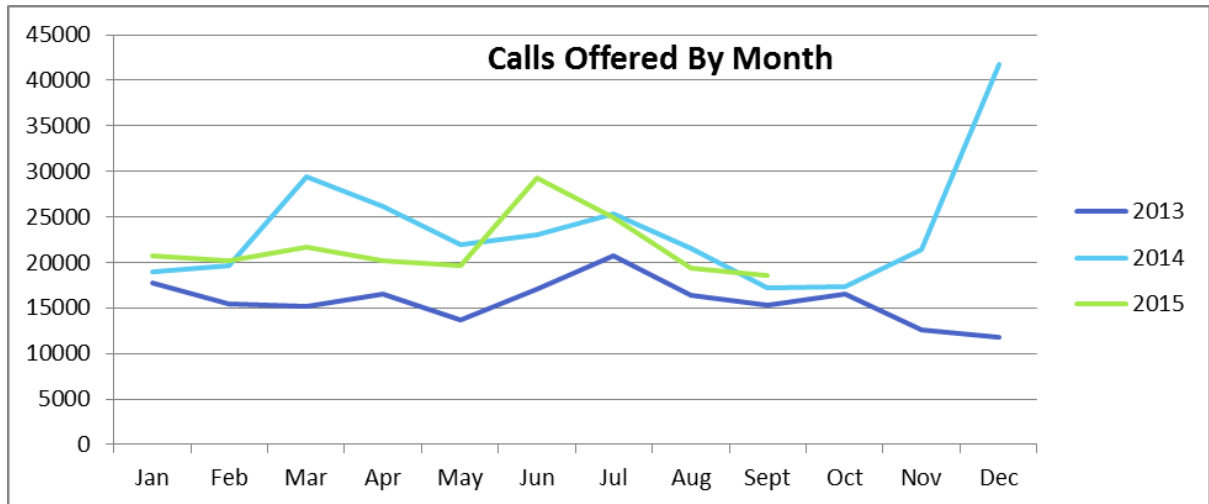
Each of the spikes shown in the below graphs represents a period of change taking place within the service area for example: -

In 2014 the increase during December relates to garden waste renewals, 10172 calls were answered in relation to garden waste representing 37% of Decembers call volumes.

June 2015 represent the roll out of wheelie bins at Perry Barr to the north of the city.

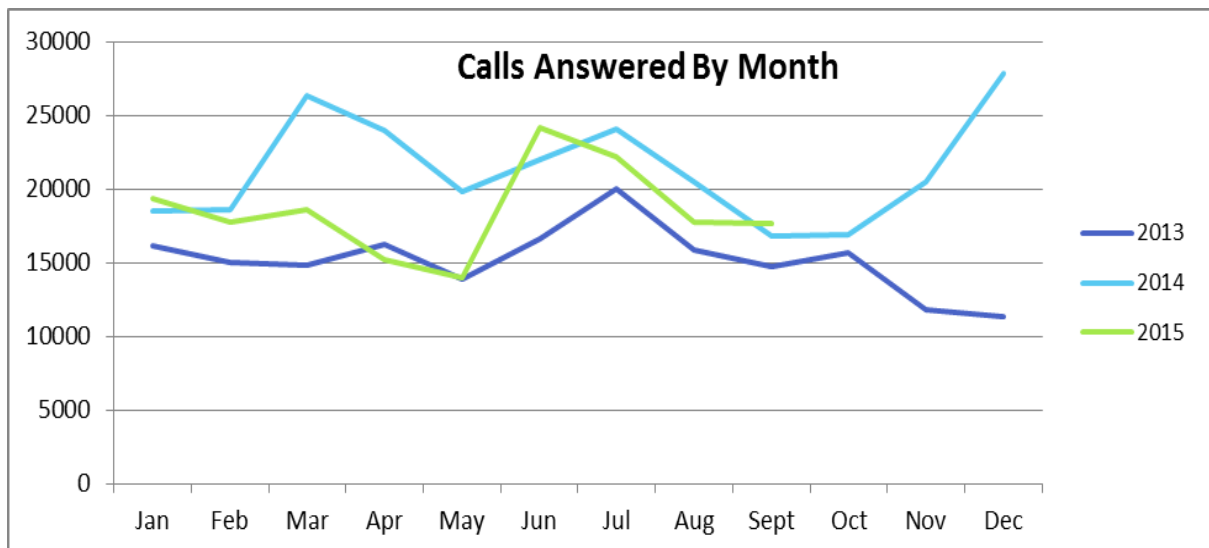
## Calls Offered

Fleet & Waste	Calls Offered											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2013	17769	15464	15137	16481	13724	17028	20783	16348	15364	16556	12558	11730
2014	18968	19686	29379	26143	21948	23087	25351	21510	17254	17288	21354	41747
2015	20740	20228	21661	20257	19642	29302	24915	19410	18564			



## Calls Answered

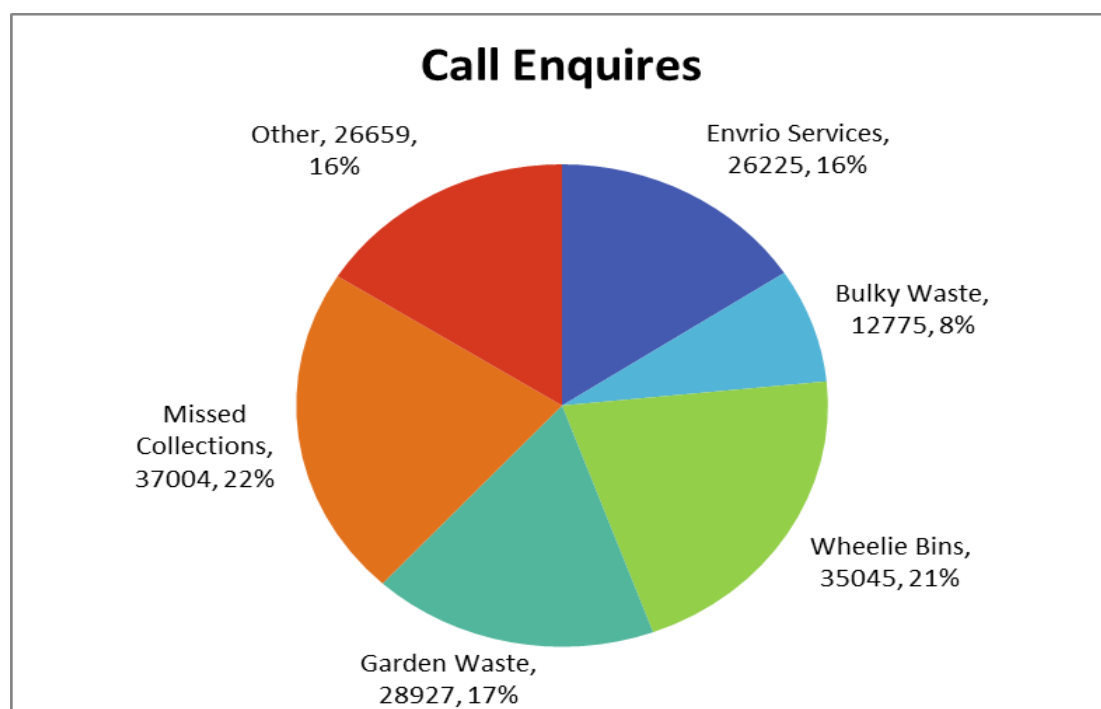
Fleet & Waste	Calls Answered											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2013	16171	15002	14820	16227	13850	16623	20017	15889	14741	15718	11846	11363
2014	18460	18640	26380	23980	19791	21955	24078	20451	16843	16945	20504	27809
2015	19316	17737	18602	15215	13997	24158	22206	17716	17688			



The Contact Centre receives a number of enquiry types for Fleet & Waste, these include: -

- Bulky waste collections
- Missed collections
- Replacement bins
- Wheelie bin enquires
- Garden waste orders & enquiries
- General enquires (collection days & schedule)
- Recycling centres
- Street cleansing
- Fly-tipping (dumped rubbish)
- Clinical waste

Since January 2015 to September 2015 the Contact Centre has answered 166,635 calls, the key call drivers are shown in the following pie chart.



**Note: -**

1. "Envrio Services" includes calls relating to clinical waste, street cleansing, dumped rubbish and Bin Replacements.
2. "Other" includes calls relating to recycling centres, abandoned vehicles and general enquires.
3. During 2016 we expect wheelie bin calls to reduce; many of the calls currently being received are in connection to the roll out of wheelie bins, delivery of bins, requests for larger or additional bins. As we move into a more stabilised period in 2016 the enquiries received will be more business as usual relating to replacement bins and missed collections.

## 5) IVR Review

IVR (Interactive Voice Response) is an automated telephony system that interacts with members of the public when calling the Contact Centre; it enables calls to be routed to the appropriate area of work or Advisor to service the call. The IVR system uses the telephone touch-tone keypad which enables the caller to select an option to direct their enquiry or obtain additional information before speaking to a live Advisor.

Customer Services has taken a full review of the existing IVR messaging presented to citizens when calling Fleet & Waste. Feedback via customer satisfaction surveys and your views evidenced a level of dissatisfaction with the current set up. The review undertaken set out with clear aims of: -

- Removing repeated messages
- Reducing the amount of messaging and wording
- Reducing the number of selection menus and options to press
- Reducing the time to reach a live advisor

The revised IVR will be in operation by November, the remodelling has retained key information, instruction and messages which are helpful. The flow of the IVR for the citizen will be quicker and easier to navigate, for example the new IVR delivers the following benefits.

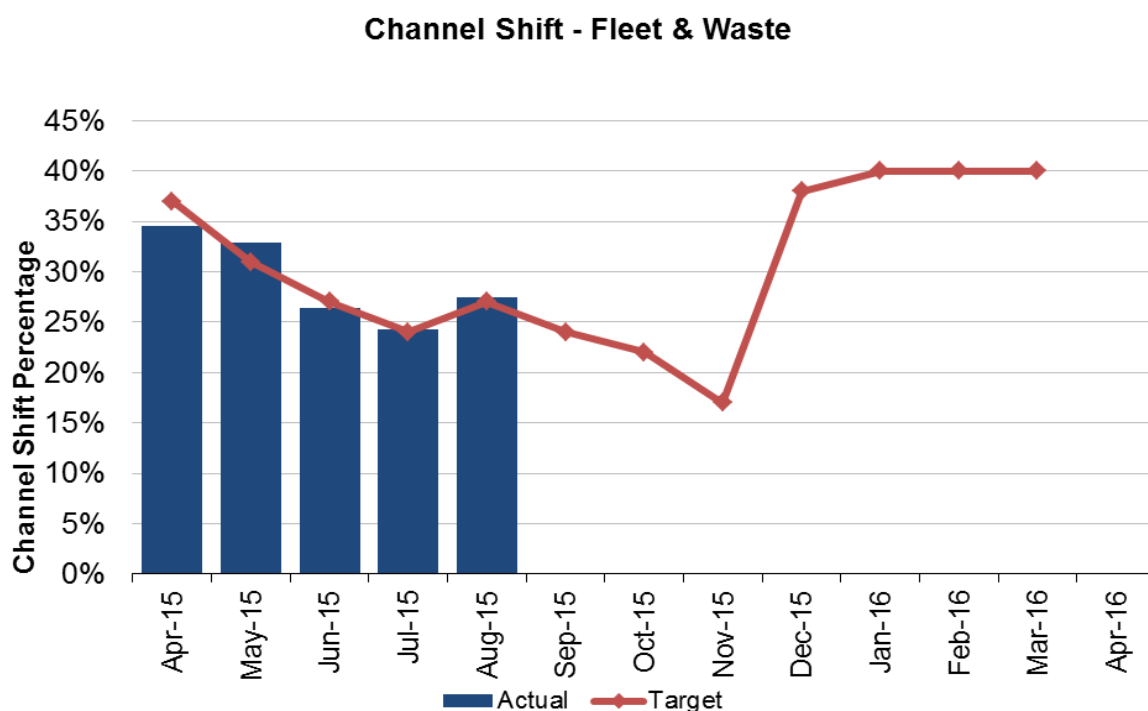
- Reporting a missed collection will reduce from 2.20 minutes to an average of 60 seconds to reach a live advisor.
- Requests for the garden waste service will reduce from 1.50 minutes to an average of 1.05 minutes to reach a live advisor.
- In most cases there is an average of 2 key presses during the navigation of the IVR (3 maximum). This is in line with industry best practice.
- Where there is no need to provide specific service information the call flows directly to a live advisor. For example a call to report graffiti will go direct to an advisor, however if the call was relating to bulky waste the IVR will provide useful information such as the price and the number of items which can be included in the bulky collection.

## 6) Web Developments & Channel Shift

Channel shift is calculated by taking the number of calls answered at the Contact Centre and dividing this by the number of service requests raised via the BCC website. The following table and graph shows the volumes, targets and performance for the current financial year.

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
<b>Calls Answered</b>	<b>15215</b>	<b>13997</b>	<b>24158</b>	<b>22206</b>	<b>17716</b>
<b>Online Transactions</b>	<b>8018</b>	<b>6863</b>	<b>8679</b>	<b>7121</b>	<b>6710</b>
<b>Channel Shift Target</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Achievement Against Target</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>27%</b>

Channel shift performance is in line with the forecasted projections for 2015, higher levels of channel shift are achieved in months where there is more stability after roll out periods for wheelie bins. During the roll out phase for Perry Barr there was a negative 10% channel shift reduction because citizens turn to the telephone to notify of service failure. Results on customer satisfaction can be found in section 10 of this report.



