

Municipality Of Chatham-Kent
Infrastructure and Engineering Services
Information Report

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Thomas Kelly, P.Eng., MBA, General Manager
Date: January 9, 2020
Subject: Infrastructure and Engineering Services (IES) – Service Backlog Analysis

This report is for the information of Council.

Background

At the July 15, 2019 Council meeting, Councillor Crew noted the large number of outstanding service requests and questioned what plans are in place to address them.

Councillor Crew requested an update report from Administration on how to improve the Municipality's response to customer service requests and eliminate the current backlog of outstanding issues.

Comments

IES service requests are received through one of seven options comprising:

1. Telephone calls to (519)360-1998 during normal business hours (from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday excluding holidays) to the Customer Services Division
2. Telephone calls to (519)360-1998 for all requests received outside of normal business hours to an after-hours Call Centre provider
3. Emails to ckinfo@chatham-kent.ca
4. "Council Contact Forms" submitted electronically by residents to Council and then forwarded by Council to IES
5. Direct requests from the public to IES staff via telephone or email
6. Direct requests from Council
7. Internal requests via work orders, telephone, email or through a tracking system.

The Active Citizen Request (ACR) system is used to log all customer complaints or requests for service. An ACR number is assigned and the pertinent details of the concern are captured, including requestor name, contact information, location, and a problem description. The information is electronically sent to the appropriate division and Supervisor as a work order for action and follow-up. Each operational area has a scheduled work plan based on seasonal needs, staffing and equipment availability. An estimated date of completion is assigned to each request for service.

In April 2019, there were 2,000 outstanding service requests that existed in the database. Service requests are opened and closed on a daily basis. In January 2020, there were 1,978 service requests that remained open.

2019 IES Annual Service Requests - Facts

- 29,000 telephone calls received from the public (24/7)
- 21,500 total service requests logged; includes: 9,000 ACRs plus 12,500 internal requests generated from road patrols, internal audits and regular maintenance requirements
- Over 3,000 service related communications were received from members of Council outside of regular Council meetings

Outstanding Service Request Analysis

Prompt customer service and response to operational issues are key priorities of Council and Administration.

An analysis was completed to determine the major categories of outstanding issues that regularly appear within the service request system. The top issues in alphabetical order are:

- Catch basin maintenance
- Grass cutting – Cemeteries and Parks, Grass/Weeds on Private Property
- Municipal building maintenance (internal)
- Road - pot holes, boulevard maintenance, curb work, street sweeping, gravel grading, debris and winter control
- Sidewalk maintenance
- Swimming pool maintenance
- Traffic - parking changes, stop sign requests, speed studies, sight obstructions, traffic sign maintenance and replacement
- Trees - trimming and/or removal
- Waste & Recycling service concerns
- Water / Sanitary maintenance, shut-offs

Root Cause Analysis

Work requests continue to escalate year over year for the following reasons:

- a) The Municipality's \$5 billion of infrastructure is funded at approximately 50% of lifecycle requirements. As infrastructure deteriorates and ages, maintenance repair work must increase to compensate.
- b) Emergency flooding and erosion events, storm frequency and intensity, climate change impacts, along with unplanned watermain, sanitary and storm failures continue to divert IES resources away from normal, regularly scheduled maintenance work.
- c) Infrastructure is either lacking or under designed for today's climate. This is particularly evident in the case of storm water management, flooding and erosion events.
- d) The level of complexity and the time to resolve complaints has increased due to enhanced government regulations, liability concerns, safety requirements and purchasing policies.
- e) While the quantity of service requests from residents and Council has increased, maintenance staffing levels and associated equipment has remained flat, resulting in a backlog of uncompleted work.
- f) The amount of infrastructure to manage in Chatham-Kent continues to increase year over year with new housing, business developments and sidewalk expansions.
- g) The Minimum Maintenance Standards (MMS) requirements have recently been revised to a higher service level comprising sidewalk salting and public weather notifications. Significant effort is also required to properly document the level of service provided to minimize liability concerns.
- h) Generally, there is a higher level of service expected from the public from past norms. Examples include responses to storm, flooding, and erosion events, along with the level of quality expected of Chatham-Kent's paved and gravel roads.
- i) There is an expectation of an initial IES response within two weeks for all service requests regardless of the priority. When an initial response is not provided in this timeframe, residents become frustrated and issues are often submitted a second time or escalated to Council and the Mayor's office for resolution.

