Office of the
Auditor General
City of Ottawa

Audit of 3-1-1

September 2026



Office of the Auditor General City of Ottawa

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Introduction

The Audit of 3-1-1 was included in the 2026-2027 Audit Work Plan of the Office of the Auditor General (OAG), approved by City Council on December 10, 2025.

Background/Context

3-1-1 is the City of Ottawa's (City) centralized, non-emergency customer service system that serves as a single point of contact for clients to access municipal services, information, and/or support. Its mandate is to receive, process, and coordinate inquiries, including service requests, related to municipal operations in a consistent, timely, and accurate manner.

The City of Ottawa launched the 3-1-1 number for its call centre in September 2005. It later evolved in 2011 with the establishment of ServiceOttawa, a centralized department created to modernize and integrate citizen-focused delivery. Clients can currently contact 3-1-1 through multiple channels, including by phone, online service request forms, in person and email inboxes.

The 3-1-1 call centre relies on a staffing model that can keep pace and adjust as required to accommodate the volume and variety of client inquiries it receives. To do this, the call centre is a mix of full-time, part-time, and casual agents, giving the team the flexibility to manage staffing levels during peak periods and maintain coverage 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Interactions with 3-1-1 generally fall into three main categories:

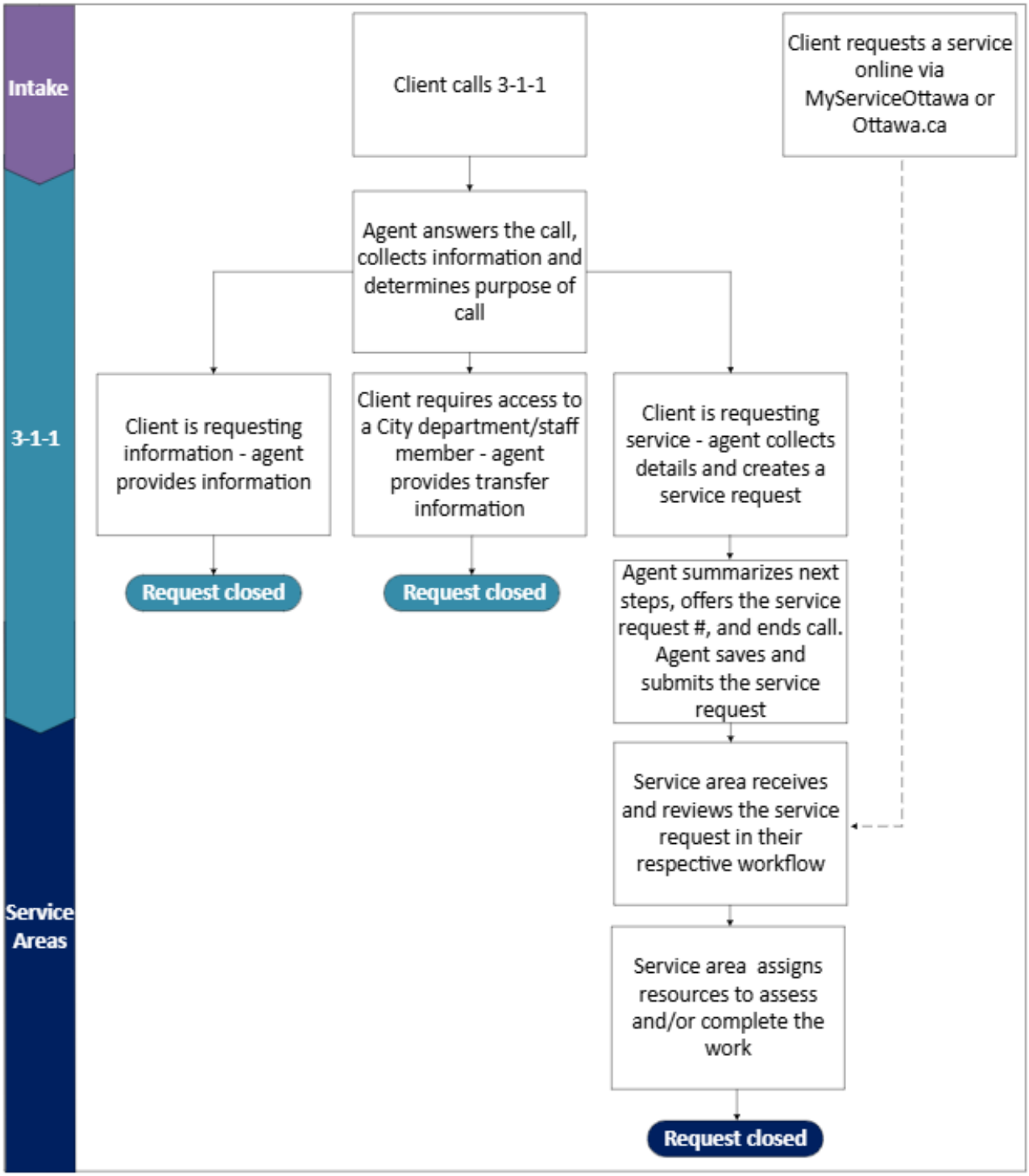
- **Service requests** where clients can report or request matters that require action from a service area such as repairing a pothole or picking up a missed garbage collection.
- **Information requests** where 3-1-1 agents provide clarification or guidance directly to clients and no operational work is required, and
- **Transfer requests** where 3-1-1 agents act as a point of contact for clients who require direct access to a City department or City staff member.

