

# CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 SEPTEMBER 2023

## CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRE

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### Summary

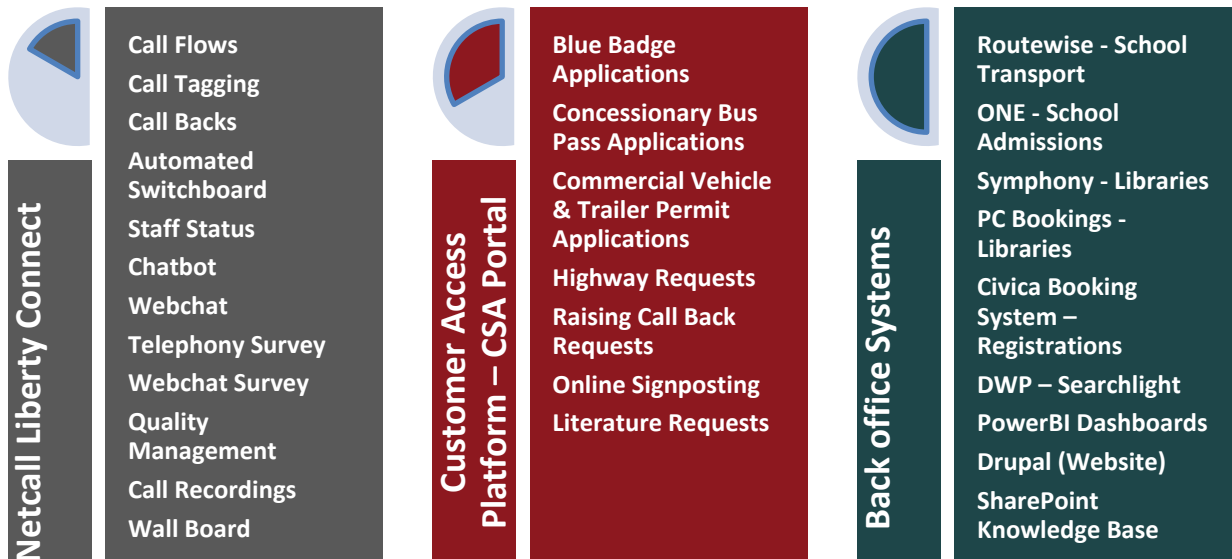
1. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has requested an overview of the Council’s Customer Contact Centre.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication and the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change have been invited to attend the meeting in order to respond to any questions the Panel may have.

### Overview of the Customer Services Contact Centre

3. The Customer Services Contact Centre provides a first point of contact for Worcestershire residents’ enquiries, offering a choice of channels including telephony, webchat, chatbot (a computer program designed to simulate conversation with human users especially over the internet), online self-service, and paper applications (limited to Blue Badge only). The aim is to make things simple, clear, easy to use and accessible for residents, whilst supporting them.
4. The team provides advice, guidance and processes a range of applications for 20 different services which are distinctly unique, and each require specific service knowledge of the processes to be followed. The enquiries received in relation to these services span broad areas of knowledge ranging from Social Care, School Admissions, to Highways and Travel. They include:

General County enquiries	Libraries	Highways	Here2Help	Payment & Client Charges	Care Contributions
Demand Responsive Transport Service	School admissions	School Transport / SEN Transport	Countryside and Public Rights of Way	Registrations	Concessionary Travel / Public Transport
Blue Badge	Gypsy services	Streetlighting	Switchboard	Waste Management	Accounts Payable / Accounts Receivable

5. For Blue Badge, Concessionary bus pass and waste management, an end-to-end application process is delivered that includes initial enquires right through to assessing and ordering badges, passes or permits.
6. Approximately 115,000 assisted contacts per annum are dealt with, and an additional 71,434 applications are received and processed per annum.
7. The team currently consists of 18 team members working a mixture of full time and part time, equating to a total Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of 14.93.
8. The team uses a range of technologies, including those set out below:



9. The Customer Services Contact Centre is open 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday. Most of the enquiries dealt with are under the umbrella of 'once and done' and 'right first time' where there is an 'end to end' process. The services provided come under the following categories: Simple Transaction, Registered Service, Facilitated Service, Advocacy Service, and Information Provision.

