Minute No. 357
Report – Executive Policy Committee – April 20, 2022

Item No. 2 Update on 311 Wait Times

COUNCIL DECISION:

Council concurred in the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee and adopted the following:

1. That this report be received as information.

Report – Executive Policy Committee – April 20, 2022

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by His Worship Mayor Bowman,
That the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee be adopted.

Carried

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On April 20, 2022, the Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and submitted the matter to Council.

The following persons submitted communications with respect to the matter:

- David Grant submitted a communication dated April 19, 2022
- Kelly Ryback submitted a presentation dated April 20, 2022

COUNCIL DECISION:

On March 24, 2022, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee, as amended, and adopted the following:

1. That a further extension of time of up to 30 days be granted for the Winnipeg Public Service to report back on the following:

    A. A cross-jurisdictional scan reviewing best practices and standards for contact centre operations in the public sector, including but not limited to acceptable wait time and issue resolution times.

    B. Options on how the City can improve wait time and resolution time for matters directed to 311.

2. That the Proper Officers at the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

Report – Executive Policy Committee – April 20, 2022

DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On March 16, 2022, the Executive Policy Committee submitted to Council that a further extension of time of up to 60 days be granted for the Winnipeg Public Service to report back on the following:

1. A cross-jurisdictional scan reviewing best practices and standards for contact centre operations in the public sector, including but not limited to acceptable wait time and issue resolution times.

2. Options on how the City can improve wait time and resolution time for matters directed to 311.

Kelly Ryback submitted a presentation dated March 16, 2022, with respect to the matter.

COUNCIL DECISION:

On January 27, 2022, Council concurred in the January 19, 2022, recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee and granted an extension of time of up to 60 days to report back on the matter.

On October 28, 2021, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee and adopted the following:

1. That the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back within 90 days on the following:

    A. A cross-jurisdictional scan reviewing best practices and standards for contact centre operations in the public sector, including but not limited to acceptable wait time and issue resolution times.

    B. Options on how the City can improve wait time and resolution time for matters directed to 311.

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

Report – Executive Policy Committee – April 20, 2022

DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On October 20, 2021, the Executive Policy Committee considered the Council Motion of September 29, 2021, and submitted the matter to Council.

COUNCIL DECISION:

On September 29, 2021, Council ruled automatic referral of the following motion to the Executive Policy Committee:

Moved by Councillor Nason,
Seconded by Councillor Mayes,

WHEREAS 311 is the main point of contact for citizens to get information about city services and programs or to make a request for service;

AND WHEREAS although 311 Customer Service Representatives are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, response times can vary significantly depending on numerous factors;

AND WHEREAS the Public Service has advised that wait times to answer 311 calls have increased due to COVID-19;

AND WHEREAS according to the 2021 budget documents, full-time equivalent staff levels at 311 have decreased by more than 25 percent over the past two years;

AND WHEREAS budgetary changes have not only resulted in increased response times but also increase resolution times;

AND WHEREAS residents often resort to contacting their Ward Councillor when faced with lengthy wait times at 311 for basic inquiries.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

1. That the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back within 90 days on the following:

Report – Executive Policy Committee – April 20, 2022

DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

COUNCIL DECISION (continued):

A. A cross-jurisdictional scan reviewing best practices and standards for contact centre operations in the public sector, including but not limited to acceptable wait time and issue resolution times.

B. Options on how the City can improve wait time and resolution time for matters directed to 311.

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Update on 311 Wait Times

Critical Path: Executive Policy Committee

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
F. Wiltshire	F. Wiltshire	N/A	M. Jack

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, the 311 Contact Centre experienced an increase in resident wait times both on the phone and email. Historically, we have seen wait times on the phone fluctuate year over year, however the average wait time in 2021 was unusually high at 11 minutes and 42 seconds.

