



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Cabinet

21 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 that meets the current and future needs of our customers, visitors and businesses. The strategy was considered by Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 January 2020 and feedback from that session will be shared with Cabinet.

Report Author

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Corporate Priority:	Decision type:	Wards:
Agility	Budget and Policy Framework	All Wards

Reviewed by:	Lee Sirdifield, Strategic Director, Transformation and Change	2 January 2020
Approved by:	Paul Thomas, Interim Chief Executive	6 January 2020
Signed off by:	Councillor Robert Reid, Cabinet Member for Communities and HR	7 January 2020

Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s)

1. That Cabinet approves the Customer Experience Strategy, subject to any appropriate amendments recommended by the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 January 2020.
2. That Cabinet commissions the consultation for proposed changes to the Stamford and Market Deeping area offices.

1 The Background to the Report

- 1.1 The Rural Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Customer Experience Strategy (appendix 1) on 16 January 2020 which is a vital part of the transformation of the council. There is a need to create a modern, flexible customer experience, offering choice and delivering convenience to all customers, businesses and visitors. Services must maximise the use of all channels available and improve 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 It is recognised that as a council we have a wide range of customers including those who have traditionally used our services and those that we have a 'transactional relationship' with. However, as a commercially-focussed local authority our customers also include visitors, local, national and international business and partner organisations.
- 1.3 As considered within the budget report, we must ensure that our services are both affordable and sustainable. It is vital that we not only deliver 'business as usual' in a more modern way, but we continue to enhance our services, putting customer needs at the heart of our organisation, and keeping pace with customer expectations and evolving technologies.
- 1.4 Customer expectations continue to increase. Customers are expecting a high-quality range of options to access services. The strategy supports us to consider the appropriate application of modern technologies to facilitate their interactions, whether that be through artificial intelligence, intelligent websites, social media, online accounts and digital forms, webchat or chatbots and apps.
- 1.5 We know that customers want to easily access information. Equally, our staff need to have the right tools to enable seamless service delivery. Customers expect our services to be joined-up. There needs to be greater consistency in our responses as well as 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 We will 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 and utilise online accounts. It is vital that Customer Services offer access to self-service, meeting expectations first time - every time, and we make this easy and consistently good in delivery.
- 1.7 The improvements in customer services will not happen by themselves. There is a need to dovetail this activity with the good work going on elsewhere in the Council. This includes developing greater synergies with our ICT capabilities, talent development and retention, as well as outward facing initiatives such as a new and improved website and more responsive and intelligent online forms. All of this will enable us to realise the savings required and to ensure delivery of a modern, consistent and reliable customer service experience.
- 1.8 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 help to our most vulnerable customers, rather than dealing with the day to day churn.

- 1.9 We will increase productivity within our services by investing in our staff and the tools we use to deliver our services. The strategy supports improvements in our offering and enables us to become more consistent in our service standards. It helps to redirect resources to priority areas where necessary, provide greater 'back office expertise' and 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.

2 Consultation and Feedback Received, Including Overview and Scrutiny

- 2.1 The strategy details how we as a council intend to provide services to our customers. We want to see ongoing improvements in service quality, making it quicker and easier, with a wider range of access. We enable customers to have a consistently good experience wherever and whenever they interact with the council.
- 2.2 Since the last Customer Access Strategy was launched, the world that we live and work in has changed. People now use digital services through a wider range of devices more than ever with online banking and shopping becoming more popular. For example, 87% of retail purchases are now made online. Our customers are now much more familiar with new and emerging solutions that provide instant help, advice and resolution. Increasingly this is 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 The strategy looks at our current offer and reconsiders our operating model in light of the known changes in customer behaviour. Often, customers now expect to be able to do more by themselves, without the need for human interaction. Reconsidering our face to face offering allows us to identify ways of rationalising locations without compromising service provision.
- 2.4 We propose 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. We will also consult on the removal of face to face provision in Stamford and Market Deeping. Both sites typically manage transactions that can be facilitated through alternative solutions that are currently not in place. Appendix 2 provides further information on the current performance, offer and utilisation at each site.

3 Financial Implications

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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

4 Legal and Governance Implications

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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, Interim Head of Legal

5 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

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

6 Risk and Mitigation

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

7 Community Safety Implications

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

8 Other Implications (where significant)

- 8.1 None identified

9 Background Papers

- 9.1 Report to Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 16 January 2020
<http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=665&MId=3856&Ver=4>

10 Appendices

- 10.1 Appendix 1: Customer Experience Strategy
- 10.2 Appendix 2: Area Office Summary
- 10.3 Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment

Report Timeline:	Date of Publication on Forward Plan (if required)	10 June 2019
	Previously Considered by: Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee	16 January 2020
	Final Decision date	21 January 2020