



Wythenshawe
Community Housing Group

Scrutiny Group review findings - Customer Hub

May 2023

Summary

During April and May our tenant-led Scrutiny Group conducted a review of the Customer Hub. This report details how the review was conducted, its findings and its recommendations.

In summary, Scrutiny Group found that the Customer Hub is well-run and provides a good service for customers. Customer Service Advisors are knowledgeable on a wide range of topics, courteous, friendly and customer-focussed in the support they provide.

However, sometimes customers are waiting too long to get through on the telephone and **Scrutiny Group recommends** that management develop a plan to ensure that the **average 5 minute call waiting time is not exceeded** in any given month. This plan should consider staffing levels.

The Review

In February 2023, Scrutiny Group selected to carry out a review of the Customer Hub for three reasons:

- **Performance levels** – having considered performance information for all tenant services, the Scrutiny Group noted that call answer times and level of abandoned calls in the period September 2022 – January 2023 did not consistently meet targets.
- **Priority for customers** - the Customer Hub is the first point of contact for customers and a vital service for tenants to access services.
- **Customer Experience (CX) Committee request** – the performance was discussed at CX Committee in January 2023 and it was agreed that a tenant scrutiny review would be helpful, if time allowed.

The review was conducted during April and May 2023. In completing the review, members of the Scrutiny Group carried out the following activities:

- Desk top review of key information:
 - performance data
 - benchmarking (housing sector and out of sector, where available)
 - customer complaint trends relating to Customer Hub
 - business transformation aims
- Shadowing in the Customer Hub (including call monitoring)
- Call monitoring (can be carried out from home)
- Interview Customer Hub Management Team
- Review WCHG's website, in particular information displayed on the website about standards
- Review open customer consultation via social media 'Have Your Say' platform

A member of CX Committee, with specialist experience in Contact Centre Management, Emma Bone, worked alongside the Scrutiny Group and its Chair to provide specialist advice

Have Your Say consultation

An open consultation was promoted to customers via social media and in community centres and reception. The purpose of this survey was to invite views from customers to inform the review.

Responses were received from:

- 20 sole tenants
- 3 joint tenants
- 5 household members

These responses have informed the findings and feedback from the review will be shared with customers on Have Your Say, Facebook and Twitter



HOW EASY IS IT TO CONTACT US?
DO WE RESOLVE YOUR PROBLEM?
ARE WE FRIENDLY?



Scan the QR code to take our survey for the chance to win!



Members sought to answer the following questions, which they set in consultation with the Chair of CXC:

- Does the Customer Hub provide a good service for customers?
- Are customer queries fixed at first point of contact?
- How does our performance compare to other housing associations or service providers?
- What's changed in terms of performance/satisfaction since the last review?
- Are there any trends that can be pulled out on complaints about phone service or customer hub?
- There looks to be a link with longer answering times and abandoned calls as you might expect, is there a tipping point we could identify for customers when the wait becomes too long? How does it compare with our average?
- How do we measure satisfaction? Is it good practice or a common method compared to others in sector and outside?
- Do the aims of the business transformation proposed, align with what changes are required?
- Are people waiting too long on the phone?
- Is the target of an average waiting time of 5 minutes still the right one?

Findings

Does the Customer Hub provide a good service for customers? Are customer queries fixed at first point of contact?

Finding: Yes, the Customer Hub is well-run and provides a good service for customers. Customer Service Advisors are knowledgeable on a wide range of topics, courteous, friendly and customer-focussed in the support they provide. Customers are treated with dignity and respect.

- ✓ 76% of customers say they prefer to contact WCHG by telephone (Acuity survey: 2022)
- ✓ Customer Hub customer satisfaction is 98.8% (based on 16,031 customer surveys completed at end of call – this is 15% of calls)
- ✓ Team leaders monitor quality of sample of calls against an agreed criteria – currently 91% of calls meet this standard
- ✓ The Customer Hub receives between 10,000 and 13,000 calls per month. 79% of queries are resolved at first point of contact
- ✓ Average call answer time is 4 minutes 31 seconds, which is under the 5 minute target
- ✓ 76% of customers say they are treated fairly and with respect across all WCHG services, including the Customer Hub (October TSM survey, in line with GMHP median of 76%)
- ✓ Reception is open and central on the estate, near the Civic and public transport links for face-to-face queries and meetings

Areas for improvement:

- ✓ Digital services need to be improved for the increasing number of customers who prefer this way of contacting WCHG
- ✓ App use increasing but needs upgrading
- ✓ Call-back service in place needs more promotion to use as it does hold the position in queue however some blip in last quartile with message

How does our performance compare to other housing associations or service providers?

