

ADMINISTRATION RESPONSE TO CITY'S RESPONSE TO 311 REQUESTS AUDIT

Recommendation

That the November 30, 2023, Financial and Corporate Services report FCS02139, be received for information.

Requested Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	LIVE. ACCESS.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	N/A	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Conditions for service success
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	N/A		
Related Council Discussions	N/A		

Executive Summary

- In 2023, the Office of the City Auditor conducted an audit of the City's response to service requests with the goal of determining if Administration effectively responds to and closes Edmontonians' service requests made through 311.
- The Auditor identified a number of key findings and made five recommendations with three addressed to the Service Innovation and Performance (SIP) Branch and two addressed to the Deputy City Managers of City Operations, Community Services, Financial and Corporate Services and Urban Planning and Economy reflecting the joint service delivery model of 311.

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- Administration accepts the recommendations and plans to implement them by March 2025.

REPORT

The City of Edmonton delivers services across more than 70 lines of business. 311 was introduced in late 2008 to provide Edmontonians with simple, convenient and easy access to City programs and services. The centralization of managing Edmontonian's inquiries through the 311 channels allows the City to allocate resources efficiently, and provides an effective and equitable service experience. The centralized service model also enables the City to collect data related to volumes, trends and performance measurement, and have an overall mechanism of listening to Edmontonians' and their experiences with City services.

Today, Edmontonians leverage multiple channels including phone, online and a mobile app to connect with City services. Since 311's inception, more than 24 million inquiries have been received, an average of 1.6 million per year. 311 agents support Edmontonians with inquiries including transit schedules, recreation program registrations, litter on public property, tax notice copies, infrastructure inquiries and more. Edmontonians' requests are triaged, logged, addressed or routed based on the order received, and all requests are trackable using a provided reference number.

The Joint-Delivery Model and Referral System

311 is ultimately a centralized window for Edmontonians into the departments, branches and teams that directly provide services. Through this model, serving Edmontonians is a joint responsibility between 311 and business areas.

Business areas provide "scripts" to 311 that provide information, references and instructions to guide the 311 agents. These scripts help resolve most inquiries on the first call. Between 2018-2022, 73 per cent of the call inquiries received were addressed by 311 as first call resolutions.

Within this same five-year period, 27 per cent of inquiries were referred to the responsible business area. These referral inquiries initiate service requests. Service requests may include requests to fill a pothole, address a sidewalk concern, clean litter on public property, trim overgrown trees, repair or maintain pathways, investigate construction site concerns, clean-up an encampment, remove graffiti, dispose of discarded needles or ticket parking infractions.

Referral inquiries require follow-up and action. The service requests from 311 are merged into the business areas' service delivery systems to be addressed with standard processes in alignment with established service standards. For example, a pothole reported through 311 would be logged into the database with other potholes to be filled as identified through road inspections and other City data sources. Although 311 provides a centralized access point, business areas are not entirely dependent on 311 to be aware of service needs in the community. For example, last year the City:

- Filled over 500,000 potholes of which 14,849 were reported through 311
- Completed 30 million waste collections and received 5,498 missed collection requests via 311

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Overview of Recommendations and Management Response

The Office of the City Auditor presented five recommendations, all of which were accepted by Administration.

Recommendation 1 - We recommend that the Service Innovation and Performance Branch define tickets as closed when the business area has resolved the service request and communicate this to all business areas that close 311 tickets.

Administration agrees that providing effective customer service requires clarity and accuracy of the status of service requests. To improve on the existing processes:

- The Service Innovation and Performance branch will create a clear definition of closed service requests to be applied consistently across all City services;
- The definition of “resolved” will clarify that no further action will be taken by the City;
- This definition will be shared with all business areas and updated across supporting tools and materials;
- The definition will also be communicated to the public along with any other relevant and standardized definitions such as “assigned” or “in progress.”

Implementation date: March 31, 2024

Recommendation 2 - We recommend that City Departments close the 311 service ticket after they have resolved the request.

Administration recognizes that the City is not consistently communicating the status or completeness of a service request to Edmontonians. This is not a universal problem — some business areas are closing tickets only when service requests are complete in the field. The consistency in both the definitions and the application across all City departments will be addressed through existing work as well as execution of this recommendation.

In March 2022, a project was initiated to enhance timely and meaningful updates through the cycle of a service request with City Operations. This area was intentionally selected due to the high number of service requests received, the volume of service escalations and follow up inquiries received. Through this work, the City successfully improved business processes to align ticket closure with service completion; enhanced the 311 app functionality to link specific requests previously reported and share the originating reference number; and developed robust status closure reasons to improve communication.

To build on this established foundation and to advance this recommendation, City Operations, Community Services, Financial and Corporate Services and Urban Planning and Economy will:

- Incorporate learnings from business areas with appropriate processes in place;
- Adjust remaining processes for parks and open spaces, roads, and waste collection services to align ticket closure with completion;
- Continue to support the waste services project to digitize field orders which will address resourcing and capacity issues associated with the manual administration of closing service requests;

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- Complete a review of business processes and establish consistency and alignment in the management of service request closures;
- Develop and communicate a consistent approach to managing service requests which bypass 311 (for example, direct inquiries from Edmontonians to City Councillors) to provide a consistent service experience.

This work will increase the transparency of the processes, effectively communicate the status or reason for closure, reduce duplicate requests and collectively contribute to a more positive service experience for Edmontonians.

Implementation date: September 30, 2024

Recommendation 3 - We recommend that City Departments improve their performance measurements for 311 tickets by identifying key measures and targets and by clarifying how they calculate their results.

Administration recognizes the importance of having service measures and targets in place to help inform decision making and determine if the program is achieving its objectives.

