PSFSS COMMITTEE: 02-21-08, #5
City Council Agenda: 03-04-08

CITY OF SAN JOSE
CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY

Memorandum

TO: Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee

FROM: Randall Murphy
Interim CIO

SUBJECT: **REPORT ON CALL CENTER CUSTOMER SERVICE**

DATE: January 31, 2008

Approved Christine F. Shippey Date 2-3-08

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee accept this Report on Call Center Customer Service.

BACKGROUND

At the August 2, 2007 Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee meeting, Staff was directed to review after-hours activity and procedures for the exploration of opportunities to improve customer service. In response to the request, staff analyzed data and provided an update to Council in the form of an Information Memo on December 19, 2007. This report provides the Committee with a review of that data and update on the most recent activities related to customer service at the Customer Contact Center.

AFTER-HOURS COVERAGE

For the past five years, the City has contracted with Personal Telephone Answer Service (PTAS) to address after-hours calls following a 2002 report from the City Auditor's Office that determined the City could realize an estimated savings of approximately $365,000 through staff reassignments. During the time of the audit, the Call Center provided 24 x 7 telephone staffing, and averaged approximately 10,000 calls per month with 18% of the calls received off-peak. Today, the consolidated Customer Contact Center handles approximately 25,000 calls per month with less than 13% of the calls received after-hours. 72% of the monthly calls to the Customer Contact Center are related to Recycle Plus.

Callers to the City's main telephone line will reach the Integrated Voice Recognition (IVR) system, or automated call tree, 24 hours per day. This system allows the caller to select: (1) a utility service; (2) the Corporate Directory Dialer; or (3) a representative from the Customer

Contact Center during business hours, or PTAS after business hours. The Corporate Directory Dialer, available 24 hours per day, is the speech recognition system that allows a person to state the name of the desired employee or department with immediate transfer to the desired voice mailbox.

At the August 2 Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee meeting, Councilmember Nguyen expressed concern regarding after-hours services and procedures at the Customer Contact Center, and directed staff to consider streamlining and/or changing current policies in order to document and follow-up on calls received post-business hours.

Staff analyzed statistical data from July, 2007 through January, 2008 in order to identify the types of calls received by the answering service and to potentially improve responsiveness. Approximately 14% of the after-hours calls handled by PTAS were transferred to Public Safety as either 911 (0.8%) or 311 (13.2%) calls, and approximately 28% of calls were utility related. The remainder of inquiries handled by PTAS covered a broad range of services including animal care, parks maintenance, street maintenance, abandoned vehicles, and calls needing redirection to County agencies. These statistics are essentially unchanged (with a slight increase in utility-related calls) since the previous reported data through November, 2007.

Recent Improvements

- Staff meets regularly with PTAS to address service concerns. The communication between the City and PTAS has greatly improved as regular meetings have generated feedback about script improvements. As a result, the current script is now relied upon as an accurate tool, and PTAS staff can confidently provide dependable service. Future improvements will include development of lists of frequently asked questions and telephone numbers.
- The Customer Contact Center Staff sends daily updates to PTAS about City meetings and various current events. The better communication makes PTAS "an extension" of the Contact Center, providing similar daily event information, day or night.
- On Friday, January 4, the Bay Area was hit with a major storm. The Contact Center prepared scripts and procedures for PTAS so that residents could be provided with the most current information and contact resources in response to downed wires, fallen or cracked trees, street flooding, power outages, sandbag locations and other emergencies.
- Staff updated after-hours call procedures, and corrected several errors in information and telephone numbers.
- Management identified key personnel within the Customer Contact Center that will be accountable for maintaining the accuracy of information and facilitating communication between the City and PTAS.
- PTAS will consistently provide monthly call statistic reports, which will allow staff to analyze after-hours call volume, call type, and referrals to City departments. Staff will monitor the data and make adjustments as required.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL RECOMMENDTIONS

Councilmember Constant suggested that Staff consider changes such as providing a Citywide department directory for after-hours personnel, email messages left for day staff, and changes to the voice recognition system. Below is a status update on the recommended changes:

- As of January, PTAS was provided with access to the City directory in the form of a searchable file. Should an employee *not* be listed in the Citywide directory, the caller will be transferred to the appropriate main departmental telephone line. A future, web-based edition of the City directory is planned to allow for the latest updates in information. Until this is available, PTAS will be provided with the most recent searchable directories on a monthly basis.
- For inquiries regarding utility or billing questions, PTAS will continue to recommend that the caller dial back during regular business hours in order to reach appropriate personnel that are able to address their issues. PTAS also has procedures in place to take messages where required, and will relay the information to City staff the next business morning.
- For emergencies, PTAS will contact the on-call supervisor or other key City personnel according to established and current procedures and scripts. Recurring issues are added to the script as needed for future reference.
- Recent upgrades to the call tree (IVR) allow callers to "self-serve." Self-service options include obtaining account balance information, ability to make payments, and the ability to contact recycling or garbage contractors.
- The corporate directory dialer (CDD) voice recognition system has improved, but many factors prove challenging in this evolving technology. For example, some employees are missing from the Citywide directory, directory information may not be complete or current, employees use nicknames, and enunciations are inaccurate or unclear. Customer Contact Center and PTAS staff have been instructed to report any failed attempt to use the CDD so that ITD can continue to make required corrections and improve the usefulness of the voice recognition system.

EFFICIENCIES OF OTHER AGENCIES

Councilmember Williams requested that staff research ideas from other entities that use Customer Contact Centers in order to obtain additional options for efficiencies.

- The City's Customer Contact Center is part of a nationwide network in which ideas and advice are exchanged about related topics (e.g. calls in queue, recording of calls, quality vs. quantity issues, training, etc.). The information shared is based on practical experience as other cities face the same challenges. This is a valuable resource of practical tools, techniques and lessons learned.

- When compared with other cities, the San José City Customer Contact Center procedures are standard with most call centers around the country. Our Center employs techniques that are essentially a hybrid of best practices, as we remain committed to our goal of providing the highest level of customer service.
- The Customer Contact Center will use this network in the future as we explore customer satisfaction surveying, call recording for quality assurance and contingency emergency plans.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Desiree Jafferies, Customer Contact Center Manager at 535-3559.

Randall Murphy
Interim Chief Information Officer