Lifecyle of a 3-1-1 Request

The majority of 3-1-1 interactions begin with a phone call where the client listens to the standardized phone menu and selects an area based on the service required. See **Figure 1** below for details on the typical lifecycle of a 3-1-1 request, starting with initial contact, the process agents follow, and how clients' requests are transferred into the City's operational workflows to respective departments. Clients can also email 3-1-1 which follows similar steps to those depicted below.

Lastly, clients can log service requests online which bypass the agent intake process and go directly to the appropriate service area[1], as illustrated in **Figure 1.**

Figure 1: The Typical Journey of a 3-1-1 Request



[1] A service area refers to a City department, branch, or operational unit responsible for completing the work associated with a service request (e.g., Roads, Transit, By-law Services, etc.).

Trends in 3-1-1 Interactions

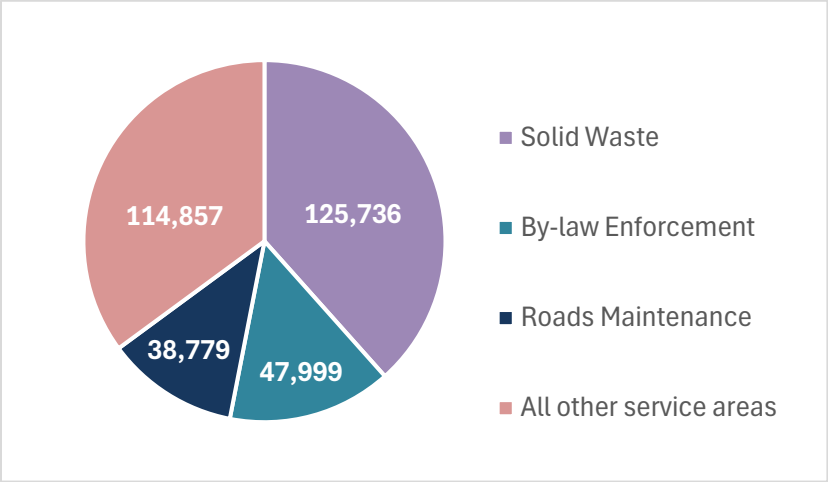
The demand placed on the 3-1-1 call centre is reflected in the volume of inquiries and requests it receives and manages each year. Recent data, displayed in **Figure 2**, shows that call volumes increased slightly between 2024 and 2025 but there was a decrease in calls processed due a higher number of calls abandoned. Clients are also increasingly turning to email as an alternative way to contact the City or using the self-service online submissions forms to initiate service requests.

Figure 2: Call Centre Performance Comparison (2024 vs. 2025) [2]

Metric	2024 Volume	2025 Volume	% Change
Calls Received	447,281	457,524	2%
Calls Processed[3]	374,326	345,437	(8%)
Calls Abandoned	72,955	112,087	54%
Emails Received from the Public	18,405	30,493	66%
Online Service Request Submissions	126,091	173,300	37%

The types of service requests received provide further insight into how client interactions translate into operational workload. In 2025, the City generated 327,371 service requests (295,724 in 2024), with a substantial proportion (65%) related to three service categories. See **Figure 3** for the breakdown by service category.

Figure 3: Service Requests Received by Service Category



[2] Figures are based on data provided by 3-1-1 management and have not been verified for accuracy or completeness.
[3] Calls processed include the number of calls 3-1-1 handled (i.e. answered directly when clients called) and the number of client callbacks made (i.e. when a client requests a callback instead of waiting on the line).

Service Improvement Initiatives

Management has indicated that the volume of 3-1-1 inquiries has highlighted the need for ongoing improvements in how information is communicated to clients and how service quality is monitored. In 2025, ServiceOttawa launched Project CX360, a multi-year effort to reduce client call-backs, escalations, and complaints by strengthening transparency and communication throughout the service request process. This includes exploring ways to provide more accurate wait times, clearer status updates, and closure explanations to clients. The project began with a pilot in Forestry and has expanded to other City departments/service areas.

Audit Objective and Scope

The objective of this audit was to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of 3-1-1 operations used to serve clients, while considering the prudent use of public funds.

The audit examined 3-1-1 operations for the period of January 1, 2025, to February 28, 2026. The audit evaluated the call intake process, the submission methods offered by 3-1-1, processes in place by service areas to action and close service requests, and compliance with established service timelines.

For purposes of receiving and actioning service requests, given that they represented 65% of all service requests generated by 3-1-1 in 2025, the scope was primarily focused on, but not limited to:

- Solid Waste,
- By-law Enforcement, and
- Roads Maintenance.

Refer to Appendix 1 for additional details on the objective, criteria, and approach to the audit. This audit was conducted in conformance with the Institute of Internal Auditors' *Global Internal Audit Standards (2024)*.

Conclusion

Our audit found that overall, 3-1-1 is fulfilling its mandate as the City's centralized point of access for most municipal services, information, and service requests. To operate effectively, 3-1-1 relies on extensive coordination with numerous service areas within the City, each with its own systems, processes, and tracking mechanisms. Despite these complexities, service requests were generally found to be closed appropriately and within established service timelines, with only a limited number of exceptions identified.

