



SOUTH  
KESTEVEN  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL



# CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE CONSULTATION – MARKET DEEPING

August 2020

## ABSTRACT

To establish the degree of support for a proposal to change the way customer services are delivered in Market Deeping

## AUTHOR

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## Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to update CMT and Cabinet 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.
2. An initial consultation was undertaken in February of this year but because everyone has experienced significant changes in the way they are now living, working and interacting with the outside world as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council decided to revisit the proposal. Listening to what residents had said about how they would like to be able to contact the Council, and what is important to them, whilst also reflecting the new way of working that has been in place for SKDC customers for just over four and a half months, a new proposal has been put forward. Not wishing to assume that the views of stakeholders have remained the same, SKDC asked local people to respond once more.

## Purpose

3. The purpose of the consultation was to:
  - Inform the decision that is due to be taken in respect of changing the way customer services are accessed in Market Deeping
  - Reflect and incorporate the results from the initial consultation into the refreshed proposals
  - Include the changes that have occurred within this service area (both in terms of service delivery and customer behaviour) as a result of the lockdown that was implemented on 23 March.
  - Determine the degree of support for a preferred option for future provision of customer services in Market Deeping

## Proposal

4. The proposal outlined as part of the second consultation was to close the customer service centre (currently located within the Deepings Community Centre, Market Deeping) and replace this with:
  - A self-service kiosk which will take payments. This would be based at either the community centre or Deepings Community Library
  - A PC with access to the internet and web-based services – based at either Deepings Community Centre or the community library. This would enable customers to contact the council via our website and/or attend appointments remotely
  - A direct phone line. This would be programmed so that it can be used to contact the council's customer services centres in Grantham and Bourne, and other organisations such as Lincolnshire County Council.
  - Virtual face-to-face appointments to be available via Skype or Microsoft Teams

## Objectives

5. The objectives of the consultation were identified as follows. To:
  - Inform the decision that will be taken by the council in respect of the provision of customer services in Market Deeping going forward
  - Ensure that the changes in both service provision and behaviour that have already occurred in this area as a result of the pandemic are incorporated in the refresh, thereby bringing the previous consultation that took place in January and February this year up to date
  - Identify how residents have been contacting customer services during the pandemic
  - Find out why people have been contacting the customer services centres during the pandemic
  - Gather feedback on how peoples' behaviour (in respect of the council's customer services centres) has changed as a result of the lockdown
  - Measure the degree of support or otherwise for the proposal(s)
  - Understand and be aware of the impact taking this decision may have on different communities

## Timescales

6. Preparatory work was undertaken during the first two weeks of July 2020. The consultation was open for two weeks - from 20 July to 3 August 2020.

## Methodology

7. Respondents were able to participate in the consultation in various ways. These included:
  - a. Completion of an on-line survey. Respondents were directed to a dedicated page on SKDC's website which contained additional context, along with a link to each of the surveys – thereby enabling respondents to complete both should they wish to. The weblink was included in the press release, via email from the customer service section and on social media channels.
  - b. Completion by phone. Should respondents be unable to take part on- line, customer service staff were available to complete the survey on the customer's behalf.
8. Opportunities to participate in the consultation were promoted across various media. These included:
  - An article published on the Stamford Mercury's website on 20 July 2020.<sup>1</sup>
  - The council's social media channels. Articles promoting the opportunity to participate were posted on 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 –Market Deeping and Stamford

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<sup>1</sup> Article outlining the proposal on Stamford Mercury's website on 20 July 2020.

<https://www.stamfordmercury.co.uk/news/consultation-relaunched-on-plans-to-close-council-offices-in-stamford-and-market-deeping-9116850/>

- Direct contact. Just under 40 individuals (who had taken part in the first consultation and had supplied their contact details) were contacted and asked for their views on the proposals. Key stakeholders were also contacted directly.
- Individuals contacting the Council's customer service section during the consultation period were asked if they would like to participate. A link to the survey was provided.

