

<b>MEETING</b>	Corporate Scrutiny Committee
<b>DATE</b>	16 February, 2017
<b>TITLE</b>	Galw Gwynedd and responding to phone calls
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Councillor Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member for Customer Care) and Joanne Parry (Galw Gwynedd, Siop Gwynedd and Registration Manager)

## Background

Galw Gwynedd was established in 2008 to try to simplify and improve the Council's performance on answering the telephone. Before establishing Galw Gwynedd, Gwynedd residents had to phone 4 different switchboard numbers to contact Gwynedd Council, around 78% of those calls were answered but were then transferred to other extensions within the Council to receive attention. By now, there is only one number for customers to use to contact the Council and staff at Galw Gwynedd can deal with approximately 38% of the calls coming through 01766 771000 directly with the remainder being transferred to officers within the services to deal with.

## The Scrutiny Committee's Questions

Here are the answers to the specific questions raised in advance by the Scrutiny Committee.

### What is the latest performance data for answering calls at a) Galw Gwynedd and b) the Council's departments generally?

- a. **Galw Gwynedd** – Over the years, Galw Gwynedd's performance has been fairly consistent, with 85% of calls being answered within 15 seconds between 2008 and 2012. In 2013 there was a deterioration in the performance with 80% of calls being answered within 15 seconds. Performance has slipped substantially from then, but, although performance has slipped, 89% of the calls coming into Galw Gwynedd are answered.

	% answered within 15 seconds	% answered	average answer time	% calls aban
Performance 2011/2012- 31/12/2012	84.59	98%	00:09	1.94%
Performance 2013/2014 - 31/12/2013	80.79	97%	00:17	2.52%
Perfformiad 2014/2015 - 31/12/2014	70.41	95%	00:27	5.15%
Perfformiad 2015/2016 - 31/12/2015	57.67	93%	00:40	6.66%
Perfformiad 2016/2017 - 31/12/2016	46.15	89%	00:58	10.55%

- b. **Calls across the Council** – The number of telephone calls coming directly to officers' individual extensions from outside of the Council has reduced since establishing Galw Gwynedd in 2008. This is not unexpected with the move to one main number and the greater emphasis over time on contacting through e-mail and the Council website. In 2011/12 770,702 external calls were received outside of Galw Gwynedd, in 2015/16 this figure had reduced to 540,553, but performance has also fallen with 26.8% of calls being lost by now.

		% answered within 15 seconds	% answered after 15 seconds	% calls abandoned
2011/12	Council Services	73%	5%	22.26%
2014/15	Council Services	72%	5%	22.56%
2015/16	Council Services	69%	6%	24.92%
2016/17	Council Services	65%	8%	26.80%

2. **Has any deterioration in performance on answering the phones been anticipated following recent changes? What plans does the service have to improve performance?**

During 2014, a decision was taken, on the basis of what was happening at other Council Contact Centres across Wales to change the response target. The aim was to answer calls on average within 40 seconds. This was on the basis of research done by another council in Wales showing evidence that customers were happy with an average response time of 60 seconds. By the end of 2015, Galw Gwynedd were reaching the target of responding within 40 seconds but, during 2016, performance has deteriorated substantially.

Following a deterioration in the performance on answering phones during 2016, we have been working to identify what has caused the deterioration. Several things have come to prominence so far.

1. 01766 771000 appears as the telephone number phoning the customer when anyone of the Council's staff make an external telephone call.
2. Decisions regarding cuts in the following areas; Grass Cutting, the Closure of Public Toilets, changes in the arrangements for collecting Garden Waste all causing a number of people to call to complain.
3. The deterioration in the Council's general telephone performance means that it does affect the performance of Galw Gwynedd, e.g. asking customers to phone back if there is no response, the line is busy, staff have not transferred their extensions to other officers when they are out of the office.

4. Turnover and vacant posts at Galw Gwynedd mean inadequate staff available to work extra hours when call volumes are higher than usual. Training a new member of staff can take between 6 months and a year until they are completely proficient in the work.

In terms of plans to respond to the situation, there are several things in hand:-

- Implementing a flexible system where, at busy times, Siop Gwynedd staff can respond to calls when the numbers awaiting a reply is too great
- Changing the system whereby 01766 771000 appears as the number when a customer is called. This has now been operational for a week and it is too early to report on concrete results but this should lead to fewer calls coming into Galw Gwynedd enabling better customer service, as enquiries get to the actual officers who deal with the matters.
- The development of the Self Service system is one important answer for the future to enable residents to gain access to services themselves without the need for telephone contact. There is another report before the committee on that issue but, in terms of its impact on Galw Gwynedd, it is likely that we will have to wait a little time before we see the development bearing fruit.
- Since performance has deteriorated in the meantime and is in danger of remaining so for a period at least, I have agreed, as Cabinet Member, with the Head of Corporate Services, that we take temporary steps to increase Galw Gwynedd's staffing levels for a period until we see an improvement in the performance.

**3. Is there data available on the amount of time it takes to answer calls at Galw Gwynedd? Has consideration been given to having a system to inform customers how long they will have to wait?**

The data on the average call response time has been given above but, of course the average time does not tell the full story. At busy times, particularly if there are periods that coincide with staffing difficulties, the response times can be unacceptably high.

We have been considering a system that could help us in this respect but there is no conclusion yet about what would be the best solution for our customers.

**4. The data probably shows that some periods are busier than others – How does the service cope with these busy periods?**

There is a pattern of variation in terms of call pressures. Usually, Monday, Tuesday and Friday afternoons are busier than the rest of the week and we know about the busy periods of the year for some kinds of calls, such as calls for Post-16 Education travel tickets at the start of every school term, annual parking tickets during March, in addition to calls about rates and benefits, and we organise our rota to address those.

There are other matters that impact on demand e.g. introducing changes such as introducing charges for garden waste collection and changing to three weekly collections. Usually, we discuss with the relevant service and, usually, there is agreement on a price for the additional temporary pressure on Galw Gwynedd that is addressed as part of the project cost. This is a temporary cost but is important in terms of helping the public to cope with change.

The final example that causes a problem for us is when some change has been implemented (such as introducing a cut or efficiency saving) where the relevant service has not foreseen the need to plan a response and Galw Gwynedd receives unanticipated calls. We try to hold a regular dialogue with services to foresee such cases but, by the end of November, Galw Gwynedd has received 15,356 more calls during 2016 than during the same period in 2015.

**5. The scrutiny committee is also looking at the Self Service project during this meeting. How will the progress of that project help Galw Gwynedd?**

As previously mentioned, the long term impact of the project is certain to be of benefit in reducing the number of calls coming in to Galw Gwynedd. However, this could take time and, in the meantime, the staff at Galw Gwynedd are part of the project of promoting this development by offering to help residents to set up self service accounts over the coming months.