

**NI 14: Reducing avoidable contact: Minimising the proportion of customer contact that is of low or no value to the customer**

Is data provided by the LA or a local partner?	Y	Is this an existing indicator?	N
<p><b>Rationale</b></p>	<p>Local authorities are fundamental points of contact for the citizen when seeking access to public services. They provide key services for their local communities that greatly affect the quality of life for individual citizens and the overall community.</p> <p>In accord with the vision of the Local Government Delivery Council and the principles of the Service Transformation Agreement (<a href="http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/B/9/pbr_csr07_service.pdf">www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/B/9/pbr_csr07_service.pdf</a>), the customer experience for both citizens and businesses when contacting their local council should be one which is responsive, timely and efficient.</p> <p>By identifying customer contact that is 'avoidable', the local authority and its partners are better placed to redesign the way services and information are made more accessible for their customers, so they do not have to make unnecessary, valueless contacts which are both frustrating for the customer and inefficient for the provider.</p>		
<p><b>Definition</b></p>	<p><b>The proportion of customer contact that is avoidable.</b></p> <p>The indicator is calculated in aggregate across all service channels, across selected key service areas. The assessment of whether a contact is avoidable relates only to what <u>caused</u> the customer to make contact (as opposed to evaluating the customer satisfaction with the contact or whether follow-up contacts will subsequently be needed).</p> <p><u>Customer contact</u>: an external customer (citizen or business) contacting the council across any channel (telephone, e-mail, post, website or face-to-face) with regard to the specified services. It includes customer requests for a service or information, reports of failure to deliver a service, and responses to council requests. Website contact is assessed as the number of transactions rather than the number of hits.</p> <p><u>Avoidable Contact</u>: to promote a clear and focussed definition in line with the issues raised in the rationale above, avoidable contact should be assessed by the adviser for a given contact if <i>one or more</i> of the following occurs or has occurred for the service areas defined for the appropriate tier of council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A. Unnecessary clarification by the customer: Any query received as a result of a previous contact during which the council was not able to provide the necessary information or service, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– phone call resulting from online service being unavailable or inadequate information on the website;</li> <li>– email asking for clarification of a council letter or other communications material which is poorly worded or presented; incomplete, inaccurate or out of date;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

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**Definition (continued)**

- B. Avoidable contact caused by poor signposting, or poor call transfer to council services – for example, customer rings wrong number because contact points not clearly advertised, or customer is passed to planning services when their query relates to parking;
- C. Repeat contact with the customer having to pass on the same notification of information to carry out transactions with the council and its partners – for example, customers being asked to provide information about a change of address to multiple parts of the council;
- D. Customers are progress chasing, asking for reassurance or making other unnecessary service delivery follow-up: any contact which results from council/partner inability to deliver a service as expected or promised (for example, missed appointment to collect sofa for disposal or faulty boiler in council house not properly fixed). This holds force regardless of whether or not customer expectations exceeds service standards, and whether or not the problem is the responsibility of the council or service delivery partners;
- E. Repeat contact after premature closure of a previous contact (for example, customer returns to one-stop shop at a later time when the queues are much shorter than previously).

Ideally the assessor should be the agent handling the contact.

Sampling

The primary way of collecting data for this indicator will be through the use of a contact management or Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Where councils do not currently have this in place, they will need to undertake surveys of a sample of contacts. Guidance to be issued by June 2008 will include advice in respect of sampling methodology.

Further detail and advice on assessing avoidable contact will be provided to local councils before the end of June 2008.

Service areas

Councils will record the proportion of avoidable contacts in respect of contacts relating to selected key service areas, which cover high volume citizen and business transactions, across a number of typical council departments. These are:

***District Councils:***

- Planning services (local planning issues);
- Building control;
- General council tax enquiries, billing and recovery process for payment of council tax & national non-domestic rates;
- Environmental Health services (licensing, food safety, pollution and pest control);
- Street scene – waste collection and street cleaning, including recycling, street furniture and fly-tipping;
- Housing (benefit claims, council tax benefit, repairs, allocations and lettings process for social housing);
- Electoral register (including registration and enquiries on electoral services);
- Parking permits and Parking Control Notices.

