

## Councilmember Herbold Contact Center Questions

- **Have there been any significant issues (technology changes, etc.) recently that have impacted the service level for the Contact Center? Are these issues now resolved? Are there any upcoming events that are expected to affect the Contact Center's performance?**

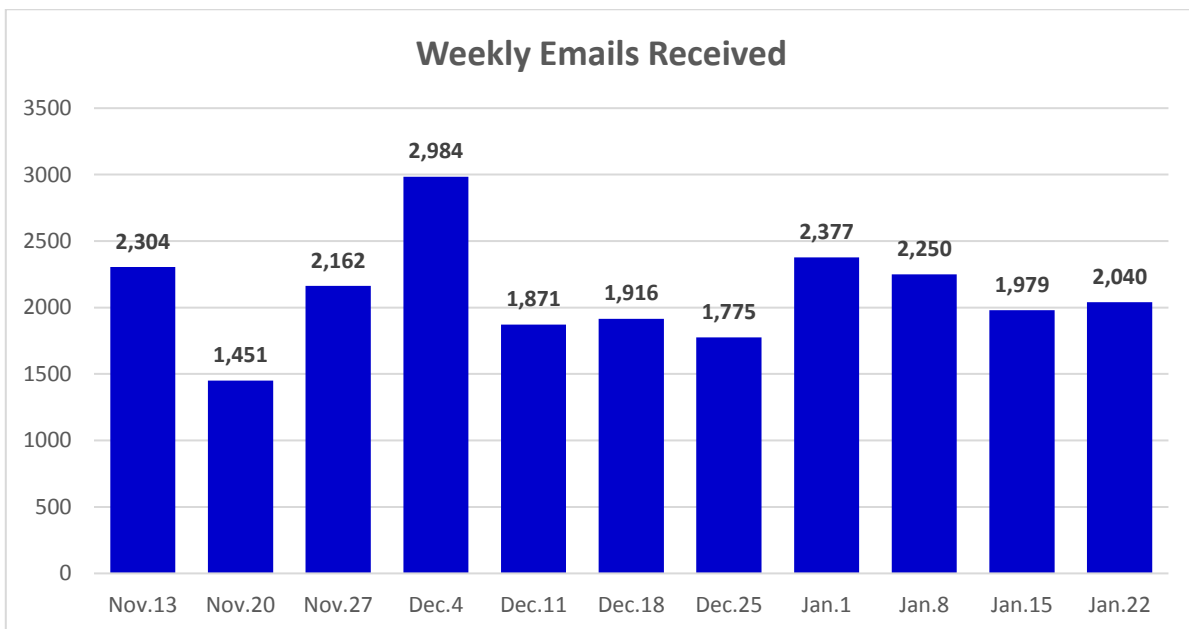
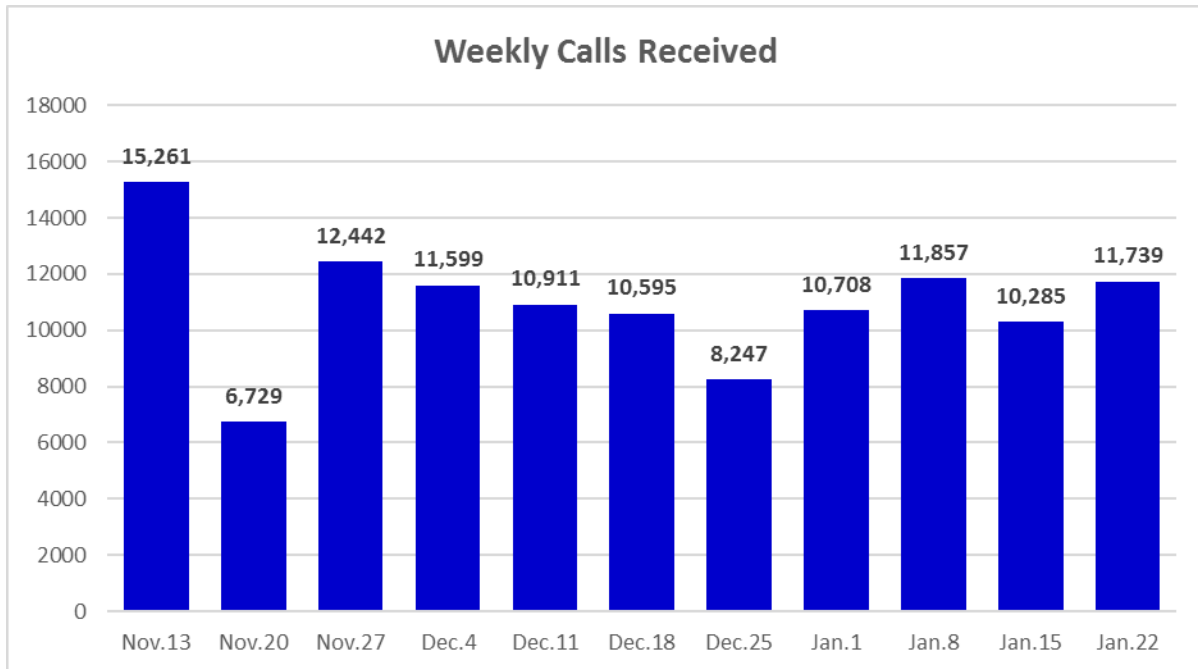
A variety of issues have and will impact the Contact Center's performance and we are working to resolve these.

