

WRS Joint Board

Date: 15th November 2018

Title: Duty Desk Information Report

Recommendation	That the Joint Board notes the Report.
Background	<p>The Duty Officer team is the first point of contact for all WRS regulatory matters on behalf of all Worcestershire districts and for the service's external contract work. Although the shift has gradually been to encourage more use of self service options, the Duty Officers continue to take phone calls, respond to email and postal enquires and sometimes, but very rarely, have face to face contact with members of the public.</p> <p>Officers are trained to try and close calls at first point of contact by either answering the query or directing callers to the appropriate website guidance. This spans all areas of WRS work across licensing, food related queries, nuisance, contaminated land, lost/stray dogs and trading standards, the last of which is simply sign-posting to the Citizens Advice consumer Service. They liaise on a daily basis with officers from across the service, and the dog warden team in particular as liaison with dog owners is an important part of their role. They also deal with people from outside of the county as part of the support for WRS's contracted activity. Most other regulatory services, based within individual local authorities either answer their own calls using professional staff or have a central call handling team in the organisation that merely signposts or redirects calls the appropriate person/department.</p>
Report	<p>Some years ago, following a request from the Worcestershire Hub for additional funding for the continued support of WRS call-taking, the then Head of Service and the WRS Management Board recommended to Members of the then Joint Committee that the service should take its own calls. This was both to limit the costs around first point of contact but also, following Systems Thinking principles, to get a better understanding of what the customer wanted and, if possible, to close the call at that point to limit any hand-offs of work to only those that were essential.</p> <p>The Duty Team has been through a number of changes to get the point it is today. The WRS Management Team felt it would be helpful to give members a better understanding of the how the team operates and what calls WRS takes on behalf of the partners.</p>

Current Process

The public continue to contact the team through a number of channels but as the service has moved towards a more intelligent and better informed online presence, the approach has most certainly been to encourage customers to go to the website for advice and self service options. Due to resource constraints, changes in consumer expectations and the changes in service options, WRS have put in place a process that allows officers to understand the issue being raised by the customer and allows officers to deal with as much as they can using their expertise and knowledge base. The requirement for the public to attempt self-help with the majority of domestic nuisance issues does limit somewhat the responses available and the Duty Team receives training on how to deliver these messages from other members of the WRS team.

The Duty Officer team comprise 3.5 FTE posts, occupied by a mix of full and part time officers. Alongside them each day there is a dedicated support officer plus 3 technical officers from each team (Licensing, CEH and Technical Services).

On average WRS receive around 130 calls and 40 emails per day with the average person waiting under a minute to speak to an officer. Table 1 shows the volume of calls received over two periods by the WRS duty team. Calls continue to be the highest contact made by the public although emails are increasingly popular.

Table 1

Service requests received by WRS

	Oct 2016 to Sep 2017		Oct 2017 to Sep 2018	
	Total	%	Total	%
Duty Officers	7,868	61.1	7,870	68.2
Other	5,017	38.9	3,661	31.8

It is important to understand that the duty desk is not seen as a call centre. WRS system is designed with understanding the problem, where possible answering the query immediately and closing the call at first point of contact, hopefully with a good satisfaction rate. Older measures such as how quickly the call is answered and re-directed are not as relevant where this is the purpose of the process. There are, of course, some elements of time looked at such as call waiting times and abandoned call rates, but the emphasis has always been to solve the query as soon as possible.

Continuous Change

A review in early 2017 identified that it was necessary refresh the website to encourage more consumer engagement and understanding of our services via this channel. It was essential to make it more user-friendly and accessible through all devices including mobile phones. At the same time the way that consumers contacted the helpdesk was also reviewed. WRS Managers looked at:

- Number of calls per channel (phone/email/post/internet query pages)

- Number of abandoned calls
- Average waiting times
- Calls per service area
- Calls Received

As a result of this review WRS worked with Wyre Forest IT and introduced a automated phone message system in September 2017 in order to:

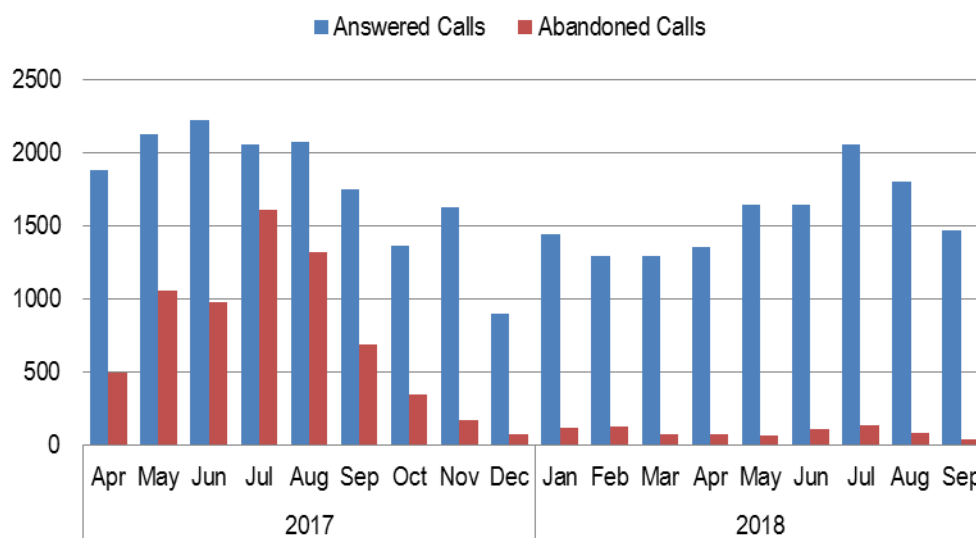
- Reduce waiting times per caller
- Get customers to the right person at a quicker pace
- Reduce the number of callers that require a different service
- Filter contract work

Not only did this have an impact on the customer but internally WRS were able to plan resources more carefully, increase staff morale and deal with the email channel more efficiently.

Data Collection and Analysis

Call Numbers

Table 2 – Calls Taken and Abandoned

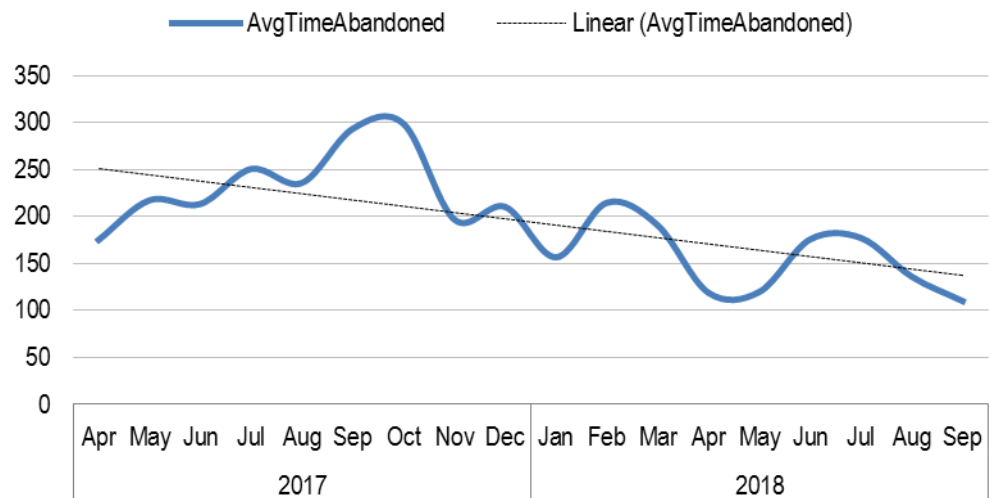


In September 2017 the changes indicated were implemented and Table 2 shows the impact of calls taken on the desk and abandoned rates before and after the introduction of the phone message. In general WRS calls tend to be higher in summer periods due to a spike in nuisance complaints and lost dogs however the chart shows that calls actually decreased over the same period after the message was introduced and abandoned calls dramatically decreased to an all time low. After careful analysis we concluded that this is

because:

- Callers are listening to the message options and therefore remain on the phone longer so do not have to be on hold waiting to speak to an officer. By the time the message options finish generally there is an officer free to take the next call.
- The separation of the dog calls, which are invariably time-consuming, from Licensing, Environmental Health and Trading Standards calls allows the latter to be picked up more quickly and efficiently.
- Less people are on hold waiting and therefore are not hanging up and calling back resulting in a change in overall total and abandoned figures.
- Callers are being encouraged to visit the website or send an email and this is repeated throughout the message providing details to customers of the website address, email contact and it also refers callers to any self service options we have available on the website where appropriate.

Table 3 – Abandoned Calls



WRS have worked hard internally to put in processes to reduce the abandoned call rates (Table 3). These measures have included:

- Allocation of resources to areas where we know there is peak demand
- Increasing resources on the technical officer side
- Identifying training needs and providing consistent support over all areas of the service
- Investment of time and support to the team

Types of calls

As previously noted the duty officers try and resolve matters at first point of contact

however this is not always achievable due to:

- Greater technical expertise being required
- A visit maybe necessary to assess the service request
- Further investigation is required by a Technical Officer or Manager

The types of calls differ slightly per district but Tables 4 and 5 show how many requests the duty team have taken in the past 12 months, how many are closed at first point of contact and how many are allocated to another officer to address or investigate.

