

The logo for the City of Edmonton, featuring the word "Edmonton" in white text on a dark blue square background.

Edmonton

OFFICE OF  
THE CITY AUDITOR

# REPORT CITY'S RESPONSE TO 311 REQUESTS

NOVEMBER 14, 2023

# Report Summary

## BACKGROUND

311 Edmonton is the City's non-emergency contact centre for access to City information and services. It provides residents, businesses, and visitors with a central point of contact for their city needs.

The Service Innovation and Performance Branch (in the Financial and Corporate Services Department) is responsible for the 311 Call Centre (311). Service delivery is a joint responsibility between 311 and the business areas.

From 2018 to 2022, 311 agents created 6.5 million tickets, and completed 73 percent of the tickets at the point of first contact. The remaining 27 percent went to the business areas. 311 documents these service requests and sends them to the appropriate business area for completion.

## AUDIT OBJECTIVE & SCOPE<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this audit was to determine whether Administration effectively responds to and closes 311 tickets.

Our review included the City's definitions for closing 311 tickets, performance measurement, roles and responsibilities, and communication of ticket information to Edmontonians.

We did not audit requests closed by Integrated Infrastructure Services and the Office of the City Manager, both of which received a low volume of 311 tickets.

We also did not audit how the City deals with service requests received outside of the 311 intake process, including requests to Councillor's offices.

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<sup>1</sup> We conducted this engagement in conformance with the Institute of Internal Auditors' *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*.

## WHAT WE FOUND

Overall, we found that 311 and business areas effectively respond to and close the majority of calls within the service standard. However, there are multiple definitions of what it means to close a ticket. Some business areas are closing tickets before actually completing them.

311 provides and reviews statistical reports with the business areas on a periodic basis. However, the business areas have not documented the key performance indicators or targets to assess their closure of 311 tickets. Business areas we spoke to believe it is the percentage of service requests closed on time; however, they do not have a clear method to calculate that number.

311 has defined roles and responsibilities related to 311 calls, however, not all business areas have assigned individuals to these roles. Business areas are not consistently providing status details of open and closed tickets on the City's 311 public website.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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.

**WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT**

The closure of a 311 ticket based on completion of the service request will provide Edmontonians with a more accurate understanding of the level of service they can expect. This can also decrease the number of follow-up or escalation tickets.

Identifying key performance indicators and targets will help business areas know whether they are achieving their goals.

Assigning individuals to their 311 role helps ensure accountability. Consistently addressing tickets across all business areas ensures a similar customer experience regardless of which business area is closing the ticket.

# 311 Call Centre

## 311 OPERATIONS

The City started 311's operation in 2008. Edmontonians can connect to 311 through:

- Telephone services. These are available 7 days a week by dialing 311. Eighty-seven percent of 311 tickets originate from a telephone call.
- Online services. Edmontonians can access these through City of Edmonton web pages or through the 311 App using a smartphone. Thirteen percent of tickets originate from online services.

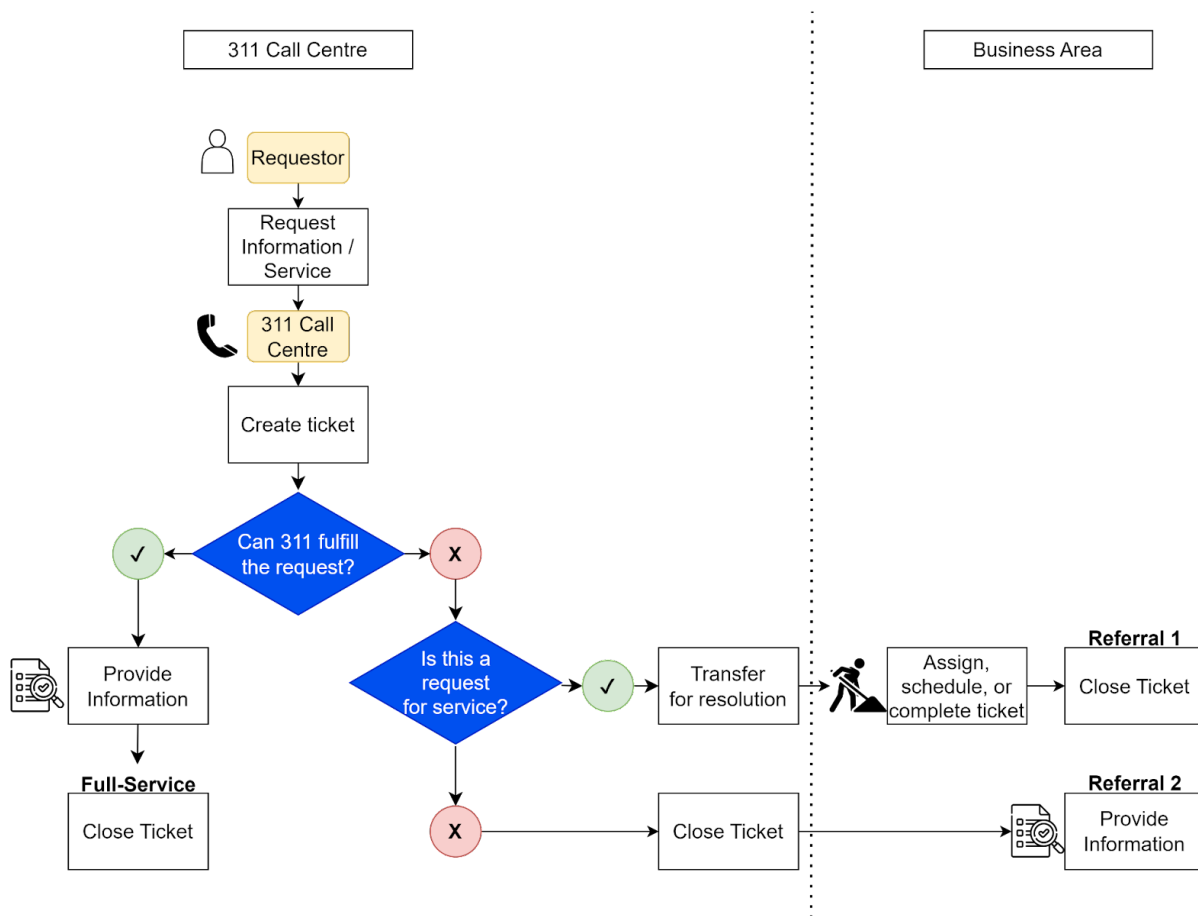
311 is part of the Service Innovation and Performance Branch, within the Financial and Corporate Services Department. The City's 311 contact centre is staffed by over 140 full- and part-time customer service representatives (311 agents).

## SERVICE DELIVERY

Service delivery is a joint responsibility between 311 and business areas. 311 agents can fully complete a service request based on scripts provided by the business areas or transfer the service request to the business area to complete.

Every service request is assigned a ticket number and a program code based on the nature of the service request. The diagram on the following page shows a typical workflow for how 311 and the business areas respond to a service request.

### 311 Service Request Workflow



### 311 TICKETS

There are two main categories of tickets:

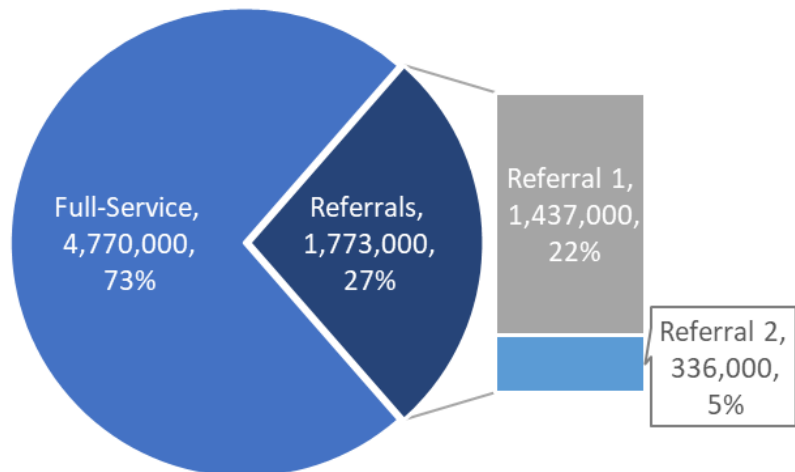
1. **Full-Service Tickets** - 311 agents create a ticket, address the service request and close the ticket (e.g., book a swimming lesson or suggest a bus route). These tickets were not the focus of our audit as they are deemed to be low risk.
2. **Referral Tickets** - There are two types of referral tickets:
  - **Referral 1:** 311 creates these tickets and sends them to the business area to address and close (e.g., pothole repair is referred to City Operations; public parking complaint is referred to Community

Services). These tickets are the focus of our audit.

- Referral 2: 311 creates these tickets and closes them at the time of transfer. This usually involves the caller wanting to speak to someone in the business area. 311 closes these tickets at the point of transfer because the request to connect the caller with someone in the business area has been fulfilled. These tickets were also not the focus of our audit as they are deemed to be low risk.

From 2018 to 2022, 311 created 6.5 million tickets. Seventy-three percent of the tickets were full-service. The remaining 27 percent were referrals to a business area.

**311 Tickets by Closure Type (2018 to 2022)**



# Closing a 311 Ticket Before Completion

## KEY FINDINGS

Based on the data the City is currently collecting, business areas are annually meeting service levels between 76 percent and 81 percent of the time (2018 to 2022). To determine this, 311 calculates the amount of time between when the ticket is open to when the business area closes the ticket. This is then compared to the targeted response time for that ticket.

However, there are at least three different definitions for a closed ticket. One definition allows business areas to close tickets before they have completed the service request. For example, when work is assigned or scheduled.

## DEFINITIONS OF "CLOSED" ARE NOT CONSISTENT

We found different definitions for the closure of a 311 ticket. Sources include the City's 311 website, the mobile App, and internal City documents:

1. The City's 311 website defines a closed ticket as *"the service request has been reviewed, and the work has been assigned, scheduled, or completed."*
2. The City's 311 App defines a closed ticket as *"the appropriate City area has investigated your concern and has taken the necessary action to resolve your request."*
3. Internal City document states that *"All Customer Relationship Management<sup>2</sup> tickets go over with an open status and get closed based on completion/resolution of the request."*

The City's 311 App and internal documents indicate that tickets are closed only when necessary action to resolve has taken

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<sup>2</sup> City's enterprise system for managing 311 service requests.



place, or there has been completion/resolution of the service request.

However, the City's 311 website states that a ticket can be closed based on the service request being assigned or scheduled. This definition allows business areas to close a ticket before completing the service request. For example, when they assign a ticket to an inspector for investigation or schedule the work for completion at a future date.

### **CLOSING INCOMPLETE TICKETS**

Business areas are closing tickets before the service request is completed. We attempted to categorize the 1.437 million tickets referred to departments based on the reason for closure. The majority of tickets (67 percent) did not have a publicly<sup>3</sup> documented reason for closure.

However, 469,000 tickets – about a third of them – had a publicly documented reason for closure. For these tickets, we categorized the closure reasons as:

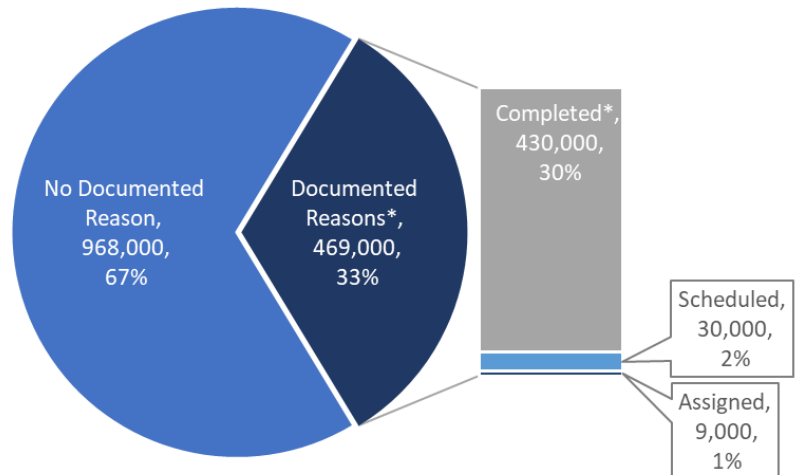
- Scheduled
- Assigned
- Completed (includes tickets classified as a duplicate)

The following chart shows that the business areas actually completed the request for the majority of tickets based on the documented reason for closing.

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<sup>3</sup> Publicly documented reason: 311 provides a ticket number for all referral requests. This allows the requestor to look up their ticket number online and see why the ticket was closed.

### Closure of Tickets by Documented Reason (2018 to 2022)



*\*includes 79,000 duplicate requests*

However, business areas closed 39,000 tickets before they had completed the work. As well, business areas closed 79,000 tickets because they were a duplicate request of another ticket.

#### Tickets Closed but Not Completed

Examples of when business areas close tickets before they have completed them include:

- The issue was reported to an inspector for investigation.
- The work was scheduled to be done at a future date.

We reviewed a small sample of these tickets and found that the actual completion date ranged from one to five business days after the business area closed the ticket. We found one ticket where the business area closed the ticket in July 2023, but has not completed the work as of September 2023. In this example, the business area deferred the work because they are planning future work in the same area as part of their pre-scheduled route.

### Duplicate Tickets

311 or business areas close tickets when a duplicate service request already exists. They are expected to link these tickets to the original ticket so that the requestor can track whether the issue has been resolved. Only 2,000 out of 79,000 closed tickets identified as a duplicate included a link to the original ticket.

We reviewed 20 tickets identified as duplicates. We found 4 tickets with a link to the original ticket. This allows the requestor to track the status of their request. For the remaining 16 tickets, we found:

- 13 did not have a link to another ticket.
- 3 had an inaccurate link.

When 311 or business areas do not accurately link to the existing ticket, it is difficult to determine whether the City has resolved the request.

### IMPACT OF CLOSING TICKETS BEFORE COMPLETION

Closing tickets before completing the service request or not linking duplicate tickets can lead to:

- 311 agents needing to create follow-up tickets.
- The requestor using other ways to follow-up on or escalate the issue, such as contacting a Councillor or the Mayor.

### Follow-up Tickets

Requestors may follow-up on an existing ticket when a ticket is closed before it is completed. When a requestor follows up, the 311 agent will create a new ticket and either provide additional information from an integrated system<sup>4</sup> or transfer the request to the business area to address.

From 2018 to 2022, there were 52,000 tickets classified as follow-up tickets.

We reviewed 20 follow-up tickets from 2023. For 9 of the 20 samples, 311 did not provide a link to an original ticket. For

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<sup>4</sup> Business area systems that are integrated with the Customer Relationship Management system. (e.g., POSSE)

these tickets, the business area will discuss with 311 whether the coding used was correctly classified as a follow-up ticket.

The remaining 11 tickets were linked to the original ticket. We reviewed the original ticket to determine the reason for the follow-up. We found:

- Five tickets where the business area closed the original ticket when they had assigned or scheduled the work. Additionally, the business areas did not publicly document the closure reason for these tickets. Therefore, requestors were unable to look up the reason for closure online.
- Five tickets where the original ticket was still open. In these samples, the target response time had lapsed by a range of 1 to 35 business days.
- One sample where the original ticket was still open and the target response time had not yet passed.

### **Using Other Methods**

Requestors may become frustrated when business areas close tickets before completing the service request or when they close duplicate tickets without a link to the original ticket. Requestors may use other methods to raise their concerns, such as reaching out to their City Councillor or Mayor directly.

Based on our discussion with management, we found that Councillors generally forward service requests they receive, to the responsible branch manager or director. Councillor requests may require additional resources and time to address which could take away from the normal operational duties of a branch manager or director.

City Operations and Community Services managers estimate that they have received 2,200 and 1,500 service requests, respectively, from January 1, 2023 to August 31, 2023.

### **WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT**

When business areas close tickets after they have scheduled or assigned the work, they have not completed the request. This

could lead to dissatisfaction with the premature closure of a ticket.

Additionally, requestors may escalate their concerns by following up on an existing ticket or contacting their Councillor or the Mayor. This may result in additional resources to respond to those concerns.

## RECOMMENDATION 1

Define tickets as closed when the business area has resolved the service request and communicate this to all business areas that close 311 tickets.



### Responsible Party

Branch Manager, Service Innovation and Performance



Accepted by Management

### Management Response

To establish a consistent service experience and contribute to enhanced performance reporting, Administration will standardize the definition of closed tickets and service requests.

The revised definition will be communicated to all business areas and updated across the supporting tools and materials.



### Implementation Date

March 31, 2024

**RECOMMENDATION 2**

Close the 311 service ticket after they have resolved the request.

**Responsible Parties**

Deputy City Manager, City Operations



Deputy City Manager, Community Services

Deputy City Manager, Financial & Corporate Services

Deputy City Manager, Urban Planning & Economy



Accepted by Management

**Management Response**

Administration will review processes in each business area and determine appropriate actions and resourcing impacts to ensure consistency of user experiences, and that tickets and service requests are closed in alignment with the definition to be completed by the Service Innovation and Performance branch as per recommendation 1.

**Implementation Date**

September 30, 2024

# Key Performance Indicators

## KEY FINDINGS

The 311 call centre has documented three key performance indicators to report on. The target for these three key performance indicators are also met. They include:

1. 311 is to provide responsive service by answering calls on average within 60 seconds or less.
2. Call abandon rate is 7 percent or less.
3. Customer satisfaction with the 311 experience is 80 percent or higher.

The first two measures are reported on the 311 dashboard. The third measure is completed by an independent surveyor to measure customer satisfaction. In the November 2022 survey, 82 percent of responders are satisfied with their most recent call to 311.

However, business areas have not consistently documented their key performance indicators and targets related to referral tickets. Most expressed their measure as the percentage of service requests closed on time. However, they do not have a clear method for calculating this measure and do not have targets.

## KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS NOT DOCUMENTED

The business areas we reviewed have not consistently documented the key performance indicators relating to referral tickets for their area.

Through our interviews, we found that business area staff believe that the percentage of service requests closed on time is their key performance indicator. The targets they gave for completing service requests on time ranged from 80 percent to 100 percent. However, they do not have the measure or the targets documented.

### UNCLEAR METHOD FOR SERVICE REQUESTS COMPLETED ON TIME

311 provides all business areas with a dashboard that reports on whether the business area is closing their service requests on time. The dashboard calculates the amount of time between when the ticket is open to when the business area closes the ticket. This is then compared to the business area's response time target. However, the business area response time targets are not consistently developed.

Some are based on the amount of time a business area takes to respond to a request. Others are based on the actual amount of time for the business area to complete the service request. When a business area's response time target is not based on the actual time to complete the service request, they are not accurately calculating the measure. This is shown in the chart below.

#### Target Based on Response Time versus Actual Completion Time

Actual Days to Close a Ticket	Target Based on Response Time	Target Met?	Target based on Completion Time	Target Met?
4 days	5 days	Yes	5 days	Yes
7 days	5 days	No	10 days	Yes

For example, a business area could close a ticket in 7 days. Using the response time target of 5 days, the target is not met. However, using a completion time target of 10 days, the business area would be meeting the target.

Business areas provide scripts to 311. These scripts include response time information. We reviewed a sample of 42 scripts and found that:

- The response time documented in the scripts did not match the response time used in the 311 dashboard calculation for 11 of the 42 samples. There is a risk that the response time used is not accurate.



- The majority of scripts used business days. However, three used calendar days or hours. There is a risk that the unit of measure is not consistent in calculating the performance indicator.

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Identifying key performance indicators allows business areas to assess their performance. Additionally, targets are required in order for business areas to assess whether they are meeting expectations.

Clearly defining methods and ensuring the accuracy of the data allows business areas to reach meaningful conclusions on performance.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

Improve their performance measurements for 311 tickets by identifying key measures and targets and by clarifying how they calculate their results.

#### Responsible Parties

Deputy City Manager, City Operations



Deputy City Manager, Community Services

Deputy City Manager, Financial & Corporate Services

Deputy City Manager, Urban Planning & Economy



Accepted by Management

#### Management Response

Administration will leverage existing performance measures and tools, further identify key measures and targets where reasonable, and improve methodology to ensure clarity and accuracy.



**Implementation Date**

March 31, 2025

# Assignment of Roles and Communicating Information

## KEY FINDINGS

The City has defined roles and responsibilities between 311 and the business areas. 311 agents are responsible for:

- Accessing documentation such as scripts provided by business areas.
- Asking relevant questions, clarifying needs of the requestor.
- Entering the request into the Customer Relationship Management system to create a referral ticket for the business areas.

The business areas are responsible for actions related to the referral request. This includes keeping the requestor informed of the status of the request and taking appropriate measures to address the request.

However, business areas are not formally assigning individuals to a 311 role. Additionally, business areas do not have formal guidance on the requirements for keeping requestors informed of the status of their request and the documentation of notes relating to a ticket.

## ASSIGNING 311 ROLES

311 and the business areas share roles and responsibilities for handling a request. The City defines four distinct roles. These are highlighted in the *311/Enterprise Relationship Roles and Responsibilities* document to ensure the City's effective and efficient delivery of the 311 service model.

1. The Executive Leadership Team's responsibilities include making key strategic decisions such as approval of services outside the scope of the 311 model, and

- providing sign-off for expectations related to 311 service response time.
2. Program Manager's responsibilities include making tactical decisions, adopting a centralized service model, and using 311 as the primary contact for city information and services. Program managers also sign-off the roles and responsibilities below the program manager role.
  3. Service Owners are accountable for overall service delivery, maintenance, reporting, and ongoing improvement at the business area level. Their key responsibilities include communications and change management, content and documentation management, issue resolution, service tracking and performance reporting. They also sign-off the service agreement and the annual documentation refresh.
  4. Program Coordinators are the key contact for ensuring that business area information is provided to 311 in an accurate and timely manner. They are the liaison to 311 for the business area, and organize training/orientation for business area staff. Program coordinators sign-off on script content including additions and deletions and training content.

311's list of *Key Business Area Contacts* identifies the individuals within a business area by their 311 role. However, the list only identifies the Program Coordinator and the Service Owner. The Program Manager was not identified.

We spoke with selected Branch Managers who were not aware of their role as a Program Manager in the 311 service model process. We also found instances where Branch Managers were listed under the role of Service Owner. In these instances, it is not clear whether they are performing a dual role, or whether another senior leader is in that role.

We contacted Service Owners and Program Coordinators and found instances where the listed individuals were not aware they were listed with these titles. Business areas have

individuals fulfilling certain duties of these roles. However, there is a risk that they are not aware of the full scope of their 311 role. We also found an example where an individual was performing duties relating to that of a Service Owner but was not on the 311 *Key Business Areas Contact* list.

Without recognition or awareness of their roles within the 311 service model, individuals may not be fulfilling and may not be accountable for performing these responsibilities.

### **KEEPING REQUESTORS INFORMED - TICKET STATUS**

The *311 Service Model* states that business areas are responsible for keeping requestors informed of the status of the request and taking all appropriate measures to address the request.

The City has not defined how each business area is to keep requestors informed of the status. Therefore, requestors are not informed on the status of their request on a consistent basis across all business areas.

311 maintains a public website that allows requestors to enter their ticket number and look up the status of their ticket.

Information includes:

- Date created (ticket open date)
- Date closed (ticket close date - if applicable)
- Request status (open/closed)
- Status code (progress of open ticket or justification for closing ticket)

We reviewed a sample of tickets to determine whether business areas are keeping requestors informed of the status. Ticket information on the date created, date closed, and request status is being disclosed for all tickets. However, the status code is reliant on the business area to input, and they are not consistently reporting this information. We found:

- The majority of business areas are not communicating the status of an open ticket on the public website.

- The majority of tickets do not contain a status code on the reason for closure on the public website.

**Usage of Interim Status Codes for Open Tickets**

There is no guidance on whether a status code is a requirement for all business areas to use to communicate the status of an open ticket.

There are valid reasons for not inputting statuses of open tickets including the fact that some tickets are only open for a short time and resolution can occur within this timeline. However, when a longer time period is required to complete a request, some business areas provide a status code to communicate the status of the open ticket to the requestor.

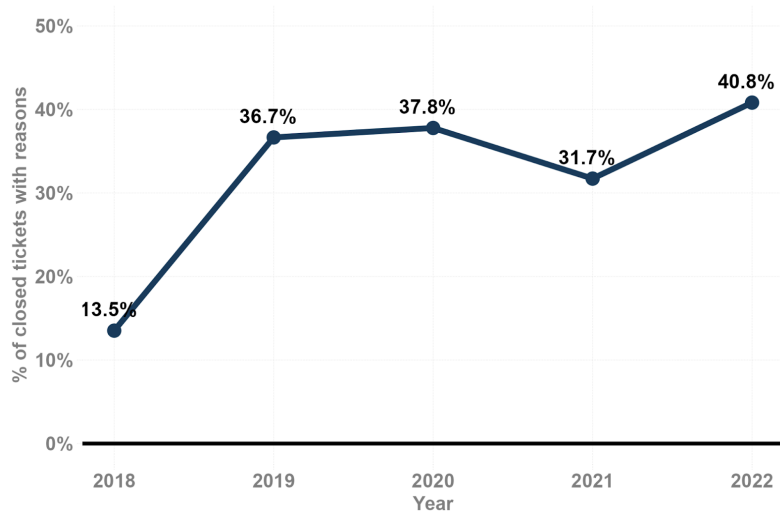
When the status code is blank, requestors may contact 311 to follow-up on the status of their ticket.

**Usage of Status Codes for Closed Tickets**

The majority of closed tickets do not contain a status code to communicate the reason for closure on the public website. The City provides no guidance on whether it requires all business areas to use a status code.

The use of a status code by business areas for closed tickets has increased from 13.5 percent (2018) to 40.8 percent (2022). However, the majority of closed tickets still do not have a status code.

### Closed Tickets with Status Code (2018 to 2022)



We found some business areas use status codes extensively in documenting publicly their reason for closing a ticket (e.g., over 98 percent<sup>5</sup> of the time) However, other business areas choose to use status codes on a limited basis or not at all.

Currently, there is no requirement for business areas to use a status code to inform requestors on the status of their request. It is good practice for the City to provide the same level of information and service.

#### Consistent Note Documentation

Requestors can call 311 and speak to a 311 agent to get a status update on their ticket if the business area is not using a status code to track the request.

Business areas can keep internal notes in the Customer Relationship Management System or an integrated system (POSSE) for open and closed tickets. In these instances, the 311 agent responding to a call can look up the ticket number and inform the caller of the status if there are internal notes.

We reviewed 42 samples of tickets closed in 2023. We found:

<sup>5</sup> Based on ticket service categories with a minimum of 500 requests in 2022.

- 20 samples used a status code to show the reason for closing the ticket.
- 13 samples did not provide a status code; however, the requestor can reasonably determine whether their concern has been addressed (e.g., visual inspection or business area contacted them).
- 9 samples did not provide a status code and the internal notes were either not clear as to the reason for closing or no notes were provided.

When business areas do not provide clear notes, the 311 agent may not be able to provide an explanation to the requestor. This would likely result in the creation of another ticket to the business area to follow-up.

Business areas may also use specialized information systems to track their operations. We found that 311 does not have access to these systems or may have limited access. Without access, 311 agents would not be able to provide a status update for these tickets.

#### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Assigning individuals to their role ensures that there is accountability.

Consistency in the process of updating the status of ticket requests will give requestors the same level of service or information no matter which department their ticket goes to.

#### RECOMMENDATION 4

Maintain a current list of individuals assigned to 311 roles.

##### Responsible Party



Branch Manager, Service Innovation and Performance





Accepted by Management

#### **Management Response**

Administration will investigate and develop a sign off process related to roles and responsibilities. This will include an orientation for new members to their 311 assigned role, to ensure understanding of the model, working relationship and joint responsibilities in the delivery of services.



#### **Implementation Date**

March 31, 2024

### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

Clarify and communicate its requirements for documenting the current status of an open ticket and reasons for closing a ticket.

#### **Responsible Party**



Branch Manager, Service Innovation and Performance



Accepted by Management

**Management Response**

Administration recognizes the value of documentation related to service delivery. Requirements for documenting every open service request or adding justification for a closed service request will be explored and balanced with costs compared to the value it may provide.

Establishing a consistent definition of closure as per recommendation 1 will be greatly beneficial in communicating expectations around closure of a service request.

**Implementation Date**

March 31, 2024

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We would like to thank the staff and management of the Service Innovation and Performance Branch for their cooperation during the audit. Additionally, we thank the staff and management in City Operations, Community Services, Financial & Corporate Services, and Urban Planning & Economy for their assistance during the completion of our audit.