



CONSULTATION ON CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE – MARKET DEEPING

Feb 2020

ABSTRACT

To ascertain the degree of support for the proposal to change the way face-to-face services are delivered in Market Deeping

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Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Cabinet and Council with the results of the consultation that has been undertaken with SK residents and other stakeholders on the proposal to change the way face-to-face services are delivered in Market Deeping.

Proposal

2. The proposal outlined as part of the consultation was:

To close the customer service centre (currently located at The Deepings Community Centre) and replace this with:

- A self-service kiosk which will take payments. This will be installed in the Deepings Community Centre close to the direct dial phone
- A direct dial phone in the community centre. This would be programmed so that it can be used to contact the Council's customer service centres in Grantham and Bourne and other organisations like Lincolnshire County Council
- A PC with access to the internet. These will be available for use in the community centre and would enable people to contact the council via our website, should they wish to

Objectives

3. The objectives of the consultation were identified as follows:
 - To communicate the preferred option(s) for the future provision of customer services in Market Deeping and the reasons why this is the preferred option
 - To outline the changes that will happen if the proposal is adopted
 - To measure the degree of support or otherwise for the proposal
 - To understand and be aware of the impact taking this decision may have
 - To enable respondents to suggest any alternative means they may like to see in respect of delivering services to customers in the Deepings
 - To inform the decision that will be taken by the council in respect of the provision of customer services in Market Deeping going forward

It will also enable SKDC:

- To establish how often the area office in Market Deeping is visited
- To identify the means of contact
- To find out why people visit the area office

Timescales

4. Preparatory work was undertaken during the second week of January 2020. The consultation was open for four weeks - from 23 January to 20 February 2020.

Methodology

5. Respondents were able to participate in the consultation in various ways. These included:
 - Completion of an on-line survey. Respondents were directed to a dedicated page on SKDC's website which contained a link to the survey. This was included in the press release, on social media channels and also at the drop-in session held on Stamford Market on 14 February (on a business card and via an iPad) where the opportunity to take part in the consultation for Market Deeping was promoted alongside the opportunity for Stamford
 - Completion of a printed copy - available at the area office in Market Deeping. It was supplied with a pre-paid envelope to enable an easy and free return.
 - Contacting the Head of Customer Experience directly
6. Opportunities to participate in the consultation were promoted across various media. These included:
 - An article published in the Stamford Mercury on 24 January¹
 - The council's social media channels. Articles promoting the opportunity to participate were posted on 24 January, 31 January and 7 February 2020 on Facebook and Twitter. Potential respondents were provided with a link to a dedicated page on the council's website. This contained links to both surveys – Stamford and Market Deeping
 - The members of staff working in the area office who encouraged those visiting the facility to take part. Posters advertising the consultation were also displayed in the area office
 - A business card. This directed people to the webpage and was used when talking to people at the drop-in session as an alternative means of encouraging them to take part.
 - Direct contact. Around 100 organisations and community groups were contacted directly and asked for their views on the proposal. Individual members of staff with responsibility for services that may be impacted by the change in provision were also contacted directly. These include the members of staff who work at the area office
 - A drop-in session on a stall on Stamford Market. This was held on Friday 14 February between 8.30 am and 1.30 pm.
7. These actions were undertaken following approval of the approach to consult which was given by Cabinet on 21 January 2020.

Detail

8. To help inform the decision that will be taken by South Kesteven District Council in respect of its proposal to change the way face-to-face services are provided in Market Deeping the consultation officer was asked to design a survey which would gather feedback from residents and other stakeholders.
9. The survey² was structured around the main premise of the consultation which was to inform the decision which will be taken by Cabinet on 17 March 2020. It included:

¹ Article outlining the proposal in the Stamford Mercury on 24 January 2020 on page 3.

² Copy of survey attached at appendix one to the main Cabinet report

- Details on the council’s proposal to change the way face-to-face services are delivered in Market Deeping
- A question to measure the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with this proposal
- An opportunity to provide details of any impacts adopting this proposal may have
- Space to detail any other options the respondent would like the council to consider

To understand if responses were being received from those who contact the council by visiting the Market Deeping office, respondents were asked to state

- How they tend to contact the council - by telephone, via email, in person etc
- Why they visited the area office in Market Deeping
- How frequently they visited the facility
- What they thought of the facility

They were also asked to supply some demographic information, including gender, age and disability and if they were responding as an individual, on behalf of a community organisation, as a councillor or member of staff.