The number of staff answering incoming inquiries at the 311 Contact Centre is regularly adjusted to accommodate known and forecast increases in volume, such as Leisure Guide Registration and significant snow events. However, we also experience times where the increase in inquiries is sudden and unexpected, such as a significant watermain break, power outage, or unexpected weather event.

Once phone wait time exceeds 20 minutes, the 311 Contact Centre will immediately undertake a number of steps to reduce the wait time including:

- Moving staff from answering email and social media to the phone lines,
- Calls out for staff willing to take an extra shift or work overtime,
- Shutting off the automatic callback feature because it ties up additional phone lines and removes staff from the primary purpose of answering the initial call,
- Skills based routing of calls so more experienced call takers are answering more difficult calls to help reduce talk time, and
- Adding messages to the interactive voice recording to address issues with unanticipated high call volume, such as operating hours for sandbag pickup or snow clearing updates.

The following work is currently being undertaken in an effort to reduce overall wait times and to provide better information to residents on current issues and wait times:

- Continue to prioritize and enhance the online forms for high request items that do not require a phone call,
- Explore the elimination of 311 email address in line with other jurisdictions,
- Redevelop the 311 training program to allow more flexibility and speed in hiring and on-boarding without sacrificing the quality of the training program, and
- Launch an online dashboard to allow residents to see real time information on:

- wait times,
- talk time, and
- current call drivers.

Over the longer term, work is being done to address employee retention as this has been a growing concern over the past two years. Among the issues we are addressing include:

- the starting wage for entry level positions at 311;
- incorporating flexible workplace arrangements for employees; and
- setting stronger guidelines for Customer Service Representatives to terminate call due to abusive language.

The Customer Service & Communications (CSC) Department is also working in collaboration with the Innovation & Technology (IT) Department to enhance online services for residents including redevelopment of the City of Winnipeg website and in the initial planning stage for the development of a customer portal. At this time, we are not exploring the option of instituting a Chatbot, as the infrastructure on the City's website needs to be repaired first. CSC and IT spent approximately 24 months working on developing a Chatbot solution for 311, however due to the state of the City's website, the Chatbot was not able to effectively navigate the website to find answers residents were looking for and therefore would have required additional human resources capacity in the Contact Centre to live chat with residents when the Bot was unable to find the answer. At this time, adding an additional channel into 311 will not help lower phone wait times, but instead will continue to drive up the wait time on phone as staff would need to be removed from the phones to handle a live chat option. We are committed to exploring the Chatbot option once we have completed our website redevelopment project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That this report be received as information.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

At its October 28, 2021 meeting, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee and adopted the following:

1. That the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back within 90 days on the following:
    A. A cross-jurisdictional scan reviewing best practices and standards for contact centre operations in the public sector, including but not limited to acceptable wait time and issue resolution times.
    B. Options on how the City can improve wait time and resolution time for matters directed to 311.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no implications associated with receiving this report as information.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

The City of Winnipeg's 311 Contact Centre (311) has been in operation since 2009, and continues to look for ways to improve the level of service that they are able to provide the residents of Winnipeg. With 311's philosophy of continuous improvement throughout its operations, from frontline call-handling and scripting, to back-end programming, all aspects of 311 are continuously monitored for routine and periodic enhancements to continuously build on citizens' customer service experience

When the 311 Contact Centre first opened in 2009, original methods of interaction with residents included phone, email, fax, and TTY (telephone device for the hearing disabled). Since 2009, additional channels have been added including Council 311, face-to-face counter service at 510 Main Street, 311 mobile app, social media, web self-service, as well as a call-back service in English and in French. This evolution has led to significant changes to 311's responsibilities in both scope and scale. The expansion of services has been accomplished within existing annual budgets and without any increase in resources.

