

Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE October 8, 2021

TO Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

SUBJECT **Enterprise Contact Center Solution Update**

On September 24-25th, Information Technology Services (ITS) deployed the City's new contact center software solution to multiple City departments. The cutover was challenging but was completed by Monday, September 27th. However, there are still some issues and malfunctions within the new system creating challenges for 311 Customer Service (311) and Dallas Water Utilities (DWU) customers.

Due to malfunctions and glitches within the new system, residents have experienced extended wait times when calling 311, Water Customer Service, Court & Detention Services, DPD Auto Pound, and Dallas Animal Services. Residents have reported other minor issues when attempting to pay their DWU account by phone.

Shortly after deployment, staff discovered a glitch in DWU's payment Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, which utilizes a Cisco Virtualized Voice Browser (VVB) product. A software bug known to Cisco can cause the VVB to "hang," automatically pushing all callers out of the self-service IVR and into a 311 queue for an agent. This consistent and uncontrollable influx of callers being placed into an agent queue is creating extended wait times for 311 callers. Additionally, increased overall call volumes, combined with the extended wait times created by the VVB malfunction pushing additional calls into an agent queue, are causing the total number of calls to exceed the overall number of phone lines available for both incoming and outgoing calls. When the capacity of the system is exceeded, it results in a "fast busy" signal for callers.

311 and ITS reported all known issues and malfunctions to the appropriate vendor for resolution, and then escalated these issues with the various vendors. After continued escalation with no noticeable improvement or resolution to issues being submitted, ITS began to explore other options available to bring about timely resolution. On Tuesday, October 5th, staff from the City Manager's Office, ITS, DWU, and 311 met to discuss the lack of resolution on reported issues, discuss concerns of vendor performance, and outline a specific plan and timeline to remedy and resolve all known issues with the recent software deployment. A notice to cure will be issued to the City's vendor, specifically identifying contract deliverables which the contractor failed to timely, satisfactorily, or within quality standards deliver to the City, with a deadline required for remediation.

As part of the notice to cure, ITS will ensure the vendor:

- Provides the City a mutually agreed-upon inventory of all remaining products, fixes, and services due
- Provides the City an updated schedule for delivery of all remaining/outstanding products and services due

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- Addresses each of the specific items outlined in the City's cure notice with potential relief

In the interim and until the issues with the new software can be fixed, and to address resident requests as timely as possible, 311 has: cancelled all training classes to allow for maximum staff on the phones; temporarily reassigned trained DWU staff to help with increased water customer service call volume; made temporary internal policy changes freeing administrative staff to take calls.

Exacerbating the current technology malfunctions in 311 are multiple vacancies caused by the global labor shortage. Like other City departments, it's a challenging talent market when trying to fill vacant positions. Interviews are conducted and offers made almost biweekly to new applicants, however, many candidates will not complete the entire onboarding process or simply stop responding mid-way through the hiring process. Salary adjustments for call center positions, which were necessary to bring pay in line with the market, were included in the FY21-22 budget and are expected to help with recruitment and stem excessive turnover and attrition. 311's new pay rates became effective on October 1, 2021, allowing 311 to offer a highly competitive living-wage to new applicants. To that end, a 311 job fair has been tentatively scheduled on October 19 to fill as many vacancies as possible.

For questions related to the contact center software, malfunctions, and plan to remedy the issues, please contact Bill Zielinski, Chief Information Officer. For questions related to 311 operations, job fair, or customer service, please contact John Johnson, Director of 311 Customer Service.



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City Manager

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