



AGENDA ITEM: 6

SUMMARY

Report for:	Finance and Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	20 March 2012
PART:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	The Role and Performance of the Customer Service Unit
Contact:	Councillor Brian Ayling Portfolio Holder for Service and Performance Improvement Author/Responsible Officer – David Gill, Group Manager Partnerships, Policy and Communications
Purpose of report:	The report presents an overview of the work and performance of Dacorum Borough Council's Customer Service Unit.
Recommendations	That the committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) note the report, b) consider the information presented c) make comment on the service and performance.
Corporate objectives:	Dacorum Delivers – The work of the Customer Service Unit (CSU) is important to the reputation of the Council. The CSU is at the heart of customer interaction for the Council and is well placed to drive improvement in customer processes across the Council
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> There are no specific financial implications contained in this report. The Customer Service Unit budget for 2011/12 is £1,236,370.
'Value For Money Implications'	<u>Value for Money</u> The CSU undertakes customer service functions across a range of services. It is able therefore, to reduce the overall cost of customer interaction by staff being multi-skilled and able to deal with many service areas.

Risk Implications	There are no specific risk implications contained in this report. A prioritised risk assessment was undertaken for the service in 2011 and this is updated whenever there are service changes.
Equalities Implications	An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the service. The service is due to be re-assessed during 2012.
Health And Safety Implications	There are no specific Health and Safety issues relating to this report. There are well established health and safety procedures in place to deal with issues arising from the CSU operation.
Consultees:	None
Background papers:	None
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<p>CSU – Customer Service Unit – This includes the Contact Centre for e mail and telephone calls as well as Customer Service Centres at Berkhamsted, Tring and Hemel Hempstead</p> <p>CSC – Customer Service Centre – This refers to the Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring face to face centres</p> <p>CSR – Customer Service Representatives</p> <p>Socitm - Society of Information Technology Management</p>

Background

1. The Customer Service Unit (CSU) delivers the first point of contact for Council customers. This includes service requests, transactions, enquiries and complaints taken over the phone and through face to face drop-ins. The CSU team manages the majority of the customer contact for the Council. The services provided by the CSU include a Contact Centre, a face to face Customer Service Centre and front of house reception.
2. The CSU manages customer contact for the following Council services: Planning; Housing (inc Repairs, Management, Homelessness and Housing Advice); Environmental Services (inc Waste services and Landscape & Recreation); Benefits; Council Tax; Regulatory Services, Environmental Health (inc Pest Control and Pollution Control), Payments, Recruitment, Dacorum Card, Complaints. Customers contacting the Council by phone are able to do so by dialling one single number and are greeted by an automated telephony system which dealt with more than 600,000 calls in its first year of operation. Around 298,000 of these went to the Contact Centre with another 300,000 going to direct dial numbers.
3. The CSU is staffed and available to customers at the times set out in the table below:

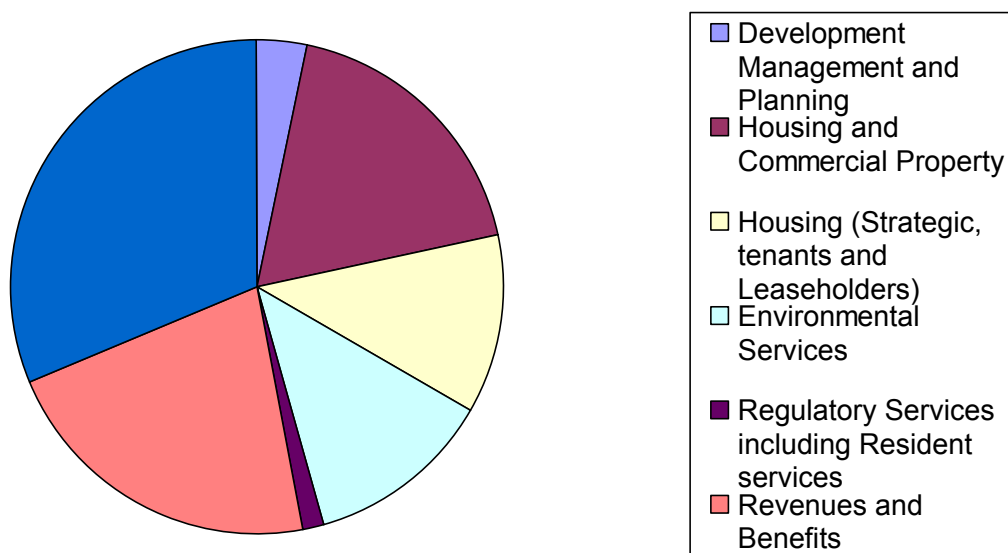
Contact Centre	Calls are taken from 8:00am to 6:30pm Monday to Friday
Customer Service Centres	<p>Hemel Hempstead 8:45am to 5:15pm Monday to Thursday 8:45am to 4:45pm Friday</p> <p>Berkhamsted 9:00am to 12:30pm & 1:30pm to 5:00pm Monday 9:30am to 2:00pm Tuesday, Thursday and Friday</p> <p>Tring 9:00am to 12:30pm & 1:30pm to 5:00pm Monday 9:30am to 2:00pm Wednesday and Friday.</p>