The services offered by 311 currently include:

- 311 phone line – operating 24 hours a day/7 days a week
- Call back services in English and French
- 311@winnipeg.ca email – monitored 24 hours a day/7 days a week
- Social media (facebook & twitter) – 8 a.m. – 9 p.m. Monday to Friday and 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday
- In-person (510 Main Street) – staffed from Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Council 311 – staffed from Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
- Self service online forms available on the City's website

It is important to remember that 311 operates as the in-take channel for residents and businesses to access information and services for the City departments. The City departments then hold responsibility for fulfilling any service requests within their own established service standards, which vary depending on the resources available within each department. There are Service Level Agreements between departments and 311 for each service request type, and at this time there are approximately 1,290 service level agreements in place.

Service levels at the 311 Contact Centre are regularly monitored, and wait time for phone and email are monitored in real time. According to the Manitoba Contact Centre Association (MCCA), most outsourced call centres aim to follow the 80/20 rule which means 80% of the calls are answered within 20 seconds and 100% of emails are answered within four hours. However, MCCA also indicated that most centres are finding 80/20 too aggressive of a target especially when dealing with complicated questions which is a growing trend. Several centres are instead focusing on quality of call with a higher rate of first call resolution (FCR). At the 311 Contact Centre, our focus is taking the time required to answer the resident's inquiry as opposed to quick termination for lower wait times. At this time, we do not track FCR, but this is a metric that we will begin monitoring and tracking.

Staffing levels at the 311 Contact Centre are regularly adjusted to accommodate known and forecast increases in inquiries, such as Leisure Guide Registration and significant snow events.

However, we also experience times where the increase in inquiries is sudden and unexpected, such as a significant watermain break, power outage, or unexpected weather event.

Once phone wait time exceeds 20 minutes, the 311 Contact Centre will immediately undertake a number of steps to reduce the wait time including:

- Moving staff from answering email and social media to the phone lines,
- Calls out for staff willing to take an extra shift or work overtime,
- Shutting off the automatic callback feature because it ties up additional phone lines and removes staff from the primary purpose of answering the initial call,
- Skills based routing of calls so more experienced call takers are taking more difficult calls such as assessment and taxation questions to help reduce talk time, and
- Adding messages to the interactive voice recording to answer a question with a high call volume such as operating hours for sandbag pickup.

The top 10 call drivers for 311 have continued to remain relatively consistent.

2021 Top 10 Call Drivers

Reason	Type	Count
Transit	Bus Schedule	34,622
Assessment & Taxation	Assessment & Taxation Inquiry	27,639
Non-City Services	Non-City Services Inquiry	17,175
Garbage & Recycling	Request for Bulky Pick-up – 10 items	12,796
Garbage & Recycling	Carts Damaged By Collection Crews	11,611
Recreation & Leisure	CmS Other – process a registration	10,491
Garbage & Recycling	Garbage & Recycling Inquiry	9,833
Parking Authority	Parking Authority Inquiry	9,131
Parking Authority	Parking Infraction Report	7,341
Water	Water Billing Inquiry (take and transfer)	6,816

2020 Top 10 Call Drivers

Reason	Type	Count
Transit	Bus Schedule	63,861
Assessment & Taxation	Assessment & Taxation Inquiry	30,621
Non-City Services	Non-City Services Inquiry	25,291
Garbage & Recycling	Garbage & Recycling Inquiry	15,740
Garbage & Recycling	Request for Bulky Pick-up – 10 items	13,594
Parking Authority	Parking Authority Inquiry	11,487
Recreation & Leisure	CmS Other – process a registration	8,451
Water	Water Billing Inquiry (take and transfer)	8,180
Garbage & Recycling	Carts Damaged By Collection Crew	7,818
Transit	Peggo General Inquiry	7,262

Cross-jurisdictional scan of contact centres in the public sector

The Public Service is in regular contact with 311 Contact Centres across the country, to discuss best practices and to learn from each other. It is difficult to directly compare each 311 Contact Centre, as no two centres operate exactly the same. There is variability in operating hours, service channels, staffing levels, and departments supported by the 311 services. Most notably, we found that most municipalities do not include Transit as part of their 311 offerings, which for Winnipeg continues to be one of our top call drivers year over year.