**Note** – The blue bars represent actual achievement and the red line represents the target for channel shift.

Developments taken on the web site to support channel shift and the wheelie bin roll out for Lifford Lane depot due to commence on the 16<sup>th</sup> November has included: -

- Citizens can access online a delivery schedule for when wheelie bins will be delivered to their property which saves a call to the contact centre to obtain this information.
- Advice added to inform of next steps once the bin has been delivered in terms of labelling and taking the bin to within your property.
- A series of web page updates during August to promote the arrival of wheelie bin red & green assessment cards. Assessment cards were sent to households to advise if the property was suitable for wheelie bins. A green card confirmed the property was suitable for wheelie bins and a red card confirmed the property would remain on sack collections. It was important to raise as much awareness as possible during August prior to the cut off date for citizens to request an additional or larger bin.
- We have ensured the web site clearly confirms that requests for additional or larger bins after the August 21st cut-off date can only be accepted from February 2016.

- Promoting the dates and venues for the wheelie bin roadshows at supermarket locations.
- A future web development currently being considered is in relation to publishing known service interruptions via the website which would alert citizens to specific roads in advance where impacts are taking place due to weather events, vehicle breakdowns or access issues.

**Birmingham Alerts** - We are looking to access the "Birmingham Alerts" database as a channel to target e-mail alerts to citizens who have consented to receiving updates. Via the website there is adverts and a pop up message asking citizens if they would like to be kept up to date on matters important to them, the citizen can then select which services they would like receive updates for. Examples of the advert and pop up is shown on the next page.

#### Web Pop Up



#### Web Advert



### Sign up for free email alerts

Our free service will help keep you in touch with the things that matter to you

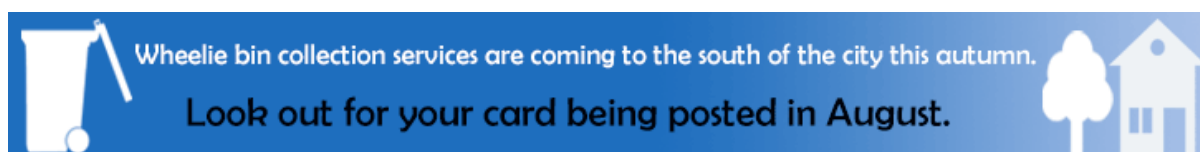


Using the data from Birmingham Alerts could be used to inform members of the public about: -

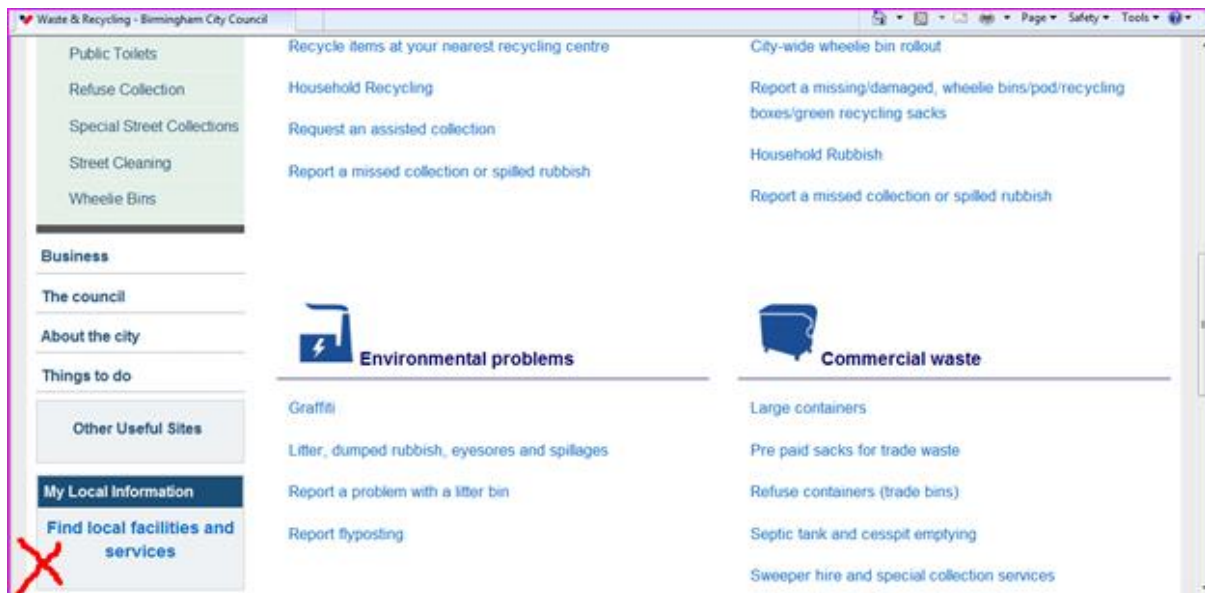
- When garden waste collections are due to end
- When garden waste renewals for 2016 can be purchased from
- Information concerning Christmas collections
- Wheelie bins updates
- Recycling updates

The first usage of the Birmingham Alerts is expected in December to support the garden waste renewals for 2016.

During the month of August we also introduced the following web banner across the BCC web site to promote awareness, when the ad was clicked on it would transfer the citizen to the main wheelie bin roll out web page to obtain further information.

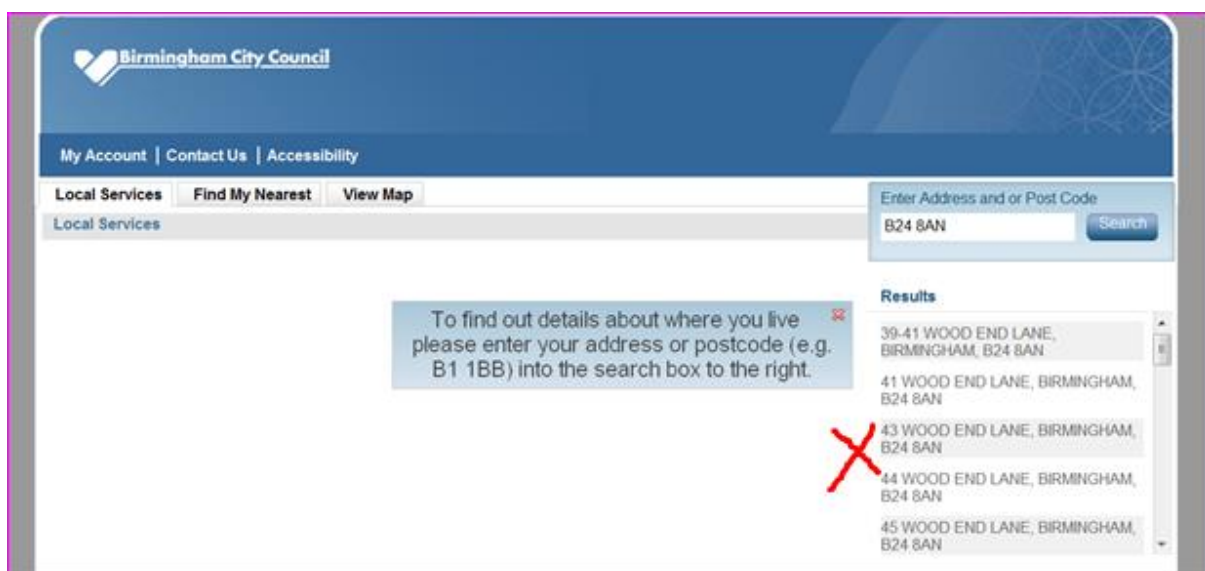


**My Local Information** is a feature via the BCC website which enables citizens to access information regarding local services. The “My Local Information” feature can be located on the [www.birmingham.gov.uk/waste](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/waste) webpage; the red cross below shows the exact location.



When the “My Local Information” link is clicked, citizens are then requested to enter their postcode.

All results in terms of address options will appear (marked with the red cross)



After selecting an address option, the following information will be displayed. This provides specific Fleet & Waste information in relation to recycling and residual collection days.




**Birmingham City Council**

[My Account](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Accessibility](#)

[Local Services](#)
[Find My Nearest](#)
[View Map](#)

Enter Address and or Post Code

Local Services

Category: Environment

 **Bin Collection:** [THURSDAY](#)

 **Multi Material Recycling:** [THURSDAY](#)

 **Paper Recycling:** [THURSDAY](#)

Category: Administration

 **Constituency:** [ERDINGTON](#)  
Contact your Member of Parliament <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/erdington-mp>

 **Polling Station:** [St Mary & St John Catholic Primary School \(Junior\), Beaufort Road, B23 7NR](#)  
More information about the election <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/elections>

 **Ward:** [Stockland Green](#)  
Contact your local Councillors <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/stocklandgreen-councillors>

 41 WOOD END LANE,  
BIRMINGHAM, B24 8AN x

## **7) Payments Team**

Customer Services currently operate a dedicated team of advisors for Fleet & Waste who specifically handle call types where debit / credit card payments are taken. Additionally the payment team also support enquires relating to the wheelie bin roll out programme. The nature of calls handled by the team include: -

- Garden waste payments
- Garden waste enquiries
- Wheelie bin enquiries
- Replacement or lost bin payments
- Bulky waste payments
- Bulky waste enquiries

By providing a dedicated team of advisors who are expert in service knowledge delivers consistency in the advice being provided to members of the public. This has been important during the service transformation phases in Fleet & Waste where there are many new, specific or additional processes to be managed.

Additionally by taking debit / credit card payments over the telephone, we need to ensure compliance to PCI security regulations. The dedicated team allows us to create the correct environment to meet these requirements.

The team has been in place since August 2013; the size of the team fluctuates throughout the year from 12 to 25 Advisors. Call volumes in relation to wheelie bin rollouts, garden waste renewal offers and the commencement of garden waste collections drive increases in call demand. To date in 2015 calls to the payment team represent 46% of all Fleet & Waste calls.

For garden waste there is typically 3 peaks in call demand during the year, these are: -

- The discounted renewal offer during the month of December
- The commencement of collections in late February and early March
- The late spring bank holiday in May

As we move into 2016 the support given to wheelie bins will reduce as the roll out across the city will be completed by the end of 2015.

## **8) Customer Refund Process**

Refunds are given for service failures around bulky waste and green waste. Fleet and Waste Management carry out this process following investigation (which includes removal of the green bin following a garden waste refund). In the six months from April to September 2015 the service have issued 300 refunds with 90% for the green waste service and 10% for bulky waste. This refund process is currently under review to ensure it is efficient.

## 9) Resolution Champions

Customer Services earlier this year introduced a team of Resolution Champions to the Contact Centre, for Fleet & Waste this involves 4 members of staff. The role of the Resolution Champion firmly sits within the live environment in the Contact Centre, the aim is to have a group of senior customer service focused Advisors who have advanced system, service area and customer knowledge.

Resolution Champions are supporting the call handling teams with the immediate resolution of escalated enquiries, repeated service failure, complaints and “on the call” issues which arise. This approach aims to proactively reduce repeat calls, improve the citizen experience and remove further escalation or ongoing complaint. To be successful in this task the Resolution Champions have direct contact with members of staff within the service area. This supports in gaining background information, progressing updates and reaching resolution to the issue in hand. Our Fleet & Waste Resolution Champions have also been meeting with the service area to discuss challenges and close knowledge gaps.

By means of illustration, one of our Resolution Champions during September managed 344 separate interactions, 85% of these were connected to 6 specific areas: -

- Missed collections - 43%
- Collection of old bins and recycling boxes - 20%
- Wheelie bins - 6%
- Fly tipping – 6%
- Clinical waste – 6%
- Bulky waste – 4%

## 10) Customer Satisfaction

Customer Services undertake an ongoing customer satisfaction survey across the services areas that access the Contact Centre. There are 2 separate methods taken to capture feedback, these are by SMS text messaging and e-mail.

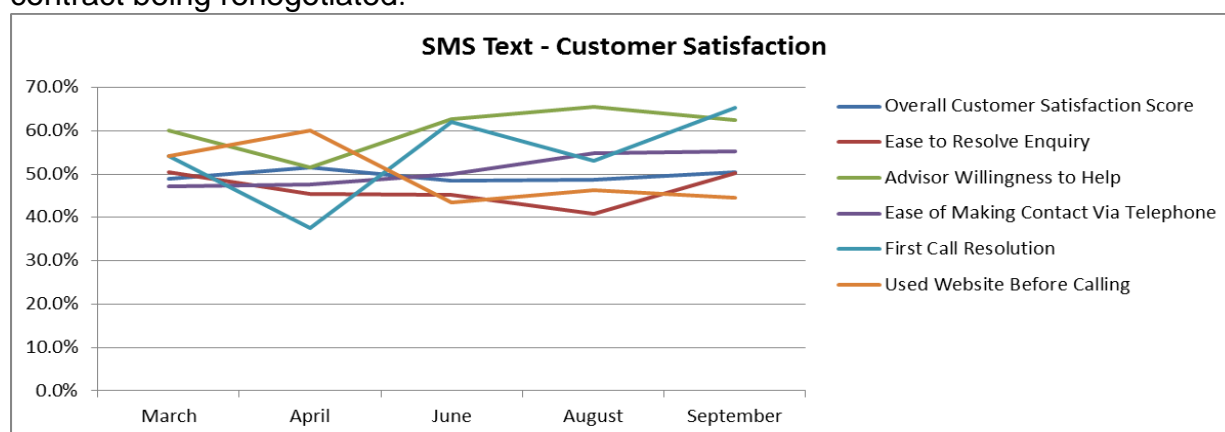
*SMS text survey* – Is a daily survey sent to a random proportion of citizens that called the council via their mobile (approximately 65% of callers use their mobile). A text message directs citizens to a website where they respond to 6 questions with a score of 1 to 10, additionally there is also the option to leave a comment on why they scored us that way.

A citizen will only receive a maximum of one text per month and has the option to opt out.

The following tables and graphs represent Customer Satisfaction specifically for Fleet & Waste.