- Peak workload volumes in seasonal moves for residential customers, college students, and escrow transactions. Move transactions take longer to process in the new billing system, which lead to longer call handle times and call wait times.
- Seattle City Light backlog for customer moves. These delays result in frustrated customer calls, which leads to longer call handle times and longer wait times.
- Weather related electrical service outages. Answering power outage calls is a priority for SPU's Contact Center. As a result, outage calls are routed ahead of all other call types to minimize an outage customer's call wait time. This increases the wait times for customers calling about issues other than outages.
- Delays in solid waste services due to holidays and inclement weather
- Accuracy of bills due to multiple, consecutive estimated meter readings
- Delays in refunds, billing adjustments, and transfers which result in frustrated customer calls, leading to longer call handle times and longer wait times.
- New billing system transition issues related to time needed to process certain transactions. In addition to an increase in mouse clicks to complete transactions, there are periods of the day in which agents experience slowness in the system's processing time, which increases average handle time. The Contact Center's average handle time per call has increased 27% (3 minutes) from that related to the previous billing system.
- Seattle City Light's launch of Advance Meter Infrastructure may lead to more calls to the Contact Center as customers will be questioning the accuracy of their City Light bills. While City Light will have a dedicated number for customers to call about Advanced Metering, some customers will call the contact center with any question about their bill and the Contact Center agents will have to explain and help educate customers.
- Seattle City Light's backlog in opening new accounts for customers will lead to customers calling the Contact Center seeking assistance, as the amount of their first SCL bill may be larger than expected since it will be for multiple months of service. In anticipation of this, City Light is including letters to customers in their bills offering payment plans and directing customers to contact SCL Account Services staff. Contact Center agents have also been given flexibility in offering pay plans to these customers.

Seattle City Light suspended electric shut offs for non-payment since August of 2016. In addition, delinquent notices were recently suspended. When collections and severance activities resume, it will lead to increase in calls from customers whose City Light bills may be large. Customers will call seeking alternative options for paying their debt.

- **How many calls does the Contact Center receive on an average day/week? How many emails are received?**

The charts below illustrate the number of call and emails the Contact Center received over the past 10 weeks.



Note: This number includes emails, correspondence, escrow, and online service requests for Solid Waste services.

