

Appendix 2 Summary Results of the 2010-11 Avoidable Contact Exercise

Overall result

The 2010-11 was undertaken across a far wider range of service areas than in the two previous exercises. In excess of 19,400 contacts were individually recorded and analysed and the results for each service area are shown below. The overall level of avoidable contact for the whole of the exercise was 20.5% which compares with previous results of 26.9% in 2008/09 and 27.1% in 2009/10.

Those service areas that had previously taken part, restricted this year's exercise to telephone contacts. For these areas the overall level across the council was 23.7% avoidable contact which compares with telephone contact levels in previous years of 36.0% in 2008/09 and 35.4% in 2009/10. The two dominant types of avoidable contact were calls to the wrong number or extension (42%) and Progress chasing (42%).

For the new service areas taking part for the first time the overall level of avoidable contact was 18.9%. The dominant types of avoidable contact were Clarification of Information (46%) and Poor signposting (39%). At this point it has not been possible to analyse the new service areas in detail by channel, however it is clear that a major cause of avoidable contact in many of the new service areas was the level of email spam.

<u>Service area</u>	<u>Avoidable Contact %</u>	<u>No. of avoidable contacts</u>	<u>Main types of avoidable contact</u>
<u>Invoicing</u> (All channels)	3.0%	99	Poor signposting (56%); Progress chasing (39%)
<u>Sundry Debtors</u> (All channels)	13.2%	21	
<u>Benefits</u> (Telephone only)	30.6%	286	Wrong extension (25%); Chasing progress (23%); Clarification of written or spoken info (29%).

Observations

Both invoicing and sundry debtors proved to be possibly unsuitable services for inclusion within the exercise but for different reasons. In the case of sundry debtors the overall levels of contact were too low to produce a statistically significant result, whilst in invoicing the vast majority of all contacts were invoices received in, either for processing or payment, and this high level of routine unavoidable contact ensured any avoidable contacts would be minimised as a percentage of overall contacts. That said invoicing did experience almost a hundred avoidable contacts and there will be merit in examining the number of repeat contacts for the same persons in case they can be correctly directed in the future.

In Benefits, as in previous years the leading types of avoidable contact were progress chasing and clarification of information. The total level of avoidable contact, at 30.6%, represents a drop in the level of telephone avoidable contact from 57.1% in 2008 and 57.0% in 2009.

Quarter 4

<u>Service area</u>	<u>Avoidable Contact %</u>	<u>No. of avoidable contacts</u>	<u>Main types of avoidable contact</u>
<u>Council Tax</u> (Telephone only)	14.0%	142	Wrong department (63%) Wrong extension (21%)
<u>Housing Management</u> (All channels)	27.5%	291	Poor signposting (65%)
<u>Housing Repairs</u> (Telephone only)	21.1%	195	Wrong department (25%) Chasing progress (37%)
<u>Housing Options</u> (Telephone only)	43.4%	245	Wrong department (28%) Chasing progress (42%)
<u>Information Desks</u> (All channels)	22.8%	1019	Poor signposting (77%)
<u>Community Services</u> (All channels)	16.4%	389	Poor signposting (52%) Unnecessary clarification (25%)
Public Relations (All channels)	65.2%	499	Unnecessary clarification (73%) Repeat information (23%)
Environmental Services (Telephone only)	27.6%	352	Chasing progress (75%)
<u>Planning exc. Forward Planning</u> (Telephone only)	17.7%	289	Wrong department (29%) Chasing progress (36%)
<u>Forward Planning</u> (All channels)	15.9%	48	Poor signposting (92%)
Licensing (Telephone only)	21.1%	60	Chasing progress (62%)

<u>Democratic Services (All channels)</u>	15.5%	68	Poor signposting (41%) Unnecessary clarification (22%) Repeat information (21%)
--	--------------	-----------	--

Observations

In Council Tax the overall level of avoidable contact at 14.0% represents a drop in the level of telephone avoidable contact from 32.2% in 2008 and 40.2% in 2009. The dominant type of avoidable contact was wrong department (89 contacts), with almost 50% of these contacts being caused by a one-off campaign which was being undertaken at the time of the exercise.