The audit identified opportunities to improve service delivery and operational efficiency. Specifically, 3-1-1 is not currently meeting its public email response standards and has a much higher average speed to answer calls than other municipalities benchmarked as part of our audit. Promoting and expanding the use of more efficient service channels, such as online service request submissions, could help reduce call and email volumes, improve response times, and enhance the overall client experience while reducing the need for Councillor involvement.

We also observed inconsistencies in the handling of client interactions, which can result in varying customer experiences and generate additional contacts when information is incomplete or not communicated consistently. Reinforcing compliance with established service protocols would help ensure a more consistent level of service for residents and render the process more efficient.

Additionally, 3-1-1 agents are expected to communicate service timelines to clients during the intake process to help manage expectations regarding when requests will be addressed. However, the audit noted service level information is currently maintained across multiple sources and is not applied consistently among service areas. As a result, agents may have access to conflicting or incomplete information, increasing the risk that inaccurate timelines are communicated to clients which could result in unrealistic client expectations.

Finally, while overall call volumes have remained relatively stable over the past two years, the number of abandoned calls has increased significantly. Further analysis of the factors contributing to this trend could help identify opportunities to further improve customer service.

Additional opportunities to further strengthen call centre controls and processes were outlined in a management letter, which was provided directly to management.

Each finding in this report has been assigned a rating that prioritizes the associated remediation. Rating definitions are provided in Appendix 2.

Value of Audit: The recommendations in this report aim to enhance the client experience by promoting more efficient service channels, optimizing 3-1-1 resources, and improving agent consistency. They will also support ongoing efforts under the CX360 improvement initiative.

Audit Observations and Recommendations

1. Performance Targets

1.1 There are limited levers within management's control to meaningfully influence the call centre's response times.

Priority Rating: Moderate

Based on the nature of operations, the most important target for 3-1-1 management is the Average Speed to Answer (ASA) which is how long a client waits in the phone queue before speaking to an agent. Management initially reported a 2025 ASA of 3 minutes and 7 seconds and used this data to set an internal target for 2026 of 2 minutes and 58 seconds. During the audit, we learned of data issues within the call centre's telephony system that affected historical operational volumes and metrics which resulted in the initial 2025 ASA being understated. Based on revised performance data, management has recalculated the actual 2025 ASA to be 8 minutes and 17 seconds and subsequently revised its internal target to 7 minutes and 52 seconds so that it is reflective of the actual 2025 ASA. Analyzing the results for January to February 2026, we noted the ASA was 5 minutes and 35 seconds. Although outside of the scope period of the audit, we further analyzed the results up to the end of June 2026 and noted that the ASA remained relatively consistent. While 3-1-1 has improved its ASA time and is now meeting its revised internal goal, overall, ASA times continue to appear to be high, when compared to the City's original target and benchmarked municipalities where we were able to obtain publicly available information.

Currently 3-1-1 does not publicly report on its call centre metrics. We understand that there are a number of Canadian municipalities that do, including Toronto and Windsor. From a review of publicly available information, it was noted that the City of Windsor's call centre has a target to answer 75% of calls within 45 seconds and in 2025 had an actual ASA of 52 seconds. The City of Toronto's call centre has a target to answer 80% of calls within 75 seconds and in 2025, met this for all quarters except for Q1 where it achieved 77% of the target. While these targets and ASA metrics are significantly lower than those of the City, the OAG notes there are differences to be considered between municipalities such as call centre size, budgets, etc.



The main lever 3-1-1 has available to achieve a more comparable ASA to other municipalities benchmarked would be to increase resourcing. Considering the budgetary constraints faced by the City, a more realistic alternative would be to attempt to influence the volume of calls 3-1-1 receives. Approximately 40% of calls that 3-1-1 received in 2025 resulted in the creation of a service request. Clients have the option to submit roughly 300 different service request types online, which is the most efficient method as it prompts clients to fill out all information required to create the request and eliminates the need to speak to an agent. While the phone option continues to be available for those requests that are more urgent in nature or where the online method is not appropriate, moving more request types online would lower the number of calls in the phone queue and allow a timelier response rate.

Although 3-1-1 is now meeting its internal ASA goal, wait times still appear to be high, which can result in client frustration, increased call abandoned levels, and clients turning to other mechanisms, such as email or through their ward Councillor, which places a further strain on resources across the City and in some instances creates inefficiencies.

RECOMMENDATION 1 – DEVELOP A 3-1-1 AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The Director, ServiceOttawa should:

- Develop an awareness campaign to highlight to the public the available reporting channels and their appropriate uses. As part of the awareness campaign, emphasis should be placed on the service types that are available online and associated benefits of using this reporting method.
- As part of the CX360 initiative, continue to offer more service request types online.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 1

Management agrees with the recommendation.

The Director of ServiceOttawa will develop an awareness campaign, in collaboration with Public Information and Media Relations (PIMR), to promote the available 3-1-1 reporting channels and clarify their appropriate uses.

As part of the CX360 program, ServiceOttawa will continue to work with service areas and Information Technology Services (ITS) to increase the number of service request types available online.