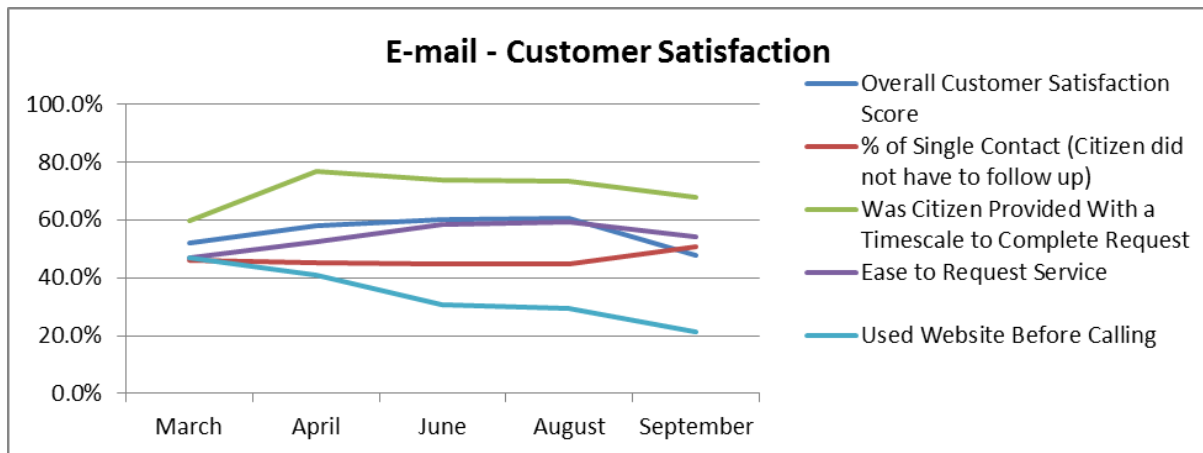
<b>SMS Text</b>	Overall Customer Satisfaction Score	Ease to Resolve Enquiry	Advisor Willingness to Help	Ease of Making Contact Via Telephone	First Call Resolution	Used Website Before Calling
March	48.8%	50.4%	60.0%	47.1%	54.2%	54.2%
April	51.6%	45.4%	51.6%	47.6%	37.5%	60.0%
June	48.5%	45.3%	62.7%	50.0%	62.0%	43.5%
August	48.6%	40.8%	65.5%	54.9%	53.1%	46.3%
September	50.4%	50.2%	62.5%	55.2%	65.2%	44.6%

Note – During May & July the survey was not commissioned due to the supplier contract being renegotiated.



**E-mail survey** – Is a weekly e-mail survey sent to all citizens whose service request has been marked as complete within CRM (typically these service requests are fulfilled by the service area directly). The survey is similar in nature to the SMS text survey although the questions are directed to how satisfied the citizen was with the whole service provided by the council and not just by the Contact Centre.

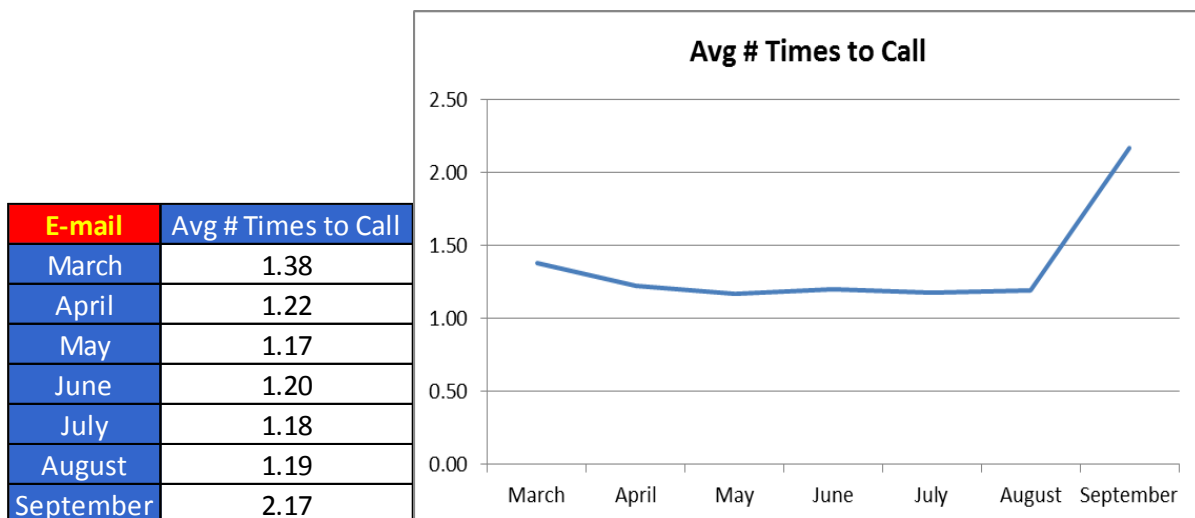
<b>E-mail</b>	Overall Customer Satisfaction Score	% of Single Contact (Citizen did not have to follow up)	Was Citizen Provided With a Timescale to Complete Request	Ease to Request Service	Used Website Before Calling
March	52.1%	46.2%	59.8%	46.7%	46.7%
April	58.0%	45.3%	76.6%	52.3%	41.0%
June	60.3%	44.8%	73.8%	58.6%	30.6%
August	60.5%	44.8%	73.4%	59.4%	29.3%
September	47.7%	50.7%	67.7%	54.1%	21.3%



The customer satisfaction e-mail survey is reporting an overall downward trend in satisfaction during the Perry Barr roll out period (June onwards) when an increased level of missed collections has been experienced.

The higher level of missed collections has a direct impact on citizens using the web site to report the service failure; this decrease is evidenced in the above graph when looking at “Used Website Before Calling”

The “Average number of times to call” reported below captures the number of calls the citizen needed to make to the Contact Centre in relation to their service request.



## 11) Initiatives

**Depot Alerts** - An initiative has been introduced for each of the Fleet & Waste depots to report on the day service interruptions to the Contact Centre. An e-mail alert is sent by the depot admin team detailing the streets where a missed collection has taken place. The alert also provides an explanation for the missed collection, such as a vehicle breakdown, shortage of drivers or a street access issue.

The Contact Centre currently receives on average 20 to 30 reports each month. This information when provided assists call handling when citizens call to report a missed collection. A missed collection is still recorded but by being able to provide an

acknowledgment and reason for the missed collections means citizens can have an increased confidence that the interruption is known and is being managed.

***Text Message & E-mail Updates*** - When a service request has been completed and the job has been closed off, CRM sends an update to the citizen to confirm. This update is either in the format of a text message or e-mail depending on the citizen's preference. It was recognised that the existing messages contained within the update was not specific or helpful. This meant the update could cause additional follow up calls or complaints. We are aware that historically there have been complaints made that text messages have been sent out when the service request has not been resolved. We believe that there have been improvements in ensuring that jobs are not closed prematurely and are continuing to monitor this aspect of service discrepancy.

A review of all alerts has been undertaken to make the updates more meaningful, for example:-

Old Update

*Update for: Missed Collection*

*Ref: 800012345*

*Status: Closed-Not Collected – Bin Tagged*

New Update

*Update for: Missed Collection*

*Ref: 800012345*

*Status: Sorry, we can't action this request as our records tell us your bin has been tagged.*

*There is information on the tag that tells you why your bin hasn't been emptied. Further information can be found at [birmingham.gov.uk/recycling](http://birmingham.gov.uk/recycling)*

Improving the content of the updates will reduce enquiries to the Contact Centre; reduce escalation and complaint by providing a more informative update.

The service is keen to explore the use of text messaging further. Suggestions to be considered are:

- Reminders to put out waste ready for collection
- Information about problems with specific routes / roads

***On line information*** - The Service has been proactively reviewing its Web Pages – providing up to date information and removing old pages/broken links. The page feedback mechanism is used to identify improvements and current focus is on:

- Updating the pages on Garden Waste and preparing for the 2016 cycle
- Redesigning the page on Missed Collections to suggest why collections may have been missed
- Updating on the Wheeled Bin rollout

We expect to complete these improvements by the end of the year.

**Outbound Calling Surveys** - During April & May the Customer Services Contact Centre embarked on 2 outbound calling survey campaigns on behalf of Fleet & Waste for garden waste. The aim was to capture feedback via a short telephone survey, the focus of the surveys were: -

- Citizens who had purchased the garden waste service for 2015
- Citizens who had not renewed the service in 2015

The objective was to ask 4 to 6 questions to establish the resident's experience of the service in the current year or to establish the reason for not renewing. The findings from both surveys have assisted Fleet & Waste in understanding how the garden waste service is being perceived. Copies of both surveys are shown in appendix 1.

**Service Telephone Lines** - Historically there have been 7 separate telephone numbers in use to reach Fleet & Waste at the Contact Centre. This array of numbers to contact the council is unnecessary and can be somewhat confusing to have varying numbers for the same service. We are currently streamlining the 7 numbers to 1 number, which will be the main 0121 303 1112 telephone line. Taking this approach ensures a consistent number is provided and used with citizens, marketing and promotional activity. The numbers being taken out of service will be done in a phased approach, citizens calling these numbers will be advised via an IVR message about the changes taking place. The IVR messages will remain in place for 2 months before the telephone lines are decommissioned.

**Longer Term Initiatives** - There are some longer term initiatives currently being developed to support our insight into how members of the public perceive the service they are receiving, these include:-

- Development of a database for our Resolution Champions to record all interactions. Allowing us to evaluate the volumes, nature and outcomes to the resolutions they are managing. The database will provide management insight to identify: -
  - Service failure themes and causes
  - Service improvements
  - Volume reduction opportunities
  - Improve 1<sup>st</sup> call resolution
  - Identify any knowledge gaps or training needs
- Working with the verbatim data being captured via the customer satisfaction survey. This data presents us with a rich source of feedback. The development is to create the tools which can extrapolate the key trends and sentiment from the data to present opportunities to improve service delivery and identify what is working well. A database tool is currently being developed to assist with this reporting, we expect this to be implemented within quarter 1 of 2016.

- The benefit of using verbatim data proactivity is shown by the recent introduction of a weekly “call back report”. The report analyses the verbatim comments captured in the customer satisfaction survey to identify feedback which suggests the expectation of the citizen has not been met. The report seeks out words, phrases and sentiment which may suggest this, the feedback is then reviewed by the Contact Centre and a call back is made to the citizen to resolve the situation. This approach may prevent additional calls, escalations and complaints, however more importantly it instils renewed confidence in demonstrating we want to fix what has went wrong and displays we act upon the feedback given.

As we come to the end of 2015 the transformation of service to wheelie bins will be completed, this offers a period of stability for 2016. Further developments in Fleet & Waste include the full implementation of “slab in the cab” for all collections rounds, a citywide process for bin retrievals from properties not renewing for the garden waste service and the yearly planning to manage garden waste renewals from December. The service focus is on getting it right first time.

## **12) Compliance to Contact Centre Processes**

***Calls made directly to the Depots*** - One of the key areas of service change that is required to comply with the corporate processes is to ensure that as far as possible, all calls are routed through the contact centre. We have established that a significant amount of calls are going directly to the Depots which means we are not getting a full picture of service demand and additional staffing resource is required to answer the calls.

- August 2015: Calls made to Depots – 2956
- Calls answered by Depots – 2532
- Answer rate 82%
- Average of 50% of calls were from citizens requesting a service

***Proposals to route calls to the Contact Centre*** - The volume and nature of calls is being explored to look at how we can encourage the service calls to go to the contact centre. This includes the redirection of numbers that are currently in use and were not part of the original transfer to the contact centre.

***Contact made directly to Senior Officers, by email & phone*** - Many of the senior officers in the service receive phone calls and direct emails about problems with the service from Members. This can cause confusion in the service area, sometimes a duplication of work and additional work for the teams to reply to correspondence on simple complaints. There is a need to encourage all Elected Member contact to be made via the dedicated phone line and mail box in the contact centre so we can ensure consistency of reporting, response and ensure that all enquiries are treated with equal importance:

Email address [SBCCCouncilorsEnquiry@ServiceBirmingham.co.uk](mailto:SBCCCouncilorsEnquiry@ServiceBirmingham.co.uk)  
Dedicated phone line is **0121 303 5900**



Note – The address of the inbox will be updated in due course to reflect a Birmingham City Council e-mail address, when update this will be promoted to elected members.

Councillors will contact the CC at the above dedicated Mailbox, which a select group of experienced CC Advisors will handle. Depending on the nature of the email one of the following two actions will be taken:

1. **General Enquiry** - If the email is a general enquiry it will be handled by the advisor and a "General Enquiry Service Ticket" will be raised as is the normal process. In addition a response to the email will be sent to the Councillor, which will include an enquiry reference number.
2. **Escalation to a Manager** - If the Advisor is unable to answer the enquiry (this will include non-compliance of Data Protection) the email will be escalated to a Senior Advisor or Team Manager for a response.

### 13) Tacking Service Failure

The Fleet and Waste Management Customer Services Team is responsible for enquiry and complaints management, including Councillor enquiries, Your Views, co-ordination with Contact Centre resources, garden waste payment enquiries and web page updates. The team was expanded in 2013 as part of the Wheeled Bin Programme and again in 2014 with the advent of the chargeable garden waste collection services with additional resources to give additional capacity for dealing with enquiries about the new services. The current level of performance on responses to enquires are at 98% (August 2015) but this is at a cost to the service of increased resources. Due to the budgetary challenges facing the service it is essential that we look at demand reduction for this support area.

The statistics on service failure show a direct correlation with service changes to levels of complaints received by the service and accounts for peaks in the statistics for example, with wheeled bin roll out.

Not all complaints to the service are fully reflected in the service statistics due to them being made direct to the service through the depots and directly to the managers/senior officers. The main cause of complaint is around missed collections and the following actions are being taken to address issues of service failure:

**Missed collections** - This is highlighted as the biggest area of focus for the operational teams and their managers for immediate action. The key activity being undertaken is:

- Focus on the performance information and data available with Depot Managers being held accountable for improvements
- Introduction of New Technology (slab in the cab) was installed in the garden waste vehicles to enable the crews to view routes and report issues (e.g. bin not presented). The Slab was integrated with CRM in summer 2015 providing Contact Centre advisors with real time information.