10. A number of actions were undertaken to ensure that the opportunity to participate in the consultation was as widely promoted as possible. These included:

- A dedicated page on the council’s website. The survey could be accessed via a user-friendly URL.
- Use of its social media channels
- Being encouraged to take part if visiting the area office
- An article in the Stamford Mercury
- Contacting individuals (including members of staff) and organisations known to have links with the facility directly, as well as other organisations based in the district
- A drop-in session held on Stamford Market on 14 February from 8.30 am till 1.30pm

11. The consultation closed on 20 Feb 2020, after four weeks. 131 responses were received. The majority of these (115 or 87.8%) were received via the weblink with the remainder (16 or 12.2%) being supplied in paper format. These were input manually.

12. The posting on Facebook on 24 January had a reach of 2,504. 263 engaged with the post with 26 individuals clicking on the webpage dedicated to the consultation. The follow up article - posted on 31 January 2020 - had a reach of 2,261. 78 individuals engaged, with 17 clicking through to the webpage dedicated to the consultation. The last posting on 7 February had a reach of 2,164. 87 individuals engaged with the post, with 19 clicking through to the webpage.

13. The tweet posted on Twitter on 24 January was seen by 1,016 individuals. 52 people engaged with the tweet, and 20 clicked on the link. The follow-up tweet posted on 7 February had a reach of 619. 15 engaged with the tweet and 9 clicked on the link.

14. Over 100 stakeholders were contacted directly³ and asked to participate in the consultation. A number of these have responded. Some have completed the survey and others have fed back directly – their anonymised responses will be attached at appendix 3.1 to the main Cabinet report.

³ List of stakeholders contacted directly attached at appendix five to the main Cabinet report

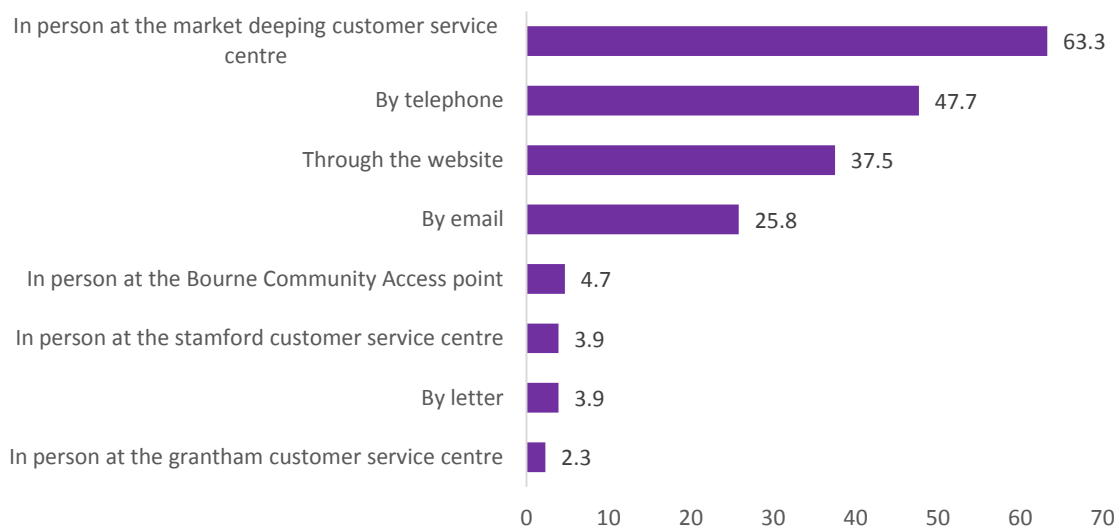
- 15. Over 40 individuals were spoken to face-to-face at the drop-in session held at Stamford Market on 14 February. Whilst the majority of these were interested in what might happen to the area office in Stamford, a couple of people wanted to know about the proposal for Market Deeping.
- 16. The Head of Customer Experience was contacted by several other individuals. Their anonymised responses are attached at appendix 3.1 to the main Cabinet report.
- 17. Responses were also received from members of staff who provide services that are likely to be affected by the proposal. Some chose to answer on-line, whilst others responded independently – emailing one of the points of contact for the survey. Their anonymised responses are also attached at appendix 3.1 to the main Cabinet report.