## Detail

9. 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.
10. The survey was structured around the main premise of the consultation -to inform the decision which will be taken by Cabinet on 8 September in respect of customer service provision in Market Deeping. It included:
  - 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

To understand if responses were being received from those who had contacted the council during the pandemic respondents were asked to state

- If they have contacted the council since lockdown was implemented
- How they contacted the council- by telephone, via email etc
- Why they contacted us
- If their method of contact had changed as a result of the lockdown

They were also asked to supply some demographic information, including gender, age and disability.

11. Various actions were undertaken to ensure that the opportunity to participate in the consultation was as widely promoted as possible. These included:
  - a. A dedicated page on the council's website. The survey could be accessed via a user-friendly URL.
  - b. Use of its social media channels – in particular Facebook and Twitter
  - c. Being encouraged to take part if they contacted the customer service section during the consultation period
  - d. An article in the Stamford Mercury
12. The consultation closed on 3 August 2020, after two weeks. 44 responses were received.
13. The initial posting on Facebook on 21 July had a reach of 2,776. 114 individuals clicked on the webpage dedicated to the consultation. The follow up articles - posted on 31 July and 1 August had a reach of 1,974 and 1,173 with 24 and 8 individuals respectively clicking through to the webpage dedicated to the consultation.

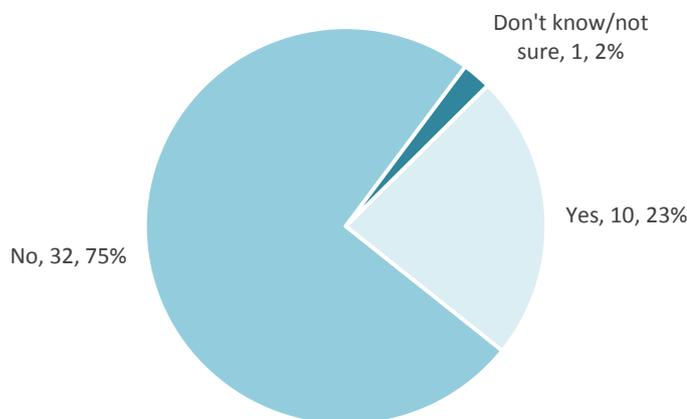
14. The tweet posted on Twitter on 22 July was seen by 650 individuals. The follow-up tweet posted on 31 July had a reach of 604, with one person clicking on the link to the webpage. The final tweet on 1 August had a reach of 694. Two people clicked on the link to the webpage.
15. Just under 40 stakeholders who had taken part in the previous consultation were contacted directly and asked to participate in the consultation.
16. The Head of Customer Experience has also talked to specific key stakeholders. Their anonymised responses are attached.

## The results

### Contacting the Council

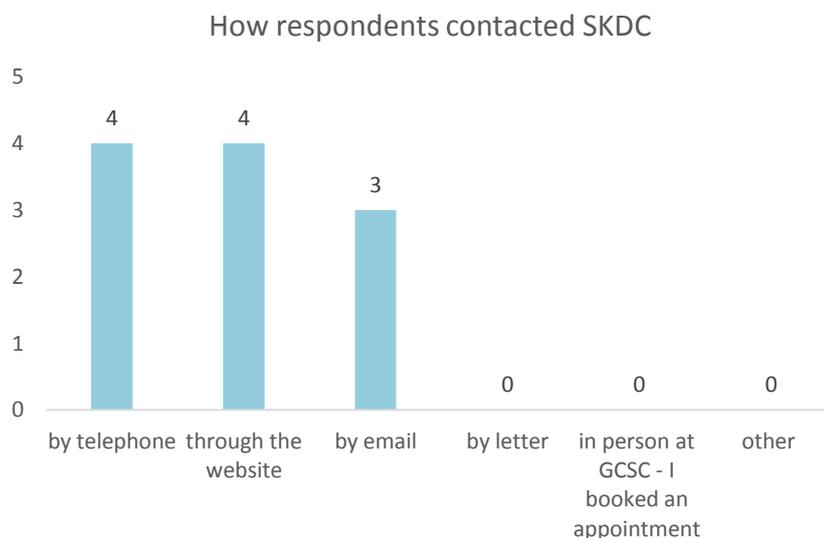
17. Respondents were given details of the proposal and how it would affect the delivery of face to face services in Market Deeping. They were then asked five questions about contacting the Council. The first question asked respondents to state if they had contacted the Council since lockdown began on 23 March. If they hadn't contacted the Council during this time, they were asked to go straight to question 6. Just under a quarter of respondents (23.3%) had contacted the council during this time as illustrated below:

Number of respondents contacting customer services since lockdown began



Just under a quarter of respondents stated that they had contacted the council since lockdown commenced on 23 March. This is worth noting as it means around three quarters of responses are from those who have not contacted the council recently, and as such will be commenting on the proposal with no first-hand experience of the arrangements that have been put in place to accommodate Covid-19. The number of responses received- particularly from those accessing the service in the last four and half months- is low. This is likely to impact on the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn from the data.

18. The second question asked respondents to choose how they had contacted the council in the last four and a half months. The most popular methods of contact were by telephone, through the website, or via email as outlined below:



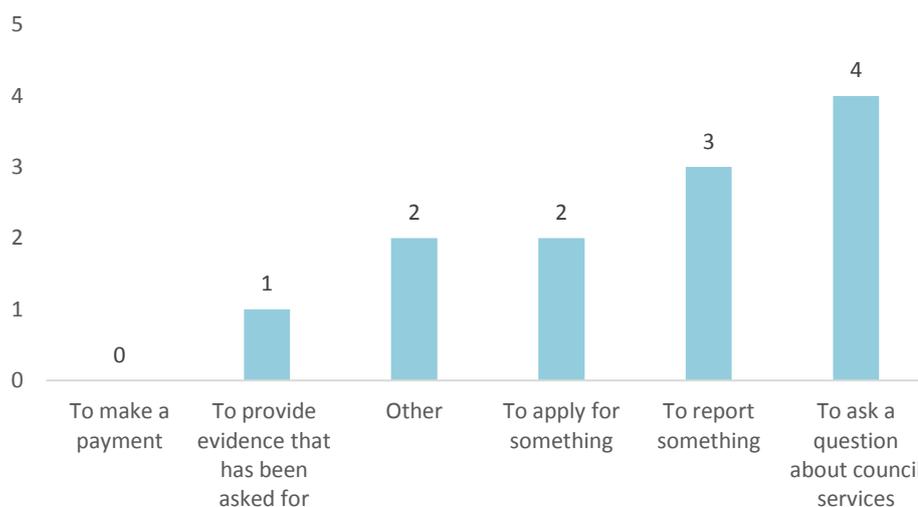
Worth noting is the lack of take-up of emergency appointment slots- these have been available from 6 April and then from the Grantham Customer Service Centre since 29 June but to date, none have been requested.

19. Respondents were then asked if their chosen method of contact had changed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Interestingly, unlike the respondents to the Stamford survey, most have not changed the way they contact the council during the pandemic. Just under three quarters of respondents (72.7%) said that the way in which they had contacted the council hadn't changed as illustrated in the chart below:

	Number	Percentage
Yes, I would normally contact the council in this way	8	72.7%
No, I have changed the way I contact the council because of the pandemic	3	27.3%
Total	11	100%

20. The fourth question on the survey asked respondents to identify why they had contacted the council. Respondents could tick as many options as they liked. As the number of respondents is so low, it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from this data. Their answers are illustrated below:

### Why respondents chose to contact the council



An analysis of those choosing other revealed one was a member of staff and the other wanted to arrange collection of a bulky item.

