

Meeting of:	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Wednesday 10th June, 2026
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Urgent Decision Procedure Used (If yes, why)	
Item Type	Part I
Report Title:	Summer 2026 – Customer Relations Update
Portfolio Holder:	Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources
Strategic Leadership Team:	Director of Corporate Resources
Lead Officer:	Nickki Johns

1.0 What is this report about?

1.1 To provide Resources Scrutiny with an update on the Council's customer contact arrangements, the operational pressures currently facing the Contact Centre, and the strategic direction for the next phase of transformation through the "95 in 5" improvement programme.

2.0 What are the Recommendations?

	Recommendations – What and How?	Reason for Recommendation – Why?
2.1	That Resources Scrutiny Committee note the contents of this report as providing an update on Contact OneVale and receive a further report in 12 months' time.	To understand the current context and future plans of Contact One Vale
2.2	That Resources Scrutiny Committee note that information relating to the performance of Contact OneVale and transformation work is also included in the six-monthly performance reports to Joint Performance Committee.	For awareness

	Recommendations – What and How?	Reason for Recommendation – Why?
2.3	That Resources Scrutiny Committee use this report as part of the evidence base to inform the planned future Task & Finish activity relating to C1V.	To align the work of the future Task & Finish project

3.0 What is the background to this report?

3.1 Resources Scrutiny Committee have expressed an interest in the work of Contact OneVale (C1V) and have requested a report providing Members with information relating to:

- data on how C1V is performing
- understanding whether residents can reliably reach the Council
- information on planned improvements.
- identifying ways to reduce pressure and improve customer experience

3.2 This report provides Members with an overview of operation of C1V and of the work currently underway.

3.3 The Council's Contact Centre remains a critical front door for residents, particularly for those who are vulnerable, digitally excluded, in crisis, or seeking reassurance and support at important moments in their lives.

3.4 A single integrated Contact Centre continues to provide significant strategic value to the organisation. It creates a more consistent customer experience, simplifies access to services, reduces duplication across teams, and enables residents to contact the Council through one recognised route rather than navigating multiple disconnected services and customer touchpoints.

3.5 The integrated model also supports broader organisational objectives around prevention and early intervention. By maintaining a more holistic view of customer contact, the Council is better placed to identify repeat issues, vulnerable households, patterns of escalating need, and opportunities to intervene earlier before situations deteriorate or become more costly to resolve.

3.6 Members will be aware that a core part of the Council's Transformation Programme, Reshaping, includes the theme of Target Operating Model. The Reshaping Programme is currently being revised for 2026/27 and will be reported to Cabinet in the coming weeks. As part of the 2026 programme, a Customer workstream of the Target Operating Model is being developed. The Customer workstream recognises the importance of bringing together complementary work to focus on:

- Contact OneVale
- Channel Shift (supporting appropriate shift to digital channels)
- No Wrong Door (ensuring consistent resident experience and support)
- Hub Model (bringing more services into the community)
- Brilliant Basics and Top 10 Customer Journeys

- Complaints
- Processes work seamlessly from initial request through to final delivery

- 3.7 Supporting all of this work is the recognition that communications need to be clear, accessible and supportive, getting interactions right first time wherever possible, and reducing unnecessary customer effort. These principles are reflected within the Council's newly developed Customer Charter, which establishes organisation-wide commitments regarding how services engage with residents and supports the wider ambitions set out within Vale 2030.
- 3.8 The Corporate Resources Directorate Plan 2026/27 includes a commitment to improve access to information and services and embed the Customer Charter across the organisation, ensuring this work remains a focus of the Directorate.
- 3.9 From a customer perspective, integration reduces complexity and frustration. Residents increasingly, and rightly, expect services to be simple, joined up and responsive, regardless of internal structures. The Contact Centre will continue to play an important role in helping residents access support quickly and reduce the need for customers to repeatedly explain their circumstances to different parts of the organisation.
- 3.10 The model also creates opportunities for more proactive approaches to customer service. Better visibility of contact patterns, service demand and repeat interactions allows the Council to identify avoidable demand, improve communication, and redesign services around customer need rather than organisational silos.