Table 4 - Service requests by district / status (Oct 2017 – Sep 2018)

	Allocated onward		Closed at Source		Overall	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	% of Activity
Bromsgrove	671	67.6	321	32.4	992	12.6
Malvern Hills	744	68.5	342	31.5	1,086	13.8
Redditch	805	60.3	529	39.7	1,334	17.0
Worcester City	1,148	65.1	615	34.9	1,763	22.4
Wychavon	1,012	66.2	517	33.8	1,529	19.4
Wyre Forest	772	66.2	394	33.8	1,166	14.8

Table 5 goes further and provides a breakdown by service request category. This table does not include stray dog handling, which will follow. Hence it is only 2.3% in this table.

Table 5 - Service requests by category / status (Oct 2017 – Sep 2018)

	Allocated		Closed at Source		Overall	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	% of Activity
Dog Control	104	58.1	75	41.9	179	2.3
Food Safety	489	65.3	260	34.7	749	9.5
Health and Safety	142	89.3	17	10.7	159	2.0
Information Requests	498	94.0	32	6.0	530	6.7
Licensing	2,280	64.2	1,270	35.8	3,550	45.1
Nuisance & Public Health	1,578	72.4	602	27.6	2,180	27.7
Other EH Request	56	87.5	8	12.5	64	0.8
Not for WRS	5	1.1	454	98.9	459	5.8

As you can see WRS continues to receive calls that are not for the service area and we are continuing to address this issue by making changes to both the phone message and our internet pages. We understand that some are inevitable however if this number reduces so should our call waiting and abandoned rates.

Stray/Lost Dogs

One of the changes WRS made was to allow messages to be left where there was a lost/stray dog. There were two reasons for this:

- A number of our contracts involve stray/lost dog issues and we did not want to

leave customers on hold and having to keep calling back,

- Each dog enquiry can vary greatly in terms of complexity and length of time.

By allowing a message to be left the team can already have half the details recorded prior to going back to the customer. All voicemails need to be answered within a 1 hour period, if not before, and there is a allocated Duty Officer dealing with dog queries on a daily basis. WRS are working with Wyre Forest IT in order to obtain better recording figures for this area of work, however Table 6 outlines our internal recording records and provides numbers of queries dealt with on a month by month period for this service area.

Table 6 – Number of Stray/Lost Dog Voicemails Received

MONTH	NUMBER RECIEVED
October 2017	11
November 2017	28
December 2017	70
January 2018	42
February 2018	150
March 2018	158
April 2018	198
May 2018	184
June 2018	180
July 2018	289
August 2018	179
September 2018	188

Results of changes

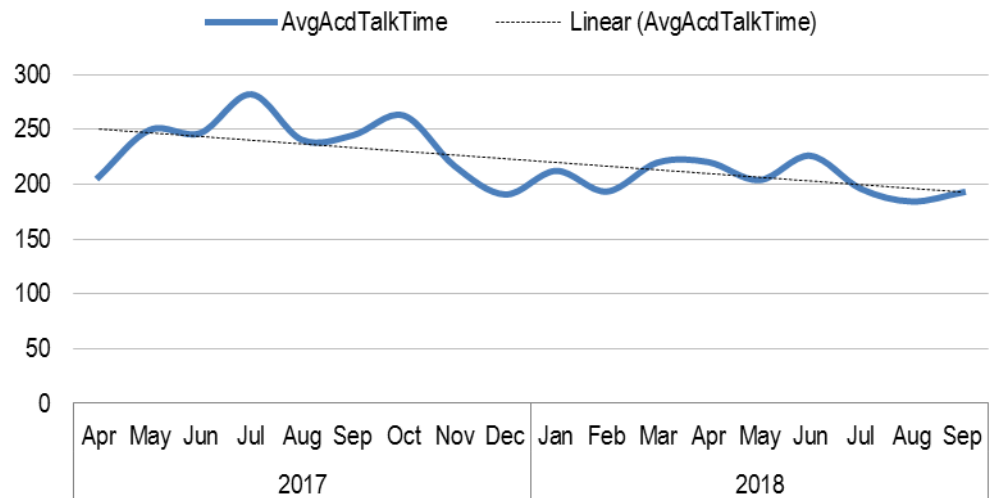
Overall, by continuously reviewing and understanding our customers better and making changes:

Customer Service

Increased training from across the service and allowing duty officers to attend operational team meetings has allowed them to understand much better the functions of the service. With support from operational teams, a knowledge directory has been produced to support the Duty Officers in their work. A new rota has allowed officers to work on different areas of the service and they are encouraged to shadow and talk to the operation officers providing support to the duty desk. All of this has led to a better understanding in the Duty Officer team of what WRS can and can not do, enabling officers to deal with customers more efficiently and quickly. They also have a detailed