Current Process Deficiencies

1. Demand for IES service is currently exceeding budget amounts and IES's ability to respond to all issues in a reasonable timeframe.

2. Emergency and safety related concerns are prioritized above existing work orders which results in missed commitment dates. IES does not have the staffing complement to follow-up with residents when commitment dates are altered, resulting in an uninformed and dissatisfied customer.
3. Although the escalation process to Council is done with the best of intentions, it regularly places lower priority issues ahead of higher priority tasks.
4. As noted in “Comments,” IES service requests are supplied through one of seven inputs. This level of complexity often results in the duplication of requests, multiple communications on the same issue, and non-value added staff time to organize and manage the data.
5. Service requests often exist outside the scope of municipal jurisdiction. Most service requests require a desktop analysis or an on-site investigation prior to determining the appropriate action. When the resident is not satisfied with the IES response, requests of this nature are often escalated to Council and dealt with a second or third time.
6. Speeding related complaints are often forwarded to the Traffic Division for resolution. Each speed limit within Chatham-Kent has been posted based on data and best practices per the Ontario Traffic Manual. The source of the complaint is typically a small percentage of the vehicle population that travel at speeds above the posted speed limit. These requests divert the Traffic Division resources away from strategic projects and safety improvement initiatives.
7. A number of service requests deal with underground infrastructure, which are difficult to properly assess for timing and resolution because the problem is not visually apparent. The use of cameras, a drain snake or digging below ground is often required to determine the root cause of the problem. Appendix A, Figure 1 illustrates a storm drain blockage caused by calcium build-up that required a complete excavation prior to diagnosing and resolving the problem. Many of these problems directly relate to the deteriorating infrastructure and the lack of funding.
8. Weather conditions play a significant role in IES operations. Work priorities frequently change based on inclement weather, resulting in missed commitment dates and dissatisfied customers. Emergency and safety related issues such as snow removal and flooding events always take priority over regularly scheduled maintenance or existing work orders. A large number of complaints were received in the spring of 2019, where abnormally wet conditions caused excessive grass growth and an inability of contractors to promptly cut the grass without damaging the grounds.
9. Non-safety related service requests are often delayed to ensure a sufficient amount of work is available for a competitive outsource. An example is a tree root removal. Due to set up and travel time, this work is outsourced only when there is sufficient quantity of work available to obtain a competitive quote. To manage costs, projects

may be delayed from 6 to 9 months. This timing is viewed as unacceptable by the public, which often leads to additional complaints and escalations.

10. Administration does not have read access to the “Council Contact Form.” This email communication is often sent to several members of Council requesting an action related to IES operations. In turn, several Councillors will forward these requests to IES administration for action and follow-up. This process supports duplication of the same request several times to multiple Councillors and IES staff. The majority of the time, the resident has not attempted to address the operational issue through the ACR process.
11. Similar to item “10,” members of the public will directly contact multiple Councillors on a specific issue via a letter, email, telephone call or in person. Often, several Councillors will forward the same concern to IES for action and follow-up. The result is a duplication of effort of Council and members of Administration on a single concern. The majority of the time, the resident has not attempted to address the operational issue through the ACR process.

Recommendations to Improve IES Service Levels

1. IES has an annual operational budget that is used to fund resources and equipment to maintain Chatham Kent’s \$5 billion of assets. Annual maintenance requirements are approximately \$100 million per year; however, only 50% of the required funding exists. It is recommended that Council continue to aggressively fund Chatham-Kent’s lifecycle budget or consider opportunities to reduce the inventory of assets.
2. In an effort to minimize the addition of staff, it is proposed to expand the role of the Customer Service Division Team Lead and Customer Service Representatives. A renewed effort will take place to develop a higher level of expertise in all operations and initiatives of IES divisions including Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Cemeteries, Engineering, Transit, Transportation, Drainage, Asset and Waste Management. The focus will be to:
 - Proactively communicate emergency events, service level changes and MMS requirements to residents and the media. It is anticipated that the number of public requests will decline with an enhanced level information and a higher level of customer satisfaction will result.
 - Monitor social media and identify gaps in communication for enhanced public knowledge.
 - Analyze the barriers to complete the outstanding service requests and recommend specific actions to optimize resources; provide updates to changes in commitment dates where applicable.
 - Attend Public Information Centres; provide follow-up communications and manage actions identified by the public.

- Assist in the management of the changes occurring in recycling collection commencing in July 2020. An increase in calls from all property owners requiring clarification and additional information is expected. A report to Council on the specific requirements of the service changes will be forthcoming in April, 2020.
- The Customer Service Team Lead will provide second level customer support to Customer Service Representatives on technical service issues, allowing operational field staff to remain focused on the highest priority work orders, thereby completing work orders more efficiently and reducing the need for overtime.
- Follow-up directly with customers as required on specific IES service requests.

This approach will be used for a one year trial period, and will be extended based on successful implementation and evidence of improved customer service levels.

3. Chatham-Kent move to a simplified system to submit and manage customer service requests. This will allow IES to focus on one database and eliminate a significant amount of non-value added duplication. This recommendation will require a new approach and discipline from all stakeholders.

In the short term, immediate recommendations include:

- The submission of all service requests to (519)360-1998 or ckinfo@chatham-kent.ca to ensure the creation of an ACR.
- All requests for service must have associated ACR numbers prior to any investigation.
- Escalation of issues will be highly scrutinized to ensure that the highest priority issues always remain first and foremost.

In the longer term, there are two future process changes planned in 2020 that will supplement this recommendation. First, the implementation of the 311 system will simplify the task for the public to call in the concern. Second, during the 2019 budget deliberations, Council approved the replacement of the current ACR system. Enhanced service features of the new software include:

- On-line feedback, which will allow customers to review and check the status of their service requests and monitor the process from “reported” to “completion.”
- Mobile capability, which will allow customers to report issues from their cell phones in the field and include photos pertaining to their service request.

- Asset management integration, permitting the ability to link real time ACR data with IES asset management software tools.
- Improved reporting, allowing the ability to monitor and manage data to ensure actions are focused on the highest priority work.

Updates on software enhancements will be provided to Council upon award of the tender in early 2020.

4. As the first step, resident requests for speed limit changes be forwarded directly to Chatham-Kent Police Services (CKPS) for compliance audits. Following a review of the audit data, IES will collaborate with CKPS to determine if a speed study is warranted.
5. Service requests for items such as stop signs, four-way stops, parking changes, new or enhanced traffic signals or crosswalks, must be supported with a petition supplied by Chatham-Kent Engineering prior to conducting a detailed traffic study.
6. Regarding the concerns identified with the “Council Contact Form” and public requests direct to Council for IES service, it is recommended that Council advise the member of the public to utilize the ACR process as a first step (telephone 519-360-1998 or email ckinfo@chatham-kent.ca). This response will reinforce the problem resolution process with the public, ensure the issue is properly recorded, and allow IES to properly prioritize the concern based on a safety criterion.
7. Council consider assigning a single point of contact on actions related to specific operational issues. This will eliminate duplication of efforts amongst Council and Administration alike thereby improving efficiency.
8. Council consider adopting an escalation process whereby outstanding IES service requests are discussed in Council meetings for priority changes, public awareness and voting.

Financial Implications

There are no incremental costs associated with the process changes recommended in this report. Savings and improved efficiencies will occur for both Council and staff related to the time required to manage IES service requests.

A time study was completed to determine the investment and actions required to eliminate the significant number of outstanding service requests from an operational perspective. Based on this analysis, an operational investment of \$700,000 is required to secure additional outside contractors, temporary municipal employees or overtime hours above the current budget. The \$700,000 expenditure is not recommended by EMT for funding in the 2020 Budget due to financial constraints. If Council were to approve funding during 2020 Budget deliberations, it is suggested that funds be utilized from the Winter Control budget.

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Attachment: Appendix A: Figure 1

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Appendix A - Figure 1
Storm Drain - Calcium Build-up