4.0 Current position and Future Direction

- 4.1 The Contact Centre has undergone significant change over recent years, both in terms of service scope and operational demand.
- 4.2 The service now handles a very broad range of customer interactions across the organisation and acts as the primary access point for many key services. At the same time, customer expectations for speed, accessibility and responsiveness continue to increase.
- 4.3 The strategic direction of travel is not simply to answer more calls more quickly. The longer-term objective is to fundamentally reduce the volume and duration of low-complexity customer transactions, allowing staff to focus more time on interactions where human support adds the greatest value.
- This includes:
- increasing digital self-service where appropriate;
 - improving the quality and clarity of information available to residents;
 - reducing avoidable repeat contact;
 - simplifying customer journeys;
 - improving service responsiveness across the wider organisation; and

- ensuring skilled staff capacity is focused on more complex or sensitive customer needs.
- 4.4 While Average Speed of Answer (ASA) is an important measure of how quickly customers can access council services, customer satisfaction is influenced by a much broader range of factors than waiting time alone. Customers place significant value on having their enquiry resolved at the first point of contact, receiving clear and accurate information, being treated with empathy and professionalism, and experiencing a straightforward process that avoids unnecessary transfers or repeat contact. Satisfaction is also shaped by the CSR ability to manage complex or sensitive issues effectively, particularly where customers may be vulnerable or distressed. In addition, the quality and usability of digital services, the consistency of information across channels, and the ease of progressing enquiries all contribute to the overall customer experience. Focusing solely on speed risks prioritising transactional efficiency over effective resolution and service quality. A balanced approach supports better outcomes for customers and reduces avoidable demand on council services over time.
- 4.5 This approach recognises that sustainable improvement cannot be achieved through telephony performance alone. It requires wider organisational change across processes, communication, service design and operational responsiveness. This is one of the key drivers behind bringing together this work as a central part of Reshaping.
- 4.6 The Council also remains committed to continuing the development of the Wellbeing Matters approach as part of its wider focus on prevention and early intervention. Wellbeing Matters is a holistic service delivered in partnership with Cardiff & Vale UHB and makes connections to a wide range of community and third sector organisations.
- 4.7 Customer-facing services play an important role in identifying wider wellbeing concerns, supporting vulnerable residents and helping ensure people are connected to the right support at the right time. The Council will continue working closely with Health colleagues and wider partners as organisations collectively review and evolve service delivery models to ensure support remains sustainable, joined up and focused on achieving the best possible outcomes for residents and communities.
- 4.8 Alongside Contact Centre transformation, the Council has also been working with service areas to review and redesign reception-based services and associated customer journeys, including areas such as Homelessness, Cashiers and wider face-to-face provision.
- 4.9 Over the coming year, the Council will continue to explore how technology, improved systems integration and redesigned processes can support a more cohesive and joined-up approach across customer touchpoints. This includes improving joined up working across services and enabling colleagues to access the information, insight and service data needed to support a broader range of customer enquiries more effectively, regardless of how residents choose to contact the Council.

5.0 Operational pressures and demand

- 5.1 The Contact Centre continues to experience significant operational pressure arising from increasing demand, the breadth of services now delivered through the function and in response to operational changes and pressures in services across the council.
- 5.2 In addition to core customer contact handling, the service also supports a number of critical operational functions including:
- Telecare services
 - Out of Hours provision
 - Wellbeing Officer support
 - Reception Services
 - Wider organisational resilience requirements
- 5.3 These functions provide important value to the organisation and directly support vulnerable residents and critical frontline services. However, the resource requirements associated with these responsibilities have not reduced in line with broader staffing level reductions required in previous years.
- 5.4 As a result, a disproportionate level of pressure has increasingly fallen on core call-handling capacity.
- 5.5 At the same time, Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) are now required to navigate a highly complex operating environment. They currently work across multiple systems and processes and collectively support in excess of 800 different service enquiries across the organisation.
- 5.6 This complexity increases training requirements, handling times, operational risk and the challenge of maintaining consistent customer experiences.
- 5.7 Alongside technology and process improvements, the Council also recognises the need to continually review how customer contact services are organised and delivered to ensure resources are being used in the most effective and sustainable way possible.
- 5.8 This does not represent a reduction in the importance of customer-facing services or the CSRs delivering them. The Contact Centre continues to provide significant organisational value and, given increasing complexity and demand, future service models may require different deployment of skills and resources, alongside continued investment in frontline capability.
- 5.9 As part of the wider Reshaping transformation programme, the Council will therefore continue to review operating models, escalation routes and the balance between frontline resolution and specialist service support to ensure customers are directed to the right level of support at the right time, whilst also making best use of organisational capacity.
- 5.10 In doing so, the Council remains committed to the principle of a single integrated customer contact model, which continues to provide significant strategic value through improved accessibility, more consistent customer experiences, better organisational insight, and

stronger opportunities for prevention and early intervention across services.

