



# CONSULTATION ON CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE - STAMFORD

Feb 2020

## ABSTRACT

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

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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 Stamford.

## Proposal

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

To close the customer service centre (currently located at 1 Maiden Lane, Stamford) and replace this with:

- A self-service kiosk which will take payments. This will be installed in Stamford Arts Centre (located at 27 St Mary's Street, Stamford), close to the direct dial phone
- Installation of a direct dial phone in Stamford Arts 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
- PC's with access to the internet. These will be available for use in Stamford Library (located at 30 High Street, Stamford). This 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 Stamford 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 Stamford
  - To inform the decision that will be taken by the council in respect of the provision of customer services in Stamford going forward

It will also enable SKDC:

- To establish how often the area office in Stamford 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 online 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)
  - Completion of a printed copy - available at the area office and arts centre in Stamford and at the drop-in session held on Stamford Market on 14 February. 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 January<sup>1</sup> together with a follow up article on-line promoting the drop-in session
  - 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
  - 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 and at the arts centre
  - 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 those 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 Stamford the consultation officer was asked to design a survey which would gather feedback from residents and other stakeholders.
9. The survey<sup>2</sup> was structured around the main premise of the consultation which was to inform the decision which will be taken by Cabinet on 17 March. It included:

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<sup>1</sup> Article outlining the proposal in the Stamford Mercury on 24 January 2020 on page 3.

- Details on the council’s proposal to change the way face to face services are delivered in Stamford
- 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 Stamford 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 Stamford
- 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 they were visiting the area office or arts centre in Stamford
- An article in the Stamford Mercury
- Contacting individuals (including members of staff) and organisations known to have links with the facility directly
- A drop- in session held on Stamford Market on 14 February from 8.30 till 1.30pm

11. The consultation closed on 20 Feb 2020, after four weeks. 392 responses were received. Over half of these (221 or 56.4%) were received via the weblink with the remainder (171 or 43.6%) 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 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 directly<sup>3</sup> 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 4.1 to the main Cabinet report.

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<sup>2</sup> Copy of survey attached at appendix two to the main Cabinet report

<sup>3</sup> List of stakeholders contacted directly attached at appendix five to the main Cabinet report

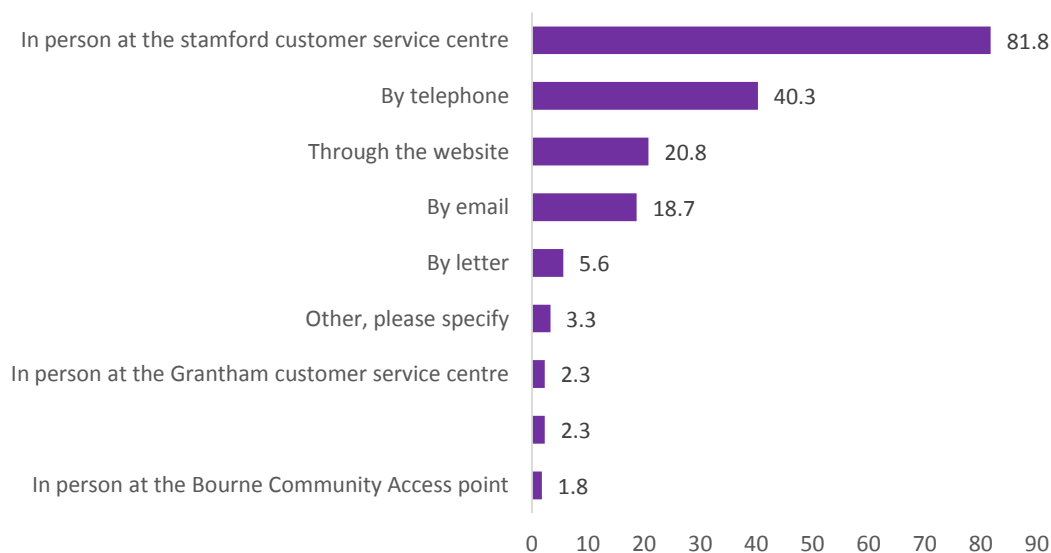
- 15. Over 40 individuals were spoken to face-to-face at the drop-in session held on Stamford Market at 14 February.
- 16. The Head of Customer Experience was contacted by several other individuals. Their anonymised responses are attached at Appendix 4.1 to the main Cabinet report.
- 17. Responses were 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 4.1 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 Stamford. 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 Stamford 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 the majority of respondents have stated that they generally tend to contact the council in person at the Stamford 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 Stamford Customer Service Centre. The top three reasons for visiting the Stamford Customer Service Centre were to ask a question about council services, to apply for something or to report something, as outlined below:

Number of respondents choosing each option

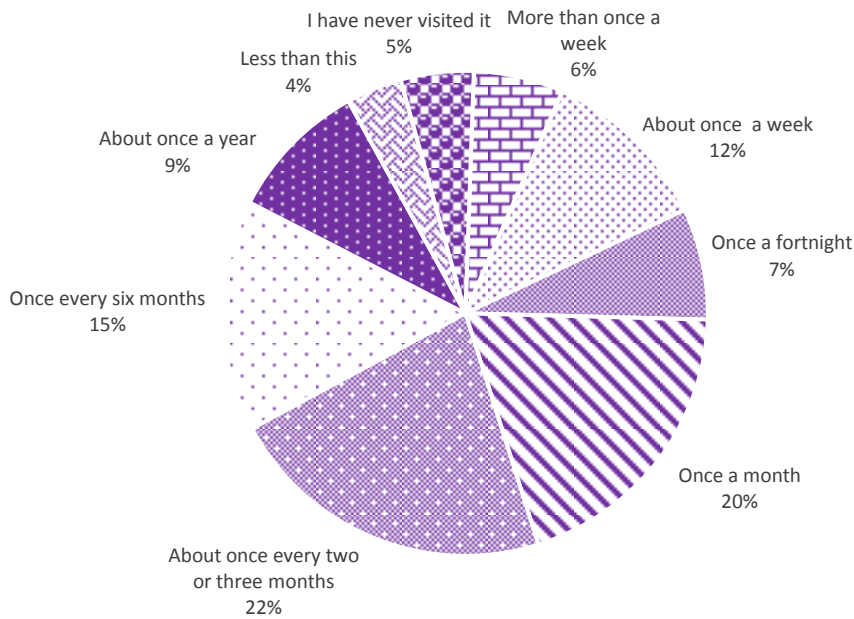


2 This is interesting as there are some similarities to the data that is collected by the customer service centre on the types of transactions that are undertaken at the Stamford Office. Monthly transactional data from this source reveals that 20% of enquiries relate to taxi licences and parking permits/visitor vouchers etc with just over a third (36%) relating to payments.

However, there are also differences. Visiting the office to provide evidence and asking a question about council services are more popular choices for sample respondents when compared against the monthly transactional data that is collected and as such may require further consideration.

ents were then asked how often they visited the customer service centre in Stamford. 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. Less than half of the respondents (44.5%) said that they visited the office once a month or more, with 22% stating that they visited once every two or three months. Around a third of respondents (32.7%) stated that they visited the facility once every six months or less than this. This is illustrated in pie chart format overleaf:

## Percentage of respondents choosing each option



22. The fourth question on the survey asked respondents to state what they thought of the current facility. Around 70% of respondents commented with many using the opportunity to say that they didn't want the office to close. The other themes present in their statements were:

- The staff who work there are knowledgeable, helpful and friendly
- The office is easily accessible and is in a good central location
- The facility is vital and an integral part of the local community
- The services provided are useful - particularly for older people who may not be familiar with or have access to the internet
- The facility is a little dated and could do with updating

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 Stamford. The majority of respondents (85%) disagreed with this proposal, with just under three quarters (73.5%) d

Given that the majority of respondents have stated that they generally tend to contact the council in person at the Stamford 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 below.

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ing strongly.