The results

Contacting the Council

- 18. Respondents were given details of the proposal and how it would affect the delivery of face-to-face services in Market Deeping. They were then asked three questions about contacting the Council.
- 19. When asked how they tend to contact the Council, perhaps not surprisingly the most popular choice was “In person at the Market Deeping Customer Service Centre”. The next most popular choices were “By telephone” and “Through the website”. This is illustrated in the graph below:

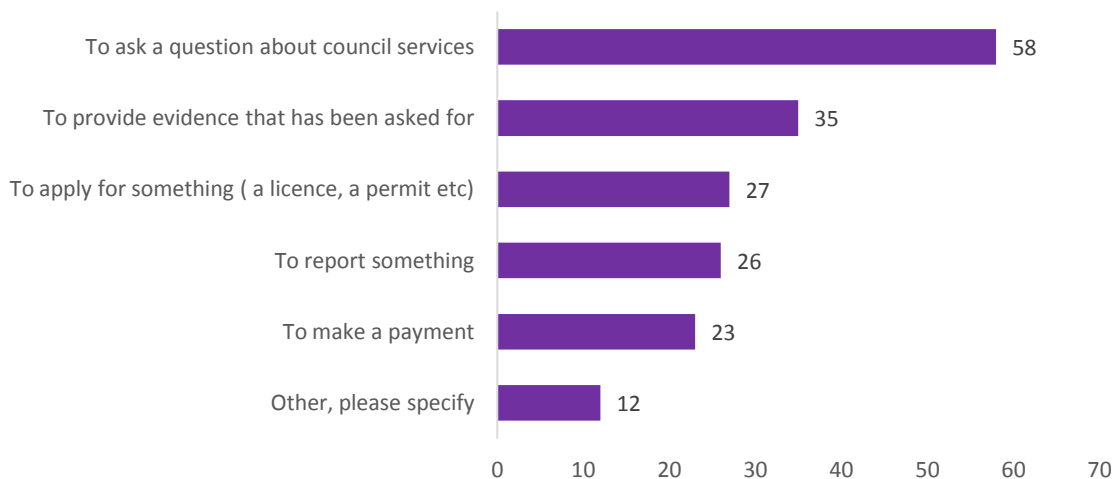
How respondents choose to contact the council (%)



Given that nearly two thirds of respondents have stated that they generally tend to contact the council in person at the Market Deeping Office, this is likely to have an impact on how they choose to answer the remainder of the questions in this survey and as such should be kept in mind.

20. The second question asked respondents to state why they chose to visit the Market Deeping Customer Service Centre. The top three reasons for visiting the Market Deeping Customer Service Centre were to ask a question about council services, to provide evidence that has been asked for or to apply for something, as outlined below:

The reasons why respondents visited the Market Deeping Customer Service Centre

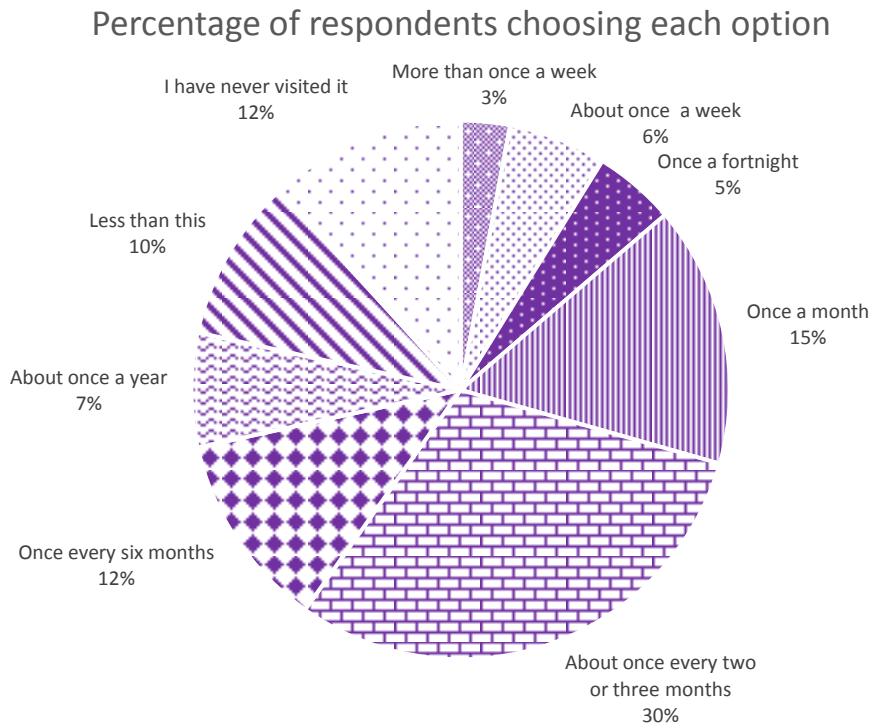


This is interesting as there are some similarities to the data that has been collected by the customer service centre on the types of transactions that are undertaken at the Market Deeping Office. Monthly transactional data from this source reveals that 14% of enquiries relate to taxi licences with just over a quarter (27%) relating to payments.

There are also similarities in respect of the data that has been collected from the consultation in Stamford. The top reason for them visiting the facility was also to ask a question about council services.

Respondents were then asked how often they visited the customer service centre in Market Deeping. The purpose of this was to try and get a measure of how much of an impact adopting the proposal to close the facility would have. Around 3 in 10 respondents (29.4%) said that they visited the office once a month or more, with a very similar proportion stating that they visited once every two or

three months (30.4%). Just over a quarter of respondents (28.5%) stated that they visited the facility less than once every six months. This is illustrated in pie chart format overleaf:



22. The fourth question on the survey asked respondents to state what they thought of the current facility. Just under half of the respondents commented with most using the opportunity to say that they thought the facility was useful and didn't want to lose it. The other themes present in their statements were:

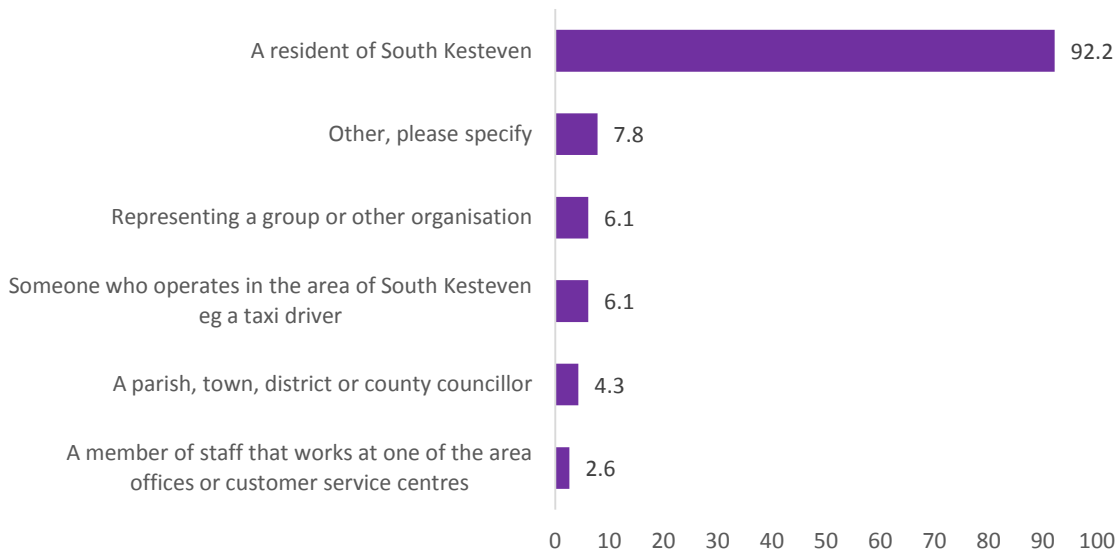
- The staff who work there are knowledgeable and helpful
- They like having someone to be able to speak to face-to-face
- The facility is vital and an integral part of the local community
- The services provided are useful - particularly for those who don't like technology
- A handful of respondents didn't know that it was there

23. Respondents were then asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to change the way face-to-face services are delivered in Market Deeping. Three-quarters of respondents (75.2%) disagreed with this proposal, with just under half (47.9%) disagreeing strongly. Around 15% of respondents agreed with the proposal, with the remainder choosing to answer neither agree nor disagree.

Given that two-thirds of respondents have stated that they generally tend to contact the council in person at the Market Deeping Office and visit the office to ask a question about council services, the lack of support for the proposal is perhaps not surprising. As such due consideration needs to be given to the themes outlined in the paragraph overleaf.