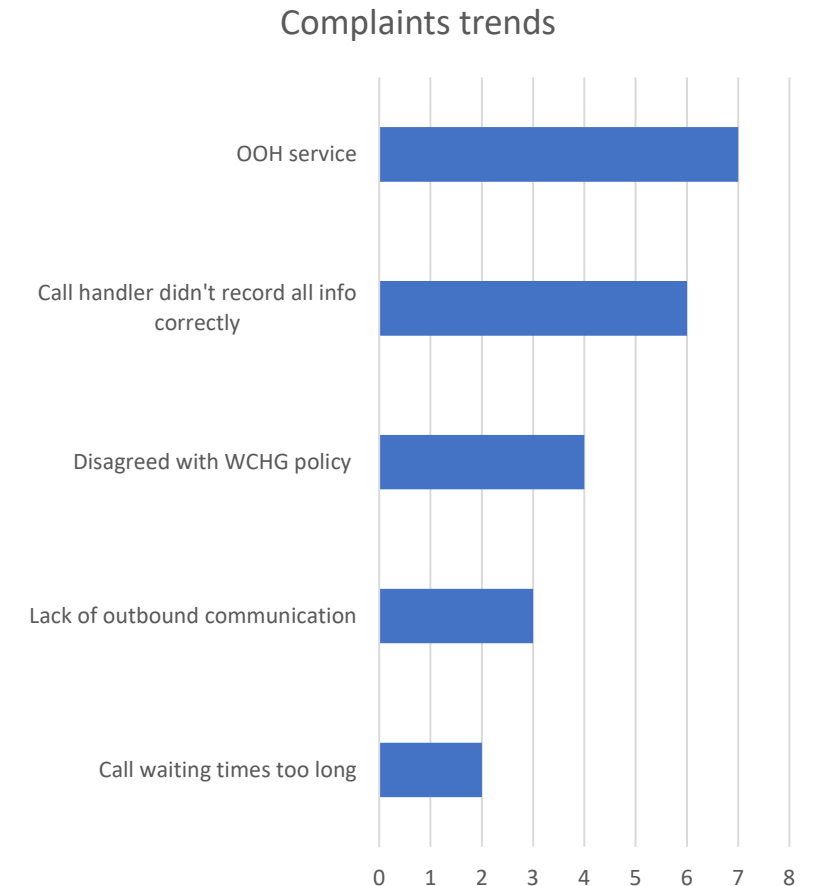
- Benchmarking shows that WCHG performance is broadly in line with sector average
- WCHG has recently joined a new national benchmarking group with 17 housing providers dedicated to contact centre performance, co-ordinated by Thirteen Group
- WCHG also benchmarks emerging TSM performance against GMHP (16 providers) , Acuity (58 providers) and Housemark (200 providers – although different questions compared)
- Initial findings include:
 - Overall satisfaction is 75% against a GMHP median of 71% and Housemark median of 79%
 - Increased sickness absence causing issues for most providers
 - Increase in suicide calls and safeguarding concerns raised in calls
 - Average call handling time doubled since 2019/20 (Covid-19 pandemic), with corresponding increase in call waiting times

What's changed in terms of performance/satisfaction since the last review?

- Customer **satisfaction** results remains **high** at 99% (no change)
- First time fix recording and performance has **improved (increased from 60% to 79%)**
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, calls have become longer and more complex and customers are waiting longer for calls to be answered (last review average 2 minutes, **increased to average 4 minutes 31 seconds**)
- Advisors are making **more safeguarding and support** referrals and having more conversations about cost of living difficulties. Customers are also reporting more jobs per call. The average call handle time has gone from 5 minutes in 2019 to 9 minutes in 2022.
- The **number of calls** and **in-person visits** to the Customer Hub has **decreased**, however the number of **emails, app transactions** and **social media** queries has **increased**
- The **percentage of calls answered has fallen** from 89% in 2019 to 81% YTD 2023/24. This is, however, an improvement on 2022/23 figure of 79% of calls answered.