Implementation will be evidenced through campaign materials, communications plans, web content updates, and records of new online service request forms added. The awareness campaign is expected to be completed by Q2 2027.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – PERFORM BENCHMARKING AGAINST OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

The Director, ServiceOttawa should perform benchmarking against other municipalities to better understand their customer service targets, strategies used that assist them in meeting their targets, as well as public reporting practices. This information should be used to establish appropriate targets and reporting practices for the City.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 2

Management agrees with the recommendation.

The Director of ServiceOttawa will oversee a benchmarking exercise with comparable municipalities in Ontario and across Canada to better understand customer service targets, strategies used to support target achievement, and public reporting practices. The benchmarking results will be used, together with 3-1-1 operational performance data, to inform the establishment of appropriate call centre targets and reporting practices for the City of Ottawa.

Implementation will be evidenced through benchmarking documentation and analysis of comparator municipalities which will be completed by Q3 2027. The information gathered from the benchmarking exercise will be used to establish a reporting framework by Q4 2027.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – PERFORM PERIODIC DATA INTEGRITY AND COMPLETENESS REVIEWS

In order to rely on operational data generated from its telephony system, the Director, ServiceOttawa should conduct periodic reviews/reconciliations to ensure data integrity and completeness before leveraging data for operational decisions, such as target setting.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 3

Management agrees with the recommendation.

The Director of ServiceOttawa will conduct periodic reviews of operational reports generated from the telephony system to help confirm data integrity and completeness before the information is used for operational decision-making, including target setting.

Implementation will be evidenced through completed data integrity checks, reconciliation records where applicable, and records of any issues identified and resolved. This recommendation is expected to be completed by Q1 2027.

2. Call Centre Intake

3-1-1 has protocols in place to help ensure a predictable and repeatable process that agents are expected to follow when interacting with clients. This process enables the gathering of sufficient information to respond to the inquiry or request and to ensure a consistent client experience overall.

The Quality Assurance (QA) program, within 3-1-1, was revamped and officially re-launched in 2026. Agents are evaluated on:

- providing proper call greetings and closings,
- adhering with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA) requirements,
- creating and processing service requests,
- demonstrating soft skills such as active listening and emotional intelligence, and
- overall quality and call management.

2.1 There are inconsistencies in how client phone interactions are processed and handled.

Priority Rating: Moderate

The OAG conducted a detailed review of 30 calls that resulted in service requests, utilizing the above revised QA program expectations as the baseline for our testing, and observed varying levels of adherence to the call centre's expectations. Examples of non-adherence observed include:

- In 100% of the sampled calls, agents did not provide sufficient explanation for the collection of personal information. While the 3-1-1 recorded call menu highlights

what personal information is used for and gives clients an option to learn more about privacy, agents are still required to reinforce this with clients.

- In 50% of calls, the agent did not provide a service timeline to the client or provided a timeline that was not in line with the published service levels.
- In 50% of calls, where logging the service type online was possible, the agent did not promote this and in 83% of calls, the option of checking the status of the service request online was not promoted.
- In 30% of calls, agents did not ask the client for their email address, which is a mandatory requirement.
- In 17% of calls, the agent did not communicate next steps to the client and in 23% of calls, the service request number was not offered for tracking purposes.
- In 17% of calls, the agent appeared to provide information to the client that was not in line with source information (i.e. reference documentation prepared by the service areas for agents to leverage when responding to client requests).



- In 7% of cases, we noted the client already had an active service request and the agent created a duplicate service request.

The OAG placed an additional 10 blind test calls to the call centre and noted similar findings. Additionally, in one (1) of the blind calls the agent did not verify the spelling of the address provided. This resulted in the wrong service address being generated which would have resulted in wasted resources if the service request had been actioned.

We understand that 3-1-1's customer service database, SIRIS, offers a Power Virtual Assistant (PVA) which is a tool available to the 3-1-1 agent that is intended to allow the caller-agent interaction to flow more naturally and provides filtering questions to obtain the correct information in an efficient manner. However, the PVA has not been operational due to functionality issues, and the technology is coming to its end of life. Management has started to explore other options to assist agents in the processing of calls including enhancing the workflow within SIRIS for efficiencies and exploring AI solutions.

Agents not consistently adhering to the established expectations and requirements can result in differing experiences for clients which can impact 3-1-1's service reputation. Further, not adhering with expectations around providing clients with next steps, service request numbers, or expected timelines can cause additional call volumes to 3-1-1 with

clients requiring further follow-up, in turn creating inefficiencies in the process and at times resulting in unnecessary involvement by Councillors.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – REINFORCE CALL CENTRE INTAKE EXPECTATIONS TO AGENTS

As part of the Quality Assurance program, the Director, ServiceOttawa should consider the discrepancies noted during the audit and ensure these elements are reinforced through mechanisms such as planned training or informational material (e.g. job aids, process documents, etc.).

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 4

Management agrees with the recommendation.

The Director of ServiceOttawa will reinforce call centre intake expectations through targeted training, coaching during one-on-one meetings, and performance management where appropriate.