- **What percentage of calls are resolved during that initial contact?**

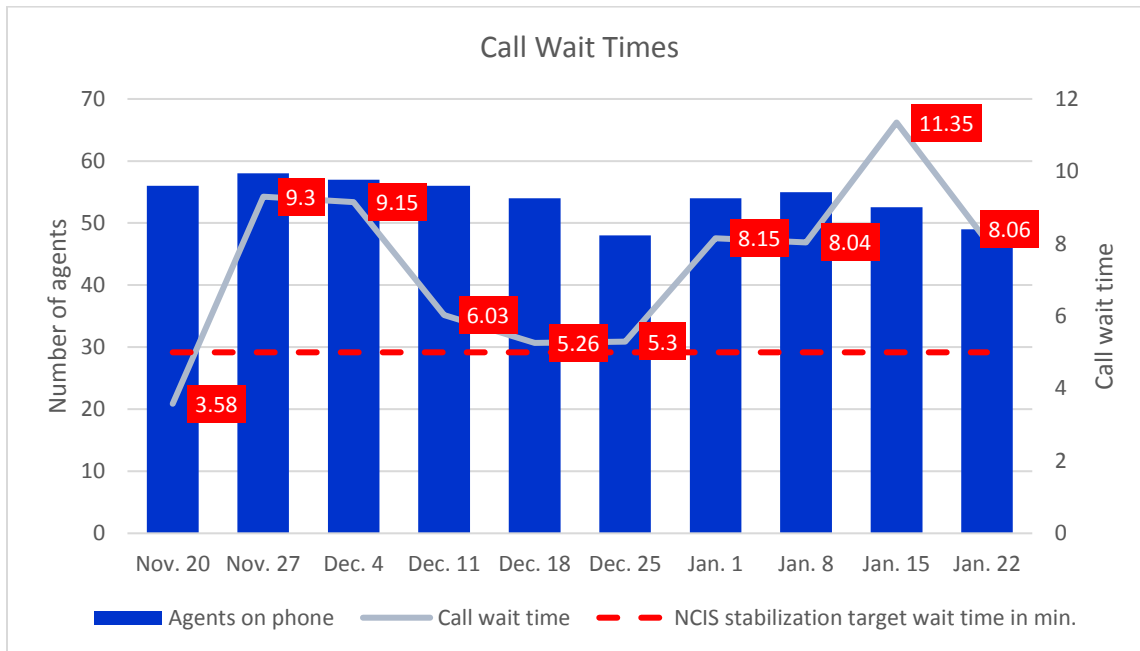
We describe this as First Call Resolution (FCR). Our current FCR is 75%. However, the way FCR is calculated does not accurately reflect the number of repeat calls from customers. Based on the backlog from the utilities we would expect FCR results to be lower than 75%. Therefore, we will be revising how we measure FCR by the end of the first quarter.

- **What is the average amount of time it takes for an email requestor to be contacted about his/her request?**

The Contact Center handles a variety of non-phone related work which includes emails, escrow requests, correspondence, and online service requests related to solid waste. Email requestors are contacted within two business days on average. Solid waste missed collection notifications are processed within 1 business day.

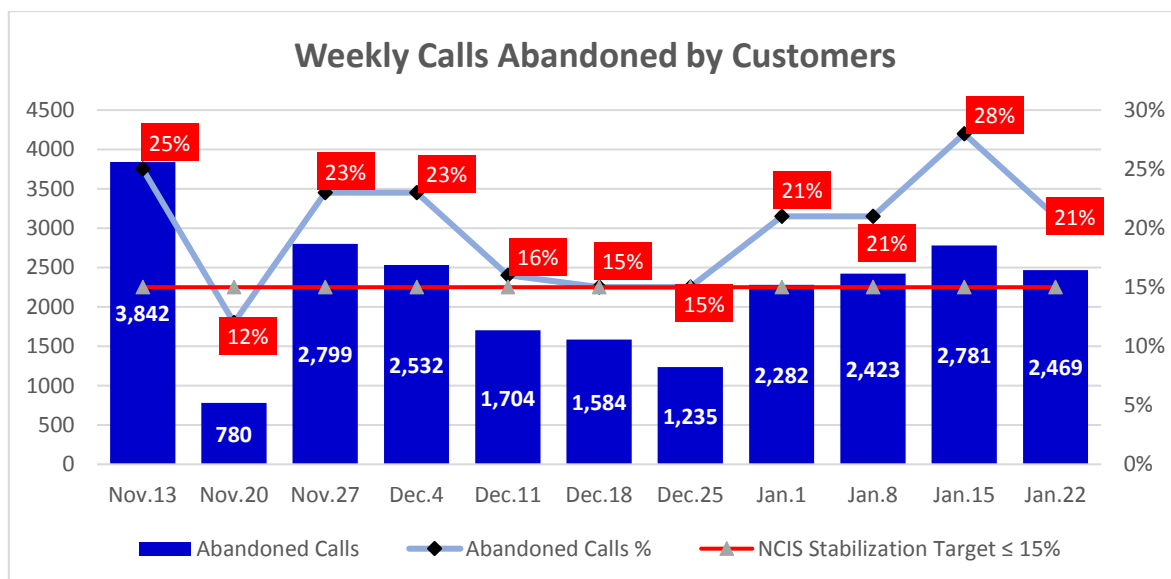
- **What is the average wait time for callers before being connected with an employee?**

