Minutes – Executive Policy Committee – December 5, 2023

REPORTS

Item No. 12 Progress to Improve 311 Wait Times

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service, as amended, and recommended to Council:

1. That this report be received as information.

2. That the Public Service be directed to provide a verbal report to the Executive Policy Committee in 30 days on the citizen portal.

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

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Rollins,

That the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service be concurred in, with the following amendment:

- Add the following new Recommendation:

    "2. That the Public Service be directed to provide a verbal report to the Executive Policy Committee in 30 days on the citizen portal."

and forwarded to Council.

Carried

David Grant submitted a communication with respect to the matter.

COUNCIL DECISION:

On October 26, 2023, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee, and granted an extension of up to 60 days for the Winnipeg Public Service to report back on the progress to improve customer service and wait times within 311 service, including on-going FTE requirements.

On March 22, 2023, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee, which included the following recommendation:

HH. That the Director of Customer Service & Communications:

i. be authorized to increase the FTE complement in the 311 division by up to 9 (6.75 FTEs prorated in 2023) in accordance with the 2023 Budget increase to ensure retention and increase recruitment; and

ii. report back to Council within 180 days on the progress to improve customer service and wait times within 311 service, including on-going FTE requirements.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Progress to improve 311 wait times

Critical Path: Executive Policy Committee

AUTHORIZATION

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Investments made in the 2023 budget increased funding to the 311 Contact Centre by $870,883 to improve wait times at 311.

To date, six new FTEs have been hired in the 311 Contact Centre and the overtime budget was increased to offer more overtime hours to deal with unexpected increases in call to 311. An additional $126,000 was spent to add more phone lines, which will help prevent residents from receiving a busy signal when calling 311 during times of high call volume. An additional $1,000 will be spent on Plain Language training for staff who are responsible for writing scripts at 311.

To date, we are anticipating approximately $125,000 will be unspent at the end of the year. This is due to challenges in hiring Customer Service Representative I (CSR I) positions, which are the front-line call operators. This funding is equivalent to approximately two CSR I positions.

To date, the average phone wait time at 311 has decreased. As of October 31, 2023, the average wait time was 5 minutes 54 seconds. In 2021 and 2022, the average wait time was approximately 11 minutes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That this report be received as information.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

At its March 22, 2023, meeting, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee and adopted the following:

HH. That the Director of Customer Service & Communications:

i. be authorized to increase the FTE complement in the 311 division by up to 9 (6.75 FTEs prorated in 2023) in accordance with the 2023 Budget increase to ensure retention and increase recruitment; and

ii. report back to Council within 180 days on the progress to improve customer service and wait times within 311 service, including on-going FTE requirements.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

The 2023 Balanced Budget Update increased funding for 311 by 25 percent to enable the recruitment of additional staff and improve retention of existing staff. This budget increase resulted in an additional $870,833 in operating funding available to 311 in 2023. The funding adjustment began in April 2023 following the adoption of the 2023 budget.

To date, six new FTEs have been created in the 311 Contact Centre, to help address staffing shortages across the division with the overall goal of reducing 311 wait times. The three the positions are at the CSR I and CSR II level, which are the frontline staff who answer phones, along with responding to emails and social media.

One additional Team Lead position was added, bringing the full complement to six. This position is responsible for supervising and providing daily guidance to CSR I and CSR II staff, in addition to handling escalated calls.

One additional Knowledge Management Liaison position was added bringing the full complement to three. This position is responsible for creating new scripts and updating existing scripts for 311 staff to follow when they are dealing with service requests and information requests.

One of the issues 311 continues to face is in recruitment. Specifically, recruiting new staff at a rate that negates turnover so that the Department doesn't fall behind overall. The Department has been struggling to keep up with recruitment and, as a result, one FTE has been used to hire a full-time Human Resources Specialist to focus exclusively on 311. This position will allow the Department to get through the hiring process more efficiently, and also allows for opportunities in the future to participate in recruitment fairs and other targeted recruitment efforts. With a dedicated HR Specialist, the Department is confident it can keep up its complement and fully utilize the increased funding.

An additional $126,000 was spent to add more phone lines, which will help prevent residents receiving a busy signal when calling 311 during times of high call volume.

In accordance with the recently-adopted Plain Language Policy, an additional $1,000 will be spent on plain language training for staff who are responsible for writing scripts at 311.

Finally, approximately $110,000 has been put towards the overtime budget. The 311 Contact Centre relies heavily on overtime in order to deal with surges in call volume due to unexpected events, such as storms. Having more funding available in the overtime budget allows us to use this more without concern of exceeding available budget resources.

The Department is continuing to make improvements to 311 in order to bring down average wait times. In 2021 and 2022, the average wait time exceeded 11 minutes. As of October 2023, the average overall wait time was 5 minutes 54 seconds. During peak call periods, between 9 a.m.

and noon, the average wait time was 5 minutes 42 seconds. Approximately 17 percent of calls are received at 311 during this timeframe.

In order to continue to bring wait times down, the Department is focused on its recruitment and retention efforts so that enough staff are available to:

a) answer phones in a timely manner on a daily basis; and

b) provide additional call-taking capacity to handle surges during unexpected events.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement **Date:** November 14, 2023

Project Name:
Progress to improve 311 wait times

COMMENTS:
There are no financial implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

Randy Bernard
Randy Bernard, CPA, CMA
Manager of Finance & Administration (Campu
Corporate Finance Department

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

n/a

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

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

Consideration was given as to whether this report connects to the Winnipeg Climate Action Plan (CAP), and it was determined that the CAP is not applicable to this specific report.

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/SupportingWinnipeggers) 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: 311 Contact Centre
Prepared by: F. Wiltshire
Date: November 14, 2023
File No: N/A

Attachments: N/A