Implementation will be evidenced through training materials, Quality Assurance results and updates to the definition document. This will be completed by Q3 2026, with ongoing monitoring continuing through the Quality Assurance program

RECOMMENDATION 5 –IMPLEMENT NEW WORKFLOW AND EXPLORE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SOLUTIONS

As part of the CX360 initiative, the Director, ServiceOttawa should complete the implementation of the new workflow design in SIRIS and consider introducing artificial intelligence solutions into the workflow to better support agents in providing the most accurate and complete information to clients.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 5

Management agrees with the recommendation.

The Director of ServiceOttawa will continue to advance the implementation of the new workflow design in SIRIS as part of the CX360 program. The improved workflow is intended to better support agents during the intake steps and provide accurate and consistent information to clients. Full implementation is dependent on the completion of technology enhancements currently being led by ITS.

In parallel with this work, ServiceOttawa will consider the feasibility of incorporating artificial intelligence solutions into the agent workflow to better support accurate and complete client interactions.

Implementation will be evidenced through SIRIS workflow design documentation, technology enhancement status updates, and documentation of artificial intelligence options assessed for potential use in the 3-1-1 workflow. The improved Knowledge Base Article search functionality is expected to be implemented by Q4 2026. The new SIRIS workflow design, including consideration of the feasibility of artificial intelligence options within the workflow is expected to be implemented by Q3 2027, subject to completion of required technology enhancements by ITS.

3. Email Inquiries and Requests

A general City email address can be used by the public to submit an inquiry or request to 3-1-1. A subset of experienced 3-1-1 agents are trained to handle email responses and there are usually 1-2 agents working on emails on any given day. However, agents are expected to prioritize the phone lines over email responses and only once call volumes are below the allowable thresholds, are they permitted to work on email inquiries. The expected service timeline for 3-1-1 to initially respond to emails received via the public inbox is 48 hours.

3-1-1 also manages a separate internal inbox for Councillors' offices and internal staff. The purpose of this inbox is to assist with routine tasks and frequent inquiries, such as initiating service requests, updates on clients' existing service requests, and requests about where to find information on different City services/programs.

3.1 Email submissions for routine matters are not an efficient mechanism for responding to client inquiries and / or requests for service.

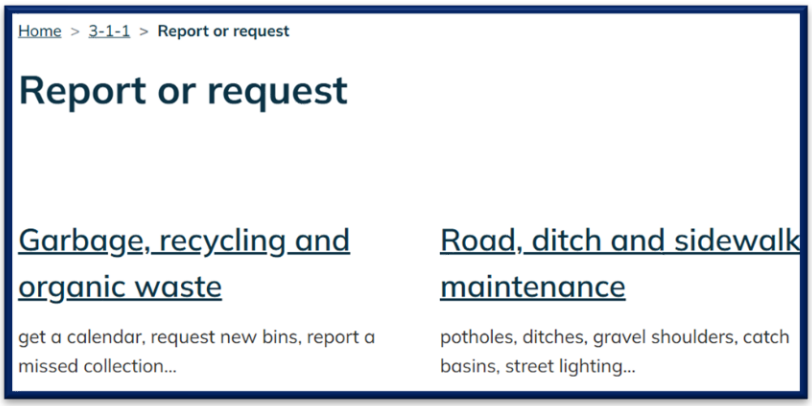
Priority Rating: Moderate

Public Emails

Email submissions to the 3-1-1 public inbox increased 66% from 2024 to 2025. The OAG conducted a detailed review of 10 emails from the public inbox and noted that the 48-hour response time was not met for six (6) of these emails. Delays ranged from one or two days late up to 35 days. Therefore, 3-1-1 is not consistently meeting service timelines when responding to public emails.

The audit identified that the most efficient way for a client to submit a routine service request is via an online submission. These are routed directly from the client intake

stage to the service area for response and do not require any wait time and up-front communication with a 3-1-1 agent.



Emails, conversely, appear to be the least efficient method as there is the potential for wasted time and resources due to back and forth required to gather all necessary information and because phone lines are always prioritized over email responses. We understand that prior to online submissions being a mature channel for 3-1-1, a public inbox was an important tool to give clients options on how to communicate with the City. However, since the online option has developed over the years and can be used for the majority of routine service requests, it is a more efficient method of electronic communication as compared to email.

Our review of the public emails identified that information requests are submitted through this channel as well, not just service requests or follow-ups. While the online alternative would be searching the City's website, there are limited tools (e.g. chat bots) available to clients to help with their search. Helping clients find the answers to their own questions is most efficient and empowers them to use this approach for future inquiries; freeing up resources for other types of client inquiries/requests.

From limited benchmarking performed, it was noted that some Canadian municipalities such as Vancouver and Calgary do not have a publicly available inbox, and Winnipeg has decided to phase theirs out. Further, Vancouver and Winnipeg have introduced AI Chatbots to improve access to information on City services and answer frequently asked questions.

Internal Emails

E-mail submissions to the internal inbox increased 14% from 2024 to 2025. Management highlighted a corresponding increase in emails received from Councillor's offices in 2025. We understand that residents have been reaching out directly to their Councillors more frequently as an alternative way to contact 3-1-1. The OAG conducted a detailed review of 10 emails from the internal inbox and noted that seven (7) emails were from Councillors offices. Five (5) of these were either of a routine nature or were a follow-up inquiry on an existing service request; which could have leveraged a 3-1-1

channel. The involvement of Councillors' offices to intervene in more routine requests or inquiries can be an inefficient use of resources.