We reached out to a number of Canadian municipalities and received information from Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Toronto, and other Ontario municipalities (Region of Halton and City of Brampton) on their 311 operations.

- **City of Winnipeg (24/7 operation)**
    - Population: 766,900
    - 2021 average wait time: 11 minutes and 42 seconds
    - 2021 number of calls received: 626,187
    - FTE count = 72
        - 51 CSRs (broken down into 22 full-time + 58 part-time), eight CSR2s, five team leads, and eight management/administrative staff
    - Service channels: Phone, email, social media, in-person, web/self-service online forms, Council 311
    - Service call types: all city-related information and service requests covering all departments including Winnipeg Transit. Non-city related inquiries are transferred to respective agencies (Federal, Canada Post, Manitoba Hydro, 211, etc). Also handling calls related to Provincial COVID-19 Public Health Orders since March 2020.

- **City of Calgary (24/7 operation)**
    - Population: 1.2 million
    - 2021 average wait time: 4 minutes and 46 seconds
    - 2021 number of calls: 609,507
    - FTE count = 63
        - 50 full time agents plus additional 29 on-call staff that can work a maximum of 20 hours per week
    - Service channels: Phone, social media, web, in-person
    - In July 2014, they eliminated email as a channel as they found email was taking too much time and many resources in order to get information required from the resident to action their request. They refer residents to online forms instead of using email.
    - They have one dedicated 311 agent to accept emails from Mayor/Council members and some internal business units
    - As of December 31, 2021, 311 Calgary did not take Transit calls. They began accepting Transit calls as of January 1, 2022, with additional FTEs being added to 311 Calgary from the Transit call centre to handle the Transit calls.

- **City of Vancouver (Daily 7 a.m. – 10 p.m.)**
    - Population: 631,486
    - 2021 average wait time: 1 minute and 12 seconds
    - 2021 number of calls: 441,134

- FTE count 57
    - Phone: 29 full-time, Chat: 3.5, and Support/QA/Pivot: 6.5
- Service channels: Phone, Web, App, Social Media, and Live Chat
- Service call types: All city related inquiries and complaints, however 311 Vancouver does not provide any services for non-city related areas including Transit.
- They eliminated email as a channel in 2016

➢ **City of Toronto (24/7 operation)**
- Population: 2.7 million
- 2021 average wait time: close to 1 minute
- 2021 number of calls: 1,183,835
- FTE count: would not disclose
- Service channels: Phone, email, chat, social media, fax
- Service call types: All city related inquiries and complaints, however 311 Toronto does not handle Transit related interactions

➢ **Halton Region (Monday to Friday 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.)**
- Population: 500,000
- 2021 average wait time: close to 2 minutes
- 2021 number of calls: 520,693 +33,908 voicemails
- FTE count = 27
    - 16 full-time CSRs, three part-time, three contractual staff, and five support staff handling social media, web/online requests, reports, and scheduling
- Service channels: Phones, emails, web, social media, in-person
- Service call types : Local municipal government inquiries, Public Works, Public Health, Social and Community Services (Children's Services, Employment & Social Services, Services for Seniors, Housing), Legislative & Planning Services (Economic Development, Human Resources, Planning Services, Legal Services), Strategic Transformation Group (IT, Business Transformation, Communications & Customer Service, Facilities), Finance, Regional Chair and CAO's office, Halton Regional Police Service, School Boards.
- Transit inquiries/interactions are not handled by 311 and handled by the Department directly

➢ **City of Brampton (24/7 operation)**
- Population: 433,000
- 2021 average wait time: 3 minutes and 46 seconds
- 2021 number of calls: 501,194
- FTE count = 52
    - 21 full-time, 64 part-time
- Service channels: Phone, email, web, dispatch
    - Phones: handles all 311 inquiries except City Hall phone inquiries which are answered by Service Brampton.
    - In person: Cashier's office, plus five Service Brampton Centres spread throughout the City for residents to receive the same services in person as they can receive over the phone. Two additional Service Brampton Centres will be opening in early 2022.