The chart below illustrates the average call wait times for the past 10 weeks.



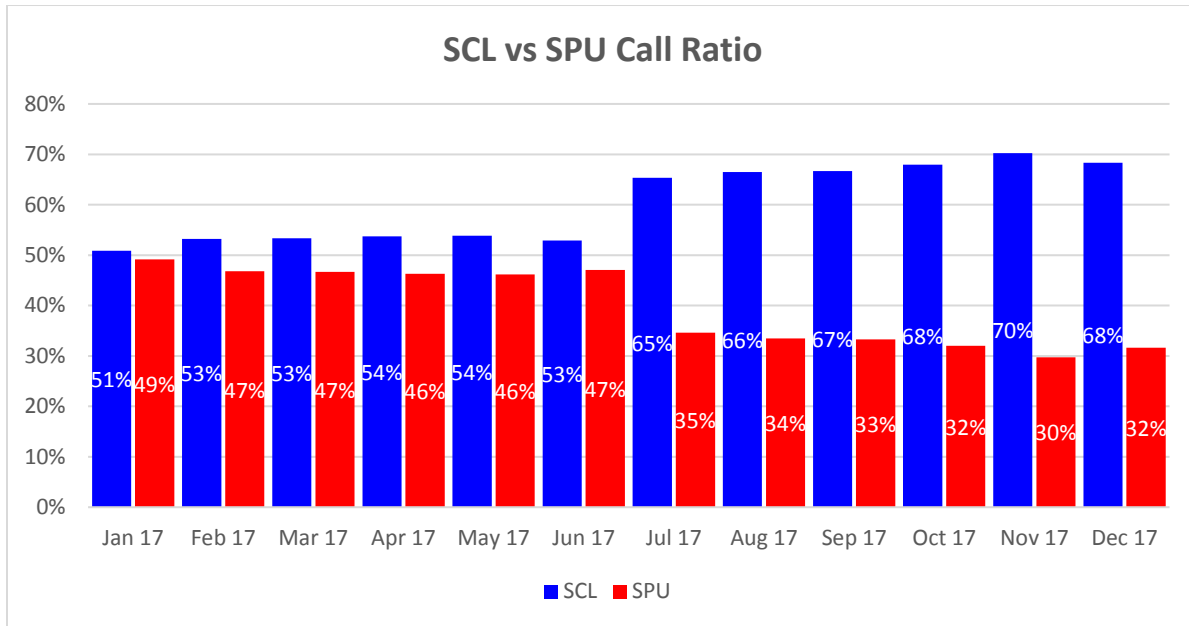
- **How many callers on an average day disconnect before being connected with an employee?**

The chart below illustrates the number and percent of calls that were abandoned for the past 10 weeks.



- **What percentage of the calls/emails are related to Seattle City Light (SCL)? What percentage are related to SPU? Please provide monthly data on this call split for the last 12 months.**

The chart below illustrates the percentage of calls each month related to Seattle City Light and Seattle Public Utilities. If a customer visits SPU’s website to send an email and selects Seattle City Light as the utility they are emailing about, their email is routed to an SCL email box so SCL can respond.



The ratio of calls to City Light increased in July due to the onset of the move season and continued during winter as customers called with concerns of high bills.