As only a subset of agents are trained on responding to emails and phone lines are always prioritized, this results in 3-1-1 not consistently meeting its stated service timelines for email response. This can lead to differing experiences for clients, which can cause frustration and can impact 3-1-1's service reputation. This can also result in clients escalating issues to their Councillor's offices as they are unhappy with not receiving a timely response from 3-1-1 and the overall wait times.

RECOMMENDATION 6: ENHANCE SERVICES AND TOOLS OFFERED ONLINE

The Director, ServiceOttawa should:

- Consider introducing online tools (such as chat bots and artificial intelligence) to aid clients in navigating the City's website and accessing City-related information on their own.
- As part of the awareness campaign (outlined in Recommendation #1), the limited and appropriate use of the public and internal inboxes should be formalized and communicated.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 6

Management agrees with the recommendation.

The Director of ServiceOttawa will continue to collaborate with ITS on opportunities to introduce online tools, including chatbots and artificial intelligence, to help clients navigate the City's website and access City-related information independently.

As part of a new initiative to assess the feasibility of leveraging artificial intelligence and chatbots on ottawa.ca, ITS began piloting a new AI assistant on ottawa.ca in 2026. In August, this beta version was made available to approximately 22,000 City of Ottawa employee test users. Feedback gathered during the pilot will help inform future phases of the project. Results on the initial pilot are expected to be reported out in Q2 2027.

As part of the awareness campaign described in Recommendation 1, the Director of ServiceOttawa will formalize and communicate the limited and appropriate use of the public and internal 3-1-1 inboxes. The awareness campaign, including communication on the appropriate use of the public and internal inboxes, is expected to be completed by Q2 2027.

Implementation of Recommendation 6 will be evidenced through approved communication materials, updated guidance on the appropriate use of 3-1-1 inboxes, awareness campaign materials, web content updates, and a summary of the AI Assistant pilot feedback.

4. Service Request Documentation and Closure

After intake from 3-1-1, service requests are sent to the corresponding service areas who are responsible for recording actions taken, documenting notes when applicable, and closing the request in their respective backend system when the requested work has been completed. Service areas use a number of different backend systems, but capabilities exist to share notes such that 3-1-1 has visibility into the status of a service request and/or work that was completed to provide status information to the client.

4.1 Formal expectations for service request closure and documentation of notes have not been clearly established and communicated by all service areas.

Priority Rating: Moderate

The audit identified that expectations regarding service request documentation of work completed/notes and requirements for closure exist in some service areas and have been verbally communicated to staff; however, these expectations have not been formalized to ensure consistency. In other service areas, clear expectations could not be readily identified.



As part of the audit, we conducted a detailed review of 49 service requests to assess documentation in backend systems and to ensure closure was supported. There were eight (8) instances identified where closure documentation was not aligned with the associated service areas expectations. Examples include notes not being documented to support closure and residents not being contacted to update them on the actions taken (this is for specific service request types only). Further there were three (3) instances where requests were closed before all work was completed.

Without clear expectations around documentation and closure of service requests, differing practices may be applied by different service areas. This increases the risk of incomplete records and the potential for inconsistent and inaccurate information to be provided to clients.

RECOMMENDATION 7: COMMUNICATE DOCUMENTATION AND CLOSURE BEST PRACTICES TO SERVICE AREAS

The Director, ServiceOttawa should communicate best practices to service areas to promote consistent service request closure and documentation expectations such that fulsome information is accessible to 3-1-1 agents to enable them to better support clients. Such practices should include ensuring that adequate notes are recorded in backend systems, relevant notes are sent to 3-1-1 (where feasible with existing technology), and service requests are closed only upon completion of the required work.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 7

Management agrees with the recommendation.

The Director of ServiceOttawa will develop and distribute a Service Request Documentation and Closure Expectations Guide to City departments to promote consistent expectations for documenting work completed, recording relevant notes, and closing service requests. The guide will outline best practices for service areas to support more complete and consistent information being available to 3-1-1 agents, enabling them to better support clients who request updates on service requests.

ServiceOttawa will also continue to collaborate with service areas and ITS through the CX360 program to improve the visibility of backend system notes and statuses for 3-1-1 agents, where feasible within existing and future technology capabilities.

Implementation will be evidenced through the completed Service Request Documentation and Closure Expectations Guide, distribution records to service areas and related communications. The development and distribution of the guide is expected to be completed by Q4 2027.

5. Abandoned calls

5.1 There is an opportunity to perform further analysis to better understand trends and address the significant increase in abandoned calls.

Priority Rating: Moderate

As noted earlier in the report, the overall number of calls placed to 3-1-1 increased slightly by 2% from 2024 to 2025, however the number of calls abandoned increased by 54%. In 2025, 24% of all calls received by 3-1-1 were abandoned compared to 15% in 2024. Abandoned calls occur when a client calls 3-1-1 but hangs up before getting through to an agent.

In August 2025, 3-1-1 introduced more accurate wait times as part of its automated messaging. If the wait time is under 30 minutes, clients are provided with a specific time; and if it is over 30 minutes, it is communicated as such to the client. Management believed that more accurate wait times would result in more calls being abandoned in the early stages.