Today, it is a requirement for all service requests to have a response time standard in place. This response standard is used to establish an agreement between the business areas and the Edmontonian requesting service, however, some business areas are more mature and consistent in how these standards are being measured and applied for performance reporting.

Administration will coordinate across the City Operations, Community Services, Financial and Corporate Services and Urban Planning and Economy departments to develop consistency and clarity of performance measures related to referral ticket processes, including the following actions:

- Evaluate existing service measures;
- Develop new service performance measures based on existing gaps;
- Document the methodology and incorporate the measures into the Enterprise Performance Management program;
- Maintain an accurate organization structure to ensure accuracy of performance data;
- Regularly evaluate, assess and review service measures and performance.

In addition, the Service Innovation and Performance branch will evaluate the applicability of 311 performance reporting and adjust or develop a new performance report as required.

Foundational work already exists with 311 performance reporting and can be leveraged to enhance performance measurement and tracking across all City services. The development of well defined performance measures and targets that accurately represent the completion of service requests will be incorporated into the Enterprise Performance Measurement framework to provide more transparency for Edmontonians.

Implementation date: March 31, 2025

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Recommendation 4 - We recommend that the Service Innovation and Performance Branch maintain a current list of individuals assigned to 311 roles.

Business contact information held by 311 should accurately reflect the individuals with assigned roles from the various City departments. The relationship roles and responsibilities list ensures that everyone is fully aware of their roles, set-up to succeed, and ultimately accountable for their responsibilities.

Today, this contact list and the roles and responsibilities are available on an internal City portal. While there have been some significant changes in personnel, priority has been given to ensuring the training and contact details of the individuals that interact with 311 most frequently is up to date.

To address this recommendation, the Service Innovation and Performance branch will:

- Develop a quarterly review of contact lists;
- Develop processes for the business areas to notify 311 when there has been a change to their staff with assigned responsibilities within the 311 joint delivery model;
- Develop and offer orientation sessions for all new members on a quarterly basis;
- Continue existing immersive listening sessions for individual members;
- Develop an annual sign off process for individuals with assigned roles and responsibilities.

Implementation date: March 31, 2024

Recommendation 5 - We recommend that the Service Innovation and Performance Branch clarify and communicate its requirements for documenting the current status of an open ticket and reasons for closing a ticket.

The greatest challenge today with respect to the current status of an open ticket is that the tickets are being closed before the work is completed. This matter will be addressed as related to recommendations 1 and 2 where Administration is to update the definition for a closed ticket and adjust the business processes to align with this definition.

When tickets are consistently closed once resolved, this will greatly reduce the exceptional tickets that are closed for any other reason, which can then be documented accordingly. Notably, there will be exceptions where no action has been taken, or will be taken by the City. An example where no action would be required would be a request for a parking infraction where the matter is investigated and found to be on private property. The City would consider this matter resolved, even though the parking situation was not changed.

All 311 service requests are merged into the business areas' service delivery systems to be addressed with standard processes in alignment with established service standards. With over 353,322 average referrals per year between 2018-2022, or just under 1,000 service referrals per day, this means that there will be a gap between when a service request is made by an Edmontonian and when service action is taken by the City¹.

¹ As referenced in the Office of the City Auditor's City's Response to 311 Requests. November 2023

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This creates a communications opportunity for interim updates, such as 'assigned' or 'in progress', to be valuable for Edmontonians to understand the status of their inquiry. In the 311 Satisfaction Survey conducted in 2022, while 75 per cent of respondents had their inquiry resolved and had no need to follow up, this interim ticket status would have been of value to the remaining 25 per cent of respondents. As such, Administration has been working on system enhancements to enable the use of interim updates and status detail features for when it makes reasonable sense to do so.

To improve ticket status transparency, the Service Innovation and Performance branch will:

- Improve closed ticket status definitions and processes as per Recommendations 1 and 2;
- Review and identify the types of service requests that result in the most follow up or escalations due to lack of documentation;
- Evaluate and document the value of having all tickets closed with notes against the resourcing impacts associated with the administration of this task;
- Establish standard processes, or exception based processes with developed criteria, for leveraging status details and closed ticket notes;
- Share new processes with business areas and support their procedural adjustments to align accordingly.

Implementation date: March 31, 2024

Community Insight

The most recent survey of 311 callers in 2022 found that 82 per cent of Edmontonians who used 311 were satisfied or very satisfied with the service. The professionalism of agents received particularly high praise, and these strong levels of satisfaction have remained steady across 10 surveys conducted since 2011.

While feedback was overall positive, callers expressed the lowest level of satisfaction on "your reason for calling was resolved in a timely manner," but yet 74 per cent of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied. This compares, for example, to 94 per cent satisfaction on "the agent was courteous and professional".

The 2022 survey also showed that nine per cent of callers called back to follow-up on an outstanding concern and seven per cent called back to obtain a status update to a previous service request. The actions outlined in this report will improve these results identified from both the audit and the community insights.

GBA+

To maintain equity of service delivery and efficiency of processes, it is important that all requests for services from Edmontonians, no matter how they are received, are all processed in a consistent manner based on established business processes and service level definitions. Failure to adhere to established processes and service level standards, or encountering inconsistencies in the handling of inquiries (particularly those that bypass 311) can lead to a less efficient response and produce inequitable outcomes.

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Administration considers a GBA+ lens in 311 processes, and in the access of services and interactions to enhance accessibility and inclusion. Notably, 311 has many tools in place to allow people of diverse needs to contact the City, such as availability of interpretive services in over 180 languages. Additionally, digital tools and telephone relay services provide accessibility for Edmontonians who are hard of hearing. 311 has also adopted inclusive language to foster respect and make everyone feel they belong. The City is always exploring new tools to make the service user-friendly for all Edmontonians, based on their feedback and experiences.