## Telephony

10. The Contact Centre uses Netcall Liberty Converse Contact Centre solution for telephony and webchat.
11. The Netcall platform includes a range of features that enable us to provide efficient and effective customer communications.
12. A summary of the features of Netcall are included below:
  - **Call Flows** provide configurable prompts that are played to callers over the telephone to direct their call to the appropriate queue.
  - **Skills Based Routing** allows telephone calls to be routed to advisers based on the skills and knowledge groups they are allocated to.
  - **Call Tagging** offers the ability to identify the nature of the call at a high level to help establish trends on the types of calls received for each service or queue.

- **Queue Buster** offers the caller an option to leave a contact number and be called back, instead of holding in the queue for an advisor.
  - The caller retains their position in the queue and will receive a call back at the same time as they would if they remained in the queue.
  - Queue buster is turned off for last hour of day to aide in clearing queues.
  - If a returned call goes to Voicemail, the advisor will leave a message and the call clears from the queue.
  - If the caller does not have a voicemail, the call is requeued and attempted two further times.
- **Activity Codes** provide the ability to identify the amount of time advisers spend in activity type (e.g. awaiting call, in call, wrap up time, etc)
- **Call Recordings** enable telephone calls to be recorded for the purposes of training and for quality management monitoring.
- **Quality Management** provides the capability to undertake assessments of advisers' performance by listening to a call recording and scoring them based a pre-defined assessment criteria. This is used to identify areas for training or best practice to pass on to other advisers.
- **Telephone Survey** enables the customer to be presented-with a short survey at the end of the telephone interaction so customer satisfaction data can be captured.
- **Webchat Survey** enables the Council to present the customer with a short survey at the end of a webchat interaction to capture customer satisfaction data.
- **Webchat** provides the capability to have a text based conversational chat with a customer via the website if they cannot resolve their query using the automated chatbot.
- **Chatbot** provides the capability to present the customer with a range of automated workflows to help signpost the customer to the relevant information or to present them with the information to resolve their query without them needing to speak to or contact an adviser.
- **Social Media & Messaging** provides the capability to automatically send web links to customers via SMS directly from the call flows to help avoid unnecessary telephone demand. It also provides the ability to present chatbot flows and webchat service via different social media channels such as Facebook Messenger and Twitter.
- **Wallboard** enables key data to be presented on a screen in the Contact Centre for example the number of calls queuing, answered, adviser status, and relevant data.

13. Appendix 1 includes further Customer Services Contact Centre Statistics

## Chatbot and Webchat

14. The “Worcestershire web assistant” chatbot was launched using Netcall on 1 February 2021 including numerous chatbot flows<sup>1</sup>. Where the chatbot is unable to answer the enquiry, then the customer is given the option to either liaise with a Customer Adviser via webchat or request further assistance via an online form. Ad hoc Chat Flows are added during ‘peak’ times, for example regarding school admissions and school transport.
15. Following introduction of the Netcall “Worcestershire Web Assistant” chatbot, over 90% of enquiries made via the chatbot are handled automatically without the need to be transferred to a Customer Services Adviser.
16. The benefits to customers include:
  - Customer still can liaise with an experienced Customer Services Adviser if required, via the webchat functionality, during normal office hours.
  - Fewer webchat requests releases capacity for Customer Services Advisers to focus on calls and other service fulfilment tasks, providing a better overall customer experience.
  - User friendly service for both for the customer and the Customer Services Adviser.
  - The availability of the chatbot is having a positive impact on the customers’ experience of the website and their ability to find information on the site. This is evidenced by the number of chats which are being automatically handled via the chatbot, which has successfully used content on the website to answer the customers query or to signpost the customer to the relevant online form to submit their request.