The OAG performed analysis as shown in **Figure 4** to better understand how long clients waited before abandoning calls and if the increase could be linked to the communication of more accurate wait times. The figures below represent the entire duration of a client call, including call back time, as clients who select a call back option although not actively waiting on the line, are still waiting for their request to be actioned.

Figure 4: Analysis of how long clients waited before abandoning a call (including call back time)

Time to Abandon	2025	2024
0 to 4 minutes	54%	64%
4 to 7 minutes	16%	15%
Longer than 7 minutes	30%	21%

The OAG performed further analysis as shown in **Figure 5** and excluded call back times as clients are not actively waiting on the line to assess the impact on the time to abandon.

Figure 5: Analysis of how long clients waited before abandoning a call (excluding call back time)

Time to Abandon	2025	2024
0 to 4 minutes	67%	76%
4 to 7 minutes	9%	9%
Longer than 7 minutes	23%	15%

In both scenarios, calls abandoned within zero (0) to four (4) minutes decreased in 2025, while calls abandoned after clients were already waiting seven (7) minutes or longer increased. Therefore, the year-over-year results do not support management's assumption that the introduction of more accurate wait times would lead to more calls being abandoned in the early stages of a call should a client not have sufficient time to wait.

As part of audit testing, when making test calls to the 3-1-1 call centre, it was noted that the wait time messaging could be confusing for clients. Upon entering the queue, the client is provided with a specific wait time, for example 25 minutes. Every few minutes they are provided with the total estimated live queue wait time, which is typically around the initially provided wait time of 25 minutes or a few minutes longer, not their remaining

wait time. As the wait times provided are not decreasing as the client waits, this could leave clients thinking they are not progressing through the queue and could result in them prematurely abandoning the call before reaching an agent. This is not consistent with the approach of other call centres where typically there is a countdown of how much time is remaining or what number the caller is in the queue.

If clients are abandoning calls because they are unhappy with the wait times or feel like they are not making progress in the queue, this could result in frustrated callers which can, in turn, impact the service reputation of 3-1-1. It could also result in clients reaching out to their ward Councillor in hopes of getting a more expeditious answer/response to their inquiry.

RECOMMENDATION 8: PERFORM ANALYSIS ON ABANDONED CALLS

The Director, ServiceOttawa should:

- Perform further analysis to better understand the underlying trends in call abandonment patterns.
- Consider other alternatives of how call wait times can be communicated to clients to avoid confusion.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 8

Management agrees with the recommendation.

The Director of ServiceOttawa will direct staff to conduct further analysis of abandoned call patterns to better understand underlying trends and identify opportunities to improve the client experience.

ServiceOttawa has already taken steps to improve the information provided to callers while they wait. Automated messaging promotes online service options and provides examples of frequently requested services that can be completed online. This gives callers the option to use an online channel instead of continuing to wait in the phone queue, where appropriate.

Since receiving the draft audit report, ServiceOttawa has also implemented changes to the wait time information provided to callers. Callers are now advised of their real-time wait time. If the wait time is under 45 minutes, callers are provided with a specific estimated wait time; if it is over 45 minutes, this is communicated to the caller. Real-time wait time information continues to be provided at regular intervals while callers remain in queue.

Implementation will be evidenced through abandoned call analysis, documented findings, any resulting action plans, and records of changes made to automated messaging and wait time communications. The analysis of abandoned call trends is expected to be completed by Q4 2027. The recommendation to consider alternative ways to communicate call wait times to reduce confusion is expected to be completed by Q4 2026.

6. Clarity of Service Timelines

Service standards are timelines that outline the parameters by when the City will address a service request. Service standards exist for each service request type and are set by the respective service area (e.g. missed garbage pick-up has a service standard of 48 hours, excluding Sundays). Agents are expected to provide the service standard to clients as part of every call interaction.

6.1 Service standards are documented in multiple sources, and their meaning can vary across service areas which can lead to conflicting information provided to clients.

Priority Rating: Moderate

From discussions with various service areas, it was noted that they do not review and/or update their respective service standards regularly. Further, service standards are not routinely tracked, as service areas focus more on their own operational and program metrics. By-law & Regulatory Services is an exception as they routinely review service standards and report on performance annually. We performed a detailed review of 30 service request calls and noted that service standards were either met or exceeded in 83% of the sample. Therefore, although not reviewed frequently, the service standards were generally met.

Historically, service standards were contained within the Knowledge Based Articles (KBAs), which are informational sources for agents to refer back to when handling client interactions. Over time, the service standards have been built into the call database, SIRIS, which agents are expected to use as the source. Throughout the audit, there appeared to be miscommunication and confusion over which source was correct and conflicting information was received from agents and management. When completing our detailed testing of 30 service requests, we reviewed both service standard sources (where applicable) and did note inconsistencies between the timelines contained in SIRIS and the KBAs resulting in conflicting information available to agents.

It was further noted through our testing that service standards can mean different things to different service areas and could contain multiple components depending on the

nature of the work. As such context may be required for the agent to provide accurate information and set realistic expectations with the client making the request. For example, a missed garbage collection request has a service standard of 48 hours. Work on that request would be expected to be completed within that timeframe. However, a service request concerning the health of a City tree, has a service standard of six (6) weeks by when an inspection on the tree must be completed. Depending on the results of the inspection, further work may be required which would then result in an additional service standard for the next step(s). Since KBAs are informational documents, there was context available to agents to support the communication of service standards to clients. In SIRIS, the service standard is programed as a date with no context field available so it could be confusing or misleading to agents and in turn to clients making the respective request.