Are there any trends that can be pulled out on complaints about phone service or customer hub?

- There were 25 expressions of dissatisfaction for the Customer Hub in 2022/23 across 156,418 interactions
- These included 7 complaints for the Out of Hours (OOH) service which includes call handling and operational delivery
- Scrutiny Group members observing calls noted that systems are complicated and that recording information in multiple ways in multiple systems must be confusing. This is reflected in complaints, where in 6 cases customers had a poor service because information was not entered fully/accurately
- 3 customers complained about waiting too long on the phone
- Weekend of 16th – 19th December caused a high number of complaints due to a cold snap (this is the main cause of the OOH complaints referenced above)



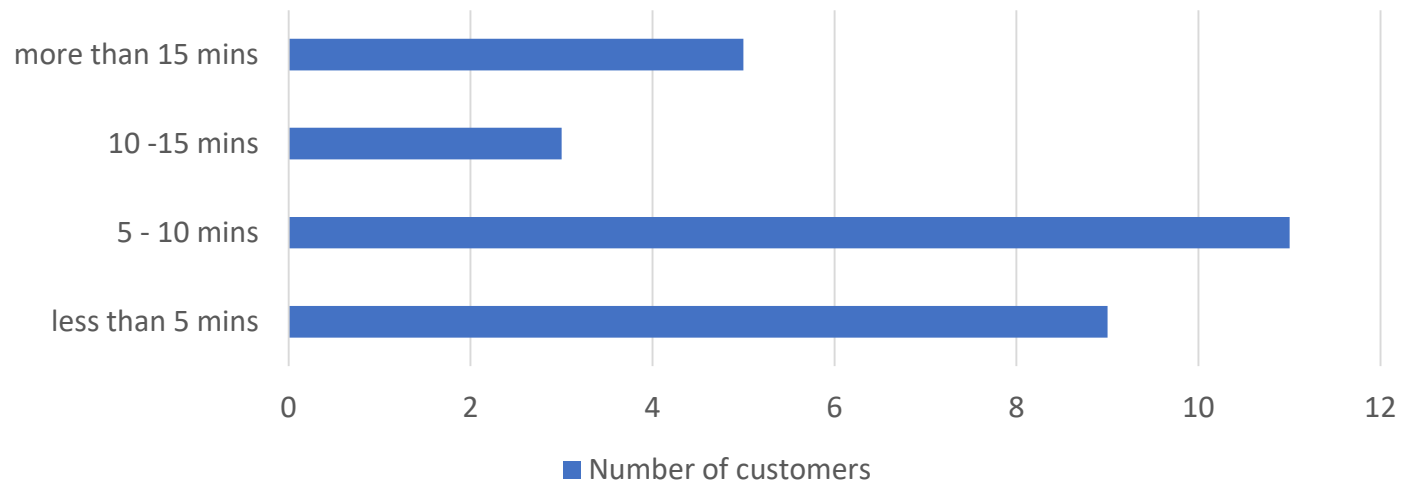
There looks to be a link with longer answering times and abandoned calls as you might expect, is there a tipping point we could identify for customers when the wait becomes too long? How does it compare with our average?

- The Have Your Say survey indicates that most (68%) customers surveyed believe it is reasonable to wait 5 mins on the phone to get through to someone - NB small sample size

Transactional data indicates that:

- 10% of callers will abandon a call by 2 mins and 30 secs
- 20% of callers will abandon a call by 5 mins 30 secs
- 30% of callers will abandon a call by 8 mins 30 secs

How long is a reasonable time to wait on the phone to get through to someone?



How do we measure satisfaction? Is it good practice or a common method compared to others in sector and outside?

- Satisfaction is measured through a survey after the call has finished
- Satisfaction is from 16,201 customers calls (15% of total calls)
- This is a common method of measuring transactional satisfaction. It is good practice that the questions are not asked directly by the Advisor and the customer remains anonymous
- As the responses are anonymous (unless a caller requests a follow up call), WCHG is not able to track any variations in satisfaction among different groups of customers
- As the satisfaction remains consistent, up to 2 additional questions can be asked to aid with learnings and improvements

Do the aims of the business transformation proposed, align with what changes are required?

