

Tower Hamlets Contact Centre

Revised Standard Operating Manual 20/21

Author: Jo Kelly
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Contents

-	Tower Hamlets Customer Contact Service Vision.....	5
▪	Customer Access Strategy	5
▪	Customer Promise	6
○	Contact Centre Background Information	7
▪	The Contact Centre’s commitment to customers	7
▪	Contacting the service (Hotlines)	8
-	Contact Centre Organization	9
○	Roles and responsibilities	9
▪	Customer Service Managers:	9
▪	Customer Service Advisers:.....	9
▪	Domestic arrangements.....	10
▪	Lunch Break/morning and afternoon breaks:	10
-	Governance.....	11
▪	Introduction	11
▪	Service Review Meetings.....	11
▪	Customer Board.....	12
▪	Senior Leadership Team (SLT).....	12
-	Contact Centre Policies and Procedures	13
▪	Display Screen equipment	13
▪	DSE self-assessment	13
▪	Flexible Working	13
▪	Homeworking protocol in event of IT outage:.....	14
▪	IT Outage in the office	14
○	Reporting absence	14
▪	Sickness:	14
▪	Requesting Annual Leave.....	15
○	Performance Monitoring.....	15
▪	The PDR Process	15
▪	Annual PDR review.....	15
▪	Six-month PDR review.....	16
▪	One-to-one meetings	16
▪	Team Meetings	16
▪	Call Quality Monitoring.....	16
▪	Contact Centre KPI’s	17
▪	CSM reports for Contact Centre Manager	18

- Real Time Monitoring..... 18
- Training 20
 - Corporate Training.....20
 - Customer Contact Centre Training20
- Service Level Agreements..... 21

- Tower Hamlets Customer Contact Service Vision

Tower Hamlets Customer Contact Service vision can be broken down into the following 3 areas - customer focused, operational and strategic.

➤ **Customer Focused:**

- The council is committed to offering digital service delivery with a shift to more efficient channels of communication. Improved analytics and customer feedback is integral to this process.

➤ **Operational:**

- The council needs to deliver efficient and effective value for money services, driving out waste and unnecessary contact.
- The council needs to target services to be more efficient, reduce avoidable contact and maximise functionality of technologies.
- Significantly reduce mis-directed calls or repeat calls to the council making us easier to do business with.
- Achieve significant shift to cheaper more efficient channels.
- Provide consistent and responsive customer service, delivering resolution at the point of contact.

➤ **Strategic:**

- Generate savings whilst ensuring that services from a customer perspective are not impacted negatively.
- Align services to the Customer Target Operating Model to support the digital journey of the council.
- Automate contact management where possible and appropriate.
- The council aims to support and coach those unable to get online.

▪ **Customer Access Strategy**

The Customer Access Strategy sets out how Tower Hamlets plans to deliver Customer Service and access to our residents and business partners in the future.

We want to be engaging with our customers in a way they want to be engaged with – efficiently, effectively and digitally.

The Customer Access Strategy aims to deliver services online that are able of being delivered online with speed efficiency and automation.

Customers should be able to:

- Transact with us online where possible.
- Have a choice of how to contact us with the offer of multiple channels.
- Have clarity in carrying out transactions without jargon and 'word heavy explanations'.
- Use services which are designed around their needs
- Have a local presence to help them when they need it
- Be kept up to date and be clear on progress
- Have issues resolved at the point of contact

▪ Customer Promise

The Council has 10 Corporate Standards of Customer Service which are applied across Council departments where relevant. These are as follows:

1. Treat people as you expect to be treated
2. Try to resolve issues at first contact
3. Follow the email signature protocol
4. Respond to service emails within two working days (though this may vary according to departmental performance indicators) and use the 'out of office assistant' when you're not available
5. Say your name and service when answering the phone and follow the voicemail protocol
6. Acknowledge letters within seven working days with your name and contact details
7. Write in plain English – avoid council speak, jargon and acronyms
8. Complete complaints, ME's and FOI requests to the required standards
9. Keep your Active Directory staff details up to date
10. Think TOWER in everything you do

○ **Contact Centre Background Information**

Location: 3rd Floor Mulberry Place, Clove Crescent , London E14 2BG

Tower Hamlets Contact Centre is a centralised and multi-skilled telephone contact centre offering efficient and effective customer resolution to callers across a range of council services.

It is based in Mulberry Place and operates between 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday.