        - Email: manage the email channel for nine public email addresses for eight divisions: Park Operations, Road Operations, Bylaw Enforcement, City Hall, Webmaster, Contact Us (Contact us forms from Brampton.ca come into this address), Property Tax, Express Support (Recreation)
        - Dispatch: This is an internal support function. They dispatch service requests for Animal Services, Parks, Roads, Enforcement, and with the addition of others based on seasonality or working alone procedures.
        - They have an internal Service Delivery program that is also managed by Dispatch, which allows the Mayor's and Council offices to have service requests created and dispatched through one central location
    - Service call types: HR, Bylaw Enforcement, Animal Services, Road Operations, Recreation, Brampton Entrepreneurial Centre, Mayor and Council Offices, Performing Arts, Planning Property Tax – Information (in person services also accept payments), Park Ops, Elections, IT Service Desk – Information and tickets, (in a back up capacity), Provincial Offences, Building Dept, Zoning
    - Transit Department has their own contact centre. These inquiries are not handled by 311 but when they get inquiries/complaints, they forward any relevant concerns to the department as needed

In addition to other 311 Contact Centres, we also reached out to other public sector contact centres based in Manitoba and heard back from Manitoba Public Insurance and Manitoba Government Inquiry Line. These contact centres operate on a limited schedule. Their practices of allowing customers to wait on hold also varies, and they will not allow a call to go through if the lines are busy, and instead callers will get a recorded message advising them that call volumes are high and they should try again another time.

- **Manitoba Public Insurance (Monday – Friday 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. and Saturday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)**
    - 2021 average wait time: 1 minute and 45 seconds
    - 2021 number of calls: 728,730
    - FTE count = 123
        - 50 full-time, with the remainder part-time
    - Service Channels: Phone, email, and chat
    - Service call types: Public calls = claims (vehicle and bodily injury), inquiries related to driver licensing, vehicle registration, and insurance. Insurance Broker calls = sale of MPI products, support calls, and process driven calls where the broker requires MPI intervention before a transaction can proceed.

- **Manitoba Government Inquiry Line (Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)**
    - 2021 average wait time: close to 2 minutes
    - 2021 number of calls: 74,203
    - FTE count = 32.5
        - five full-time permanent, 25 full-time term, and five part-time term S
    - Service Channels: Phone, email, and chat
    - Service call types: All tier 1 inquiries across provincial government and COVID tip line for Manitoba (except Winnipeg which is directed to 311).

Future Improvements for 311

Over the past two years, we have seen a significant increase in wait times on phone and email at the 311 Contact Centre. Historically we have seen wait times on the phone fluctuate year over year, the average wait times in 2020 and 2021 have been abnormally high.

2017 average wait time (in minutes) - 3:04
2018 average wait time (in minutes) – 7:36
2019 average wait time (in minutes) – 2:56
2020 average wait time (in minutes) – 5:27
2021 average wait time (in minutes) – 11:42

There are a number of factors that have contributed to this increase in wait times including:

- Increased complexity in calls which requires more time on the phone. Data shows that talk time at 311 has steadily increased year over year for the past five years.
    - 2017 average talk time (in minutes) – 4:39
    - 2018 average talk time (in minutes) – 4:54
    - 2019 average talk time (in minutes) – 5:13
    - 2020 average talk time (in minutes) – 5:41
    - 2021 average talk time (in minutes) – 6:14
- An increase in new staff which often requires more time on the phone as they become more comfortable with scripting and call processes.
- A steady increase in the number of emails and social media interactions, which means Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) are taken off the phones each shift to focus on answering emails and social media.

The Customer Service and Communications Department is working on a number of initiatives to reduce wait times and to address the factors that are directly linked to the increased wait times.