5.11 The Council recognises the commitment, resilience and professionalism of CSRs and wider customer-facing staff, who continue to operate within an increasingly complex and demanding environment whilst supporting residents across a wide range of sensitive and challenging situations.

5.12 As with many public-facing services nationally, customer-facing teams can also experience difficult interactions and challenging behaviours from a small minority of customers. The Council is therefore continuing to work closely with Human Resources and operational managers to ensure appropriate wellbeing support, training and operational practices are in place to support staff welfare and resilience.

5.13 A further challenge continues to be avoidable repeat contact, where customers re-contact the Council because customers are seeking updates, reassurance or further clarification regarding existing requests. This creates additional pressure both for operational teams and for customers themselves, who may feel frustrated or uncertain about the status of their request.

5.14 This theme is also reflected within customer feedback and complaints data, which increasingly highlights communication, updates and responsiveness of council services as key areas of concern.

6.0 New communications platform and Service Improvement

6.1 The implementation of the Council's new customer contact platform, Amazon Connect, provides an important foundation for future improvement.

6.2 The platform enables the Council to modernise how customer contact is managed and creates opportunities to improve responsiveness, consistency and insight across services.

6.3 Importantly, the platform supports a more flexible and integrated approach to customer contact by enabling:

- improved visibility of customer demand and contact patterns;
- better routing and management of enquiries;
- enhanced reporting and operational oversight;
- improved integration opportunities with other systems and services;
- greater support for digital channels and self-service; and
- the introduction of automation and assisted customer journeys where appropriate.

6.4 The implementation represented the first known deployment of Amazon Connect within England and Wales in local government, completed without the use of a specialist implementation partner. Delivering the project internally is estimated to have avoided implementation costs in the region of £100,000 to £300,000 whilst also building internal organisational capability and reducing future dependency on third-party suppliers.

6.5 Alongside the platform implementation, the project also resolved a significant Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) compliance risk. Payment-related calls create

operational and compliance challenges associated with handling card information within customer contact environments. The new solution now routes all payment-related calls through a compliant and secure payment handling process, significantly reducing organisational risk and improving compliance assurance.

6.6 The implementation has already enabled a number of wider operational improvements, including:

- redesign of customer call flows to simplify navigation and reduce customer effort;
- introduction of a simple conversational chatbot capability allowing customers to move directly to the appropriate service area without relying solely on traditional telephone menu options;
- improved insight into customer demand through better capture and categorisation of customer intent;
- implementation of SMS options allowing customers to receive information without remaining in telephone queues;
- introduction of callback functionality enabling customers to retain their place in the queue and receive a return call rather than waiting on hold;
- introduction of statutory and informational messaging within queues, reducing the need for Customer Service Representatives to routinely communicate standard information during live calls and therefore helping to reduce average handling times without negatively impacting customer experience; and
- delivery of the first phase of AI-assisted support for CSRs, helping reduce time to competency for new members of staff, improving access to knowledge, and reducing the operational reliance on manual knowledge base searches during customer interactions.

6.7 Further improvements are already in development. The next phase will enable the Council to begin capturing customer information whilst callers are waiting in queue and pre-populating customer information directly into advisor screens before calls are answered. This will reduce repetition for customers and shorten handling times, particularly where residents do not have a Vale Digital Account or where customer details cannot automatically be identified.

6.8 Where customer telephone numbers can be recognised and matched to existing records, information will increasingly be pre-populated automatically to improve both customer experience and operational efficiency.

6.9 By the end of Summer 2026, the aim is to significantly reduce handling times for Waste Management & Highways contacts through a redesigned operating model. This includes reducing the need for CSRs to navigate multiple systems during calls, alongside trialling a revised operational approach where administrative activity is separated from live customer handling wherever automation is not currently possible.

6.10 An additional benefit of the new platform is the increasing ability to better understand the reasons why customers are contacting the organisation repeatedly or requiring additional

support following earlier interactions.