4. Service Statistics:

4.1 Telephony

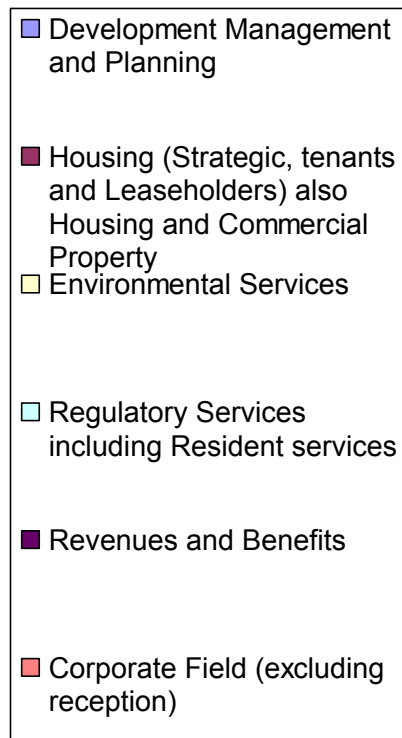
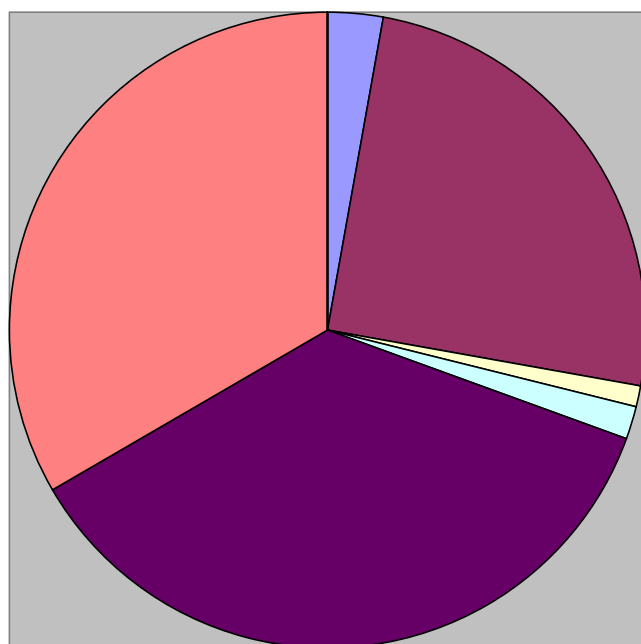
The current in bound call and face to face volumes over the previous calendar year broken down by service are as follows:

a) Calls (number of calls by service in 2011)



Service	Number of Calls in 2011
Development Management and Planning	10,220
Housing and Commercial Property	54,510
Housing (Strategic, Tenants and Leaseholders)	34,672
Environmental Services	36,656
Regulatory Services including Resident Services	4,036
Revenues and Benefits	64,202
Corporate Field	93,807
Total Number of calls	298,103

4.2 Face to Face Contact



Service	Number of Face to Face in 2011
Development Management and Planning	1,993
Housing (Strategic, Tenants and Leaseholders) also Housing and Commercial Property	17,289
Environmental Services	713
Regulatory Services including Resident Services	1,247
Revenues and Benefits	25,151
Corporate Field (excluding reception)	23,061
Total Number of interactions	69,454

Further service statistics are presented at Appendix A. The statistics are presented in order that Members can get a fuller picture of the activity that is being undertaken in the CSU.