1. Continue to prioritize and enhance the online forms for high request items that do not require a phone call.

In the fall of 2020, we launched a new 311 self-service website which included 14 fully bilingual forms online. The online forms allowed residents to quickly submit a service request to the City, without needing to speak to a CSR. Online forms are also beneficial to 311 staff and departments because they go directly to the department without needing to be handled by 311, and will contain all of the information the department requires to address the request as the resident is not able to submit a form without all of the required fields being completed. Residents are then provided with a tracking number for their service request, and able to track progress on their complaint online. While we are expediting the creation of online forms, we know there are still gaps in the information being provided to residents about their request. We are continuing to work on improving the information that is available to the resident on their issue, however due to the volume of forms that are being submitted, there are times when we are unable to provide residents with as much detail as they would like. This is an area that we will continue to work on as time permits.

Since the launch of online forms in 2020, we have continued to expand the service. We are focusing our efforts on service requests that have a high call volume, but do not necessarily require an agent on the phone to answer.

As of March 31, 2022, we have 35 online forms available to the public, that can create 57 different service request types. Some of the latest online forms added include:

- Snow clearing deficiencies
- Parking infractions
- Frozen catch basins
- Missed garbage/recycling collection
- Request for bulky waste pick-up

We are currently working on expanding online forms specifically related to issue such as:

- Tree concerns such as pruning, branch pick-up, damaged, fallen, sick
- Animal Services requests
- Insect control complaints/requests
- Parks maintenance requests

As we continue to expand the number of online forms we are seeing an increased use of the forms by members of the public. In 2021, we had 6,399 service requests submitted through online forms. Up to March 31, 2022, we had approximately 11,783 service requests submitted through online forms.

2. Explore the elimination of 311 email address in line with best practice across other jurisdictions.

As part of the cross jurisdictional scan of 311 Contact Centres across the country, it was found that most other jurisdictions have eliminated the use of email as a service channel at 311. Instead of the generic email address, they are relying on online forms. The rational other jurisdictions have used for eliminating email is that it is one of the most expensive service channels when broken down by cost per interaction, because it takes a significant amount of time to go back and forth with residents via email to get all of the necessary information before 311 can file a service request with a department.

At this time, we have not done this specific financial analysis within our own service, but are looking into this as part of putting together the budget for 2023. However, we feel that our analysis will yield similar results to other jurisdictions as email interactions with a resident can often extend over multiple shifts and multiple days. Staff at 311 are unable to submit a service request with a department until they have all the information required by the department, which in turn delays submission and ultimately delays action on the service request.

With the increased availability of online forms for specific requests, and the future creation of a generic service request form to handle all other inquiries, we are looking to eventually move to elimination of the 311 email address.

The other concern with email, is that when wait times increase we see a correlation in the increase in emails, however the allocation of resources at 311 remains constant, so CSRs are then removed from the phones to deal with the increase in emails, which leads to a circular process of less CSRs answering phone calls and therefore further increased wait times.

3. Redevelop the 311 training program to allow more flexibility and speed in hiring and on-boarding without sacrificing the quality of the training program.

The current 311 training program has set an industry standard and has been awarded the Training and Development Award from the Manitoba Contact Centre Association. The training program has continued to be refreshed over the years, in an effort to ensure trainees are prepared for the reality of taking calls from the public as soon as possible into their training. This has been done by breaking up training into smaller modules, and then placing trainees into the call centre to answer calls related to those specific modules, before returning to the classroom for further training on more complex topics.

The current training program requires trainees to commit to five weeks of full-time training in a classroom setting, before they are fully released into the call centre. Increasingly, we have found this full-time commitment has become a barrier for anyone who wishes to work part-time hours with 311 as they are often unable to complete the training requirement. In addition, we are only able to accommodate 12 trainees in a class at a time, which means a tremendous amount of effort goes into hiring 12 people to fill the class but once trainees make their way through the training, some will realize the job is not quite what they anticipated and will withdrawal from training and resign from their position.