- 6.11 Using improved analytics and emerging AI capabilities, the Council will increasingly be able to identify patterns within customer contact, including situations where customers are making repeat enquiries, chasing updates, or experiencing difficulties completing services through existing processes.
- 6.12 This insight will provide a stronger evidence base for service improvement and redesign activity across the organisation. Rather than focusing solely on telephony performance, as an organisation, we will collectively be better placed to understand the underlying causes of customer demand, identify avoidable contact, and target improvement activity towards the services and processes creating the greatest customer frustration or operational pressure.
- 6.13 Over time, this will support a more proactive and preventative approach to customer service improvement, helping reduce unnecessary customer effort whilst improving overall organisational efficiency and service responsiveness. This will also contribute to the efforts being made to focus on reducing complaints and learning from them.
- 6.14 The Council will also explore opportunities to expand customer contact channels where this supports improved accessibility and customer experience. This includes initial discovery work around channels such as WhatsApp and other conversational messaging platforms, recognising changing customer expectations regarding how residents choose to interact with services. Any future expansion will be carefully assessed to ensure it delivers clear operational value, maintains appropriate governance and security standards, and supports a consistent customer experience across channels.
- 6.15 The implementation should therefore be viewed not simply as a technology replacement, but as a strategic enabler for wider customer service transformation.

7.0 Performance and Measures

- 7.1 The Council is continuing to develop a more balanced and meaningful approach to customer contact reporting.
- 7.2 Historically, performance reporting within contact centres has often focused heavily on Average Speed of Answer (ASA). Whilst still important operationally, ASA alone does not fully reflect customer experience, particularly where average performance can mask longer waits experienced by some residents.
- 7.3 Future reporting will therefore place greater emphasis on customer-focused measures, including:
- percentage of calls answered within 5 minutes (“X in 5”);
 - percentage of calls answered within 10 minutes (“X in 10”);
 - longest customer wait times;
 - repeat contact levels;
 - abandoned calls after threshold waits;

- digital self-service utilisation;
- email demand and response volumes; and
- wider indicators linked to customer experience and service responsiveness.

7.4 First Contact Resolution, the percentage of customer enquiries resolved without the need for further contact, remains an important indicator of both customer experience and service effectiveness.

7.5 Due to the breadth of services delivered through the Contact Centre and the complexity of some underlying processes, establishing a consistent and meaningful measure for this indicator has historically been challenging. However, recognising the importance of reducing customer effort and avoidable repeat contact, the Council has an ambition over the next 12 months to develop a more effective approach to measuring First Contact Resolution and to establish meaningful targets aligned to service improvement activity and customer outcomes.

7.6 Benchmarking contact centre performance across local government remains complex due to significant differences in operating models, service scope and organisational responsibilities between councils.

7.7 Whilst some authorities operate primarily transactional customer service centres, others, including this Council, deliver a significantly broader range of functions through their integrated customer operation, including Telecare, Out of Hours support, wellbeing provision and wider organisational resilience functions.

7.8 As a result, direct comparison using single measures such as Average Speed of Answer (ASA) can provide an incomplete picture of both customer experience and operational demand.

7.9 The future approach will focus less on benchmarking against simplistic headline indicators and more on demonstrating measurable improvement in customer responsiveness, reduction in avoidable contact and improved resident experience over time. These measures are included within the Council's Performance Management Framework and will be published in the regular performance reports to Members, and are also made available to members of the public.

7.10

Current position & Targets

Metric	Explanation	Current	Q3 2027 Target
Service Level	Calls answered in 5 minutes	70%	95%
Average Speed of answer	Blended across all calls except Telecare/OOH	04:59	Remove and focus on Service Level
First Contact Resolution	Percentage of enquiries handled by the contact that can be resolved	N/A	Establish an effective method of measuring performance and establish a

	without further contact with the resident.		baseline prior to agreeing future target.
Inbound Calls	Period 1/4/26 -30/4/26 C1V only	8783	6500

7.11 Strategically, the Council's focus will increasingly shift away from high volumes of lower complexity transactions and towards higher-value customer interactions, including Wellbeing Matters, complex needs and preventative support activity.

7.12 Average Handling Time (AHT), the total time taken to manage a customer interaction and complete all associated work, remains an important operational measure and has a direct influence on overall service responsiveness and performance. However, the Council also recognises the risks associated with applying overly rigid handling targets within complex customer environments, as this can unintentionally encourage rushed interactions, unnecessary transfers, repeat contact and poorer customer outcomes.

7.13 As part of the wider transformation programme, the Council will therefore continue to assess the most appropriate use of handling metrics and performance targets, recognising the importance of early intervention, effective signposting and allowing sufficient time for higher-value conversations where this may deliver better long-term outcomes for residents and reduce future demand on services.