4.3 Performance Information

Performance of the Customer Service Unit is reported to this committee quarterly. The table below contains the performance for 2011 against each element.

Ref	Description	Performance over 12 months	Target
CSU01	Percentage of customers in the customer Service Centre seen within 5 minutes	67.56	70.00

CSU02	Percentage of enquiries that are resolved at first point of contact in the Customer Service Centre	97.77	90.00
CSU04	Percentage of calls answered in the Contact Centre within 20 seconds	45.61	70.00
CSU05	Percentage of enquiries that are resolved at first point of contact in the Contact Centre	98.97	90.00

4.4 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction for the CSU is measured using Govmetrics. At the end of every call customers are given the option to complete the survey, for the face to face measurement a stand-alone automated device situated in the CSC is used as customers exit. Survey take up by customers is generally low and we are incentivising staff to encourage customers to respond. Despite the low take up the Govmetric service is valuable and responses are generally very positive. A summary of comments received in January 2012 are included at Appendix C. The measurements for 2011 are:



Contact Centre

Good	Average	Poor	Total
2,956	255	47	3,258
90.7%	7.8%	1.5%	

Customer Service Centre (Hemel Hempstead CSC)

Good	Average	Poor	Total
4,445	811	889	6,145
72.3%	13.2%	14.5%	

4.5 Number of Staff

Staff in the CSU cover Face to Face contact, Contact Centre and the Civic Centre reception. The staff make up is:

- 2 x Senior Managers
- 4 x Team Managers
- 49 CSR positions (37.75 FTE)

Berkhamsted and Tring have 5 part time staff (included in the above figure, 3 at each Berkhamsted and 2 at Tring)
Reception has 2 part time staff

4.6 Service Functions

When the CSU was first set up Councillors took the decision to transfer as much customer contact as possible from the back office service to the CSU. This allows the

back office service to deliver the function for which it is designed without having to keep resources free for customer contact. The CSU aims to resolve a minimum of 80% of all transactions at the first point of contact without needing to refer to back office services. Traditionally resolution rates are very high with only a small number of transactions requiring back office assistance. This method of dealing with customer contact is very cost effective for the Council as it allows Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) to deal with customers on a range of different services at any one time as well as levelling out the demand variances across services.

The services that use the CSU as its first point of Contact are:

Service	Description of service
Development Management & Planning	Take initial contact on planning enquires, applications and some searches. Payments are also taken for applications and copies of planning and building control documents.
Housing Property	Service requests for repairs to housing properties. Also to pass on information on standard up grades.
Housing (Strategic)	For housing applications documentation is received at the CSU. Advice is also given on any issues customers may have while filling out applications. Homelessness bookings with officers and general advice on homelessness is also given.
Housing (Tenants and Leaseholders)	Rent enquires and payments are taken by the CSU. Insurance payments for contents coverage for tenants. Lease holder charges maintenance of communal areas and repairs, for both tenants and lease holders.
Environmental Services (including Waste services and Landscape & Recreation)	Service requests and payments for bulky collections. The reporting of untaxed vehicles. The reporting of missed bins. Missing equipment for missing bins and recycle bins. Request for the removal of dead animals on public land. Reporting and service requests of graffiti. Reporting and service requests of hedge and grass cutting. Reporting of dangerous trees and other tree request such as overhanging branches, exposed roots etc. Clean up of public parks and children play areas of glass and litter. Removal and emptying of waste bins and dog waste bins.
Regulatory Services and Environmental Health	Log service requests and send out initial documentation on pollution requests including noise, waste (fly tipping) and light intrusion for all residential and business as well as public land. Reporting and service requests for rat removal in residential areas. This includes taking and logging requests about Pest Control and Pollution Control
Resident Services	General advice on anti social behaviour complaints.
Revenues and Benefits (Including Council Tax)	First point of contact on all Council Tax enquiries and any documentation. Taking of payments for Council Tax. First point of contact for benefit enquiries and to take in documentation for benefit claims.
Commercial Assets	Rent enquiries, repair works and payments for garages. Log service requests for Allotments and Pitches. First point of contact for hiring of council halls.

