Agenda item no. 6 - Question from members of the Council

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Cllr Ben Proctor, College	In the period from October last year to January this year (the only period for which figures are available) only 13% of calls to the Housing Triage line were answered. How will the executive improve this performance, to what level and by when?	Cabinet member adults, health and wellbeing

Response:

Thank you for the question. I acknowledge that there have been issues with the performance on answering telephone calls to the housing triage line. It is clear that, despite a number of different approaches to managing the phone lines, demand continues to outstrip the available capacity. In simple terms, the Triage team has dealt with 1,338 customers who presented as homeless since 1st April 2024, these were telephone calls and in person. Completing a homelessness assessment takes up to 15 minutes and even longer if the customer on the line is distressed or does not speak English as their first language. An increase in the number of people presenting in person at Blueschool House has taken capacity away from answering the telephone.

This situation has been exacerbated in recent months by the Home Point waiting list being closed whilst the new IT system was implemented and customers could not bid for a period of time. As a result, there was a substantial increase in telephone calls to the HomePoint team with a consequent knock-on impact on the triage line.

In order to address the increased demand, a further three Triage Officers are being employed to be the first point of contact. I anticipate that this will significantly improve performance within the next two months. We will continue to keep this under review and will bring in further resource if required. I would be happy to meet with you on a regular basis to keep you informed of progress.

Supplementary question:

I first raised a question about the performance of this phone line in April last year when I heard from many of my residents in need of housing support that despite calling repeatedly their calls were not answered. In June I raised the issue again and I was told that a system to measure call volumes would be in place by the end of July at the latest and if there was further delay I would be updated. There clearly was further delay but I'm afraid I wasn't updated and the figures I based my question on had to come from an FOI request. I'm pleased to hear that a year after I first raised the issue more resource is finally going to be committed to this service but given the experience of the past 12 months how can the executive assure members of this Council that housing support is receiving the political attention it badly needs?

Response to supplementary question:

I am sorry that you feel that you were not given a satisfactory answer. Due to the review and the demand that has been identified we are now monitoring the telephone answering system. Weekly monitoring is undertaken by the corporate director and fortnightly report to me as Cabinet Member.

The demand is unprecedented and is likely to increase which is a concern. A full review of the staffing model is underway which will report in April. We are aware of the distress to those facing homelessness and conscious of the impact on staff dealing with the increased demand. The review is important to staff and local residents. Detail regarding demand and the service review is contained in the answer that was originally provided to you.