- Further roll out of the technology to all vehicles to be completed by summer 2016 so that missed collection information is fully recorded and available in real time. We are currently looking as to ways to bring this implementation forward.

**Repeat missed collections** - Additional focus on this area by the Senior Team to look at key issues with focus on

- Analysis of the reasons for repeated service failure and associated performance management issues
- Flats – not currently on our technical database to allow for focussed performance monitoring. Plans being prepared to include this specific type of property.
- Assisted collections – establish the cause of the issue and ensure the teams take responsibility for ensuring the collections are made. The ‘slab in the cab’ rollout supports this additional requirement.
- New builds – this process currently tends to be reactive rather than proactive and the service is reviewing how information about new builds is passed to the service to redress this balance.

**Correct application of closure codes** - Following the decisions around the Birmingham Promise to include all missed collection reports, regardless of collection dates, it is very important that the service area inputs the correct closure date when they close down the jobs. This will ensure that the reporting against the Birmingham Promise is accurate and that the text messages received by the citizen are accurate.

## 14) Planning for the Future

**Getting it right first time** - The result of this will be a reduction in demand on the contact centre and consequently costs to the service. The embedding in of Wheeled Bin operations will reduce demand for Contact Centre support and the demand on the back office complaints team in the Service.

**Proactive communication** - We aim to share our data to be transparent about service delivery and failure.

### **Waste contract re-procurement processes:**

- Reduce waste coming in to the waste stream
- Reuse: redirect to others e.g., Ladywood Furniture Project and Upcycle
- Recycle : prioritise waste for recycling focussing on value for money and our green credentials

Work is underway to produce a vision and develop a strategy detailing the Council’s approach to all aspects of waste management from 2019 and beyond.

### **A balanced budget and significant contribution to the City’s savings targets -**

All aspects of the service are under review to look at opportunity for efficiency and savings. This work links into the Future Council Programme.

***Waste prevention and customer engagement around the waste prevention (3R's) agenda*** - Compliance is sought from residents using the wheelie bins through education, awareness raising and ultimately an enforcement process. Roadshows, community engagement and support are provided in attempt to deliver increased recycling and reduced landfill from waste presented by residents. Where none compliance with the requisite procedure is found the household will be advised served a notice and in extreme cases served with a fixed penalty notice.

Since 1st April 2015 the waste prevention team have responded to incorrectly presented waste by issuing:

- 501 Refuse Warning Letters
- 4164 Recycling Warning Letters
- 916 section 46 Letters
- 27 fixed penalty notices

## Appendix 1 – Outbound Calling Surveys

### Green Waste – Outbound Calling Survey

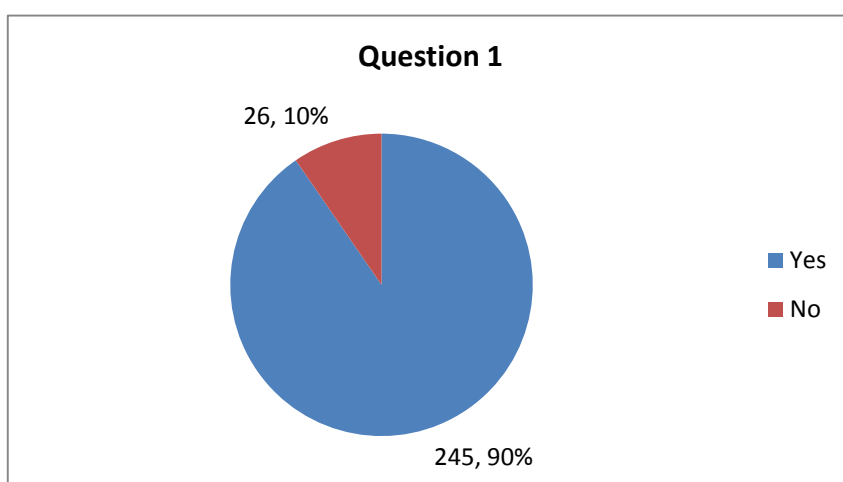
#### Background

During April 2015 the Customer Services Contact Centre embarked on an outbound calling campaign on behalf of Fleet & Waste to conduct a short call survey with residents who had purchased the garden waste service for 2015. The objective of the survey was to ask 6 questions to establish the residents experience from the initial purchase to the actual service delivery.

A total of 874 call attempts were made from a team of 2 advisors, 271 surveys were completed with 88 residents declining to take part. The remaining 515 call attempts are attributed to no answers, deadlines and engaged calls. From the 359 residents we spoke to 75.4% completed the survey. The findings from the completed survey are provided below.

#### Survey Results

Q1 - Would you recommend the Garden Waste service to friends and family in Birmingham?



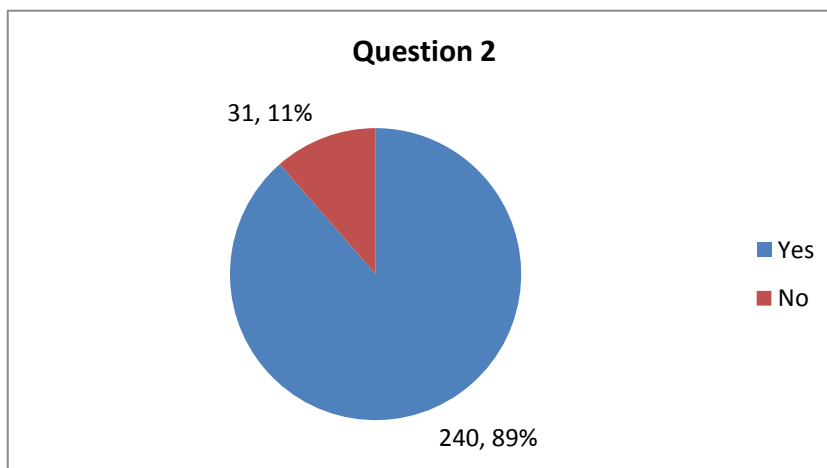
25 of the responders stated they would not recommend the service with the key reason being the cost of the service, many feeling the service should not be chargeable.

Residents stating dissatisfaction just stated they were “not happy” without any specific reason.

The “other” category includes 1 resident having no one to recommend the service to, another who had yet to start using the service and a resident who felt they had no other option but to purchase the service.

Cost of service	11	44%
Dissatisfaction	2	8%
Missed collections	6	24%
Other	6	24%

Q2 - Was the booking service easy to use?



89% of surveyed residents found the booking of the service easy.

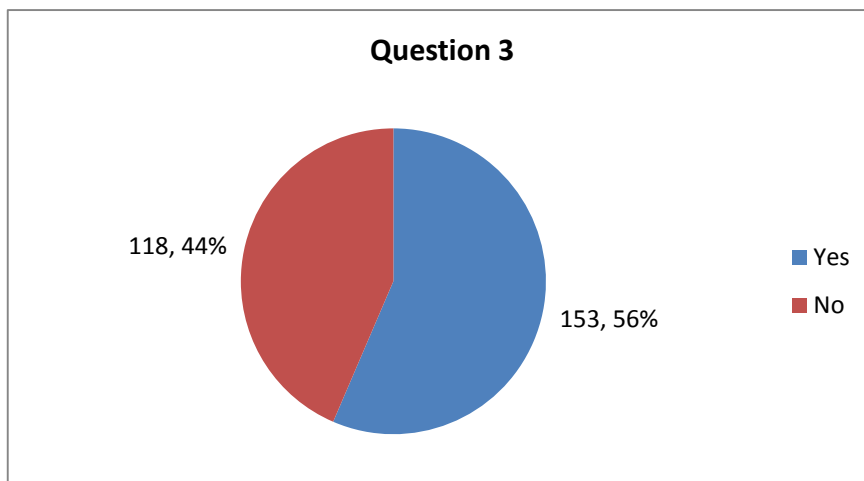
However there were some residents who shifted to online because telephone lines were busy during the December discounted offer.

17 of responses cited “ease of use” and “renewal process” via the web site as an issue. Residents returning to renew were confused thinking they were purchasing the service for another bin to be delivered. Additionally the setting up online one accounts needed to purchase the service caused difficulty with password set ups.

Accessibility relates to residents who are not on-line / web enabled.

Accessibility	4	13%
Other	3	13%
Payment line busy	7	22%
Renewal issue	2	6%
Website ease of use	15	47%

Q3 - Would a direct debit payment system be of interest to you in future years?



Q4 - Where did you hear about this service?

The table below is suggesting letter correspondence and newspaper advertising has been the most responsive channels of communication and promotion.

Email Marketing	Letter	Newspaper	Other	Radio Advert	Roadshow	Website	Word of Mouth
8	125	78	0	1	2	9	37
3%	48%	30%	0%	0%	1%	3%	14%

Q5 - What do you think of the service that you have had so far this year?

84% of responders stated that the service was good to excellent, 4% responded negatively.

1.Very Poor	2. Poor	3 OK	4.Good	5.Excellent
3	7	31	96	134
1%	3%	11%	35%	49%

Q6 - Any other comments or suggestions for improvement

Bigger bins	4	4%
Bin placement by crew after collection	9	9%
Collection of side waste	3	3%
Deal with fly tipping	2	2%
Full year service	4	4%
Ensure no missed collections	7	7%
More frequent collections	4	4%
Other (breakdown below)	6	6%
Payment options	7	7%
Provide collection calendar	5	5%
Reduce / remove the fee	34	35%
Option of sacks	6	6%
Website needs improving	5	5%

**“Other”**

Bulky waste service should be highlighted / promoted more
Customer did not feel service is working due to bags being collected even for people who have not paid.
Reinstate each resident being able to have at least one bulky waste collection
Improve refund process because it took had taken 3 months.
Resident hasn't used the service as of yet
Not enough notification was provided for when GGW started 2015

## Green Renewals – Outbound Calling Survey

### Background

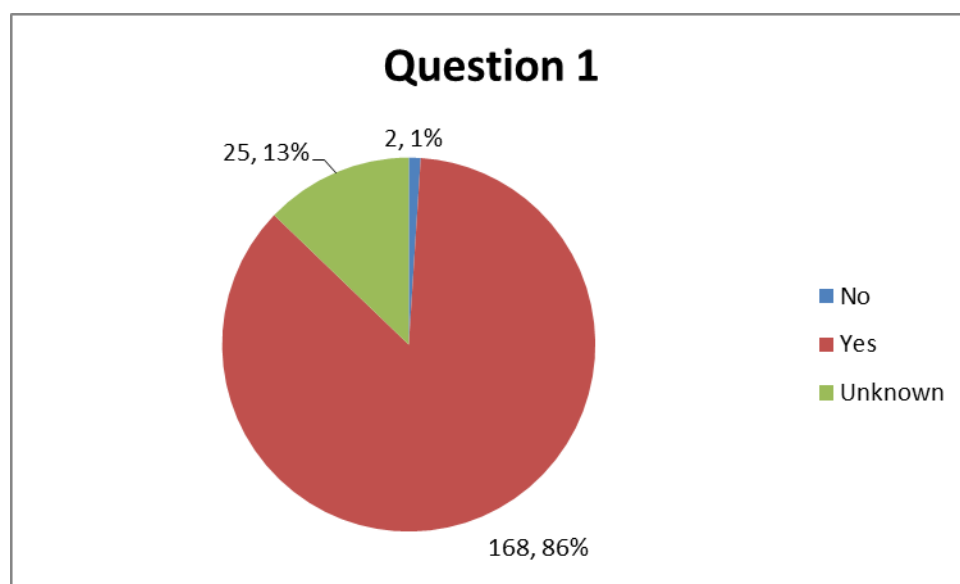
During May and June 2015 the Customer Services Contact Centre embarked on an outbound calling campaign on behalf of Fleet & Waste to conduct a short call survey with residents who had purchased the garden waste service in 2014 but had not renewed in 2015. The objective of the survey was to ask 4 questions to establish the resident's reasons for not renewing in 2015.

A total of 803 call attempts were made from a team of 2 advisors, 195 surveys were completed with 38 residents declining to take part. The remaining 573 call attempts are attributed to no answers, deadlines and engaged calls. From the 236 residents we spoke to 83.8% took part in the survey. The findings from the completed survey are provided below.

There was a further 63 customer records not called due to identifying the resident had renewed before making the outbound call.

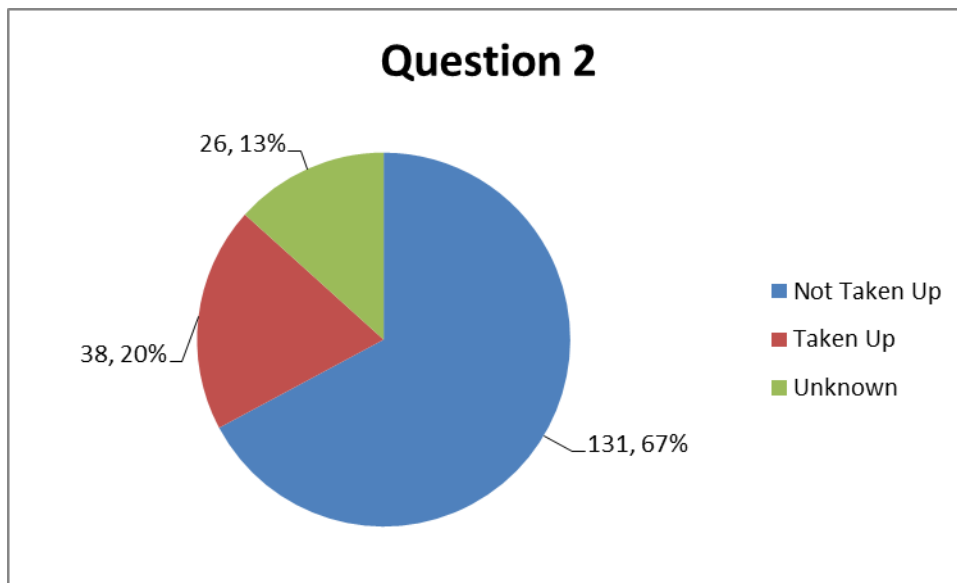
### Survey Results

Q1 - Did the resident use the service in 2014?