Corporate contact	Take and redirect calls from automated switchboard. Advise of other service delivery organisations outside of the Council (e.g. Hertfordshire County Council; age concern etc). First point of contact on all complaints against the Council including logging and chasing of complaints. Registering and sending out applications for vacant posts advertised. Take payments for a majority of Council services and accounts. Issue Dacorum cards. Meet and greet officer for all customers visiting the CSU. Reception point as first point of contact to help visitors to the civic centre.
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4.7 Staff Recruitment, Retention and Training

The design of the service function outlined in paragraph 4.6 requires highly skilled and well trained staff to cover the range of services provided. Each Customer Service Representative (CSR) will undertake several months of training before they are competent to cover all the services undertaken in the CSU. This means that the CSU is vulnerable to poor performance when it is not fully staffed.

During the past two years the internal procedures at the Council has meant that there have been recruitment delays and when posts have been filled the CSR training needs take another few months to complete. This means that when a fully trained CSR leaves the CSU performance may suffer for more than a year before a fully trained replacement is available.

CSR jobs are often considered to be 'entry level' jobs. Whilst the council is fortunate to have many staff in the CSU that have been with us for many years there is always a turnover as trained staff seek opportunities in other parts of the Council. Unusually amongst Customer Service Units, the Council's CSU does not have particularly high turnover rates but the impact of any staff leaving is felt very acutely and performance suffers immediately.

5. Channel Shift and Avoidable Contact

Two areas of concern for the Council are 'channel shift', (where customers are encouraged to use more cost effective means of contacting the Council,) and 'avoidable contact' (where the contact from the customer could have been avoided through better or clearer services). Both channel shift and avoidable contact are of considerable concern to the CSU.

In order to serve the customer most effectively it is important that we develop more self service opportunities for those who wish to use them and encourage e-service wherever it is possible. This will have the advantages of allowing customers to self serve at the time they wish to do so and it will free up CSRs to concentrate on those who need a more personal service. The Council's strategy is outlined in the 'Web and Customer Access Strategy' which was approved by Cabinet in 2011. The CSU service is directly linked to improvements in the Council's web capability because it will allow the CSU to continue to develop and ensure that the Council is truly customer focussed.

Avoidable Contact is important to the CSU because every contact that adds to call/customer numbers costs the Council time and money. Getting processes right first time; writing clear and understandable letters; getting reliable voicemail messages; contacting the customer when we say we are going to; doing what we say we will. All of these things will resolve the customer's issue at first point of contact and reduce the number of contacts with the Council. Industry estimates are that

around 15% of all Councils customer contact is avoidable. If that is the case in Dacorum that would result in a reduction of 90,000 calls annually across the council, around 45,000 of them to the Contact Centre. Socitm estimate that each call to a Council incurs a cost of around £2.90 so a considerable business case can be made for reducing avoidable contact.

6. Improvement Activities

A rapid improvement process commenced with CSU staff in 2011. The aim was to use those with best knowledge of the system to identify where improvements could be made. This has resulted in a large number of changes designed to make the service more customer focussed and CSU processes simpler and more effective. This process will be a continuous one and a small staff panel has been set up to continue sampling staff concerns.

7. Benchmarking

A benchmarking exercise across Hertfordshire was undertaken during 2010/11. It revealed that authorities across the County have markedly different approaches to dealing with customers. Several Hertfordshire districts still route calls through a switchboard then transferring to a back office for the transaction to be completed. Some have CSUs with limited numbers of services undertaken within them and some share facilities with other organisations (eg NHS).

This generally makes 'like for like' comparison very difficult however it is possible to get an indication of the Council's performance by looking at the ratio of call volumes and face to face visitors per resident. Dacorum is performing around the middle of all Hertfordshire districts for contact per resident. Considering that Dacorum has high levels of Council housing and retains many of its services in house this is a good result. Our aim is to continue to improve this figure by reducing avoidable contact and improve web and self service access to customers.

The ratio figures are attached at Appendix B

8. General Comment

The CSU design and performance are important factors for the Council to consider. The service customers receive whilst in contact with the CSU will, to a large extent, determine how local people view the Council. The Council's reputation is therefore closely linked to the CSU and the performance of the CSU is closely linked to the performance of back office services. Members are asked to comment on the service provided in the CSU and to consider their aspirations for the future of the service.

