



**SOUTH  
KESTEVEN  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL**

## Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16 January 2020

**Report of:** Councillor Robert Reid

Cabinet Member for Communities  
and HR



# Customer Experience Strategy

The purpose of this report is to consider the Council's position in updating and developing a Customer Experience Strategy (appendix 1) that meets the current and future needs of our customers, visitors and businesses.

### Report Author

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Corporate Priority:	Decision type:	Wards:
<b>Agility</b>	<b>Budget and Policy Framework</b>	<b>All Wards</b>

<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Paul Thomas, Interim Chief Executive	23 December 2019
<b>Approved by:</b>	Lee Sirdifield, Strategic Director – Transformation and Change	2 January 2020
<b>Signed off by:</b>	Councillor Robert Reid, Cabinet Member for Communities, Health and Wellbeing	2 January 2020

### Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s)

- Notes the development and progress to date and makes any appropriate comment for consideration and inclusion in the strategy, ahead of going to Cabinet with the final version.**
- Subject to point 1 above, recommends to Cabinet that the strategy be adopted.**

# 1 The Background to the Report

- 1.1 A vital part of the transformation of the council is the creation of a modern, flexible customer experience, offering choice and delivering convenience to all customers, businesses and visitors. To do this, services must maximise the use of all channels available. It is essential that the council improves its hours of accessibility by promoting self-service for all transactions. This will make it easy to do business with SKDC whilst actively supporting those most vulnerable.
- 1.2 As a council we have a wide range of customers. They include those who have traditionally used our services and those that we have a 'transactional relationship' with. As a commercially-focussed local authority, our customers also include visitors, local, national and international business and partner organisations.
- 1.3 We need to ensure that our services are both affordable and sustainable. It is vital that we not only deliver 'business as usual' in a more modern environment but we continue to enhance our services in line with the customer expectations, evolving technologies and opportunities for customers, putting their needs at the heart of our organisation.
- 1.4 Customer expectations continue to increase. Customers are expecting a modern council with a high-quality range of options to access services. We will consider the appropriate application of modern technologies to support their interactions, whether that be through artificial intelligence, intelligent websites, social media, online accounts, webchat or chatbots and apps.
- 1.5 SKDC customers expect to easily access information and our staff need to be enabled with the right tools to make service delivery as easy and as seamless as possible. Ideally customers would like a joined-up service offer, with our channels providing consistent responses and connected signposting to partner organisations. To achieve this, we need to provide an ever-increasing depth of service that is efficiently delivered across all channels – modernising our services to be fit for the future, firmly putting the customer first.
- 1.6 It is vital that Customer Services offer access to self-service, first time - every time, and we make this easy and consistently good in delivery. We will also maintain the option of face to face and telephony services for those most vulnerable, as well as supporting customers and businesses to self-serve 24/7, interact online, set up online accounts to meet current and future demand.
- 1.7 There are several contributing factors that dovetail with this strategy (ICT capability, retaining our talented staff, a new website, online forms etc.) which must be considered to realise the savings required and to ensure delivery of a modern, consistent and reliable customer service experience.
- 1.8 By investing in our staff and the tools we use to deliver our services, we will also become more productive. Gaining extra capacity gives us choice. We can improve and become more consistent in our service standards, redirect resources to priority areas, provide 'back office expertise' or reduce operating costs, all in a managed way. We cannot ensure that we have a sustainable organisation that meets customer expectations by staying as we are.
- 1.9 If we stay as we are, we will continue to have to manage high volumes of switchboard-based contacts directed from customer services into individual service areas. Services will only be provided within defined operating hours determined by staff availability and within

agreed office opening hours. These transactions are supported by a range of different specialist software applications to manage each transaction individually for every contact. This typically extends transaction times and results in a fragmented service offer.

