

CITY OF LOS ANGELES

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October 19, 2017

REF: EXE-237-17

The Honorable Members of the City Council
City of Los Angeles
Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention Personnel and Animal Welfare & Information Technology, and General Services

SUBJECT: **ANIMAL SERVICES CUSTOMER SERVICE AND CALL MANAGEMENT
(CF# 99-1939-S1)**

OVERVIEW

The Department of Animal Services receives more than 30,000 calls each month from City residents and others interested in animal services. In September 2017, concerns were raised with the difficulty of the public to contact the Animal Services Department to request services and information. This is important to the potential impact of safety to both animals and humans threatened by animals. Aptly described in the Council Motion, effective communications requires adequate numbers of well-trained staff to answer the calls and a telecommunications system that can handle the workload. This report seeks to summarize initial findings on the telephone systems installed at the Department of Animal Services and at its six Animal Shelters that impact residents' ability to reach department staff to request services. In addition, the report will summarize initial measures taken to remediate the situation.

BACKGROUND

The current phone system in the Animal Shelters of the Los Angeles Department of Animal Services (LADAS) has two components, an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system and an Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) system. The IVR provides general information such as hours and location information of the shelters, services available via their website (<http://www.laanimalservices.com>), as well as the ability to be transferred to a shelter. Calls transferred to a shelter are then managed by the ACD system to ring on specific phone lines at the animal shelters.

LADAS advertises a toll free line, (888) 452-7381, to the public for central assistance and access to its six shelters. Two of the animal shelters, North Central and East Valley, are able to receive calls 24 hours a day. After-hours calls for the other four shelters are directed to one of these two shelters. LADAS receives a total of just over 30,000 calls

each month, of which about 20,000 are transferred to one of six shelters. The table below details the call volumes from the IVR that were transferred to each shelter (i.e. resident called 888 number and then requested to speak to specific shelter):

Animal Services IVR Transfers to Shelter (July and August 2017)*

Calls Transferred to:	Jul '17	July %	Aug '17	August %
North Central	4960	23.98	4992	25.15
South LA	5350	25.86	4988	25.13
East Valley	4370	21.13	4306	21.7
West Valley	3023	14.61	2560	12.9
West LA	2304	11.14	2303	11.6
Harbor	678	3.28	696	3.51
Total	20,685	100%	19,845	100%

**The actual calls being managed are higher as this does not include direct calls to Animal Shelters through unpublished phone numbers or callers whose needs were met by IVR (e.g. shelter hours and address information).*

TELECOMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT

After a technical review by the Information Technology Agency (ITA) Voice Communications team, the following initial findings for both IVR and ACD were identified.

The IVR system uses current technology and has no perceived technical issues. However, the Animal Services IVR phone tree is lengthy and complex compared to other City departments. This may be the source of some resident complaints and should be again reviewed by Animal Services to help people get more quickly and clearly to the information they need.

The ACD system does have an identified technical limitation in call capacity that could also be the source of resident complaints. There are limitations to the number of calls each shelter can receive at once. The ACD system provides each shelter with three dedicated agent lines (except for Harbor which has two agent lines) to answer incoming calls. Incoming calls for a shelter above their allocated number of lines (e.g., 3) are held in a queue until an agent becomes available. A queue size of 16 is shared among all six shelters after which a new caller would receive a busy signal. In other words, periods of high call volume (greater than 16 callers at once) would provide subsequent callers with a busy signal.

In addition, ITA found a concern around the process at Animal Services. As commonly found in these systems, ACD requires a login in order to receive calls. In the event that LADAS staff logged out of the system, callers would receive a busy tone. Animal Services was notified of this and ensured that all shelters were logged into the ACD system.

In summation, the following are the identifiable concerns with existing Animal Services telecommunications:

- A. IVR system is relatively lengthy and complex
- B. ACD system does not allow more than 16 concurrent calls in the queue, resulting in subsequent callers receiving a busy signal
- C. Department process must ensure shelters are logged into ACD system or risk caller busy tones

POTENTIAL TELECOMMUNICATION IMPROVEMENTS

ITA identified two potential telecommunication system improvements to improve resident's ability to reach the department for information or to request services:

1. Replace existing ACD system with rollover group - This is a cost-effective solution that would replace the existing 18-year-old ACD system with a rollover call group. When a caller chooses to speak with a shelter, the phone will ring on the primary phone, then a secondary phone, then a tertiary phone, etc. If none of the phones were answered, then the caller would receive a message to call back at another time. This solution would increase awareness of calls to LADAS staff, but still requires answering of the calls for resident satisfaction. While less robust than the VCC solution described below, this solution will have minimal system cost to implement (~\$3,600 per year) and may be a better fit for the existing LADAS call process.
2. Replace existing ACD with Full Call Center (VCC) system - The Verizon InContact Call Center (VCC) system is the City's current solution for coordinated, call center functions. Implemented across major City call centers over the last two years, this cloud-hosted system incorporates improved caller features and reporting capabilities. Callers waiting in the queue can be advised of callers ahead of them and opt for call back without losing their place in the queue. There are no limitations on callers and no busy tones. This solution also includes robust reporting and analytics. However, this option greatly increases the effort for LADAS call takers. Like a call center, shelter staff would need to faithfully login every shift. Call taking would be slightly more complex and changes to the system would require configuration and cost. This type of solution is typically best performed by dedicated call taker personnel. The estimated cost of this technical solution is \$31,680 per year with \$7,200 setup cost.

INITIAL STEPS TAKEN TO IMPROVE RESIDENT EXPERIENCE

In addition to traditional IT services, ITA manages the City's 311 Call Center. Since concerns were raised, LADAS set up a working group in September and requested the 311 Call Center to quickly assist with handling some of their non-emergency calls to LADAS. The 311 Call Center now handles around an additional 2,000 Animal Services calls per month.

To support this effort, Animal Services provided basic training to 311 staff, the ITA revised the 311 Call Center daytime self-service IVR menu (removing the option to be transferred directly to Animal Services from 311). Callers now start with a 311 agent who attempts to answer questions and/or satisfy the request, reducing the need for assistance from staff at the Animal shelters. This has resulted in over 2,000 new calls over the last month to an already burdened 311 Call Center (311 operators receive more calls per operator than any City call center), this should help improve resident experience for the short-term. The ITA is submitting a budget package for the FY2018-19 budget to cover 311 staffing requirements to manage up to 18,000 of the 30,000 average monthly calls received by Animal Services. In partnership with Animal Services, the ITA hopes that a resourced 311 Call Center can greatly improve resident experience requesting services for animals.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted Ross", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ted Ross
General Manager and Chief Information Officer

cc: Felicia Orozco, Council District 7
David Hersch, Council District 5
Cheryl Banares, CLA
Megan Cottier, CAO
Trina Unzicker, CAO
Anne Wu, ITA
ITA Executive Team