It currently handles calls for the following services:

- Parking, Mobility and Abandoned Vehicles
- Streetline/Highways Services
- Pest Control
- Council Tax
- Housing Benefits
-
- General Enquiries through Switchboard calls

The number of calls received annually is in excess of 212,000 (report for 1 Year: 1st Oct 2019 to 30 Sep 2020)

▪ **The Contact Centre's commitment to customers**

The following customer service principles underpin everything that we seek to achieve in the Contact Centre:

- We will make it quick and easy for customers to access council services.
- We will make sure customers only have to tell us once.
- We will make sure customers only have to speak to one person wherever possible.
- If we can't resolve queries immediately, we will keep customers informed of progress.
- We will keep our promises.
- We will treat customers fairly and with respect at all times.
- We will encourage and welcome suggestions.

- **Contacting the service (Hotlines)**

Customers can contact the services detailed above on the following numbers:

Switchboard – 0207 363 5000

Council Tax – 0207 364 5001

Parking Services – 0207 364 5003

Streetline/Highways – 0207 364 5004

Pest & Noise Nuisance – 0207 364 5007

- Contact Centre Organization

The Contact Centre comprises the following staff – 2 x Customer Services Manager (CSM), 14 x Customer Services Advisers (CSA)

o Roles and responsibilities

▪ Customer Service Managers:

Each CSM is responsible for a team of staff who report to them for day to day issues such as booking leave requests, reporting sickness, booking training.

Additionally, the CSM will conduct Sickness Reviews for their team members under the Council's Sickness Management procedure up to the Formal stage.

CSMs also act as a lead manager for a specific service in the Contact Centre and will field queries from staff throughout the day in relation to that area of expertise as shown in table below:-

Formuz Ali	Farid Miah
Parking, Appeals and Mobility	Council Tax
Waste Management	Highways
Switchboard	Pest Control

They will be expected to engage proactively with back offices in relation to problematic areas of service and will instigate any escalations that are felt necessary in resolving service issues that have become protracted.

CSMs attend monthly Service Review Meetings at which they will be instrumental in highlighting areas of service that have either performed well or have proved challenging for Contact Centre staff.

▪ Customer Service Advisers:

The key day to day duty of the CSA is call handling. The job requires a generically trained group of CSAs to be logged onto phones dealing with all services currently offered in the Contact Centre.

CSAs are required to log onto the Mitel phone system and their work activity is recorded in real time. This can be monitored by both the officer themselves and their manager using real time data that is displayed on the Mitel Ignite application.

Where CSAs encounter problems with a customer or identifies a service issue that warrants investigation, they should bring the matter to the attention of the relevant CSM (each CSM has a specialised area of expertise based on the services provided in the Contact Centre).

It is important that CSAs are available to take calls expediently for the duration of time they are logged onto phones. Therefore, difficult and/or protracted issues should be escalated to a CSM.

CSAs can be placed back on phones at any time should the service come under pressure with a spike in phones calls being offered.

▪ **Domestic arrangements**

- Staff must be available to take calls when the service becomes available to the public at 9am.
 - Staff should therefore be logged onto all applications open and with reference material accessible.
 - Desks must be kept clear in line with the corporate hot-desking policy. Staff must ensure that lockers are used to store personal belongings, stationary etc. at the end of your working day.
 - Food should not be consumed as desks. Staff must use the canteens or breakout areas when you wish to eat.
 - Mobiles are to be put on silent and not used in the CCC. This includes texting.
 - General noise levels should be kept to a minimum. Staff should refrain from calling across the office or raising their voice when speaking to customers. With staff working in close proximity to each other and other departments and it is important that customers cannot over-hear other conversations taking place in the CCC.
 - Staff may use the internet during their breaks but it must not be accessed during periods when CSAs are available to take calls.
- Staff should refrain from reading magazines or papers between calls. This can be done during designated breaks.

▪ **Lunch Break/morning and afternoon breaks:**

Full time staff will normally take a 1 hour lunch break between either 12pm -1pm or 1-2pm. CSMs can use discretion should it be necessary for an alternative time to be considered owing to special circumstances.

Part time staff will normally take lunch within the same 12 – 2pm timeframe. Again, a local arrangement may be agreed with the CSM

Morning and afternoon breaks are for 15 minutes and are normally taken between 10am-11am and 3pm-4pm, ensuring that there is an adequate number of CSAs available to cover the phones.

- Governance

▪ Introduction

Customer Services Governance is about driving accountability by assigning specific (customer service) tasks to specific individuals within the organisation. It's also about establishing oversight across our customer experience initiatives and activities. The purpose of this framework is to therefore establish governance practises to monitor customer experience and service level quality, improve it on a regular basis and resolve any issues at a local level long before they escalate.