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<p><b>Definition (continued)</b></p>	<p><b>Unitary Council, Metropolitan Borough Councils, London Borough Councils and City of London:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children’s services (school admissions, free school meals, youth services);</li> <li>• Highways (condition of roads, street lighting);</li> <li>• Housing (benefit claims, council tax benefit, repairs, allocations and lettings process for social housing);</li> <li>• Environmental Health services (licensing, food safety, pollution and pest control);</li> <li>• Street scene – waste collection and street cleaning, including recycling, street furniture and fly-tipping;</li> <li>• General council tax enquiries, billing and recovery process for payment of council tax and national non-domestic rates;</li> <li>• Planning services (local planning issues);</li> <li>• Building control;</li> <li>• Trading standards;</li> <li>• Adult Social Services (care packages, dial-a-ride, home helps, meals on wheels);</li> <li>• Electoral register (including registration and enquiries on electoral services);</li> <li>• Parking permits and Parking Control Notices.</li> </ul> <p><b>County Councils:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children’s services (school admissions, free school meals, youth services);</li> <li>• Highways (condition of roads, street lighting);</li> <li>• Trading standards;</li> <li>• Adult Social Services (care packages, dial-a-ride, home helps, meals on wheels).</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Formula</b></p>	<p><math>(x/y) * 100 = z\%</math>  x = the number of customer contacts that are assessed as avoidable;  y = the total number of customer contacts within the relevant services;  z = percentage of customer contacts that are assessed as avoidable.</p>		
<p><b>Worked example</b></p>	<p>If 600 contacts are assessed as avoidable out of a total of 1,000 contacts, the proportion of avoidable contacts is 60.0%</p>	<p><b>Good performance</b></p>	<p>Improved performance is typified by a lower percentage.</p>
<p><b>Collection interval</b></p>	<p>Annual (Financial year)</p>	<p><b>Data Source</b></p>	<p>Varied: Local authorities and/or councils through Customer Relationship Management Systems and/or other forms such as emails, call centres and websites</p>

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<b>Return Format</b>	Percentage	<b>Decimal Places</b>	One
<b>Reporting organisation</b>	Local authority		
<b>Spatial level</b>	Single tier, county and district council		
<b>Further Guidance</b>	<p><i>a) Sources of advice</i></p> <p>Local Authorities will be expected to have effective processes in place to underpin their assessment.</p> <p>To ensure that effective processes are in place in Local Authorities, the requirement to assess NI 14 will take hold as of October 2008. Training and guidance packs will be worked up in consultation with the sector, and issued before the end of June 2008 on the IDeA website (<a href="http://www.idea.gov.uk">www.idea.gov.uk</a>) and Business Improvement Package (<a href="http://www.bip.rcoe.gov.uk">www.bip.rcoe.gov.uk</a>). These will also set out any refinements to the definition of the indicator (such as the wording of the services covered) in the light of lessons learned through piloting of the indicator.</p> <p><i>b) Collecting data</i></p> <p>The primary way of collecting data for this indicator will be through the use of a contact management or CRM system. Where councils do not currently have this in place, they will need to undertake surveys – adding up the number of contacts assessed as avoidable within the sample number of contacts, divided by the sample number of contacts. The guidance to be issued by June 2008 will include advice in respect of sampling methodology.</p> <p><i>c) Supplementary data for use on voluntary basis</i></p> <p>To enhance local understanding of customer needs, councils may wish to consider <b>voluntary</b> use of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disaggregation by service and channel (with a particular focus on priority areas) for use as an internal service audit and improvement tool;</li> <li>• Disaggregation with respect to equalities where appropriate (gender, age, ethnic background etc);</li> <li>• The Contact Council's Performance Management Framework (<a href="http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/public_service_reform/contact_council/workplan.aspx">www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/public_service_reform/contact_council/workplan.aspx</a>);</li> </ul> <p>Where the council carries out customer satisfaction surveys on these services, feedback can be used to assess the robustness of the processes in place to measure the indicator, as well as being a valuable management information tool in its own right to improve the way that customers access information and services from the council.</p>		

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**Further Guidance (continued)**

*d) Other elements of good practice*

The indicator does not measure all aspects of behaviour to reduce time spent in contact that is of low or no value to them. Councils may therefore also wish to consider other elements of good practice, including reducing the need to repeat information when passed from agent to agent; and the ability of customers to get through to call centres.

*e) Background – redesigning services for greater customer satisfaction, increased staff engagement and enhanced efficiency*

The vision of the Local Government Delivery Council and Service Transformation Agreement is for local government and its partners to deliver services that are “better for customers, better for staff and better for the taxpayer”.

These services will be organised in ways that make sense to their users, rather than being convenient for the organisations that are delivering them; handled by staff who have the appropriate training, skills and access to information to be able to assist the citizen effectively; and delivered both effectively and efficiently through all channels which are designed for the user so that they are simpler, clearer and more accessible.

Effective action requires councils to:

- Understand their local customers and their needs;
- Recognise the extent and causes of customer contact;
- Understand the stages of the delivery chain from end to end in terms of the value each adds to the customer experience;
- Assess the capability that exists compared to what is needed to deliver that value, and the barriers that prevent enhanced customer service;
- Engage customers to help shape how services are designed and delivered;
- Monitor changes over time including an analysis of the factors that lie behind changes in performance as measured by the indicator;
- Take a multi-channel approach, both enabling customers to self serve and empowering staff and intermediaries to assist effectively those who need help through whichever channel they choose to approach their council; and
- Work with local and central government partners through LSP and LAA arrangements to find better ways to deliver joined up customer focussed services.

By understanding the causes of ‘avoidable contact’ in this way, councils can then work to address key barriers to efficient and effective service delivery.