

**Local Government  
Industry Benchmark**

Are local authorities ready to measure avoidable contact?

A rostrvm survey - October 2008

This document explains the requirements of NI 14, presents the findings of our research and explores the problems faced by local authorities.

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This summer, Rostrvm Solutions gathered a significant body of anecdotal evidence that many local authorities would not have systems in place in time to meet the October 2008 target for measuring avoidable contact.

Topic

**Executive summary**

**Headline findings**

What they said

96% of local authorities said they anticipated problems in meeting the October target

The most common problem, impacting 41% of projects, related to the basic challenge of collecting the data

**Executive summary**

Performance on reducing avoidable contact is one of the factors that will be assessed within the new performance management framework agreed between communities, local councils and the Local Government Association – the so called National Indicator number 14 (NI14). Under NI14 English local councils are required to start measuring avoidable contact by October 2008.

This summer, Rostrvm Solutions gathered a significant body of anecdotal evidence that many local authorities would not have systems in place in time to meet the October 2008 target for measuring avoidable contact.

To gain an understanding of the reality behind the anecdotes, we conducted a survey of local authorities; we wanted to establish whether there were any common factors as to why the target might not be reached. The survey was conducted using person-to-person telephone interviews; we approached 95 Local Government call centres in England during August and September 2008, with 91 complete responses.

The survey confirmed the anecdotal evidence; it found that while 82% of local authorities had started a project to measure avoidable contact, nearly one in three (32%) did not expect to be ready to meet the October target. By far the biggest hurdle faced by local authorities was the basic challenge of collecting the data, with a third of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system users saying their CRM system cannot be readily adapted to measure avoidable contact.

This document explains the requirements of NI14, presents the findings of our research, explores the problems faced by local authorities and explains how Rostrvm Solutions can help.

**Headline findings**

- 82% of local authorities said that a project has started to measure avoidable contact
- 32% of local authorities said that they did not expect to be ready to meet the October target
- 96% of local authorities said they anticipated problems in meeting the October target
- The most common problem, impacting 41% of projects, related to the basic challenge of collecting the data
- 65% of local authorities expect to use their CRM system to measure avoidable contact
- 31% of CRM users said they cannot easily use their CRM system to measure avoidable contact.

It's a cliché, but if you don't measure it, you can't manage it. Most organisations 'know' that they get unnecessary contact – but anecdotal evidence won't give you the hard facts.

Topic
<b>What is it?</b>
<b>Why measure it?</b>
<b>Why reduce it?</b>

Reducing avoidable contact ISN'T about generating nice performance metrics.

Nor is it just about making life 'better' for your customers – no matter how laudable an aim that may be.

**What is avoidable contact?**

We've all been there, done that and got the T-shirt. We've rung the council because the rubbish hasn't been collected; phoned the call centre because we can't find the information on the web site; gone to the bank without the 'correct' ID...

In fact, the concept of 'avoidable contact' is just common sense. Ask almost anyone if they have made contact with a business that was unnecessary and they will be able to reel off example after example. Avoidable contact is a waste of time, effort – and usually money – for both consumers and organisations.

But in the case of Local Government 'reducing avoidable contact' has a more specific meaning. Reduction of avoidable contact is one of the National Indicators that will be assessed within the new performance management framework agreed between the Local Government Association and Communities and Local Government. Reducing avoidable contact is National Indicator number 14 and is frequently referred to as NI14. Local councils are required to start measuring avoidable contact from October 2008.

So, for most organisations, reducing avoidable contact makes obvious business sense and local government is taking a structured approach to improving service to manage both effort and cost.

**Why measure it?**

It's a cliché, but if you don't measure it, you can't manage it. Most organisations 'know' that they get unnecessary contact – if you have a call centre then just ask the customer service representatives, they'll give you more than a few anecdotes. But anecdotal evidence won't give you the hard facts that you need in order to assess the volume (and cost) of avoidable contacts and put in place a strategy to reduce it. Before you can reduce avoidable contact you need to know the volume and, perhaps more importantly, build a clear picture of what causes it – Is it poor information? Processes that need improving? More training needed? Once you have a metric you can work on improvement.