- **What is the length of time it takes to refund a customer after SPU agrees to a refund?**

SPU takes about 47 business days to provide a customer refund. An additional 3-5 business days is added if the refund check needs to be processed by the City’s Treasury group. SPU currently has 619 refunds to process. The oldest refund request is mid-December 2017 with one exception dated November 2017 which requires extensive research to complete. The following steps and groups are involved in the refund process:

- Step 1** - Contact Center representative creates a refund request that is sent to SPU’s Customer Accounting and Billing Services group
- Step 2** - Customer Accounting and Billing Services group researches and approves refund request
- Step 3** - Customer Accounting and Billing Services group sends the refund check requests in batches to SPU’s Accounts Payable group.
- Step 4** – SPU’s Accounts Payable group prints the refund checks and mails them out to customer
- Step 5** (if necessary) – SPU Accounts Payable sends refund check requests to the City’s Treasury group to print and mail refund checks greater than \$1,000.

Proposed mitigation plan:

- Filled a vacant Account Tech II position – February 7th start date
- Adding five Temporary Account Tech II positions (two have been hired)

- **How many employees staff the Contact Center on a typical day? Are employees separated in terms of those that respond to phone calls and those that respond to emails?**

The Customer Response Division is made up of the Contact Center, Business Support Team, and Administration. The number of employees in the Customer Response Division is 104 and, of those, 83 are contact center agents. Nine of the 83 contact center agents are TES and 74 are budgeted FTE. Based on averages from Jan 2 – 24, 2018 (excluding Vacation, Sick, Appointments, and Leave of Absences), the daily averages for staff on the phones and staff assigned to work emails and other non-phone related work is as follows:

- 52 agents average on phones
  - 9 agents average offline (Email, Correspondence, Escrow, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Customer Service Desk)
- **How do the current performance measures (e.g. average # of calls, average wait time, etc.) compare to previous years? Please provide a chart showing the current and historical data on these measures for the last 5 years.**

The attached Contact Center Call Volume chart shows the Contact Center's performance for the past 4 years.

- **How does the Contact Center's performance compare to other jurisdictions or comparable utilities?**

SPU needs more time to compile data for this response. As each contact center is unique due to a variety of services and lines of business they support, it may be challenging to find a comparable utility with a contact center that handles five lines of business (electric, water, sewer, solid waste, and drainage). We are anticipating providing this information by the end of Q1.

- **Has SPU undertaken, or is it planning to undertake, any efforts to significantly modify the way that the Contact Center operates?**

The Contact Center has made the following changes to the way it operates to become more efficient, improve performance, and the customer experience:

- Created an offline team to handle all the non-phone related customer requests which includes emails, escrow requests, correspondence, solid waste online service requests, and staffing customer service desk on SMT 4<sup>th</sup> floor. Also, hired a supervisor to manage the offline team. The Contact Center is current on all the customer requests that its staff is responsible for processing.
- Eliminated the processing of credit card payments by Contact Center agents to eliminate the challenges we faced in complying with Payment Card Industry (PCI) standards and requirements. If a customer wants to make a payment with an agent instead of a self-serve option, they are transferred to KUBRA's Contact Center. KUBRA is the current electronic billing and payment vendor for the city of Seattle.
- Changes were made to SPU's website to improve the way customers send us emails. To ensure that we receive all the necessary information to promptly respond to the customer's issue, required fields were added for customers to identify if their email is regarding SPU or SCL, the topic of their issue, their email address, account number, etc. before they can submit an email. If the customer selects SCL, then their email is directly sent to SCL's email box for response.
- As a temporary change, the Contact Center hired 8 temporary Customer Service Representatives to exclusively handle Solid Waste calls and emails.
- Once the back-office areas of SPU and SCL are current with their workload and we have a better picture of what normal is, we need to evaluate whether the Contact Center has the appropriate staffing levels to support the growth the city has experienced over the past years. The Contact Center has not increased its staff since 2001.

Six contact center positions were eliminated in 2011-2012 to comply with a Council Budget Guidance to reduce the O & M budget.

**Note: The attached 2018 Contact Center Action Plan details additional actions the Contact Center plan to take to improve performance.**