Due to the in-person requirement for training, 311 was unable to offer as many training classes during the pandemic. They are working to increase the number of training classes, and to increase hiring, however there continues to be a higher number of vacancies at 311 than is ideal.

In order to address this hiring backlog, 311 is working with Human Resource Services to update their training program. Included in the update is the production of online training modules which trainees can do as their schedule permits, online exams to test knowledge following the completion of training modules, and then scheduled time in the contact centre to introduce trainees to the realities of working in a contact centre environment. We feel that moving to having online training options available, in addition to the standard in classroom training, will allow 311 to hire CSRs on a rolling basis, allow them to more easily increase the staffing levels, and will attract more staff who are only interested in working on a part-time basis.

4. Launch an online dashboard to allow residents to see real time information on:
   a. wait times,
   b. talk time, and
   c. current call drivers.

In 2019, we launched an internal dashboard to provide staff at 311 with real-time information on wait time, talk time, and call drivers to help make operational plans to address issues in real time.

We are now working with the Innovation & Technology Department to update this dashboard and make it available to the public. We feel that by releasing this information publicly, it can be used as another tool for residents when they are making the decision to call 311. They will be able to see the current wait time, talk time, call types, and which area of the city the calls are

coming from. If an issue is not urgent, residents will be able to see when the wait time is lower and they are able to receive phone service sooner.

5. Increase employee retention

In 2021, the turnover rate at 311 was approximately 27% compared to an approximately 45% turnover rate for the Manitoba Contact Centre Industry in the same timeframe. While our turnover rate is significantly lower than the industry average, we would still like to see this number substantially lowered.

Over the longer term, work is being done to address employee retention. Among the issues we are addressing include:

- the starting wage for entry level positions at 311;
- incorporating flexible workplace arrangements for employees; and
- setting stronger guidelines for Customer Service Representatives to terminate call due to abusive language.

The job of a frontline CSR at 311 is not an easy job. Staff require a tremendous amount of knowledge in order to perform their jobs, and that knowledge base only grows with time. When we have high staff turnover rates, we not only lose valuable members of our staff, we also lose institutional knowledge. Talk time is higher for newer CSRs and steadily decreases as the longer employees are with 311, as their familiarity with city services, processes, and common issues increases. We also know that the 311 CSR positions are a great entry point into the City's workforce, but we also want to do our best to give employees a positive work environment and a place where they want to grow their careers.

We are currently working with Human Resource Services to perform a comprehensive assessment of the terms and conditions of employment within 311 (including compensation) to determine what adjustments, if any, may be required to address these issues. We expect this analysis to be complete within the next 2-4 months, with any recommended changes occurring thereafter.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic also forced us to introduce remote work for 311 employees, but we have found the flexibility for remote work has had a positive impact on staff at 311. Over the past two years we have had a constant mix of 311 staff working from the call centre and from home, including our front-line CSRs. In order for 311 staff to work remote, we required them to have reliable internet and a quiet, dedicated workspace. We have required all staff to return to the contact centre for Leisure Guide registration days, but otherwise have continued to work in this hybrid environment. For a city service that operates 24/7 staff have responded positively to this flexibility, and we have not received any complaints about call quality as a result of anyone taking calls from home. We intend to make flexible workplace a permanent fixture of 311, and will begin advertising it as part of our hiring process.

Finally, we are also working with Human Resource Services to set stronger guidelines for CSRs to terminate calls due to abusive language. Over the past two years, we have noticed that calls are taking on a more negative tone with more abusive language directed towards 311 staff which is having a direct impact on the mental health of our staff. In line with the City's Code of Conduct, we are further empowering staff to terminate calls sooner when the language and tone

of an exchange is unacceptable. We feel staff need to be able to terminate a call with only one warning if it becomes abusive, without fear of being reprimanded for failing to address the resident's reason for calling. The health and well-being of our staff is important, we feel this is one more small improvement that will have a significant positive impact on our staff.