Having service standards contained in multiple places could lead to conflicting information being communicated to clients. In contrast, having service standards displayed as just a date in SIRIS with no context could result in the wrong information being communicated to clients. Both of these situations can result in misaligned expectations and/or frustration by clients.

RECOMMENDATION 9: CONTINUE WITH EFFORTS TO HAVE SERVICE STANDARDS IN ONE SOURCE AND CLARIFY THEIR MEANINGS

The Director, ServiceOttawa should:

- Continue with the initiative to remove service standards from all KBAs so there is one single source of information.
- Enhance the training agents receive around service standards to ensure the varying meanings are understood.
- Consider, as part of CX360 efforts, the addition of details/context in SIRIS related to service standards for agents to leverage when communicating with clients.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 9

Management agrees with the recommendation.

The Director of ServiceOttawa will continue its initiative to remove service standards from Knowledge Base Articles (KBA) so that SIRIS becomes the single source of information for service standards used by agents when creating service requests. This will help reduce the risk of conflicting information being available to agents and

support more consistent communication with clients. The removal of service standards from KBAs is expected to be completed by Q2 2027.

The Director of ServiceOttawa will also provide training to agents on service standards, including how service standards may differ by service area and how they should be communicated to clients. This training will support a more consistent understanding of service standard expectations and help agents provide clearer information to residents during the intake process. Training for all 3-1-1 staff is expected to be completed by Q1 2027.

As part of the CX360 program, ServiceOttawa is designing enhancements in SIRIS to make service standards more visible to agents when creating a service request. Where available, these enhancements are intended to present service standard information more prominently and support agents in communicating accurate timelines and relevant context to clients. Full implementation is dependent on the completion of technology enhancements currently being led by ITS.

Implementation will be evidenced through records of Knowledge Base Article updates, training materials, SIRIS enhancement documentation, and implementation records related to the technology enhancements. SIRIS enhancements related to service standards are expected to be completed by Q4 2027, subject to completion of required technology enhancements by ITS.

Appendix 1 – About the Audit

Audit Objective and Criteria

The objective of the audit is to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of 3-1-1 operations used to serve clients, while considering the prudent use of public funds.

The audit focused on information requests and service requests received by 3-1-1. The audit scope did not include transfer requests as these are brief interactions that involve direct routing to City staff, therefore there are minimal steps required by 3-1-1 agents to process these call types.

Criteria listed below were developed from our assessment of key risks related to the 3-1-1 call centre, while considering ongoing initiatives such as Project CX360.

1. Call Centre Intake and Resourcing Processes	
1.1	There are established protocols in place to ensure 3-1-1 agents provide accurate and complete information to clients.
1.2	A formal quality assurance program is in place to ensure that clients receive consistent and courteous service – from any communication medium.
1.3	Submission methods offered by 3-1-1 are an effective use of resources and provide a uniform experience for clients.
1.4	Call Centre staffing levels take into consideration call volumes and prudent use of taxpayer dollars to meet the established call response target.
2. Processing and Completion of Service Requests	
2.1	Service areas consistently provide explanatory notes supporting the status of open/closed service requests.
2.2	Service areas close service requests, as appropriate, once all required actions have been taken.
3. Performance Management	
3.1	The City consistently tracks its compliance with established service timelines that are provided to clients and are addressing gaps as necessary.

Audit Approach and Methodology

Audit staff performed the following procedures to complete this audit:

- Reviewed relevant documents,
- Performed interviews and walkthroughs with key City personnel,
- Performed detailed reviews and testing of processes,
- Performed benchmarking with other Canadian municipalities, where relevant, and
- Performed other analysis and tests, as deemed necessary.

Appendix 2 – Rating Scale for Audit Findings

The following rating definitions were used to assign priority to the findings associated with this audit.

Priority Rating	Description
Critical	The finding represents a severe control deficiency, non-compliance or strategic risk/opportunity and requires an immediate remedy. If left uncorrected, this could have a catastrophic impact on the achievement of the City's strategic priorities, its ongoing business operations, including the risk of loss, asset misappropriation, data compromise or interruption, fines and penalties, increased regulatory scrutiny, or reputation damage.
High	The finding represents a significant control deficiency, non-compliance or strategic risk/opportunity and requires prompt attention. If left uncorrected, this could have a significant impact on the achievement of the City's strategic priorities, its ongoing business operations, including the risk of loss, asset misappropriation, data compromise or interruption, fines and penalties, increased regulatory scrutiny, or reputation damage.
Moderate	The finding represents a moderate internal control deficiency, non-compliance or is a risk/opportunity to business operations that should be addressed timely. If left uncorrected, this could have a partial impact on business operations, resulting in loss or misappropriation of organizational assets, compromise of data, fines and penalties, or increased regulatory scrutiny. Typically, these issues should be resolved after any high-priority findings.
Low	The finding should be addressed to meet leading practice or efficiency objectives. Remediation should occur as time and resources permit. While it is not considered to represent a significant or immediate risk, repeated oversights without corrective action or compensating controls could lead to increased exposure or scrutiny.