

COUNCIL – 17 OCTOBER – SO 30 QUESTIONS

Question from Councillor Windsor

Question to the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

This question has been prompted by difficulties my residents have experienced trying to pay their correct council tax, including a new resident trying to register.

In the last data report to Strategies and Resources it was reported that, at the end of Q1, targets for collecting council tax and processing changes had been met. Are we setting our target high enough? What is being done to ensure new residents can make arrangements for efficient payment of their council tax, difficulties in doing so are dealt with promptly and, where recipients of the single occupier discount are no longer living alone, the correct payment is collected?

Response from the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

The Council Tax team work to provide an efficient service for Council Tax payers and maximise income for the Council. The team is relatively small, consisting of 5 billing officers for c38,000 properties. However, we work with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and the County Council to undertake exercises like Single Person Discount reviews. 90% of Council Tax income is collected on behalf of the County and Police and so there is limited funding available to the District to invest more in collection.

A number of different contact channels are available, including email, online, via telephone and in person at the Council Offices. When annual billing was undertaken in February 2024, the team had the lowest backlog figures for the past 3 years following migration to our new NEC database. Backlogs have continued to decrease as we move through this financial year. Very recently, a significant amount of team resources has been diverted into testing and finalising the new My Account portal, which launches imminently. This has a short-term impact on workload but will have long term benefits for residents and workloads by enabling more queries (across Council Tax and other areas) to be managed online. The team have increased automation to work more efficiently and in April 2024, instigated a full timetable to ensure all discount/exemptions reviews are updated and all empty properties are inspected to ensure we are using the most up to date data.

Collection rates are holding steady despite cost-of-living difficulties.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Windsor

My concern is people moving into the area and I hope MyAccount will improve this. When something fails, for example, their online direct debit isn't set up correctly, how are problems dealt with promptly?

Response from the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

I don't have a specific response to that question, but the team have had a short-term workload pressure dealing with the new database and one would expect that peak to subside. As the team come off that peak, there will be more opportunities to tackle any problems faced by new residents. There are metrics available so in the event that there is not such a response we would know that quickly and ensure action is taken.

Question from Councillor Windsor

Question to the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

Data for on call processing for Q2 is not yet available but in Q1 the average time to answer was 4.29minutes and 14.1% of calls were abandoned.

What is the longest waiting time, and do we have any data on how long callers who abandoned their call were waiting before giving up?

Response from the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

The average call handling times most recently reported were for quarter 1, at an average of 4.29 minutes. Details of abandoned calls weren't captured at the time and cannot be retrieved from the system. However, for the most recent three months, the longest wait for customer services prior to abandonment was 31 minutes. This was an exceptional case, as most were abandoned in less than 5 minutes.

- 99.9% of abandoned calls were at less than 30 minutes.
- 91% of abandoned calls were at less than 10 minutes.
- 78% of abandoned calls were at less than 5 minutes.

Customer dialling individual numbers, rather than the mainline, may experience longer waits. Officers are gathering statistics regarding these secondary phonelines and will consider as part of the overall project to improve customer contact.

Appropriate KPIs for call handling, and other channels are being considered and will be reported back to the Strategy & Resources Committee. Abandonment measures will be considered as part of this. The Council's online MyAccount will be launched imminently and will progressively allow residents to resolve queries online, where they are able to do so, as well as reducing the pressure on call answering.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Windsor

When Councillors make a direct call to an Officer, they are able to leave a voicemail if the Officer is unable to answer. Is that the same for residents?

Response from the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

I will ask Officers the question as to whether there is an opportunity for residents to leave voicemails on individual numbers.

Question from Councillor Cooper

Question to the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

Under the Climate Change Strategy banner we received a list of items which are to be investigated to determine TDC's impact on climate change. (Scope 1,2 etc) Whilst these cover the day-to-day TDC operations they do not include the impact of the assets required which of course generate huge amounts of CO2 and SO2 in their creation and transportation for example, cars, lorries, laptops etc. Will we produce a comprehensive list of these items and the amount of CO2 etc that is generated in their production?

Not to do so ignores a huge amount of greenhouse gases and fails to indicate the actual impact of TDC on the environment.

Response from the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

We do not report emissions data in the production of our assets. This would fall under the responsibility of the manufacturer to measure and report these emissions as part of their organisation's carbon footprint. These emissions fall under Scope 3 which are not in the council's control.

Our climate change strategy includes an objective to reduce waste and emissions across our own estate, assets and activities and use natural resources more efficiently.

Over the medium term the council will be taking action to develop a sustainable procurement policy and part of this will include reducing emissions from goods and services we purchase; sustainability measures will be added into existing and new contracts and environmental objectives will be considered when tenders are evaluated.