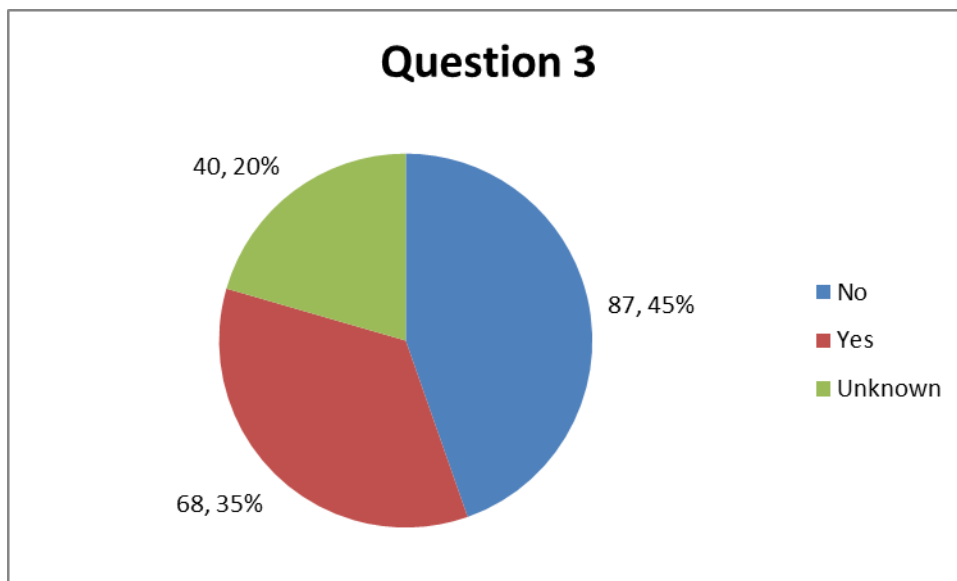


In 25 cases we could not establish if the property had purchased the service in 2014, this was because another member of the household participated in the survey or there was a change in resident at the property.

Q2 – Had the resident taken up the service for 2015?



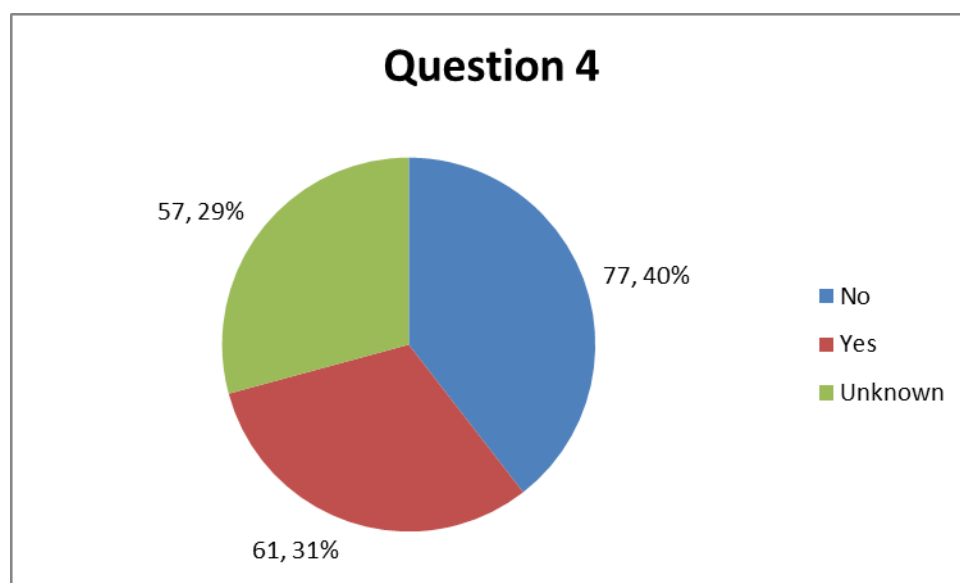
Q3 - Had the resident received a reminder to renew?



From the 68 responders who acknowledged the reminder to renew, 47 stated they received a letter and 21 stated they had received an e-mail.



Q4 - Will the resident be taking up the service this year?



From residents who responded stating “Yes”, the outbound call advisor was able to obtain a renewal during the call in 31 cases. Across the 195 contacts made during calling this represents 15.89%.

A further 28 “yes” responders stated it was not convenient to process a renewal or that they did not have payment details to hand (5). This equated to 14.35% of contacts during calling.

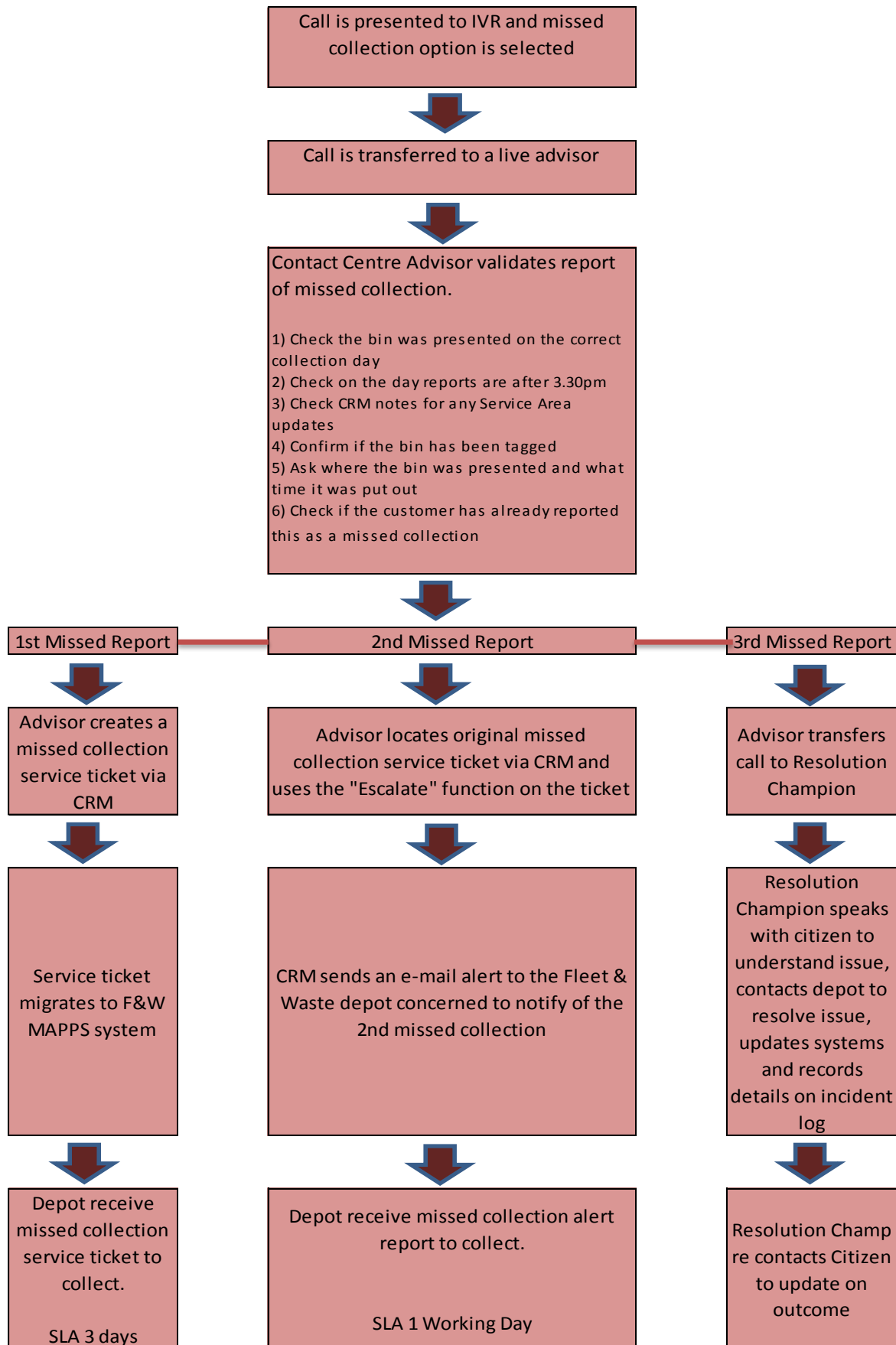
92 of responders representing 47.17% of contacts provided the following reasons as to why they would not be renewing the service.

Not Renewing Reason	Total	%
Change of address	13	14.1%
Service no longer required	10	10.9%
Will use HRC	11	12.0%
Prefers sacks	8	8.7%
Further consideration / Undecided	12	13.0%
Dissatisfaction with service	4	4.3%
Sharing with neighbour	4	4.3%
Has made alternative arrangements	4	4.3%
Did not use service enough	16	17.4%
Price	6	6.5%
Cost - Full cost for partial year	1	1.1%
Bin replacement cost	1	1.1%
Composting	1	1.1%
Disputes non-payer collections	1	1.1%

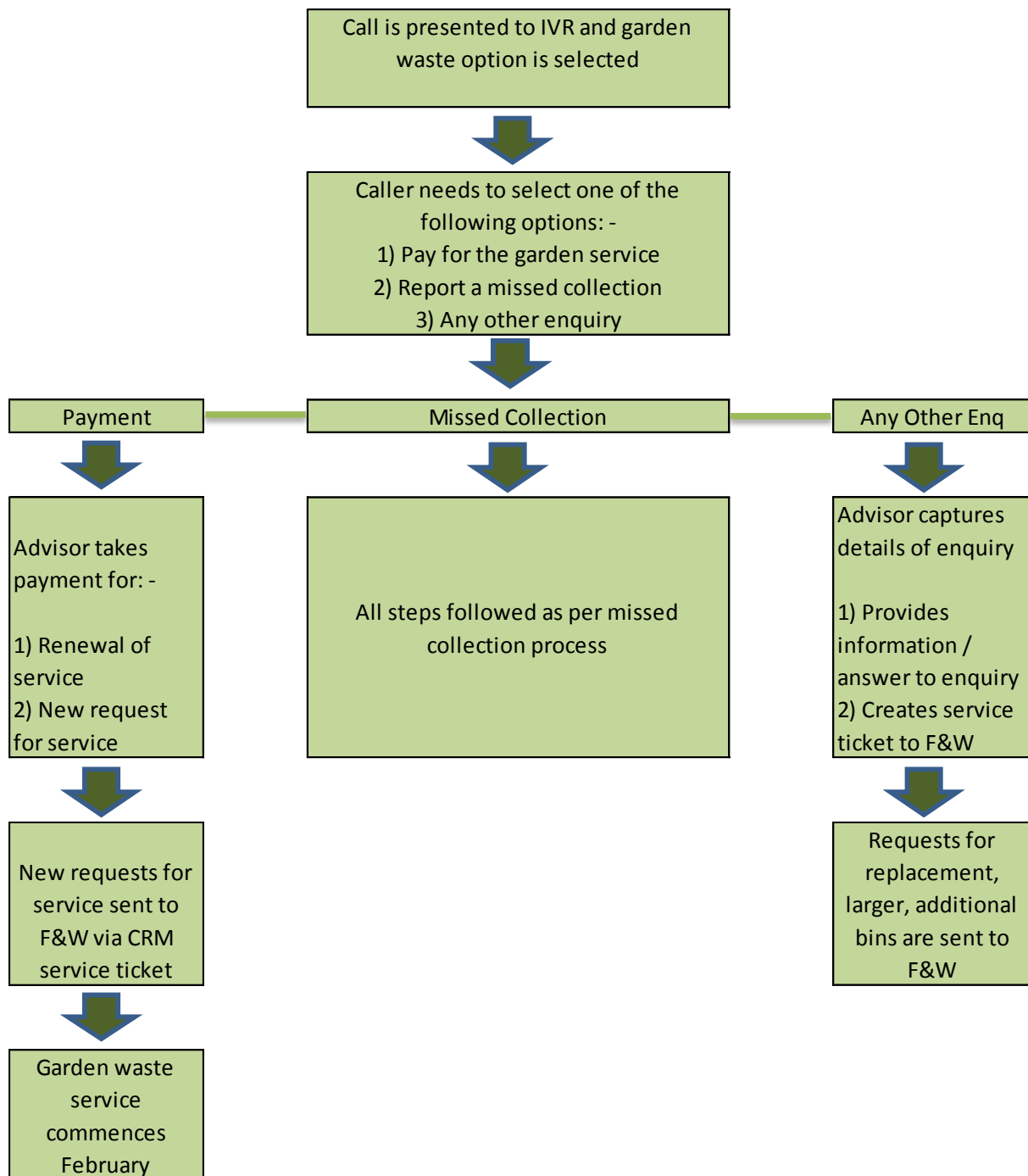
When asking residents who did not intend to renew the service how they intended to dispose of garden waste the response rate was low, however we can see from the above table the HRC is the main alternative option.