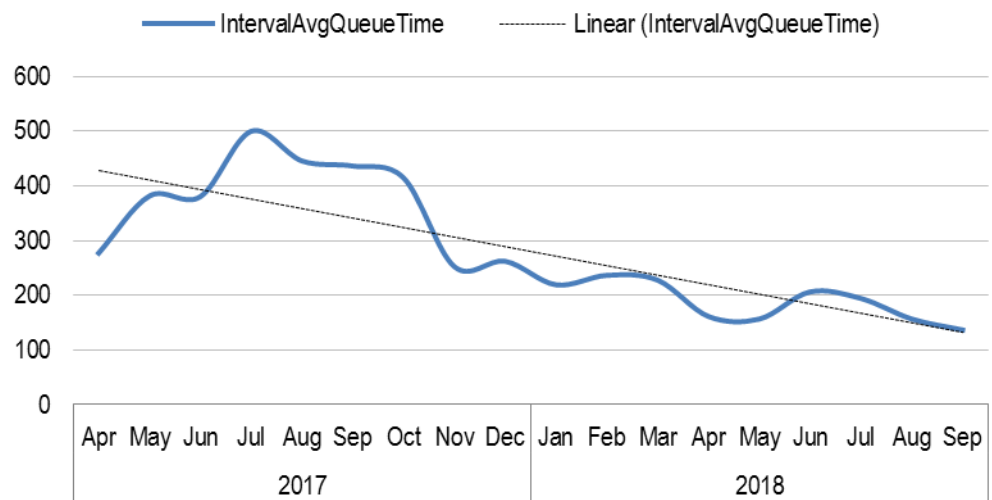
knowledge of the website, allowing them to direct customers to the website self service pages and allowing them to answer questions regarding external contract providers more confidently.

Table 7 – Average call Lengths



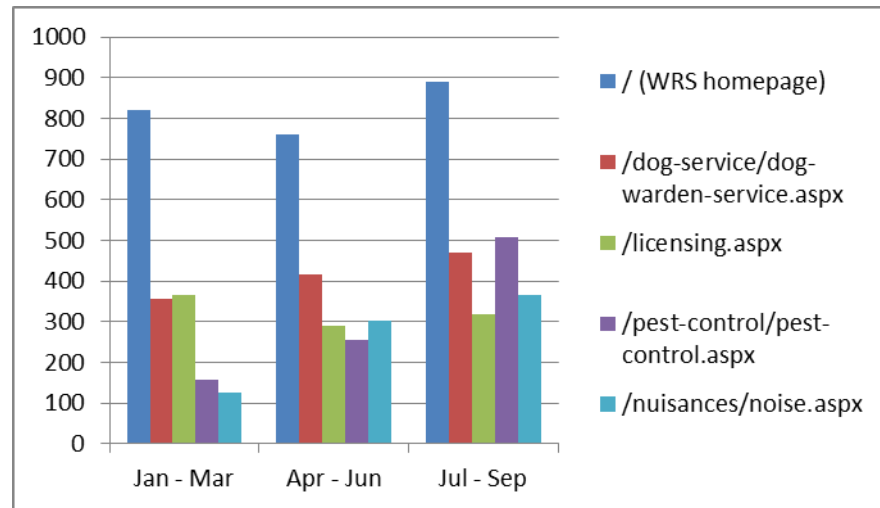
All of this has led to call length and queuing times being shorter than previously as shown in Table 7 and Table 8

Table 8 – Average Queue Times



Channel Shift

Table 9 – Internet pages



Data regarding activity on our internet pages shows that more and more people are using our pages every month. It also shows a breakdown of which pages have increased activity and how many new users we have had every month on every page. Table 9 shows the top four pages by quarter. It is evident that when we have introduced new self service options and duty officers have directed customers to them, activity has increased significantly. For example, the use of the nuisance pages have increased between the last two quarters and pest control had also increased this year as it was added to the telephone voice message, although there were more pest control queries than last year so this caveat has to be applied.

WRS will continue to monitor this and make the necessary changes in order to keep call volumes low and introduce more self service options where appropriate.

There were significant levels of abandoned calls and potentially long waiting times for people who wanted to contact WRS before these changes were introduced. However, the evidence is now showing that, changes to the messaging on the telephones, the wider use of the service's enquiries email address and the shift of a proportion of telephony based contacts to self-service on the website has resulted in reductions in call volumes and an improvement in the service for those who need to speak to the service rather than using other channels to either make contact or resolve their problems.

Contact Points

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