### Key Benefits of the Chatbot



17. The chatbot features the ability to create flow-based chats (e.g. pre-defined questions and answers) and intelligent conversational chats (e.g. when will my bus pass expire?). If the customer is not able to resolve their query via the automated chatbot then they can choose to start a real-time text-based conversation with a Customer Services Adviser through the chatbot (often referred to as a webchat).

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<sup>1</sup> A flow-based chatbot is one that works by using a pre-defined conversational flow. In other words, they have their conversations already mapped out like a flowchart.

## Customer Satisfaction

18. Customer satisfaction has been built into the chatbot conversation to elicit feedback on the service provided. Feedback from customers is as follows:



## **Paper Applications**

19. The only paper applications that the Contact Centre processes are blue badge applications because there is a statutory obligation to do so.
20. Blue Badge paper applications are received, assessed and processed by the Customer Services Team. There has been a real focus on promoting the online form and now 90% of Blue Badge applications are completed online. However, residents also have the options of making an application by paper or by an appointment at a local Library for assistance in completing an online application.

## **Quality Management**

21. The Netcall Quality Management solution incorporates both adviser performance monitoring and customer feedback surveys.
22. The Council's customer surveys are presented at the end of each telephone and webchat interaction so that customer satisfaction can be tracked.
23. The telephony survey currently includes the following 2 questions:
  - Q1. Were you happy with the how the call was handled by the Adviser today? (Yes / No)
  - Q2. Did the Adviser resolve your enquiry today? (Yes / No)
24. The webchat survey currently includes the following 3 questions:
  - Q1. How would you rate your experience with our Web Assistant today? (Star Rating – 5 Highest & 1 Lowest)
  - Q2. Did the Web Assistant resolve your enquiry today? (Yes / No)
  - Q3. How easy was it to contact us today? (Very Easy, Fairly Easy, Easy, Difficult or Very Difficult)
25. Through adviser performance monitoring advisers' calls with customers can be assessed and monitored.
26. At least four or more calls are evaluated per adviser per month based on a predefined set of questions with each question having a weighted % score.

27. Once a call has been evaluated it is sent directly to the adviser along with any comments that have been added by the reviewer.
28. The adviser can listen back to the call as part of their learning and coaching and they are required to acknowledge the evaluation and the outcome.
29. Call Monitoring Questions each have a result of Yes / No / Not applicable for each of the below questions.
  - Did the Adviser politely greet the customer and state their name either at the beginning of the call or somewhere during the call?
  - Did the advisor explain to the customer what they were doing to avoid any long silences?
  - Did the advisor make it clear to the customer that they were putting them on hold and how long for?
  - Was key information repeated and confirmed regarding the enquiry?
  - Was the customer's enquiry correctly diagnosed.
  - Was correct advice/information given to the customer and the correct process followed?
  - Did the advisor signpost to self-serve if appropriate and / or send a channel shift link to the online option?
  - Did the advisor check or take an email address and/or a telephone and confirm details back to caller?
  - Did the Advisor confirm what they had done to resolve the enquiry or advised what the next steps will be?
  - Was a reference number given or advised it would be sent in an email?
  - Was Service Level Agreement given or advised it would be sent in an email?

## Channel Shift

30. Channel shift refers to the process of encouraging or enabling customers to switch from one communication or interaction channel to another, often from traditional or in-person channels to digital or self-service channels. There are several benefits associated with channel shift for both businesses and customers:
  - **Cost Savings:** Digital and self-service channels are often more cost-effective for businesses to operate compared to traditional channels.
  - **Efficiency:** Self-service channels, such as FAQs, chatbots, and automated systems, can handle a large volume of customer inquiries simultaneously without the need for human intervention. This improves the efficiency of customer service operations.
  - **24/7 Availability:** Digital channels allow customers to interact with a business at any time of the day, regardless of business hours. This enhances customer convenience and responsiveness.
  - **Faster Response Times:** Automated systems and chatbots can provide instant responses to common customer queries, reducing the time customers have to wait for assistance.