## 15)Appendix 2 – Call Centre Processes

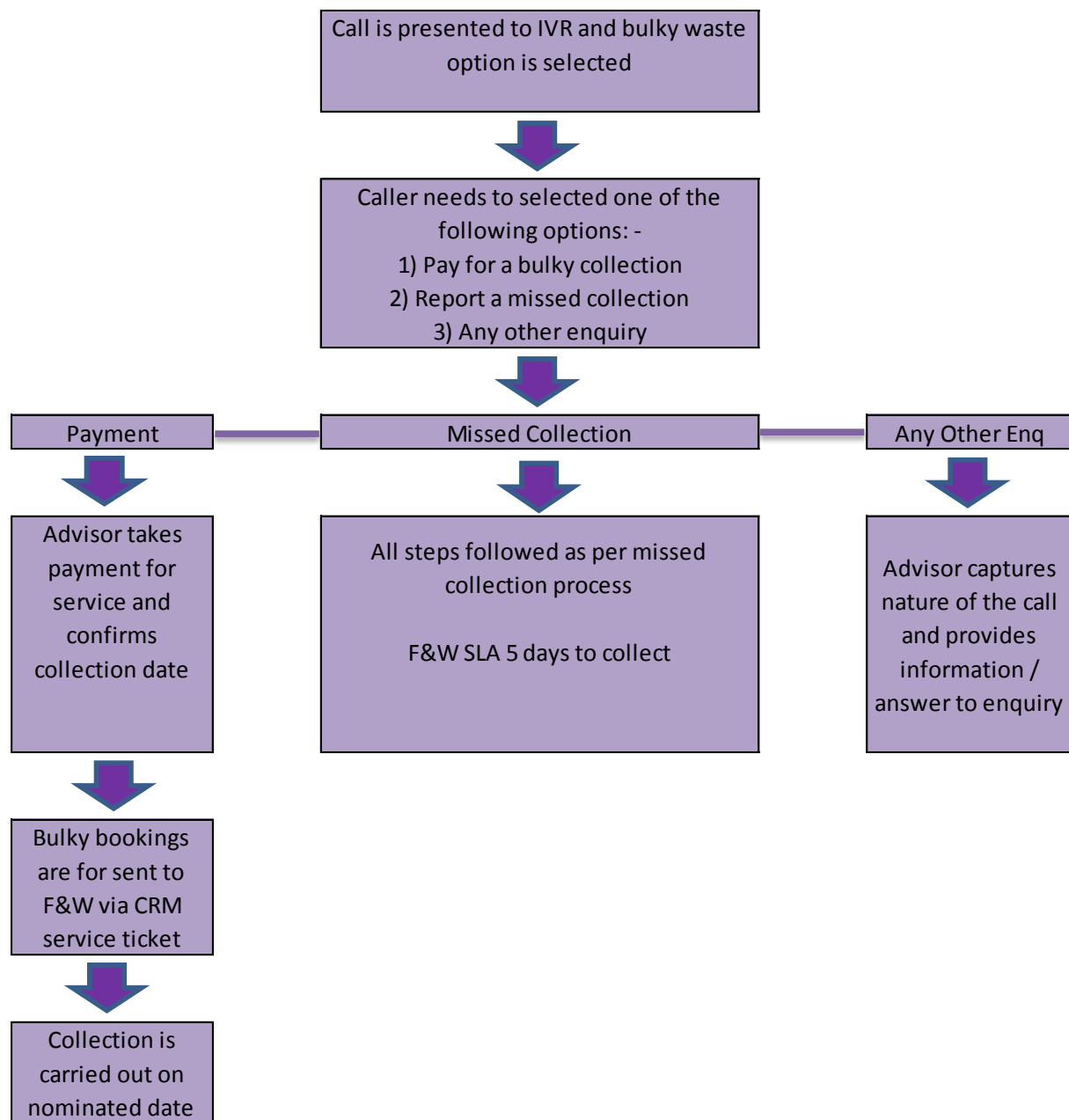
### Missed Collection



## Garden Waste



## Bulky Waste



## **Customer Services Division – Birmingham City Council**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Report – Council Tax**

**October 2015**

**Report prepared by – Georgina Foxwell, Head of Business Change and Service Improvement**

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#### **1. Background Information**

The Revenues Service is a key front-line service that touches every household and business within Birmingham.

There are approx. 440,000 Council Tax accounts in Birmingham, and the vast majority of citizens make payment of their Council Tax without the need to contact BCC.

Council Tax and Business Rates are the most significant source of income to the City, generating £469.6 million per year for the City (£271.2m from Council Tax and £198.4m from Business Rates), which allows the Authority to provide necessary services for all Birmingham residents, and meets its key priorities.

However, there will always be situations where citizens will need to make contact, as a result of changes in their individual circumstances, etc. In addition, where citizens are facing difficulties in meeting their payments they are requested to make contact as soon as possible to ensure that accounts can be dealt with appropriately, and stop the requirement for further enforcement and recovery action being taken.

There are, unfortunately, those citizens who do ignore various attempts to make contact, which results in further communications being sent. However, in the majority of cases this will eventually result in the citizen making contact in order to set up a Special Payment Arrangement, to notify the City of a change in circumstances or to raise a general query.

The initial telephone calls from citizens are handled in City's corporate contact centre whilst the back office function is outsourced to Service Birmingham.

## 2. Service Birmingham Role

Birmingham City Council has outsourced its Revenues Council Tax and Business Rates Service Operation to Service Birmingham since April 2011.

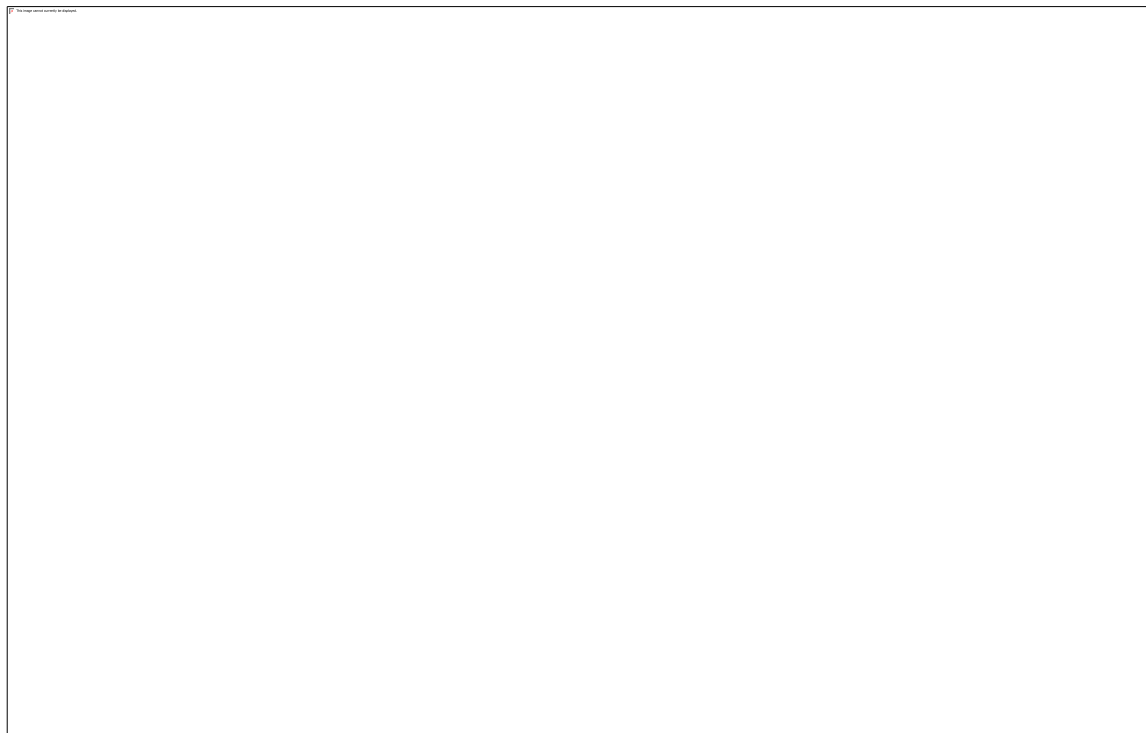
Service Birmingham provides the statutory function for the billing, collection, recovery, enforcement and administration of Council Tax and Business Rates, maintains all appropriate databases and ensures compliance with all appropriate legislation and regulations.

Due diligence and investigation was undertaken prior to the awarding of the Revenues Contract to ensure that Birmingham City Council achieved both value for money and the provision of an effective Revenues Service which delivered against agreed key contractual performance measures.

The SB Revenues Contract has a set of key performance indicators to ensure collection levels of 98% over a 3 year period which allows the City Council's budget, in terms of discretionary expenditure, to be achieved and its budget to be balanced. The Contract, now in its 5th year of operation, continues to provide this and has over-performed against the targeted collection rates across a number of years.

## 3. Call volumes and types

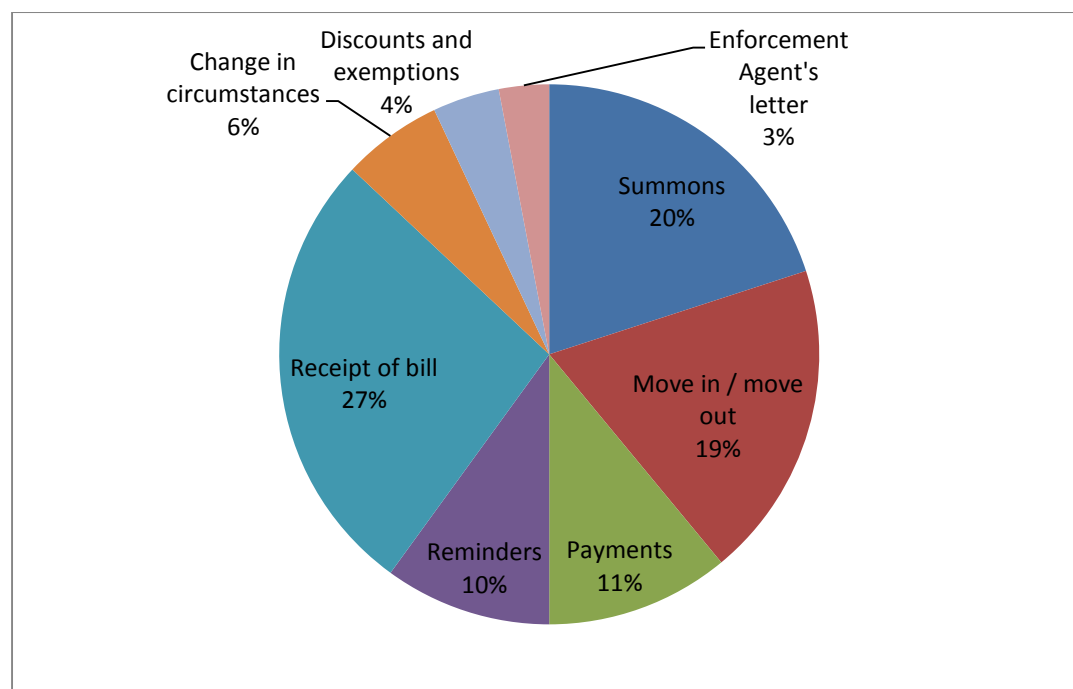
The following graph shows the volume of calls answered at the contact centre by month from April 2012 to September 2015. The chart below shows the underlying data.



The contact centre receives a number of enquiry types for Council Tax. These include:-

- Move in / Move out
- Change in circumstances
- Discounts and exemptions
- Payments – missing payments, refunds, transfers
- Query following receipt of bill
- Query following receipt of reminder
- Query following receipt of summons
- Query following Enforcement Agent (Bailiff's) letter

The typical breakdown of enquiry types is shown in the pie chart below. It should be noted that this breakdown will change during the course of the year eg at annual billing time the proportion of queries following receipt of the bill is likely to increase.



#### 4. Mailing Sequence

65% of citizens pay their Council Tax by direct debit and rarely need to contact the Council unless they experience a change in circumstances.

The majority of contact is from citizens who do not use direct debit.

Citizens are given a number chances to clear their debt before being issued with a summons to attend Court as follows:-

- Initial bill
- Reminder 1
- Reminder 2
- Final notice
- Summons

The following table shows the volume of different mailing types that were despatched last year:-

#### **2014/15 Output – Daily CT Bills, Reminders, Final Notices, Summons and 14 Day Letters.**

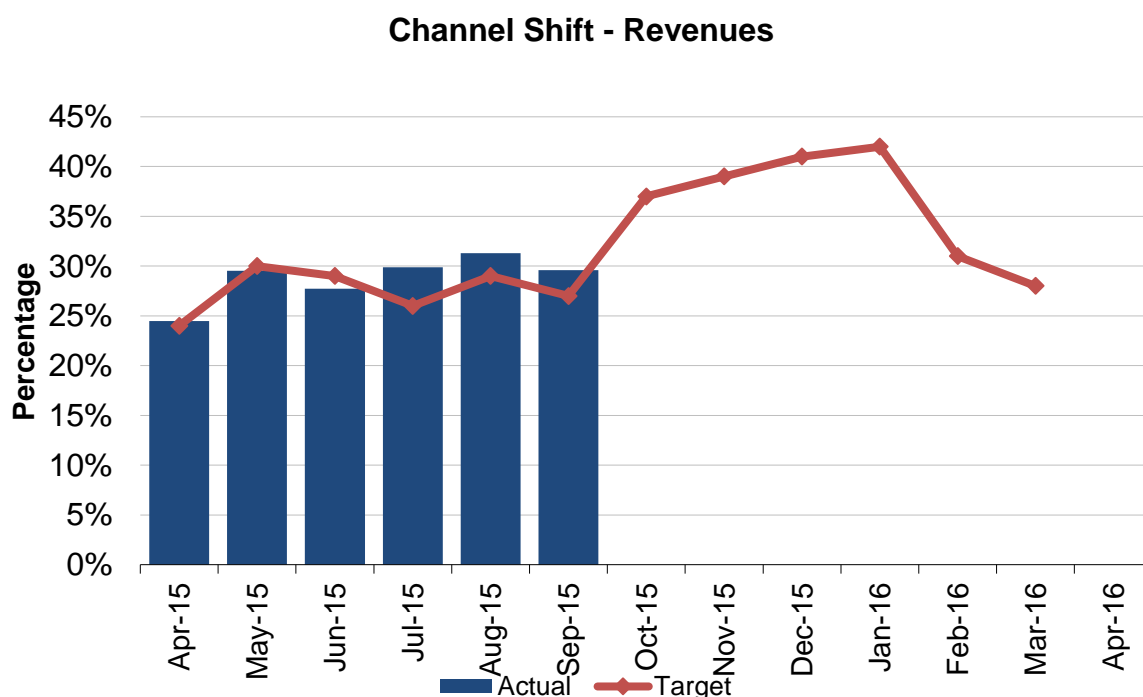
Month	Bills	Reminder 1	Reminder 2	Final Notice	Summons	14 day letter
April	97391	44083	39	12	1602	3835
May	48803	38078	3070	3	12000	3698
June	48731	17310	7048	535	16000	10769
July	56720	16439	4920	1719	12000	10280
August	44617	15946	3841	4286	10567	14568
September	51610	9238	3965	2090	10246	9056
October	50934	13933	4223	2420	4778	8268
November	43605	13046	3181	2293	5153	3647
December	44686	12922	3732	2407	8000	3935
January	44482	15093	3332	2349	4934	6313
February	43948	5152	2112	932	5545	3706
March	12711	11199	1135	358	8383	4098
Total	588238	212439	40598	19404	99208	82173

NB – In addition during the Annual Billing Period in March approx. 440,000 bills are issued



## 5. Web Developments and Channel Shift

Channel shift is a corporate target. In 2015/16 four key services are included in the measurement of the target – Benefits, Council Tax, Fleet and Waste Management and Housing Repairs. The graph below shows the target for Council Tax and the actual achievement by month.