Within this toolkit, there are copies of:

- New SLA template to be agreed upon, signed by and adhered to by Customer Service Teams and Service Providers.
- Defined process for reviewing customer experience issues and escalation procedures.
- Terms of References for each group with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Whilst the SLA is the underpinning document to describe the roles and responsibilities, it is supported by a governance system as follows:



▪ Service Review Meetings

These are the first line of defence, taking place monthly with an effective SLA driving behaviours, customer focus plus inputs and outputs of the meeting. They are conducted on a service by service basis, chaired by the Customer Service Manager representative for both Ideas Store and the Contact Centre and attended by the

relevant back office service manager representative(s). Customer Service performance, review of contact received, issues and future plans are the main themes but the group are also expected to resolve issues and approve minor service change requests. After each meeting, along with minutes and actions, a management summary is to be produced for the Customer Board to review. In the event of any issues not being resolved and or requiring more senior input, these are then escalated to the Customer Board through the management summary report as a minimum.

▪ **Customer Board**

The Customer Board is made up of Heads of Service representatives and is chaired by the Head of Customer Service. It meets less frequently (quarterly) but can meet more regularly if circumstances require it to. This Board has ownership of all SLA's but also has oversight of Service Plans and is expected to approve medium impact change requests and resolve senior service level operational issues that are escalated, as a minimum, through the service review management summary report. After each meeting, along with minutes and actions, a management summary is to be produced for SLT to review. In the event of any issues not being resolved and or requiring Director level input, these are then escalated to the SLT through the management summary report as a minimum.

▪ **Senior Leadership Team (SLT)**

This group has a number of functions but including for Customer Service, they serve as the Executive Sponsors for all Customer Experience activity and performance. As such, Customer Experience serves as a standing agenda item. This group has oversight of all organisational Customer Experience activity, performance and insight and ownership of the Customer Service Strategy and Customer Service Risk Register is with the Customer Service Director who chairs SLT. In the event of any issues not being resolved at Customer Board level and or require strategic input, the SLT are expected to own and manage these.

- **Contact Centre Policies and Procedures**

▪ **Display Screen equipment**

Contact Centre staff are required to carry out a Display Screen Equipment Assessment (DSE) annually. More details of this policy can be obtained by reference to the Council's intranet.

The purpose of the DSE assessment is to help address the potential aches and pains or visual fatigue that can arise from sitting behind a PC or laptop during a working day can be avoided if:

- Equipment and furniture is suitable for the tasks and user
- Employees take time to adjust their workstation set-up before they start work
- Employees take adequate breaks from the tasks

▪ **DSE self-assessment**

To complete your workstation self-assessment, go to the HR self-service area and complete the DSE form. This can be found on the left-hand side of the dashboard under 'Health and Safety'.

▪ **Flexible Working**

The council operates a Flexible Working Policy which enables staff to work from home as a base instead of coming into the office environment.

A request for homeworking can be made to a line manager.

It should be noted that this is not an entitlement. Homeworking will be supported wherever possible, subject to the needs of the service but can be withdrawn at the discretion of the Customer Service Manager.

It is vitally important that effective communication is maintained between work colleagues and their managers and that 'Face time' is built in to tackle the potential problem of isolation that can be experienced by being at home all the time. To this end, CSAs who do work from home will be expected to come into the office at least once a week.

'Staff should refer to the rota set up for homeworkers which ensures that there is an even distribution of staff in the office throughout the week. Requests for specific days will be accommodated where possible.

▪ **Homeworking protocol in event of IT outage:**

Where a member of staff working from home experiences problems logging into the remote working system or where they lose connectivity for whatever reason it is important that:

- The CSA attempts to log in once again as this may just be a temporary problem.
- Where they have done this for 15 minutes and are still not able to access their applications, they should ring one of the Customer Service Manager.
- Where the managers is aware that there is a general problem with the IT infrastructure and this is affecting a majority of staff then the resolution time provided by IT will determine whether the member of staff will be asked to go into the office or remain at home. If it is likely to be longer than 1 hour then staff will be expected to go into the office.
- If there is not a widespread problem, then the manager will have to ring the service desk (x4444) to report the problem.
- Any outage during the morning will almost certainly result in staff having to work from the office. Afternoon outages will be at the discretion of the CSM.
- It is important that all home workers provide their manager with a contact number to avoid staff going off the radar in the event of a problem. These will be placed on the supervisors' drive for future use.
- Staff **MUST** be in a position where they can be contacted throughout an IT outage problem. Failure to put managers in a position where they can liaise with staff will be considered misconduct.