- **Personalisation:** Digital channels can use customer data and preferences to offer personalized experiences. This can lead to more relevant recommendations and solutions, enhancing customer satisfaction.
- **Reduced Wait Times:** Moving customers to digital channels can alleviate congestion in call centres and reduce wait times for those who do require assistance through traditional channels.
- **Flexibility:** Customers can choose the channel that best suits their preferences and needs. Some may prefer self-service options, while others might still prefer to interact with a human agent.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Digital channels provide businesses with valuable data about customer interactions, preferences, and behaviours. This data can be used to improve products, services, and customer experiences.
- **Scalability:** Digital channels can be easily scaled to accommodate increases in customer volume without significant additional resources.
- **Consistency:** Automated systems and digital channels can ensure consistent responses and service quality across interactions, reducing the risk of human error.
- **Customer Empowerment:** Self-service options empower customers to find answers and solutions on their own terms, which can lead to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.
- **Reduced Friction:** Digital channels can simplify the customer journey by providing easily accessible information and quick solutions, reducing the effort required on the customer's part.
- **Environmental Impact:** Encouraging digital interactions can lead to reduced paper usage and overall environmental impact, contributing to sustainability efforts.
- **Accessibility:** Digital channels can offer features like screen readers, language translations, and other accessibility tools to cater to a wider range of customers.

31. However, it's important to note that channel shift should be approached strategically and considerately. Not all customers may be comfortable with or capable of using digital channels, and some inquiries or interactions may be more effectively handled through traditional channels. Balancing the benefits of channel shift with the diverse needs and preferences of customers is essential for a successful transition.

32. Analysis on the cost per transaction by channel has been undertaken based on staff costs, system costs and time to process, which is set out below:

Channel	Total Cost of Service Provision	Total Contacts Per Annum	Total Cost Per Contact
Telephony	£507,398	114,392	£4.44
Webchat	£15,613	3,520	£6.48 <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Staff also undertake telephony and administrative tasks whilst dealing with webchats

<b>Chatbot</b>	£5,398	59,006	<b>£0.09</b>
<b>Online</b>	£141,446	81,243	<b>£1.74</b>
<b>Paper</b>	£14,485	1,789	<b>£16.19</b>

### **Call Centre Management Association (CCMA) Awards**

33. The Customer Services Contact Centre was recently a finalist in the National Contact Centre Awards, in the category of Small Contact Centre of the Year category.
34. The Council has received the following feedback from the CCMA following the Council's successful entry and selection as finalists in the Contact Centre of the Year Award. The feedback from the judges is outlined below.
35. The strengths for this nomination were:
- A great visit that showcased a great thirst for digital innovation
  - A very good first entry and one you should feel rightly proud of.
  - Clear set of results across a number of KPI's with some solid and exceptional results.
  - Strong leaders in your field - open to feedback, learning and development.
  - Customer centric
36. Development areas for this nomination are:
- We would have liked to have heard more feedback from employees and "felt" the culture more. KPI's and performance only tell so much.
  - It's clear that the Council has a good approach to the people culture, so tell us how this works in the contact centre.
37. Advice from the judging panel for this nomination:
- Continue to challenge the status quo and seek out what good looks like from outside your own industry.
  - Utilise the power of the CCMA to understand and benchmark what others are doing to raise the bar on performance.
  - Look to go on as many best practice visits to pick up industry relevance (not just other councils).
  - Continue to push the digital innovation.
  - Consider challenging your own QA model as it is very much in its embryonic stage versus others across the industry.
  - Don't just invest in online - customers "demand" a true omni channel experience, hence consider using virtual bots in your model, virtual IVR's etc - appreciating that you have to balance the delivery of a service against a backdrop of continual cost reduction.