To date, channel shift performance has been in line or slightly exceeded the forecast projections for 2015/16. Analysis shows that the volume of calls in 2015/16 is on average 26.5% lower than in 2014/15 whilst the volume of online transactions completed is fairly static at an average of 11,600 per month.

A number of improvements have already been made to the Council Tax pages on the website to support channel shift and to improve customer satisfaction with the website. These are designed to make it easier to find the information; to better understand the information; and to take the correct action without needing to speak to anyone.

The main changes are as follows:-

- The Council Tax landing page has been planned around usage evidence and citizen priorities and complaints to allow easy access to services and content.
- Making a Council Tax payment has been added to the home page as a top task and this has resulted in an increase in the number of citizens utilising the online automated payment facility.
- All Council Tax pages have been reviewed, duplicate content has been removed, language has been simplified, the layout has been changed so that it is easier to find key information and links, and pages have been split where there was previously too much information on one page.
- New pages have been created
  - Council Tax Bands and Charges – this information was not easy to find and therefore citizens had to ring the contact centre. A new page is easily accessible from the Council Tax landing page and clearly shows how much the charge is for each band and how the amount is made up.
  - Problems paying your council tax – this page outlines the various stages in the recovery process, what the citizen should do at each stage and what will happen if they ignore the letters.
  - Your Council Tax bill explained – shows a copy of a bill and what each piece of information means.
  - Council Tax student discounts – a page dedicated to students and how Council Tax applies to them and what they need to do.
- A feedback widget has been applied to all of the Council Tax pages. This enables customer feedback (both positive and negative) to be routed through to the Web Team as soon as it has been left. The Web Team are then able to make changes to the pages very quickly and let the citizen know as soon as this has been done.
- Paying by Direct Debit has been given a higher profile.

## 6. Integrated Voice Response (IVR) or Automated Messaging Review

Customer Services has undertaken a full review of the existing IVR messaging presented to citizens at the start of a Council Tax call. Feedback through customer satisfaction surveys and Your Views evidenced a level of dissatisfaction with the current set up. The review had the clear aims of:-

- Removing repeated messages
- Reducing the amount of messaging and wording
- Reducing the number of selection menus and options to press
- Reducing the time to reach an Advisor

The revised IVR is due to be implemented by the end of October. The new IVR has retained key information, instructions and messages that are helpful to the caller. The intention is that the flow of the IVR will be quicker and easier for the citizen to navigate.

The key changes are as follows:-

- The number of options on the main Council Tax menu has reduced to just 3 options whereas previously it was 5.
- The number of layers is now typically 2 and the lengthy information messages have been removed.
- The out of hours messaging has been substantially reduced by removing unnecessary and lengthy messages. Callers are now either given the option of being put through to the automated payment line or going on to the website for more information.
- The general wording has been simplified making it easier for customers to select the correct option.
- The typical journey through the IVR has reduced from 3 mins 27 secs for a change in circs and 2 mins 43 secs for a reminder letter to around 1 minute.

## 7. Current contact centre processes

Please refer to Appendix 1 for the call flows that show the typical customer experience when contacting Council Tax in respect of the most popular call types.

## 8. Resolution Champions

Earlier this year as part of the 'One Contact vision' Customer Services introduced a team of Resolution Champions to the contact centre. Council Tax Advisors have access to 5 Resolution Champions. The aim of the Resolution Champions was to have a group of senior customer service focussed Advisors who have advanced system, service area and customer knowledge. They support the call handling teams with the immediate resolution of escalated enquiries, repeated service failure, complaints and "on the call" issues that arise. The objective of adding these roles to the operation is to proactively reduce repeat calls, improve the citizen experience and remove the need for further escalation or complaint.

To be successful in this task Resolution Champions have direct contact with members of staff in the Service Area so that they are able to gain background knowledge, progress updates and request assistance on a case in order to resolve any customer concerns in a quick turnaround. Resolution Champions will also call the customer back to give them an update on what they have done and to give them reassurance that action has been taken. They are also able to contact the enforcement agents direct and request a stand over on the account if they feel this is appropriate.

By way of illustration, between July and September one of the Resolution Champions handled 250 escalations with a breakdown as follows:-

- 81 – Customers not happy with the Council Tax recovery process/policy – 32.4%
- 64- Query regarding the process ( correct process had been followed) 25.6%
- 33 – Service Error ( Back office process delays account not updated) 13.2%
- 33 – Advisor Error ( Contact Centre Error) 13.2%
- 18 – Enforcement agent cases – 7.2%
- 17 – Customer error – 6.8%
- 2 – Staff Behaviour ( Lack of soft skills) – 0.8%
- 1 – Complaint avoided – 0.4%
- 1 – Complaint Escalated – 0.4%

## 9. Customer Satisfaction

Customer Services commissions a monthly customer satisfaction survey across the Service Areas that use the contact centre. For Council Tax this is conducted via an SMS text survey. A daily survey is sent to a random selection of citizens who have called the Council via their mobile (approximately 65% of callers use their mobile phone). The text message directs citizens to a website where they respond to a series of 6 questions about the service they received and they score each question on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is poor and 10 is excellent. They also have the option of leaving a comment to explain why they have scored the service in the way that they have. A citizen will only receive a maximum of one text per month and has the option to opt out of the survey process altogether.

The following graph tracks overall satisfaction with the Council Tax service since the surveys were first commissioned. This shows a steady increase in overall satisfaction. It is recognised, however, that further improvement is still required and there is a focus in the contact centre on improving soft skills, increasing first time contact resolution, making the customer experience easier for our citizens and improving the online presence.



One of the questions asked of citizens in the survey is how willing the Advisor was to help. This is a key measure for the contact centre as it provides evidence that the improvement plans that were instigated following transfer of the contact centre from SB are working. The results are shown in the graph below. Again this also shows a steady increase since November 2014.



The results for September are disappointing and have shown a dip in performance that is against the longer term trend. Further analysis of the results does not show a clear reason for this dip although there is evidence of more citizens complaining about the time to get through to an Advisor and dissatisfaction with the automated messaging. As detailed above, the automated messaging is due to be improved by the end of October. A number of new Advisors have been recruited to fill gaps in the teams and they are currently in training. They will be fully operational during October and this will improve call answering times.

## 10. Future plans

### **Letter review**

A review of existing letters shows that citizens typically call as they are unsure what to do with a bill or reminder. The wording is not clear and often causes confusion. 27% of all calls during September were as a result of receiving a bill.

Customer Services has reviewed the current bill, reminder notices and summons. A number of positive changes have been made to the look and feel, plain English has been used and some “nudging” techniques have been used to encourage customers to sign up for direct debit. This will result in savings against printing and postage costs, reduce calls coming into the contact centre and reduce recovery action.

## **Single Person Discount**

Requests for exemptions and discounts account for considerable demand in the contact centre. The most significant are calls in relation to single person discount. Historically the contact centre has been unable to resolve customers' enquiries and instead have had to send an email to the back office for them to send out a manual form. This created unnecessary delay for the customer and created additional activity in the back office.

Customer Services have worked with colleagues in Council Tax to deliver a seamless online solution for single person discounts and some of the other most frequently used exemption and discount forms. Contact centre advisors are now able to order a single person discount form electronically at the first point of contact and award the discount for a one month period pending receipt of the form from the customer. This removes at least 20 days from the process for the customer, reduces back office activity and improves customer satisfaction.

## **Direct Debit Take up**

The Council would like to encourage those in arrears to change their payment method to direct debit; thus reducing the time and money spent on chasing arrears and pursuing citizens at Court where they incur additional costs that they cannot afford to pay.

Work has been undertaken to identify where costs could be reduced and where the service to the customer could be improved.

A new process was introduced on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015 whereby contact centre advisors will offer those citizens in arrears the opportunity to pay by direct debit. The incentive to the customer is that if payments are maintained and the account is cleared, court costs will be withdrawn. Once the account is clear the direct debit will continue to the next financial year, reducing the possibility of further arrears.

## **Discretionary Payments for Rent and Council Tax**

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) & Council Tax Discretionary Fund payments (CTDF) payments are awarded as a short term measure to help claimants in extremely difficult circumstances. These funds support people who need extra help with their rent or Council Tax when Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance/Universal Credit/Council Tax Support does not cover the full amount.

Previously customers claiming the rent element did not claim the council tax element as it was less well known.

A new claim form has been created that incorporates both elements into one form. This will support those suffering financial hardship and reduce the arrears collection for the City. Again this will reduce costs and back office activity.

### **Refund process**

Previously any requests for a Council Tax refund received at the contact centre resulted in an email being sent to Revenues Back Office to request that they make the appropriate refund. Where there has been Council Tax support paid on the account, the back office sent an email to Benefits to check that benefit had been awarded appropriately and that the credit on the account could be refunded to the customer. Once checked, the Benefit Service sent an email back to Revenues to confirm if the refund could be made or not. This process could take more than a month and meanwhile it was not unusual for a citizen to ring in multiple times chasing the progress of the refund.

This process has been improved considerably, saving time for the customer and the back office by up to 20 days; by removing elements of the process to provide a more efficient process.

### **Text messaging**

A mobile phone text alert process is to be introduced from October 2015, sending messages to customers who are in arrears with their Council Tax payments. The text message will be sent automatically to run before the paper reminder notice is sent. This is intended to reduce printing and postage costs and reduce arrears action which can be expensive, by encouraging citizens to bring their account up-to-date sooner. It is also intended to accelerate cash flow by serving as a gentle reminder. It costs BCC approximately £1 per Council Tax Arrears letter, whereas text message alerts cost 3.8p per text. The text will refer customers to the online payment solution, encouraging channel shift for other council services. It is a quick, interactive and convenient way of communicating with Council Tax payers - providing instant information to customers.

## **11.SB Revenues Role**

The Back Office receives over 1,000 items of customer communication per day through the document management systems. Over 50,000 outbound call contacts per annum are also made, as well as maintaining weekly court attendance and customer interaction through a team of inspection officers.



SB has continued to work closely with the Contact Centre to drive down unnecessary customer contacts (both in/outbound) and changes this year to the reminder mailing schedules have reduced premature arrears letters being sent out. This aligns well to the text messaging processes outlined above.

There is regular dialogue to cover aspects of joint working and both Managers and Resolution Champions have received further coaching and development training from the Back Office. Both SB and BCC believe that there is potential to further improve the skill levels of the two areas through the sharing of best practice and using customer data more proactively. A number of specific areas have been highlighted covering escalations, liaison with Enforcement Agents etc.

SB liaises with a number of BCC functional areas to support and improve Council Tax collection rates including the Benefits Service, Finance and Property Services. There is also an involvement with many of the ongoing projects that cross the operation including process change, annual billing and improvements to the customer journey.

SB has recently been undertaking more detailed analysis of customer behaviour particularly dealing with the more significantly indebted customer. They are working closely to identify opportunities to segment customers that require more specific action through bankruptcy or committal.

A new workflow management tool has been implemented within the back office and whilst this is a recent addition it is expected to deliver significant improvements to the management information and performance of the operation. In addition this is being used to shape and deliver a better customer-centred view of actions required when dealing with more complex interactions. This will reduce customer confusion where multiple communications are being sent out. This system will be extended to the Business Rates teams over the next few weeks.

The SB back office function is also going through a restructure and refocus of approach. It is expected that this will enhance and drive clarity to the customer journey whilst also providing opportunities for contractual savings.