21. When asked to describe how satisfied they were with the way in which their enquiry had been dealt with, 90% of respondents were satisfied. The remaining 10% were dissatisfied.
22. 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. Four out of ten respondents (40.6%) agreed with this proposal, with the same proportion disagreeing. If these results are compared to those obtained in February, it appears there has been an increase in the proportion of respondents agreeing with the proposal. In February, 15.4% agreed with the proposal. This has increased to over 40% in July. This is illustrated in the table below:

	Number (July 2020)	Number (Feb 2020)	Percentage (July 2020)	Percentage (Feb 2020)
Strongly agree with the proposal	6	11	18.8%	9.4%
Agree with the proposal	7	7	21.8%	6.0%
Neither agree nor disagree with the proposal	6	11	18.8%	9.4%
Disagree with the proposal	6	32	18.8%	27.3%
Strongly disagree with the proposal	7	56	21.8%	47.9%
Total	32	117	100.0%	100.0%

These results are interesting. The proportion of respondents agreeing with the proposal has increased from February to July, which seems to suggest that some might have changed their minds and now feel the proposal is more acceptable. Although it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions as the number of responses collected is low, a shift in what people think does seem to have taken place. This has also been seen in the responses to the Stamford survey, where the number of respondents is higher.

It may be worth looking at these results in more detail - undertaking further analysis to establish if rates of support are higher, lower or no different for those who have used the services available during the pandemic.

23. When asked why they had chosen to answer in this way, around half of the respondents commented. The main themes were:
- a. A preference for face to face contact
  - b. Technological solutions not always suitable
  - c. Limits access for those with no internet
24. 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 detail them. Around 20 respondents commented. The main themes were:
- a. It's easier to talk to someone face to face
  - b. Wanting the service to continue as it is
  - c. Technological solutions don't suit everyone
25. 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 %	Weighting
Male	20.7	48.2	2.3
Female	79.3	51.8	0.7
Total	100.0%	100.0%	

The sample is not representative of the district when considering gender. Males are under-represented, and females are over-represented. Given the size of the sample, this is perhaps not surprising.

#### Age

	Sample %	District %	Weighting
Under 18	-	21.4	
18 to 24	-	6.3	
25 to 34	3.4	10.7	3.1
35 to 44	-	12.0	
45 to 54	13.8	15.8	1.1
55 to 64	20.7	14.4	0.7

65 and over	62.1	19.4	0.3
Total	100.0%	100.0%	

The sample only representative of those aged between 45 to 54. Those aged under 45 are under-represented and those aged 55 or above are over-represented in the sample. Given that the sample size is small, this is perhaps not surprising.

#### Disability

According to national statistics, one in five people (or 21% of the population) state that they have a disability. When asked, 13.8% of the sample stated that they had a disability. This means the

Comparing the demographic characteristics of this sample to those of the wider population revealed that whilst the sample is not representative in terms of gender, age or disability. Those aged under 45 are under-represented in the results and those aged 55 or above are over-represented. Given the size of the sample, this is perhaps not surprising. The lack of representativeness should be kept in mind when considering the results as it is likely to have an impact on the distribution of responses, particularly in respect of how individuals might want to be able to access customer services in Market Deeping.

not quite representative in terms of disability.

### Other comments

26. Respondents were then asked if they had any questions or if they would like to comment on anything included in the survey. Only two respondents commented. Both were a plea to keep the office open
  - a. Please keep the small office in Market Deeping Community office open. For the elderly like myself it is so useful.
  - b. Whilst I am able to use technology, there are many residents who can't. That is why we need a local presence - someone to talk to face-to-face. Someone to help guide customers through using technology.
27. Some feedback has also been received independently to the survey. This has been anonymised and attached at appendix six.
28. 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 possible.

### Conclusion

29. The purpose of this consultation was to inform the decision that will be taken about this issue by SKDC's cabinet on 8 September 2020. Responses, whilst not representative in terms of gender, age

or disability, have been received from a variety of stakeholders across various channels. The Council has had some good feedback on the impact adopting the proposal will have on certain sections of the local population (particularly those who do not have access to the internet) or who may be vulnerable because of age and/or disability.

It is important to note that although there has been an increase in the proportion of respondents in support of the changes, they are still not, on the whole, in favour of the proposal that has been suggested.

The number of responses received - particularly from those who have used the services since lockdown began on 23 March – is low. Whilst the responses received help to give a flavour of what local people think to the proposal, the small number of responses makes it difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions. It also means that the distribution of responses is likely to have been affected – which should be taken into account when considering the results.

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