**Why reduce it?**

Reducing avoidable contact ISN'T about generating nice performance metrics. Nor is it just about making life 'better' for your customers – no matter how laudable an aim that may be. Any contact causes workload. As simple transactions are increasingly satisfied by consumer self-service – internet and automatic voice systems – the content of the person-to-person contacts you receive are more complex and take longer. Reducing avoidable contact gives you more capacity to handle the unavoidable contacts more effectively and, in turn, reduce end-to-end workload.

The vast majority of the local authorities we interviewed had encountered, or expected to encounter, some problems in implementing NI14.

Topic

**What did we discover?**

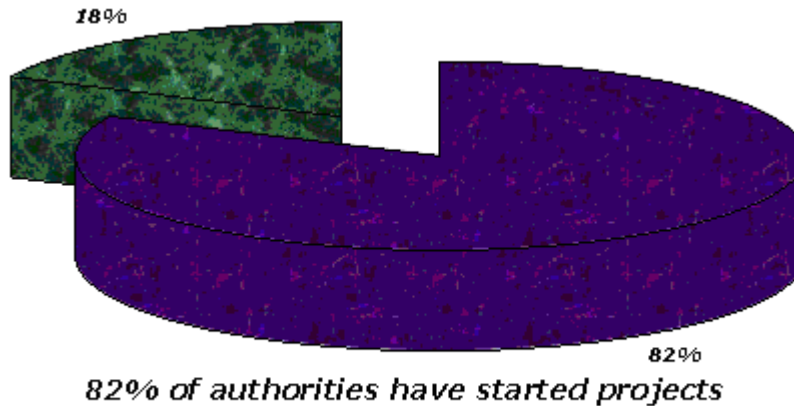
**What are the challenges?**

Summary

82% of those local authorities that took part in the survey said they had started a project to measure avoidable contact...

... just 4% of respondents did not see any difficulty in meeting the challenge.

**What did we discover?**



It was encouraging to find that the vast majority of local authorities have begun work on their NI14 projects; 82% of those local authorities that took part in the survey said they had started a project to measure avoidable contact.

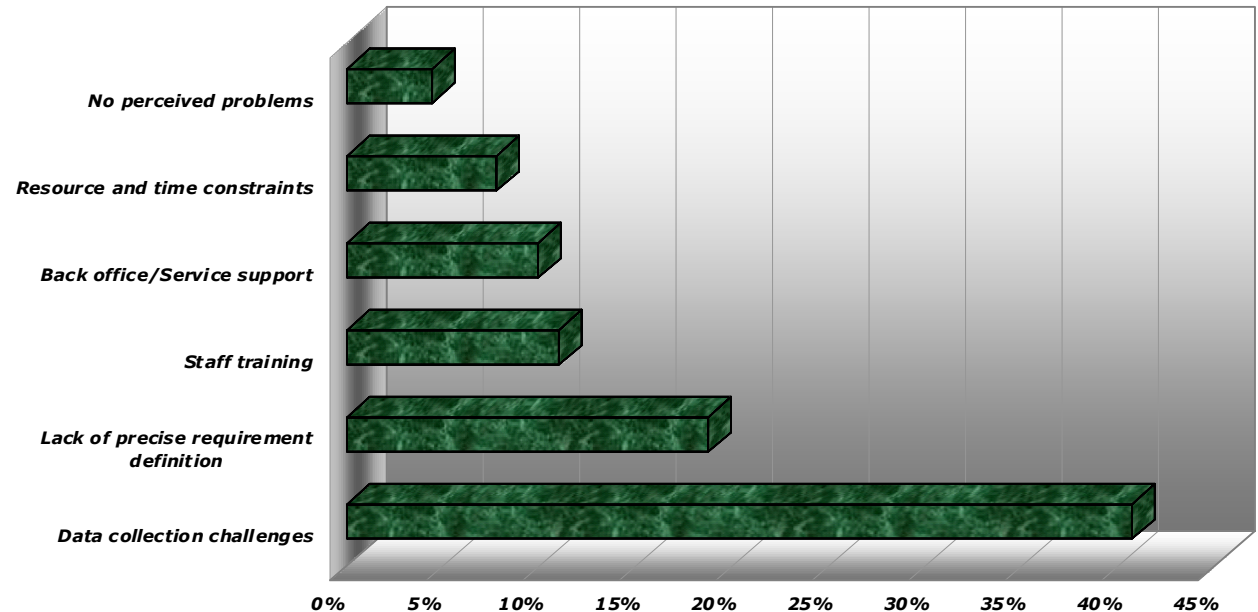
However, on a more worrying note, more than 30% confirmed that they do not expect to be ready to meet the October target. And, overall, the vast majority (96%) of the local authorities we interviewed had encountered, or expected to encounter, some problems in implementing NI14.