Appendix A

Figures presented below relate to the 2011/12 third qtr performance. Table 1 and 2 indicate performance in the Customer Service Centre Table 3 indicates performance in the Contact Centre.

Service Summary

Version: 3.0
 Created by: Linda Smith
 Created at: 08/03/2012 15:32

Service	Customers				Waiting Times				Serving Times						
	Arrived	Called	Served	No Shows	Average	Max	Total	Target	Average	Max	Total	Target			
Benefits	4561	4562	4353	192	4%	0:08:05	1:18:22	232:48:28	2212	48%	0:12:33	1:33:14	315:19:10	2895	67%
Benefits and Council	435	435	435	0	0%	0:00:12	0:23:06	1:30:44	428	98%	0:13:18	1:14:30	79:28:36	281	65%
Bus Passes	69	69	66	3	4%	0:04:18	0:33:16	4:55:24	51	74%	0:02:48	0:11:32	2:55:42	66	100%
Council Tax	990	990	934	49	5%	0:08:36	0:48:46	107:39:38	473	48%	0:09:57	1:22:30	100:25:24	716	77%
Dacorum Card	427	427	412	15	4%	0:03:10	0:29:48	18:45:16	332	78%	0:05:06	0:52:50	24:16:56	397	96%
Env Health	60	60	55	5	8%	0:10:51	0:40:20	10:29:02	18	30%	0:08:09	0:33:56	7:27:18	46	84%
Environment Services	172	172	160	12	7%	0:07:31	0:50:10	19:15:28	97	56%	0:07:51	0:28:58	18:39:58	139	87%
Environmental Health	205	205	205	0	0%	0:00:06	0:07:50	0:20:46	204	100%	0:09:39	1:08:30	28:47:02	168	82%
General Enquiries	954	954	878	75	8%	0:06:03	0:51:14	78:31:18	582	61%	0:08:37	1:28:14	85:12:32	721	82%
Housing	4154	4156	3993	155	4%	0:07:10	0:52:52	212:31:44	2203	53%	0:10:01	2:11:46	265:52:58	3112	78%
Payment	2253	2253	2212	39	2%	0:02:09	1:10:40	24:09:18	2015	89%	0:04:42	1:21:04	68:44:18	2107	95%
Payments and	1318	1318	1318	0	0%	0:00:15	0:29:00	5:35:10	1293	98%	0:06:37	2:18:46	90:20:52	1177	89%
Planning	397	397	377	20	5%	0:07:11	0:38:28	42:21:08	213	54%	0:08:06	0:46:36	40:34:48	320	85%