### **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

38. The Contact Centre has a range of KPIs to measure team performance and individual adviser performance.



39. The last full year KPI performance figures are included below.

<b>Current Metric</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>2022/23 Q2 Performance</b>	<b>2022/23 Q3 Performance</b>	<b>2022/23 Q4 Performance</b>	<b>2023/24 Q1 Performance</b>
<b>Calls answered within 90 seconds</b>	70%	74.33%	82.67%	82.67%	80.67%
<b>Calls answered within 120 seconds</b>	80%	Not captured	Not captured	Not captured	88.00%
<b>Call backs responded to</b>	90%	94.33%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
<b>Self-Service Contact</b>	80%	78.00%	83.00%	82.00%	85.00%
<b>Administration tasks completed within service level</b>	77%	94.63%	96.69%	92.67%	92.13%
<b>Customers satisfied with telephony contact</b>	80%	86.10%	87.33%	88.67%	89.67%
<b>Customers satisfied with Webchat contact</b>	80%	82.20%	90.57%	88.60%	90.13%
<b>Performance monitoring meeting quality criteria</b>	90%	98.67%	99.00%	99.33%	99.67%

40. The following performance figures and metrics relate to the period 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

Quality Targets

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Performance</b>
<b>Adherence to schedule (Ensuring staff adhere to their working schedule)</b>	100%	100%
<b>After Call Work</b>	<5% of the total working day	1.29%
<b>Average handling time</b>	200 seconds	178 seconds
<b>No. of Quality Checks</b>	4 calls per agent per month	100%
<b>Quality of calls by service operators</b>	90%	96.50%

Online Form SLAs - 77% Overall SLA Target

<b>Fulfilment</b>	<b>Service Level</b>	<b>Average Performance</b>
<b>Commercial Vehicle Trailer Permit (Household Waste Sites)</b>	1 working Day	86%
<b>Bus Pass</b>	10 Working Days	99%
<b>Literature (Information Leaflets, etc)</b>	1 Working Day	100%
<b>Tell Us Once (TU0)</b>	10 Working Days	96%
<b>Application/Evidence Triaged</b>	5 Working Days	100%
<b>Blue Badge</b>	20 Working Days	100%

Webchat SLAs

<b>Webchat Channel</b>	<b>Service Level – To Respond to a Webchat Request</b>	<b>Average Performance</b>
<b>Blue Badge</b>	30 Secs	13 Secs
<b>Bus Pass</b>	30 Secs	33 Secs
<b>County Waste</b>	30 Secs	27 Secs
<b>School Admissions</b>	30 Secs	28 Secs
<b>School Transport</b>	30 Secs	24 Secs
<b>Travel</b>	30 Secs	8 Secs
<b>All Services</b>	30 Secs	25 Secs

Postal / Paper SLAs (Blue Badge postal applications)

<b>Fulfilment</b>	<b>Service Level</b>	<b>Average Performance</b>
<b>Postal applications</b>	20 Working Days	100%

First Call Resolution (FCR)

41. 93% of calls handled are resolved at first call resolution.

AHT (Average Handling Time)

<b>Telephony</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Average Performance</b>
<b>Average Handling Time</b>	200 Secs	178cs (2m 58secs)

Customer Satisfaction

**Telephony**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Average Performance</b>
<b>Were you happy with how the call was handled by the Adviser today?</b>	80%	87% (Yes)

## Webchat

Question	Target	Average Performance
How would you rate your experience with our Web Assistant today?	80%	84% (5 or 4 stars)

## Customer Effort Score (CES)

Question	Target	Average Performance
How easy was it to contact us today?	80%	91% (Very Easy)