**What are the challenges?**

Just 4% of respondents did not see any difficulty in meeting the challenge.

When asked "what are the key challenges?" there was a wide range of responses.

The most common responses are categorized in the chart to the right.



The advice provided in official guidance indicates that local authorities should be using CRM as the simple method of data collection, but CRM is not a panacea.

Topic

## The data collection challenge

Summary

71% of local authorities expected to use a CRM system but a significant number of these authorities still perceived data collection to be the most significant challenge they faced.

As the previous chart shows, by far the most common problem, impacting over 40% of the projects centred on the basic challenge of collecting the data. When we delved a little deeper we discovered that this was both a technology and, in some cases, an organisational problem.

### Why is data collection such a big issue?

The advice provided in official guidance indicates that local authorities should be using CRM as the simple method of data collection. This concept is confirmed by our survey which indicated that 71% of local authorities expected to use a CRM system to collect avoidable contact data; however, a significant number of these authorities were amongst the 40% who perceived data collection to be the most significant challenge they faced. Why is this?

Drilling down into the data we found that whilst many councils have deployed systems, CRM is not a panacea.

Three frequent issues arose:

- A number of local authorities ran a number of mini call centres and faced a difficulty in centralising the data into a single source
- CRM is only available in the call centre or contact centre. Other departments and services do not have appropriate access
- Existing CRM systems cannot easily be adapted for recording avoidable contact



**31% of CRM users cannot easily use the system to measure avoidable contact**

Local councils faced with the task of meeting new NI14 regulations on avoidable contact can turn to a free guide available from Rostrvm Solutions.

Topic

### rostrvm CallGuide

In summary

rostrvm CallGuide improves business efficiency, contact handling and the experience of callers as well as helping to reduce avoidable contacts.

#### How can Rostrvm Solutions help?

Local councils faced with the task of meeting new NI14 regulations on avoidable contact can turn to a guide from Rostrvm Solutions. The guide contains a number of top tips on how to measure avoidable contact and minimise the number of unnecessary calls, which are a waste of time, effort and usually money for both residents and their local councils.

The guide explains how Rostrvm Solutions can quickly help councils and other organisations identify, monitor and reduce avoidable contact. It focuses on:

- The value of measuring avoidable contact
- The benefits of reducing it
- The functionality of **rostrvm** CallGuide software

The **rostrvm** CallGuide software is a desktop IT application that allows public sector and commercial organisations to support contact processes or simply record contact outcomes. It can manage an entire contact flow step-by-step thus recording the detail required, or can simply allow the agent to confirm whether or not contact was avoidable at the end of the call.

All the data is stored in a relational database for reporting and analysis, providing supervisors with a snapshot of current activity, for example, or allowing them to print summaries of results. The information can be accessed using a range of analysis tools, including Microsoft Excel and SQL Reporting.

In addition to helping reduce avoidable contacts, **rostrvm** CallGuide improves business efficiency, contact handling and the experience of callers. It can link to email or other IT systems, streamlining functionality across different technology platforms.

The guide can be downloaded free at [www.rostrvm.com/reducing\\_avoidable\\_contact.shtml](http://www.rostrvm.com/reducing_avoidable_contact.shtml)