- The aims of the business transformation are to:
 - Develop a digital-first customer offer
 - Increase first-time fix
- If achieved these aims will:
 - Improve communication with digital customers, providing up-to-date progress and better info on when technician is arriving etc
 - Allow customers to contact the Hub 24/7
 - Maintain in-person and telephone contact for the large number of customers who prefer these contact methods
 - Reduce call waiting

Finding: Yes, the aims of the business transformation programme align with: the need to reduce call waiting time; and the need of an increasing number of customers using digital contact channels

Are people waiting too long on the phone? Is the target of an average waiting time of 5 minutes still the right one?

- On any given day, a call is likely to be answered in 4 mins 31 secs
- Most customers (68%) report that 5 minutes is a reasonable time to wait, however 20% of customers will abandon a call if they have to wait more than 5 mins 30 secs
- In 5 months of the 2022/23 year (Sept, Dec, Jan, Feb, Mar) customers waited an average of more than 5 mins
- One customer waited 51 mins (in February) and a small number of customers waited in excess of 40 mins in Sept

Finding: Whilst the target of 5 minutes answer time is still the right one, this needs to be a maximum. Average call waiting should not exceed 5 minutes in any month

Website review

Scrutiny Group members reviewed the WCHG website to check how easy it is to find the information needed to contact WCHG. Members also reviewed the Customer Care Standards.

Findings:

- Overall the website provides all the information required to contact WCHG in a range of ways, including telephone, in person and via email
- The Customer Care Standards were reviewed with no changes proposed to the standards
- Helpful recommendations (detailed in Appendix A) have been made to improve the user experience of the website. These include:
 - Making information – such as opening hours, how to complaint and how to get involved - more prominent
 - Making sure most important information is at the top and the bottom of the page
 - Better managing customer expectations by stating how long it will take to respond to contact e.g. if completing an online form
- **Appendix A** outlines the changes in full

Recommendations

Scrutiny Group recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Management develop a plan to ensure that the average 5 minute call waiting time is not exceeded and to include consideration of staffing levels
2. Management invest to deliver the proposed business transformation objectives to further improve the customer experience
3. The proposed changes to website be made to further improve ease of access



Wythenshawe
Community Housing Group

Appendix A - Website review

Questions:

- Does the website make it easy to find out how to contact WCHG? Is it clear where our telephone number is? Is it clear what the opening hours are? Is it clear that you can attend reception and where that is? Is there any information that should be easier to find?
- Please review the customer care standards available here [WCHG-Customer-Charter-Jan2022.pdf](#) – are these easy to understand? Are they the right standards? Should anything else be included?

Responses:

- Telephone numbers are easy to locate though I do believe that putting them at the top of the page in the header would make them even easier to find rather than having to scroll to the bottom of the page or click through to the 'contact' page.
- Regarding opening hours - This is not clearly shown. They are not with the phone numbers or on the contact page. I did find them in tiny writing on the 'Book a Repair' section. I feel this isn't good enough. They should be shown clearly on the front page.
- Regarding reception. The address for the housing is clearly shown. However, there is no clear mention that you can attend reception except again in tiny writing on the contact page where it states 'In Person' but some might not clearly understand what this means. I think the wording could be better and larger.
- Information that should be easy to find I think is shown on the front page. However, though it is on the contact us page. I would have a section on how to complain on the front page, plus how to get involved. This will show all customers that they can get involved not just those looking to get involved.
- The Calendar of Meetings needs updating as it is last years calendar. Also when you hover over 'contact' unless you realise you can click the word contact not just the drop down menu items you won't find the contact us page.
- Yes, I found it easy to understand how to contact WCHG. The only one think would be the online contact form, perhaps a little note underneath saying how long the expected length of the reply would be regarding emails.
- Access to other sites for example Wythenshawe House were good, easy to find.
- The Customer Care Standards look fine. I would like to see the contact information at the beginning and at the end just in case the reader decides to stop half way through.