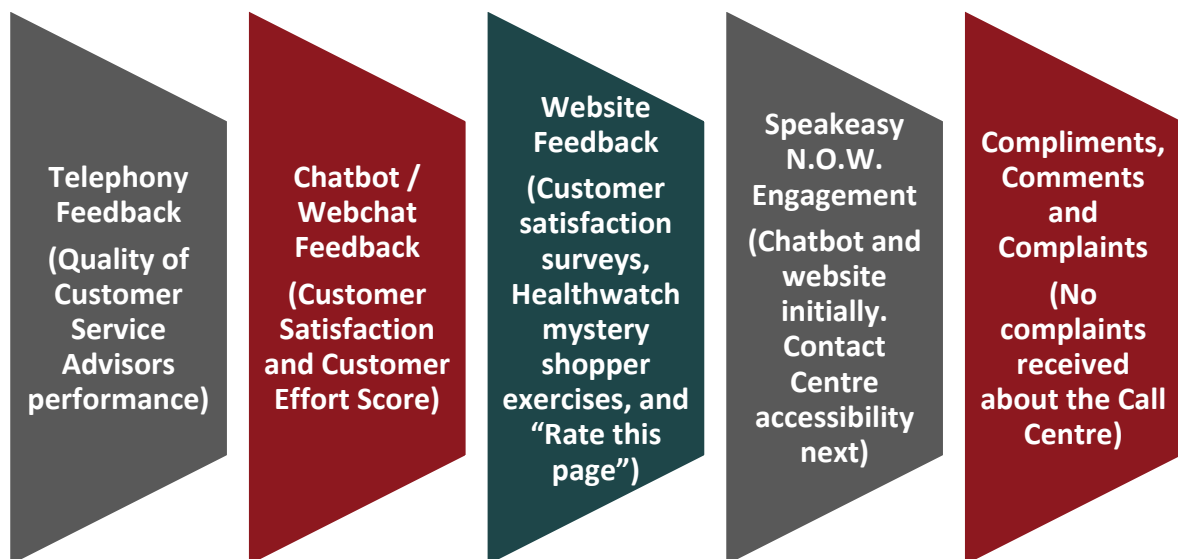
## Complaints per Customer

42. Customer Services itself did not receive any complaints during 2022/23. The number of complaints about the contact centre against number of contacts (Complaints per Customer) is therefore 0%.

## Customer Feedback

43. Customer feedback provides valuable insights into what is working well and what is not. It highlights specific pain points, bottlenecks, and helps in understanding customer needs.

44. Customer feedback is gained in the following ways:



45. [SpeakEasy NOW](#) is a self-advocacy charity for people with learning disabilities, across Worcestershire. They run projects that help to ensure that health, social care and local government services, meet the needs of people with learning disabilities.

## Translation Services (Clear Voice)

46. If a resident requires a translation service if English is not their first language, the services of Clear Voice are used. Clear Voice offers on-demand telephone

interpreting, face to face interpreting as well as a translation and transcription service.

### Accessibility / Digital Champions

47. Residents in Worcestershire have several channels where they can request assistance with their enquiry. As well as telephony, online and Web Assistant options, residents also have the option of face-to-face help and support at any local library in Worcestershire. Digital Champions in the libraries offer online assistance to residents in applying for a Blue Badge or Concessionary Travel Pass for example.

### Next Steps

48. A corporate approach is being adopted to the use of contact centre technologies and practices to provide a consistent and improved customer experience across the Council.

49. The following objectives, taken from Contact Centre Best Practice Report which has been taken to Chief Officers Group (COG), outlines a programme of work to implement a corporate approach to contact centre best practice across all contact centres within the Council.