7.14 Digital Utilisation

7.15 In 2025/26, the Council processed more than 190,000 customer requests through digital channels. During 2025/26 residents rated their experience at an average of 4.3 out of 5 at the point of submitting their digital request. These transactions equate to almost 9,000 hours of call handling effort and t we would need at least 8 additional staff to deal with these enquiries by telephone

7.16 More importantly, digital services provide residents with greater flexibility and accessibility by allowing requests and reports to be submitted 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, without needing to wait in telephone queues or contact the Council during standard office hours.

7.17 The continued expansion of digital services therefore remains a key component of the Council's wider customer strategy, supporting both improved customer experience and more sustainable service delivery.

7.18 The highest volume digital transactions during 2025/26 included:

Service	Requests
Household Waste Recycling Centre Bookings	140,000*
Homes4U Bid For A Home	16,802

Garden Waste Service Subscription	12,350
Littering	3,388
Report pothole and pavement issues	2,773
Winter Garden Waste Collections	2,395
Council Tax Enquiry	1,773
Homes4U Bid For A Home That Needs A Local	1,688
Missed Recycling or Black Bag Collection	1,528
Council Tax Exemption	1,354
Highway Licences	1,351

7.19 The Council is continuing to invest in the expansion and improvement of digital services.

7.20 The upcoming Vale Homes delivery of the new Housing Online capability will further reduce manual processing and duplicate data entry associated with Homes4U and related housing processes. The platform will also introduce additional online functionality for residents, including the ability to report housing repairs digitally, reducing the need for telephone contact and improving customer convenience.

7.21 Alongside service availability improvements, the Council is increasingly focusing on ensuring that digital services are designed around customer need and are simple, accessible and effective to use. This includes reducing unnecessary form complexity, improving mobile accessibility, and ensuring customers receive clearer updates and visibility regarding the progress of their requests.

7.22 Whilst digital expansion remains an important strategic direction, the Council also recognises that not all residents can or wish to access services digitally and choice of channel often depends on the subject matter and circumstances. Maintaining accessible non-digital routes while ensuring a single view of the customer across all channels therefore remains an important principle within the Council's wider customer strategy and is reflected in the Reshaping – Customer workstream activity relating to exploring increased/enhanced community service provision.

8.0 95 in 5 Improvement Programme

8.1 As part of the Reshaping Customer work, the Council has established the “95 in 5” improvement programme as the overarching framework for improving customer responsiveness and modernising how customer contact is managed across the organisation.

8.2 The ambition of the programme is to ensure that 95% of customer calls are answered within 5 minutes, whilst also reducing excessive wait times and improving the overall customer experience.

- 8.3 Importantly, the programme recognises that sustainable improvement cannot be achieved through additional telephony resource alone. The underlying causes of avoidable demand, service complexity and repeat contact must also be addressed.
- 8.4 The programme therefore combines operational improvement, service redesign and digital transformation activity into a single coordinated approach focused on improving both customer experience and organisational efficiency.
- 8.5 Key areas of activity within the programme include:
- reducing avoidable repeat contact by improving communication, updates and service responsiveness;
 - simplifying customer journeys and reducing unnecessary process complexity;
 - increasing digital self-service for straightforward and repeatable transactions;
 - improving knowledge management and consistency of information provided to residents;
 - identifying and redesigning high-volume, low-value contact types;
 - improving real-time operational management and workforce planning;
 - strengthening performance reporting and organisational accountability;
 - improving integration between customer contact systems and back-office services;
 - introducing greater automation and assisted handling capabilities where appropriate; and
 - improving insight into customer demand, failure demand and service pressures to better target improvement activity.
- 8.6 The programme also recognises the strategic importance of maintaining capacity for higher-value customer interactions, particularly where residents may be vulnerable, require reassurance, or need more complex support.
- 8.7 Alongside service improvements, the programme will support the Council's longer-term ambition to move towards more proactive and preventative models of customer service, using better insight and improved processes to reduce customer effort and avoid escalation wherever possible.

9.0 Strategic Direction

- 9.1 The Contact Centre should not be viewed solely as a transactional function, but as a strategic organisational capability that supports resident access, early intervention, organisational insight and service improvement across the Council.
- 9.2 The direction of travel outlined within this report aligns closely with the Council's wider ambitions around prevention, accessibility, community wellbeing, being the best council we can be, and improving how residents experience and interact with the Council on a day-to-day basis.

10.0 Key Contacts

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