Table 2

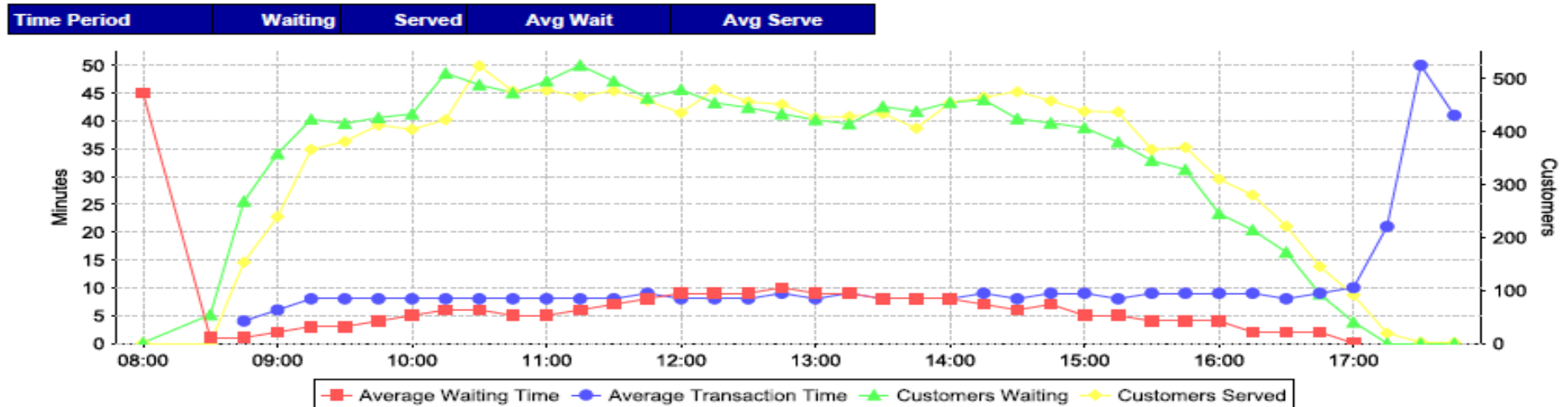


Table 3 – Contact Centre

Inbound Calls Summary Report By Service

Start Date : 01/10/2011

End Date : 31/12/2011

v1.8

SLA level: 20

Service	Call Breakdown					ACD					Call Handling Averages		
	Tot Calls	IVR	Voicemail	Diverted	ACD	Answered	Abandoned	Av Wait	Wt SLA%	Lngst Wait	Talk	Wrap	Handling
ACD Voicemail	7	7	0	0	0	0	0	00:00:00	100	00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00
Benefits	6175	252	0	0	5923	5210	713	00:01:29	43	00:14:19	00:05:03	00:00:05	00:05:08
Community Safety	306	13	0	0	293	264	29	00:00:52	52	00:13:35	00:01:15	00:00:04	00:01:19
Community Services	12	4	0	0	8	4	4	00:00:48	62	00:05:00	00:01:16	00:00:09	00:01:25
Complaints	269	60	0	0	209	174	35	00:00:28	56	00:05:56	00:04:50	00:00:05	00:04:55
Council Tax	8522	313	2	0	8207	7434	773	00:01:25	46	00:13:54	00:04:05	00:00:06	00:04:11
Dacorum BC	278	42	0	0	236	179	57	00:01:56	37	00:12:03	00:01:56	00:00:07	00:02:03
Environmental	6215	431	4	420	5360	4655	705	00:01:26	44	00:14:42	00:03:09	00:00:05	00:03:14
General Calls	47	18	0	0	29	14	15	00:00:24	62	00:04:00	00:00:35	00:00:07	00:00:42
Housing	9933	277	1	0	9655	8075	1580	00:01:47	36	00:16:57	00:03:04	00:00:06	00:03:10
Housing Repairs	14449	344	0	1481	12624	11691	933	00:01:11	46	00:16:22	00:03:37	00:00:04	00:03:41
Operator External	14207	731	1	0	13475	10381	3094	00:01:35	38	00:20:15	00:02:04	00:00:06	00:02:11
Operator Internal	2370	298	0	0	2072	1583	489	00:01:31	43	00:27:39	00:01:31	00:00:07	00:01:38
Payments	4432	288	0	0	4144	3744	400	00:01:06	54	00:15:49	00:02:40	00:00:07	00:02:47
Pest Control	424	67	6	0	351	260	91	00:01:20	45	00:08:31	00:02:16	00:00:06	00:02:21
Planning	2385	69	1	0	2315	1813	502	00:02:10	31	00:20:24	00:02:42	00:00:06	00:02:48
Pollution Control	107	29	0	0	78	50	28	00:01:25	38	00:06:49	00:03:54	00:00:04	00:03:58
Recruit ACD mail	4	1	0	0	3	0	3	00:00:00	100	00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00
Recruitment	109	7	0	0	102	77	25	00:02:00	26	00:10:41	00:01:59	00:00:05	00:02:03
Staff	112	4	1	0	107	79	28	00:00:26	57	00:03:23	00:01:09	00:00:07	00:01:16

Appendix B

District Councils in Hertfordshire. Comparative 'call', 'web' and 'face to face' ratios per resident. (Undertaken 2010/11)

(Ranking '1' being the lowest number of contacts per resident with '10' being the highest)

	Broxbourne	East Herts	Dacorum	Hertsmere	North Herts	Stevenage	St Albans	Three Rivers	Watford	Welwyn Hatfield
Population (2010 estimates)	90,600	138,500	142,900 (Highest population)	99,900	125,800	81,800	138,800	88,900	86,000	114,400
Face to Face (Visits per resident)	1.10	0.49	0.48 (ranking 5 th)	0.44	0.21	0.61	0.38	0.58	0.52	0.24
Calls (Calls per resident)	2.6	2.21	1.83 (ranking 6 th)	0.81	1.01	2.75	0.45	2.05	1.72	0.89
Web (hits per resident)	n/a	3.13	4.43 (ranking 5 th)	3.53	4.34	4.56	5.11	2.7	5.96	4.73