Objective	Description
<b>Netcall Converse Features</b>	<p>Consistent usage of all the features available within Netcall by all customer facing contact centres.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call Flows</li> <li>• Skills Based Routing</li> <li>• Call Tagging</li> <li>• Queue Buster</li> <li>• Activity Codes</li> <li>• Call Recordings</li> <li>• Quality Management</li> <li>• Telephony Survey</li> <li>• Webchat Survey</li> <li>• Social Messaging (Messenger, Twitter &amp; SMS)</li> <li>• Wall Board</li> </ul>
<b>Chatbot &amp; Webchat</b>	<p>Expand the content of the Chatbot to include all service areas.</p> <p>Where appropriate expand the use of Webchat across all customer facing contact centres:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adults Access Centre</li> <li>• Family Front Door</li> <li>• Highways Control Centre</li> <li>• Homecare Reablement</li> <li>• Emergency Duty Team (EDT)</li> </ul>
<b>Paper Applications</b>	<p>Wherever possible replace paper-based applications or contact from customers with online forms.</p>

<b>Emails on website</b>	Replace all @worcestershire.gov.uk and @worcschildrenfirst.org.uk email addresses are replaced by a single, intelligent 'generic contact form'.
<b>KPIs</b>	Adopt a consistent set of KPIs and targets across all customer-facing contact centres.

## **Purpose of the Meeting**

50. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider:

- the information provided in the report;
- decide whether any further Scrutiny is required; and
- agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication.

## **Supporting Information**

Appendix 1 – Customer Services Contact Centre Statistics

## **Contact Points**

Emma James / Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers

Tel: 01905 844965 / 844964, Email: [scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk)

## **Background Papers**

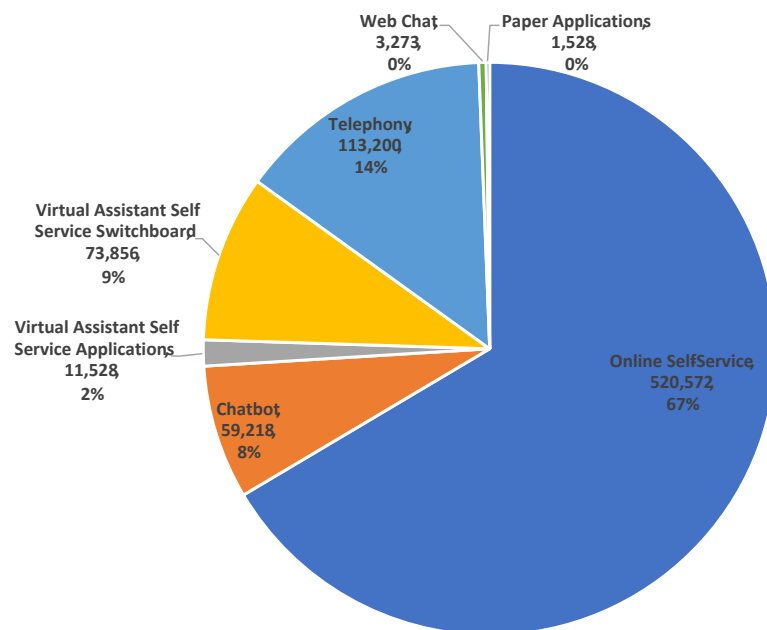
In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.

All Agendas and Minutes are available on the Council's website [weblink to Agendas and Minutes](#)

## Appendix 1: Customer Services Contact Centre Statistics Quarter 2 2022 to Quarter 1 2023

# Annual Volumes by Channel

Volume of Contact by Channel



Channel	Volume of Contact by Channel	Contact Type
Online Self-Service	520,572	Self-Service Contact
Chatbot	59,218	Self-Service Contact
Virtual Assistant Self Service Applications	11,528	Self-Service Contact
Virtual Assistant Self Service Switchboard	73,856	Self-Service Contact
Telephony	113,200	Assisted Contact
Web Chat	3,273	Assisted Contact
Paper Applications	1,528	Assisted Contact

	Volume	Percentage
Assisted Contacts	118,001	15.07%
Self-Service Contacts	665,174	84.93%
<b>Total</b>	<b>783,175</b>	

# Chatbot and Webchat Volumes