- 1.10 We will use technologies to modernise our telephony offer, improve the website, rationalise our face to face offering and increase self-service provision as well as the content of our online customer accounts. We'll be using new technologies to answer high volume, knowledge-based enquiries both through the website and over the telephone. We will increase our deployment of intelligent automation to achieve process efficiencies and ensure that our staff can provide the additional value to our most vulnerable customers, rather than dealing with the day to day churn.
- 1.11 This will help to balance the Council's current budget whilst delivering 'business as usual' enhanced with new technology in line with the customer expectations and enabling our staff to keep customer at the heart of our organisation.
- 1.12 The service must maximise the use of all channels available to improve our hours of accessibility 24/7 by promoting self-service for all transactions and making it easy to do business with SKDC, whilst actively supporting those most vulnerable.

## **2 Consultation and Feedback Received, Including Overview and Scrutiny**

- 2.1 Our customer experience strategy sets out how we as a council intend to provide services to our customers. We want this to be quicker, easier and with more choice of access, with consistently good experience wherever and whenever you deal with the council.
- 2.2 We know that many people are now regularly using digital services, with online banking and shopping becoming more popular. For example, 87% of retail purchases are now made online. The web is now the first choice for service help and increasingly is being delivered through solutions such as Chatbots and Webchat. Access is also now predominately through smart phones and tablets in preference to desktop computers.
- 2.3 Re-considering our customer service offering in order to create a modernised service will require the Council to rationalise its face to face customer service provision, including the offering to the Stamford and Market Deeping offices, and develop a range of other channels. Appendix 2 provides further information on the current performance, offer and utilisation at each site.
- 2.4 The proposal is to create a North and South hub in the district providing online digital services, payment kiosks, face to face support, enhanced access to web forms and signposting alongside the library services.
- 2.5 Across other areas in the district the proposal is to create service delivery through self-service payment kiosks, direct 'hot phone' to services and an automated payment line, ideally located close to library services and arts facilities. The proposal places specific emphasis on redesigning the Market Deeping and Stamford offer.

## **3 Next Steps – Communication and Implementation of the Decision**

- 3.1 The implementation of the Customer Experience Strategy will see some public consultation take place. Initially this will focus on the changes to the Market Deeping and Stamford face to face service provision. However, as part of the drive to ensure customers

are at the heart of the organisation, the strategy will see us consulting and engaging with customers more regularly in the future.

## **4 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 Plans for the implementation of the customer service delivery model have been built into 2020/21 budget proposals. This includes implementing alternative customer services at specific locations with kiosk and telephony provision being put in place. It is expected that in 2020/21, the Council will save £81k by delivering the service in a different way. This will rise to £113k in future years.
- 4.2 The modernisation of Customer Services is not just about face to face provision. There is a need to continue to invest in our customer offer. Investments in our digital offer will be made through invest to save proposal supported by business cases later in the year.

**Financial Implications reviewed by: Richard Wyles, Director of Finance**

## **5 Legal and Governance Implications**

- 5.1 The strategy sets out how the Council will deliver services in the future. The equality assessment considers how any changes to service provision will impact on those with protected characteristics and highlights that further assessments will be completed as and when required.
- 5.2 The strategy recognises the requirement to consult and seeks to engage different customer groups at various stages of process development to ensure that our services are fit for purpose.

**Legal Implications reviewed by: Shahin Ismail, Monitoring Officer**

## **6 Equality and Safeguarding Implications**

- 6.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed for the Customer Experience Strategy. This is shown in appendix 3.

## **7 Risk and Mitigation**

- 7.1 No significant risks have been identified as a result of this report.

## **8 Community Safety Implications**

- 8.1 No significant community safety implications have been identified as a result of this report.

## **9 Other Implications (where significant)**

- 9.1 None identified.

## 10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1: Customer Experience Strategy

10.2 Appendix 2: Area Office Summary

10.3 Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment

<b>Report Timeline:</b>	Date of Publication on Forward Plan (if required)	16 January 2020
	Previously Considered by: N/A	N/A
	Final Decision date	21 January 2020