Appendix C

- DAWN B HAS BEEN VERY HELPFUL EACH TIME I COME
- USELESS.
- I FIND HAVING EVERYTHING UNDER THE SAME ROOF VERY BENEFICIAL AND EASY
- The lady I got through to was exceptionally good and it's a very simple reason she was patient and listened to me and then when I was finished she made comments, suggestions whatever and then I spoke and then she spoke and I have already been in contact with your Dacorum telephonists this morning who have the desire to talk over you. This particular lady and this particular department is brilliant 10 out of 10 big pats on the back and the lady has put me at my ease. Being disabled and not being able to do much for one's self this is the sort of attitude that helps me carry on with the rest of my day. Your other people who tend to talk over and shout you down make me very angry, very stressed and I have a heck of a day after that to come to terms with the way that I have been spoken to. Thank you very much for putting me through to that department as that department was brilliant. It was Housing Repairs by the way. Thank you very much.
- WAITIN TIME APPAULING 20 MINUITES CHECKED IN 1.10PM SEEN AT 1.30PM. YOU ARE BREAKING THE STANDARD SET BY THE COUNCIL PLEASE GET SORTED ITS A DISGRACE. STANDARD STATES 5 MINUTE WAITING TIME. NO MORE EXCUSES BECAUSE ITS LUNCH TIME THIS IS A PERSISTANT PROBLEM WHICH YOU HAVE NOT SORTED
- THANK YOU .TO.THE.LADY.AT.POSITION.9.
- MISTAKE MADE BY COMPUTER LEADING TO INCORRECT ASSUMPTIONS AND EMBARRASSEMENT.
- HASAN WAS EXTREMELY FRIENDLY AND HELPFUL
- YOUR SERVICE STINKED
- ASAM WAS V GOOD
- I was served in Housing Benefits by a gentleman called Julian and I would just like to comment that he was very, very, very helpful dealt with my query extremely efficiently so thank you very much for that.
- Seen today by Anthea who gave me excellent service.
- Julian and desk clerk were very helpful, very courteous and very patient, thank you very much
- The lady that dealt with me had to talk me through the transfer application on the laptop computer and she didn't rush me or want to hurry me up she just talked me through it and was very patient and helpful and I succeeded in looking at what I wanted to on my computer due to her help so thank you.
- VERY WELL INFORMED STAFF AND VERY PLEASANT.
- Fantastic service thank you.
- HELPFUL EFFICIENT APPROACHABLE
- I WALKED IN AND WASABLE TO SEE AN ADVISOR STRAIGHT AWAY. ALSO I LIKE THE WAY YOU PROVIDE A RECEIPT FOR THE DOCUMENTS I SUPPLIED
- A POLITE AND EFFICIENT MEMBER OF STAFF
- SARAH WAS VERY HELPFUL.
- VERY GOOD PERSONABLE SERVICE AS WELL EXTREMELY HELPFUL

- ASAM WAS HELPFUL AND ACTUALLY KNEW WHAT HE WAS ON ABOUT COMPARED TO THE MAJORITY OF STAFF HERE WELL DONE ASAM THANKS
- A bit of a long wait but when I got through the lady I spoke to was very, very good and very helpful so it was worth the wait. Thank you very much.
- I received good and helpful service today thank you very much.

- I deal with the council on behalf of a deaf person and it would be helpful to advise your workman that they shouldn't just knock on the door but they should use the doorbell as this has a flashing system for the deaf person to see. If you are deaf you may not hear the knocking at the door but you would see the flashing for the doorbell. Please advise your workman. Thank you.
- The lady I spoke to was very helpful and helped me in more ways than I asked for so it was great thank you very much.
- I am very pleased with the quick response thank you very much.
- I have just spoken to Jackie in Housing Benefit front-line and she was very helpful. I am very satisfied with the service there. The only problem before that was the queuing but it was not as bad as it has been so you are improving in that way thank you very much.
- The adviser I have just spoken with was cheerful and bright and helpful, listened to me fully and answered all of the questions I had calmly and in an order that made sense, yes she was helpful in everyway thank you.