## 12. Longer Term Improvements

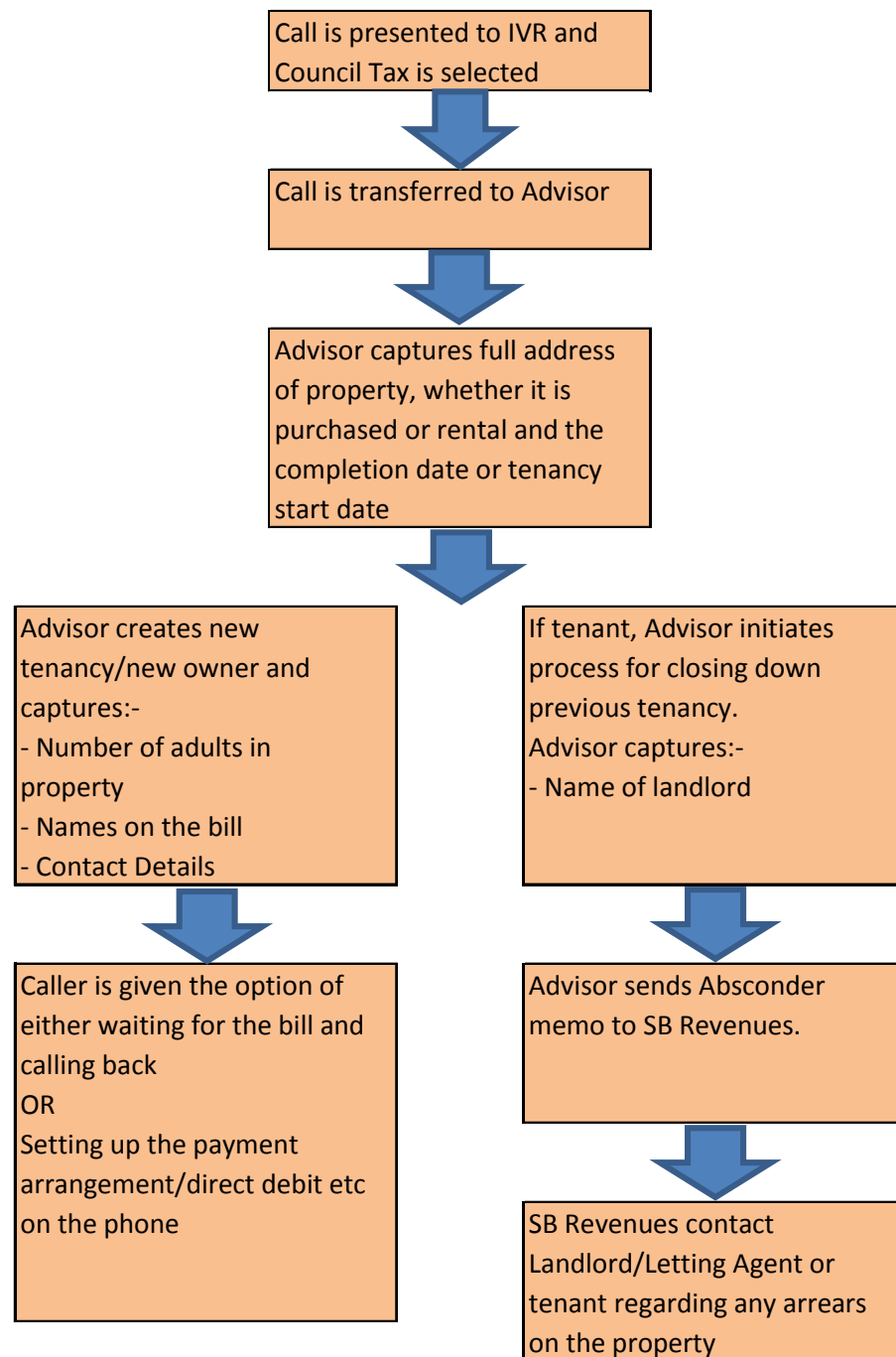
Identifying and segmenting the customer base to understand and distinguish between the “Can’t pay/ Won’t pay” is an important part of developing communication strategies that maximise performance and service. SB is working increasingly with a wider sphere of specialists to not only learn from them but also share the knowledge that exists within Birmingham. This includes other Authorities and specialist Legal/Insolvency practitioners.

Data capture is being refined to understand more about what makes customers respond to all of the communication channels. Joint working is taking place to reduce multiple contacts. There are customers that require more engagement in order to educate and inform and the intention is to increase the channels used. .SB and the contact centre will also continue to respond to feedback gained through complaints and front office satisfaction surveys.

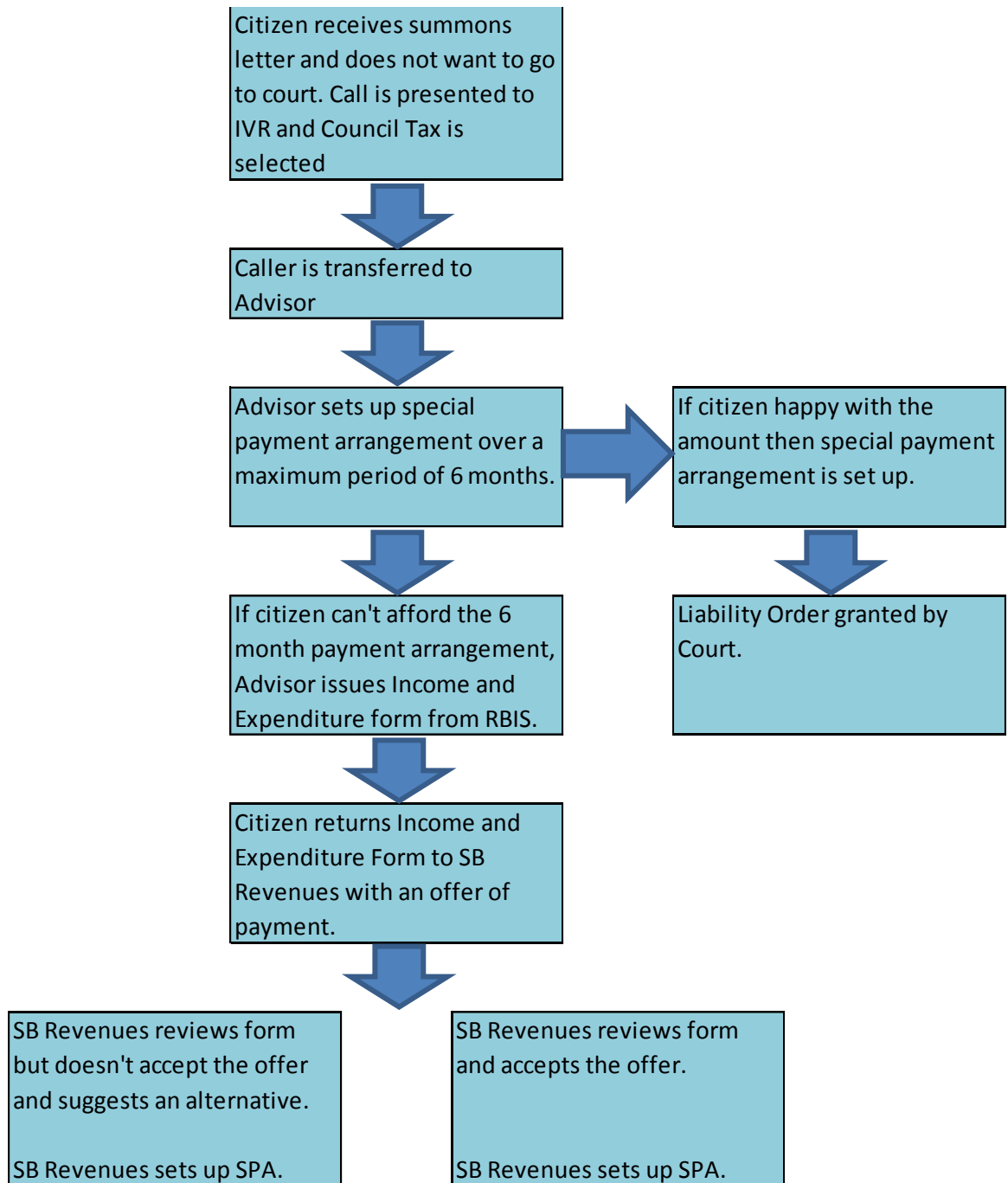
There are a number of automation opportunities under consideration aimed at reducing processing time, enhancing the customer experience and consequently reducing customer contact, to include enhancing payment capabilities, on line data capture and greater personalisation of communications.

## Appendix 1 – Call flows for the most popular call types

### **Move in / move out process**

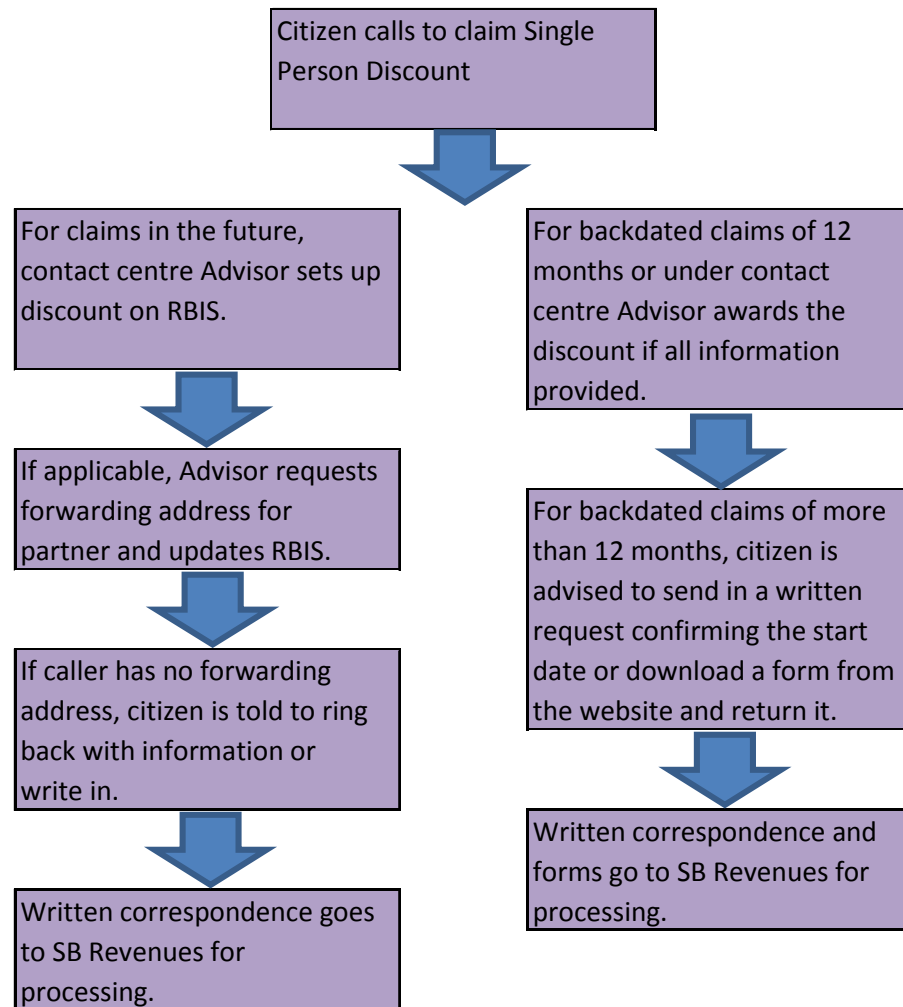


## Summons Process



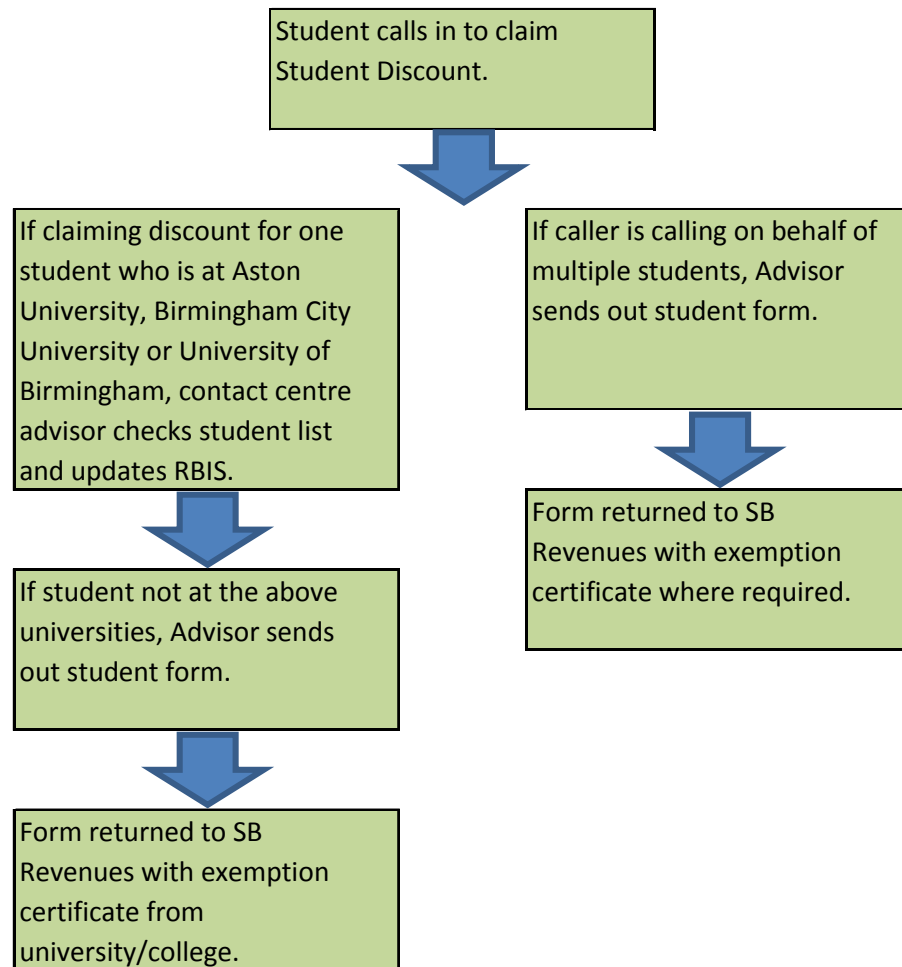
Note: SPA stands for Special Payment Arrangement.

## Single Person Discount Process



Note: RBIS is the specialist Council Tax and Benefits system that is used to record information about the customer.

## Student Process



## Reallocation Process

Caller querying why recovery process is happening when payments have been made.  
Note - this happens where the citizen has multiple balances and the amount paid is different to the agreed payment arrangement.



Contact centre advisor reviews all balances and identifies that money has been allocated to the wrong balance.



Advisor escalates issue to Resolution Champion.



Resolution Champion sends reallocation memo to SB Revenues.



SB Revenues re-allocates funds to correct balance.