▪ **IT Outage in the office**

Any IT issues in the office should be brought to the attention of the CSM who will report outages to the service desk.

○ **Reporting absence**

▪ **Sickness:**

- The way in which staff report sickness is governed by the Council's Sickness Management Procedure.
- All staff must contact their line manager, (or another CSM in the Contact Centre), each working day for the first five days of a period of sickness absence and on a weekly basis if the period of absence continues for more than one week. This is to ensure that the manager is aware of the reasons for absence, to offer appropriate support and make plans to ensure services can

be delivered throughout the expected period of absence. The above applies even when a doctor's certificate has been provided.

- The manager who takes details of the call must complete a sickness pro-forma which should be placed on the CSAs electronic file. An email with the form as an attachment should then be sent to the Line Manager (in the event that the Line Manager has not been available to speak to the officer).
- The Line Manager must then complete the HR self-service process relating absence reporting.
- If the Line Manager is sick themselves then the manager who takes the call should complete the HR self-service process.

▪ **Requesting Annual Leave**

- All annual leave requests must be made through the HR self- service system.
- Two leave slots (or the equivalent of 28 hours) are available each day and once the slots are full no further leave can be agreed. (There would have to be very good reasons to exceed this allocation of daily leave and this would be at the discretion of the CSM).
- Leave is booked on a first come first served basis.
- An additional leave slot (7 hours) may be agreed during half term and summer holidays to accommodate the increase in requests for leave.

○ **Performance Monitoring**

The Contact Centre has in place a robust performance monitoring culture.

The starting point for this is the councils Performance, Development and Review process.

▪ **The PDR Process**

All staff undertake a formal performance review meeting annually with their line manager, a six-month progress review meeting and regular monthly one-to-one meetings. These provide opportunities for managers and staff to work together to:

- assess their current work and past performance
- set performance objectives and targets for the coming year
- identify any training needs.

▪ **Annual PDR review**

PDRs take place between April and June. The employee and line manager review the previous year's performance, evaluate learning and development

undertaken, agree on new targets for the coming year, identify new learning and development needs and complete a Personal Development Plan.

- **Six-month PDR review**

A review meeting takes place to assess the employee's progress against targets and objectives.

- **One-to-one meetings**

these provide managers and employees with the opportunity to raise any issues around performance and these are conducted on a monthly basis by CSMs when they provide feedback to CSAs in relation to performance.

- **Team Meetings**

Frequency: Quarterly as suggested by staff as they felt they were kept fairly informed.

While it is always preferable to bring staff together for a meeting, this is not always practical given the requirement to maintain adequate staffing levels. There needs to be enough CSAs available to take calls with the emphasis on low customer wait times. For this reason, meetings will be staggered among the 4 groups in the Contact Centre to ensure that service levels can be maintained.

The homeworking arrangements in place means the meetings will take place via Teams.

- **Call Quality Monitoring**

Monthly call quality monitoring is carried out by CSMs who will listen to and report on a random sample of at least 5 calls for each CSA each month.

Particular emphasis is placed on ensuring that Mary Guber principles of Customer Service are adhered to and the following areas are measured:

- **Standard Greeting** : Good morning/afternoon. You are through to Tower Hamlets Contact Centre. My name is 'x' . How may I help you?
- **Positive 1st Response** : Yes response : I can help you with that. Not sure response: I can check/I can find out/what I can do is...
- **Template 1>2>3** : a) what you can do/what you have done; b) what you are unable to do/the disappointing news c) next steps/additional options
- **Names Before numbers:** Obtain names before searching for an address/providing technical information
- **Preface** – describe and explain what you are going to do/your next steps

- **Running commentary** – Avoid silences, explain what you are doing while you are doing it
- **Foreshadow** – Help the caller understand what is going to happen next, set expectations
- **No road blocks** – Focus on ‘what I can do’. Avoid the terms ‘can’t or unfortunately’
- **Time -speak** – Provide specific time frames and/or dates eg; apt on 1st June in the afternoon.
- Provide SOR numbers or references at the end of all call where appropriate

CSMs will provide feedback to staff monthly on this aspect of performance. This should be done on a 1-2-1 basis and not by just sending an email.

▪ **Contact Centre KPI's**

Additional performance monitoring carried out by the CSMs is informed by the overall corporate objectives.