24. When asked why they had chosen to answer in this way, around three quarters of respondents commented. The main themes were:

- The proposal relies on people being computer literate. This may not be good for the elderly or those who prefer face-to-face contact for other reasons
- The current location is easy and convenient
- A few respondents stated that they would have difficulties if the proposal is approved because of their disability

25. To ensure that the council is aware of any impacts that closing the customer service centre in Stamford may have on individuals, respondents were then asked to detail them. Around two thirds of respondents commented. The main themes were:

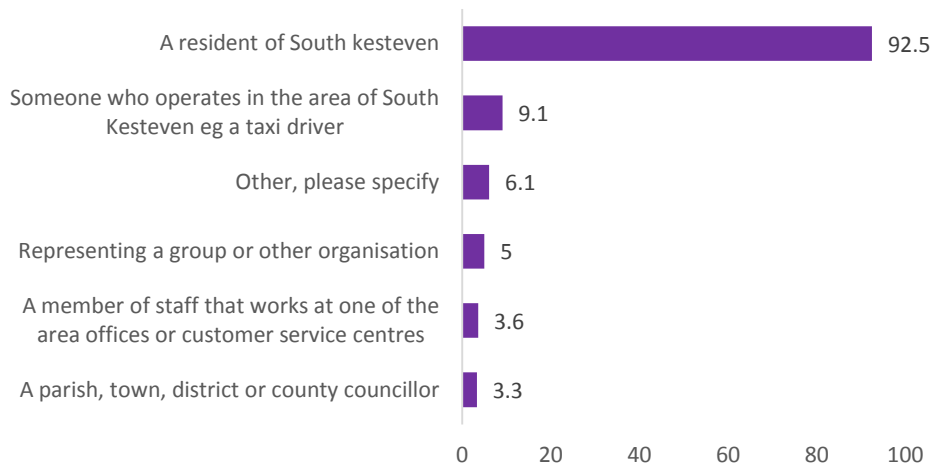
- Processes and procedures – what will be in place to enable respondents to show evidence in relation to taxi licences, car parking permits /visitor passes
- Renewing or arranging services if they don't have internet access. For example- being able to renew green bins or arrange bulky collections
- No access to transport - having to travel to either Bourne or Grantham on the bus
- Inconvenience -including tenants when terminating a council tenancy for example
- Vulnerable customers – including those with visual impairments who won't be able to use the pcs provided without specialist software

26. Respondents were then asked if they thought there were any other options the council could consider. Around two thirds of respondents (65.4%) made suggestions. They ranged from keeping the office where it is, to providing services on a part time basis, to providing services from somewhere else in Stamford. Suggested locations included the Town Hall, council owned premises on the Bus Station, Stamford Library or Stamford Arts Centre.

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. The majority of respondents were residents as shown in the graph below:



### Percentage of respondents choosing each option



The responses to this question illustrate 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 %	
<b>Male</b>	44.0	48.2	1.1
<b>Female</b>	56.0	51.8	0.9

The sample is representative in terms of gender.

Age

	Sample %	District %	
<b>Under 18</b>	0.0	21.4	
<b>18 to 24</b>	2.4	6.3	2.6
<b>25 to 34</b>	5.7	10.7	1.9
<b>35 to 44</b>	9.6	12.0	1.2
<b>45 to 54</b>	17.6	15.8	0.9
<b>55 to 64</b>	23.2	14.4	0.6
<b>65 +</b>	41.5	19.4	0.5
	100.0	100.0	

The sample is not representative in terms of age. Those aged under 35 are under-represented and those aged 55 or over are over-represented in the sample.

Disability

According to national statistics, one in five people (or 21% of the population) state that they have a disability. When asked, 21.5% 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 the sample is representative in terms of gender and disability. It is not however representative in terms of age, with those aged under 35 being under-represented and those over 55 over-represented. The results should be viewed with this in mind.

sample is representative in terms of disability.

## 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. One in four respondents wanted to know more or to make their views known. Their comments included:

- Statements about why Stamford had been earmarked for closure rather than one of the other facilities across the district. Why Stamford was a frequent question.
- Statements about how adopting the proposal will have a direct impact on them. They are unable to use the internet and cannot travel to other locations

30. Some feedback has also been received independently to the survey. This has been anonymised and attached at Appendix 4.1 to the main Cabinet report.

31. 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

32. 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 Stamford 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, 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 want to, or do not have access to, the internet.)

Respondents are not in favour of the proposal that has been suggested as part of the consultation. There have however been some constructive suggestions in respect of alternative options which can now be used to inform other solutions which may be more acceptable to stakeholders.

It is also important to acknowledge that whilst this report focuses on the responses that have been received in survey format, due consideration should also be given to the responses received independently to the survey. These are attached at Appendix 4.1 to the main Cabinet report.

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27 February 2020