24. When asked why they had chosen to answer in this way, around two thirds of respondents commented. The main themes were:
- The proposal puts the more vulnerable in society at a disadvantage. Particularly the elderly and those with disabilities who may not be able to use technology
 - The current location is easy to access and convenient
 - The Deepings is growing so needs to retain a face-to-face presence locally
 - Respondents don't want to lose another vital service
25. To ensure that the council is aware of any impacts that closing the customer service centre in Market Deeping may have on individuals, respondents were then asked to provide details of what they were. Nearly three fifths of respondents commented (58%). The main themes were:
- No access to transport - having to travel to either Bourne or Grantham on the bus
 - The impact it would have on the elderly and other vulnerable groups. Climate change was also mentioned (carbon emissions from taxi drivers travelling to Bourne or Grantham)
 - The knock-on effect it will have on the Community Trust and Library, as well as other organisations like the CAB who provide advice every Wednesday from the Community Centre.
26. Respondents were then asked if they thought there were any other options the council could consider. Just over three fifths of respondents (61.0%) made suggestions. They ranged from reducing the number of days the facility is open, working with partner organisations to plug the gap that will be left if the facility closes to providing services from somewhere else in Market Deeping. Suggested locations included the Town Hall or the Community Library. Other suggestions included identifying who are the most in need, and tailoring the services that are provided towards them.
27. To help the Council understand what the impacts of the proposal may be on different stakeholders, and to ensure that opinions had been sought from different groups of stakeholders, respondents were asked to identify if they were a resident, a parish, district or county councillor, someone who operates in the area (a taxi driver for example), a member of staff or a representative of another organisation. Most respondents were residents as shown in the graph below:

Percentage of respondents choosing each option



The responses to this question illustrates the breadth of the consultation and who has been contacted. Responses have been received from those living in the district, as well as those who operate in the area, those representing community and other organisations as well as councillors and members of staff.

28. Respondents were then asked for some demographic information. The purpose of this was to get a measure of how representative the sample was of the district. They were asked for their gender, age and if they considered themselves to have a disability or not. Comparing these statistics to those of the district revealed the following:

Gender

	Sample %	District %	
Male	35.7	48.2	1.4
Female	64.3	51.8	0.8

The sample is representative for female respondents but not male.

Age

	Sample %	District %	
Under 18	0.0	21.4	21.4
18 to 24	0.0	6.3	6.3
25 to 34	3.7	10.7	2.9
35 to 44	13.7	12.0	0.9
45 to 54	27.5	15.8	0.6
55 to 64	25.7	14.4	0.6
65 +	29.4	19.4	0.7
	100.0	100.0	

The sample is not representative in terms of age. Those aged under 35 are under-represented and those aged 45 or over are over-represented in the sample.

Disability

According to national statistics⁴, one in five people (or 21% of the population) state that they have a disability. When asked, 19.2% of the sample stated that they had a disability. This means the sample is representative in terms of disability.

Comparing the demographic characteristics of this sample to those of the wider population revealed that the sample is representative in terms of disability. It is not however representative in terms of the number of males that have responded or age, with those aged under 35 being under-represented and those over 45 over-represented. The results should be viewed with this in mind.

Other comments

29. Respondents were then asked if they had any questions or if they would like to comment on anything included in the survey. Just over one in ten respondents wanted to know more or to make their views known. Their comments included:

- There shouldn't be an assumption that everyone can use digital services
- How will people cope if there is a problem with the technological solutions that have been provided - the volunteers in the community centre probably won't be able to help
- Maybe there's an opportunity for joined up thinking between the district and county council

⁴ Source- Family Resources Survey 2017/18

30. The final question asked for respondents' contact details so that any queries they had could be responded to. These will be answered as soon as is practicable.

Conclusion

31. The purpose of this consultation was to ascertain the degree of support for the proposal to change the way face-to-face services are delivered in Market Deeping and inform the decision that will be taken about this issue by SKDC's Cabinet on 17 March 2020. Responses, whilst not representative in terms of age or gender, have been received from a variety of stakeholders across various channels. The Council has had some constructive feedback on the impact adopting the proposal will have on certain sections of the local population (particularly those who are unable to, or do not want, access to the internet.) There have also been some good suggestions in respect of other options which should now be used to draw up alternatives. Whilst this report considers in the main, responses received in survey format, due consideration should also be given to the responses received independently to the survey. These are attached at appendix 3.1 to the main Cabinet report.

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Communication and consultation
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