In Housing Management the level of avoidable contact could almost certainly have been higher as a number of instances recorded as unavoidable seemed to indicate that they related to other service areas within the council. Whilst these offices may well handle a lot of contacts as proxy information desks and satellite offices for the Civic Offices, this is not formally their primary purpose and there would be merit in quantifying just how much work these locations are handling on behalf of others and possibly formally recognising and promoting this work.

Housing Repairs undertook their exercise against the background of the launch of their automated telephone call direction system. Misdirected calls to repairs (particularly calls for Housing Assets or contractors for central heating etc.) remained significant as a proportion of all avoidable contacts, however, the total level of avoidable contact, at 21.1%, represents a drop in the level of telephone avoidable contact from 42.8% in 2009 and 35.1% in 2010.

Housing Options experienced a total level of avoidable contact of 43.4%. Levels of telephone avoidable contact in previous years of 42.7% in 2009 and 39.7% in 2010 remain at a consistent level. As in previous years, calls to the wrong department or extension remained high in 2011 (47%) with Clarification of Written or Spoken Info (42%) also remaining a significant type of avoidable contact.

The Information Desks at Civic Offices, Waltham Abbey & Loughton were taking part in the exercise for the first time. The overall result of 22.8% masks the variations between the sites with Civic Offices as low as 4.6%, Waltham Abbey 34.9% and Loughton as high as 40.4%. A scan of the Waltham Abbey and Loughton data sheets suggests that the actual results may well have been even higher. Many contacts for spam emails as well as people asking for services elsewhere in the same building, eg. Waltham Abbey Town Council or Loughton Library Services, could have been classified as avoidable and quantified just what level of contacts our staff are handling for these others services. At the Civic Offices all contacts coming to reception for council business were considered unavoidable. There is merit in quantifying what service users are coming to the desk, which parts of the office are they ultimately looking for, why they came to the desk and whether they could have been more efficiently signposted straight to their relevant

destination. As with Housing Management, this would again recognise the levels of work the Information Desks are carrying out on behalf of other service areas.

The overall level of avoidable contact in Community Services was quite low at 16.4% and this was more or less reflected at each of the individual areas within - Community 12%, Arts 23%, Sports 14% and the Museum 23%. Where avoidable contact did occur, it tended to be dominated by email spam and unwanted advertising. This is the dominant theme that has come out of this year's exercise, particularly for the new service areas taking part, and it would be prudent to add the strengthening of the corporate spam filter system to any future work.

Public Relations had the highest level of avoidable contact in any service area at 65.2%. The statistics show that 73% of this was Unnecessary Clarification however an examination of the comments alongside the contacts suggests that in fact almost every one of these contacts was email spam and therefore most of them should be classified as Poor Signposting. This also applies to almost every one of the contacts listed as Repeat Information and therefore Poor Signposting or spam contacts account for approximately 99% of all avoidable contacts in PR. The sheer volume of spam contacts the PR team are having to manage (over 450 in 4 weeks) serves to reinforce comments made above about the need for work to be done on the corporate spam filter to see if its effectiveness can be enhanced so that the avoidable contacts can be reduced.

Environmental Services overall level of 27.6% represents a drop in the level of telephone avoidable contacts from 32.9% in 2009 and 37.7% in 2010. As in previous years Progress Chasing was the dominant type of avoidable contact albeit at 75% of all avoidable contacts this year it is significantly higher than in both previous exercises. Of the 352 avoidable telephone calls, 234 were in connection with missed bins. Bearing in mind that 55,000 receptacles are collected each week there will always be this type of call and at the level evidenced it is not considered significant. Having analysed the other calls, the most significant reason was a lack of calendar delivery. This accounted for 83 calls and is being investigated.

Planning, Forward Planning, Licensing and Democratic Services all returned low levels of avoidable contact. Forward Planning as a stand alone service area does not generate sufficient volumes of activity to make the exercise particularly worthwhile. Licensing and Democratic Services also generate comparatively low levels of contact and are of limited value as avoidable contact exercises.