This sets the following KPI's for the Contact Centre:

- **Customer satisfaction (90%)** – based on the GovMetric survey
- **Average wait times not exceeding 90 seconds**

The effective management of calls is of course fundamental in ensuring that the above expectations are met and to that end CSMs currently collate the following statistics in relation to their CSAs each month:

- **Average number of calls answered per 7 hour shift (target currently 89)**
- **Average call handling time (target currently 3 minutes)**
- **Use of the make busy code (this should not exceed 25%)**
- **First point resolution (random sample monitoring of 40 transactions each month)**

Data relating to these metrics is derived from Mitel telephone reports and CSAs are provided with copies of this information each month. CSMs will liaise with their staff to consider any problem areas identified.

Reports currently distributed to staff identifying the above performance areas are as follows:

- Agent Event by period – monthly report (**provide screenshot of reports**)

- Agent Performance chart (**provide screenshot of reports**)
- The CSAs and CSMs PDRs will reflect the importance of achieving, as a minimum, the targets detailed above.

- **CSM reports for Contact Centre Manager**

- Call Quality Monitoring – this information is recorded on a shared manager’s drive and is updated monthly for each manager’s respective teams.
- Statistics - Reports relating to calls answered per hour, call handling times and utilization of time while logged onto the Mitel phone system are all saved in the Supervisors folder on the shared drive.
- First Time Fix – random sample of 40 transactions are again saved to the supervisors drive each month.

- **Real Time Monitoring**

- **Customer Services Manager role:**

- A Customer Service Manager are expected to carry out ‘real-time’ monitoring in the Contact Centre.

- This requires the manager to fulfil the following functions:

Beginning of the day:

- Ensure that all staff are logged on at the commencement of their working day.
- Check that all applications are working effectively and report any issues to the Help desk (x4444).
- Be proactive in the use of the Mitel real-time monitoring application.
- Highlight for CSAs when there is an increase in the number of customers held in a queue (greater than 5).
- Highlight for CSAs when call wait times have exceeded 60 seconds.
- Ensure staff call management is acceptable (staff should be keeping the use of make busy codes to a minimum)
- Use alternative staff resources during peak call periods as agreed in the SLAs.
- Monitor adherence to breaks and lunches.
- Use the Mitel capability to listen into calls where they are excessively long as CSAs may require support in dealing with a particularly difficult call ((greater than 10 minutes).
- Make active interventions using Lync instant messaging to acknowledge good performance as well as flagging more negative issues.

- This level of engagement is essential in ensuring that the staff are motivated and productive throughout the working day.

End of the day:

- CSM to ensure that all staff are logged off
- Make a log of any issues identified throughout the shift that may require attention in the future or some form of handover for the manager the following day.
- In addition, each CSM will schedule a Mitel report for the end of each day outlining individual team member's performance. This allows early intervention if necessary, rather than waiting a month for data. (Employee Event by Period – daily report.

Manager to complete daily capacity matrix and issues log, highlighting any matters that may impact performance such as staff absence, IT issues.

- Training

▪ Corporate Training

The council's HR service provides a corporate training programme which delivers a wide range of courses that are suitable for staff across all directorates. The programme is designed following analysis of Personal Development Plans (PDPs) and identifying the training needed to enable staff to deliver the strategic plan.

Further training is also commissioned by the Learning and Development team to meet the needs of specific teams or professional groups of staff.

All course applications must be made through the HR self-service portal.

▪ Customer Contact Centre Training

It is mandatory that all Contact Centre staff undertake the Mary Gobar International training in customer service.

- CSAs – 2 full days
- CSMs – 4 full days

MGI training looks to change the business culture and improve business performance by providing tools and techniques to enable staff to handle any situation that they may encounter...not only in the workplace but outside of work too.

The call quality monitoring exercise conducted in the Contact Centre incorporates many of the techniques that are taught on this course.

Further training needs for CCC staff are analysed on a monthly basis with a skill matrix actively monitored as a live document by managers to record any training needs and fulfil these.

- Service Level Agreements

Service Level Agreements are made between Customer Service and the Services themselves. SLAs are reviewed bi-annually between the Head of Services and Head of Customer Services. The agreed SLAs support the recharging models. Recharges will be carried out by the finance team monthly. Signed copies of the SLAs are saved in the Customer Services shared folder under the Partnership Portfolio files.

The responsibility of ensuring the SLA is agreed with Head of Services sits with The Divisional Director Customer Services - Teresa Heaney and Head of Customer Services – Jo Kelly.