6. Enhancing online services.

The Customer Service & Communications Department is also working in collaboration with the Innovation & Technology Department to enhance online services for residents including redevelopment of the City of Winnipeg website and the development of a customer portal.

Website redevelopment project

The website redevelopment project includes the development of:

- a content strategy that meets audience needs, improves user experience, and includes accessibility standards for content;
- a sitemap that organizes pages and content types into a service and topic focused structure that makes navigation easy for users;
- a migration strategy for content to be rewritten and moved to the redeveloped site, and
- a content management system.

The next phase of the website is anticipated to launch in Q4 2022.

Customer Portal

The implementation of a general-purpose customer portal will connect online city services, enhance resident self-service capabilities, and improve resident tracking of the status of service requests. Overall, resident experiences will be improved by giving them one spot to track all of their interactions with the City of Winnipeg, regardless of the department or service that they are looking for.

The City of Winnipeg provides online self-service through several existing portals and apps, including myUtility, leisureOnline, KnowYourZone, WTOnRequest, and PulsePoint. Each of these online self-service tools improves customer service and the resident experience by making information and service requests available directly from a smart phone or laptop. Each inquiry or service transaction that is completed via a portal represents the avoidance of one or more calls to 311. As an example, recent self-service capabilities have been added or enhanced in myUtility and leisureOnline to reduce top-10 call drivers for bulky waste item pickups and leisure programming registration which is now completed online by almost all registrants.

The City does not yet have a general-purpose multi-service portal or customer relationship management capability which would enable reduction of calls to 311 for taxation and other general inquiries. Integrating existing portals with use of a shared digital identity would strengthen overall use of these tools and promote further maturing of online self-service.

The Public Service will use funding from the Innovation Program Capital funding to initiate the development of a general-purpose customer portal, and will be seeking capital funding in future budgets for the completion of this project.

Chatbot

At this time, we are not exploring the option of instituting a Chatbot, as the infrastructure on the City's website needs to be repaired first. CSC and IT spent approximately 24 months working on developing a Chatbot solution for 311, however due to the state of the City's website, the Chatbot was not able to effectively navigate the website to find answers residents were looking for and therefore would have required additional human resources capacity in the Contact Centre to live chat with residents when the Bot was unable to find the answer. At this time, adding an additional channel into 311 will not help lower phone wait times, but instead will continue to drive up the wait time on phone as staff would need to be removed from the phones to handle a live chat option. We are committed to exploring the Chatbot option once we have completed our website redevelopment project.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement

Date: March 28, 2022

Project Name:

Update on 311 Wait Times

COMMENTS:

There are no financial implications to receiving this report as information.

(Approved electronically by J. Duke for J. Peters)
Jocelyn Peters, CPA, CGA
Manager of Finance & Administration (Campus)

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

Innovation & Technology Department

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

1.5 Evidence-Informed Decisions
Invest in data and technology in order to support objective, evidence-informed decision-making; support open government and open data principles for collection and sharing; help coordinate records and information management; and improve process efficiency, results-based service delivery and accountability.

1.19 Equitable Service Access
Achieve best practice standards in equitable customer service and communications, enabling all community members to understand and navigate municipal service-delivery systems and decision-making processes, in the official language of their choice.

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

n/a

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

Goal 6: All City Services are Equitable, Inclusive and Accessible

Action 6.3 – Increased Communications of City Programs and Services
Strategically use communications tools to increase awareness of existing City programs and services that benefit people experiencing poverty. These include, but are not limited to, updating the centralized information page on the City website (winnipeg.ca/Supporting Winnipeggers) and sharing with community partners, enhanced promotions for key City services (e.g. multi-lingual interpreter service available on 311, Recreation Fee Subsidy and third-party referral program, WINNpass program, low-cost shower-only ($1.95) option at Recreation facilities, etc.)

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Customer Service & Communications
Division: Office of the Director
Prepared by: F. Wiltshire
Date: March 30, 2022
File No: