

Assessment of a pilot call handling script for Council Tax customers

Prepared by TNS BMRB



Valuation Office
Agency

Main Findings

- The pilot call handling script was received positively by respondents:
 - 88% of respondents who received the pilot call handling script agreed that the helpline advisor had the knowledge and expertise needed to answer all questions, compared to 70% of customers who received the existing script.
 - 74% of respondents who received the pilot call handling script agreed that the service needed no improvements, compared to 52% of respondents who received the existing script.
- For each of the following results there was no statistically significant difference between respondents who received the pilot script and those who received the existing script.
 - 26% of respondents said they were intending to recontact the VOA.
 - 34% of respondents agreed that the way the VOA values properties is easy to understand.
 - 35% of respondents said they know a lot or a fair amount about how properties in England and Wales are valued for Council Tax banding.
 - 32% of respondents agreed that they trust the VOA to place properties in the correct Council Tax band.
- Most respondents who read the information sheet responded positively to it: 84% agreed that it was easy to understand; 83% agreed it was laid out in a clear way; 71% agreed that it was helpful; and, 71% agreed it gave them all the information needed.

About this report:

This report has been written by TNS BMRB, based on research carried out in February and March 2015. The views and findings expressed in the report are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Valuation Office Agency.

The report presents the results of a survey that was undertaken amongst Council Tax customers to assess the effectiveness of a new pilot call handling script and an associated information sheet posted to certain customers.

The pilot was designed to improve the quality of the customer experience for customers contacting the VOA about their Council Tax band. Compared to the existing approach, the pilot script involved a more structured call handling method which aimed to handle and resolve more calls at the first point of contact. The script included the facility to send customers an information sheet which explained how their property was valued for Council Tax.

Customers who were dealt with using the existing approach and the pilot script took part in a telephone survey. This was to provide an indication of any similarities or differences in the experiences of the two groups.

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Understanding of the valuation process

Overall, around one in three (34%) respondents agreed that the way the VOA values properties is easy to understand. A similar proportion of all respondents (35%) disagreed. There was no statistical difference in agreement between respondents who received the pilot call handling script (35%) and respondents who received the existing script (31%).

Trust in the VOA to place properties in the correct band

Around one in three respondents (32%) agreed that they trust the VOA to place properties in the correct Council Tax band. The same proportion of respondents disagreed (32%). Again, there was no statistical difference in agreement between respondents who received the pilot call handling script (34%) and respondents who received the existing script (28%).

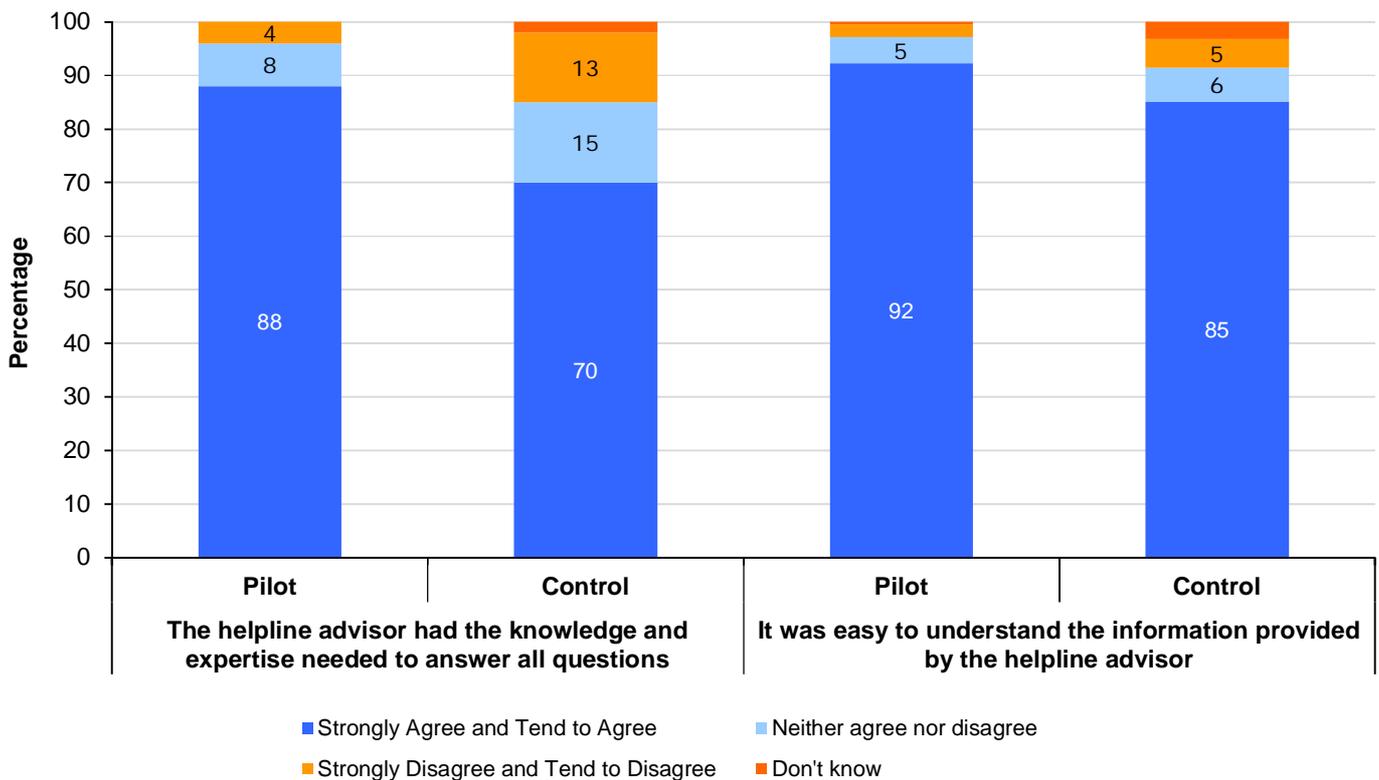
Knowledge of Council Tax banding

About one in three (35%) respondents said they know a lot or a fair amount about how properties in England and Wales are valued for Council Tax banding. Almost half (49%) said they knew a little and 15% reported that they knew nothing. There was no significant difference between respondents who received the pilot call handling script and respondents who received the existing script.

Quality of service

Respondents who received the pilot call handling script were more likely to give a positive response about the quality of service than respondents who received the existing approach (as shown in Figure 1).

Figure 1: Quality of service provided by helpline advisor



Base: All respondents – Existing script (94), Pilot script (248)

Q3. I now want you to think about the helpline advisor you spoke to on [date]. Can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Around nine in ten (88%) respondents who received the pilot call handling script agreed that the helpline advisor had the knowledge and expertise needed to answer all of their questions, with 66% strongly agreeing and just four per cent disagreeing. Around two in three respondents who received the existing call handling script (70%) agreed, with 41% strongly agreeing.

Similarly, a significantly higher proportion of respondents who received the pilot call handling script strongly agreed that it was easy to understand the information provided by the helpline advisor (75%) than respondents who received the existing call handling script (54%).

When asked what the helpline advisor helped them to understand better, about half gave a specific response.

¹ Among those who provided a response:

- 18% felt that the advisor helped them to understand the process better and what would happen next
“He was very informative of the procedure I would have to go through and the waiting time”
- Nine per cent said they had been helped to understand the bandings and how they are calculated
- Six per cent responded that the advisor confirmed that the customer has the right to appeal and/or explained how to appeal.

“She said, look you are in your own right that if you don’t agree with the band change you can appeal, and she could send you a form you can fill out to appeal. She also highlighted the fact that I would have to send my response back ... within 6 months and clear with steps to follow”

Respondents who received the pilot call handling script were less likely to state improvements are needed to the service. Around three in four pilot group respondents said that there were no improvements needed to the service (74%) which was significantly higher than for respondents who received the existing call handling script (52%).

In addition, respondents who received the pilot call handling script were significantly less likely to say that there should be greater consistency of information between helpline advisors than customers who received the existing approach (2% compared to 9%).

Intention to recontact the VOA

Around one in four (26%) respondents reported that they were planning to recontact the VOA. There was no significant difference between respondents who received the pilot call handling script (23%) and those who received the existing call handling script (32%).

For those who said they were going to, or may possibly recontact the VOA, just under half (45%) wanted an update on an appeal. Around one in five (23%) believed they were in the wrong Council Tax band, and around one in ten (12%) wanted to know how Council Tax was banded.

The information sheet

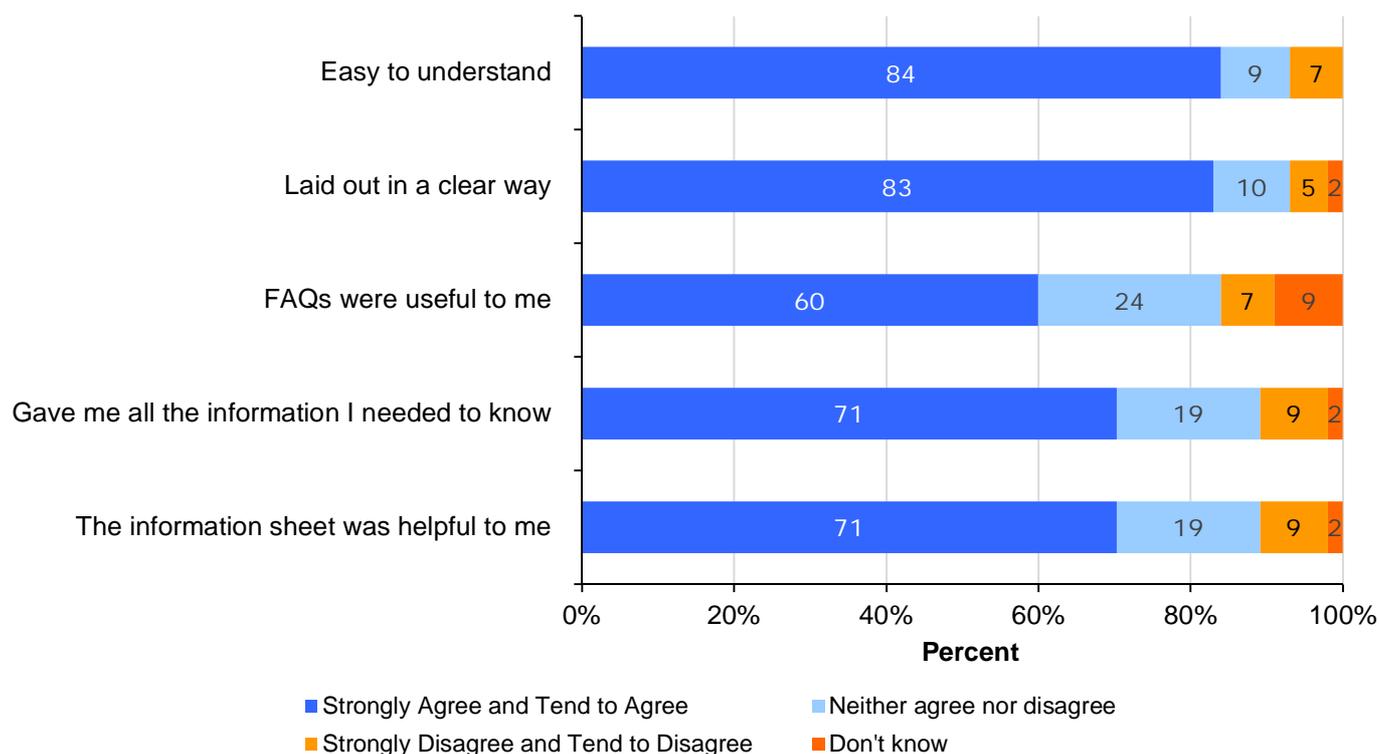
Out of 248 respondents who received the pilot call handling script, 108 were sent the information sheet. The information sheet detailed how their Council Tax banding was assessed and provided answers to frequently asked questions.

Around two in three respondents who had been sent an information sheet reported receiving it (65%). Of the customers who reported receiving the information sheet, 83% read it or at least glanced at it.

As shown in Figure 2, 84% of those who read the information sheet agreed that it was easy to understand. A similarly high proportion (83%) agreed that it was laid out in a clear way. Seven in ten agreed that it was helpful to them (71%) and the same proportion agreed it gave them all the information needed (71%). Six in ten (60%) reported that the frequently asked questions were useful to them.

¹ These open questions mostly had small base sizes; analysis is included on them to give a ‘qualitative’ feel for some customer viewpoints. However, as results for these questions have small base sizes they should be considered indicative of customers’ feelings and not statistically robust findings.

Figure 2: Attitudes towards the information sheet



Base: All pilot script respondents who read the information sheet (58)

Q7. Now thinking about the Information Sheet which gave you information on how your property was valued, can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Respondents were asked to provide comments as to whether the information sheet helped them to understand anything better². Responses indicated that the information sheet explained to them how the banding process worked. There were some concerns about the clarity of the banding system and that valuations are based on data which was regarded by respondents as now out of date.

“It told me on what basis it made the rating... it didn’t tell me how they obtain the information”

“Based on something that was bought 15 years prior to the house being built”

There were some differences between pilot script respondents who were sent the information sheet and those who were not, although it is not possible to directly state whether these differences were as a result of receiving the information sheet:

- Respondents who were sent the information sheet were less likely to state that no improvements were needed to the service (64%) than those who did not receive the information sheet (81%).
- Respondents who were sent the information sheet were more likely to disagree that they trust the VOA to band properties correctly (39%) than those who did not receive the information sheet (26%).
- Respondents who were sent the information sheet were more likely to be planning to recontact the VOA than those who were not (36% compared to 14%).

² These open questions mostly had small base sizes; analysis is included on them to give a ‘qualitative’ feel for some customer viewpoints. However, as results for these questions have small base sizes they should be considered indicative of customers’ feelings and not statistically robust findings.

Sampling and survey method

Records of customers who had agreed to be contacted for the purposes of research were sent by the VOA to TNS BMRB. These included information on whether the customer had been through the pilot call handling script, or had been through the existing script. For customers who had received the pilot call handling script it also confirmed whether an information sheet had been sent to the customer. Interviews were conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). There were 689 issued sample records. The survey achieved completed interviews with 342 respondents (248 customers who received the pilot call handling script and 94 customers who received the existing call handling script) between the 4th February and 30th March 2015. Tables 1 to 3 provides some demographic information on the survey respondents.

Table 1 Gender breakdown of the sample

Gender	
Male	48%
Female	52%

Table 2 Age breakdown of the sample

Age	
16-29	11%
30-39	17%
40-49	19%
50-64	28%
65-74	17%
75+	6%
refusal	1%

Table 3 Regional breakdown of the sample

Region	
East	22%
West	27%
North	28%
South	22%
Wales	<1%

Questionnaire and analysis

The survey was approximately five minutes in length. It covered reasons for contacting the VOA, perceived quality of service received, knowledge and understanding of the valuation process, views on the information sheet and whether the customer still planned to recontact the VOA about their query. Many of the questions were taken from the existing VOA Customer Tracking Survey.

Where the results for one group of customers are compared against the results for another group, any differences stated are statistically significant at the 95% probability level, unless otherwise stated. Data is shown unweighted.

The questionnaire included four 'open' questions where respondents could provide verbatim answers. These open questions mostly had small base sizes; analysis is included on them to give a 'qualitative' feel for some

customer viewpoints. However, as results for these questions have small base sizes they should be considered indicative of customers' feelings and not statistically robust findings.

Use Made of the Data

This publication is being released as part of a general drive towards making VOA data more accessible. The report will support the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Wales Government (WG) in carrying out its duties and the data will also be used to inform government policy, respond to Freedom of Information requests and to parliamentary questions as well as to conduct operational analyses to support the VOA.

Background Notes

The VOA is an executive Agency of HMRC. Its strategic function is to provide "the valuations and property advice required to support taxation and benefits" in England and Wales.