



CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE CONSULTATION - STAMFORD

August 2020

ABSTRACT

to establish the degree of support for changing the way customer services are provided in Stamford and

AUTHOR

Deborah Wyles – Consultation Officer

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 Stamford.
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 Stamford
 - 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 Stamford

Proposal

4. The proposal outlined as part of the second 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- installed in Stamford Arts Centre.
 - A PC with access to the internet and web-based services – based at either Stamford Arts Centre or Stamford Library. This would enable customers to contact the council via our website and/or attend appointments remotely
 - A direct phone line in Stamford Arts Centre. 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.
 - A click and collect service (for taxi licence plates etc) based at Stamford Arts Centre
 - Virtual face- to -face appointments to be available via Skype or Microsoft Teams
 - Limited access to an adviser for face- to- face appointments (part time and on a seasonal basis)

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 Stamford 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. ¹
 - 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

¹ 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/>

to a dedicated page on the council's website. This contained links to both surveys – Stamford and Market Deeping

- 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 proposal
- 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 Stamford 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 Stamford. It included:
 - 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

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. 115 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.

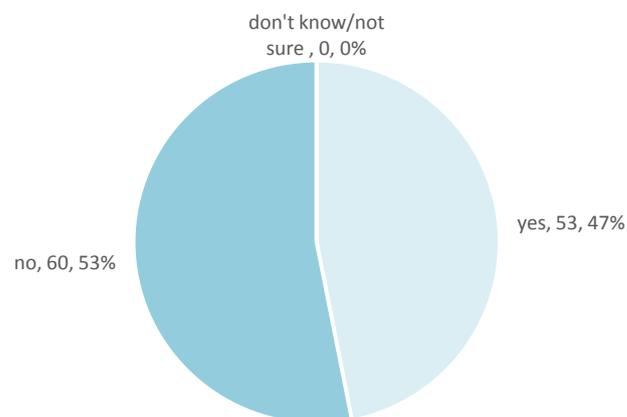
The results

Contacting the Council

17. Respondents were given details of the proposal and how it would affect the delivery of face to face services in Stamford. 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 half of respondents had contacted the council during this time as illustrated below:

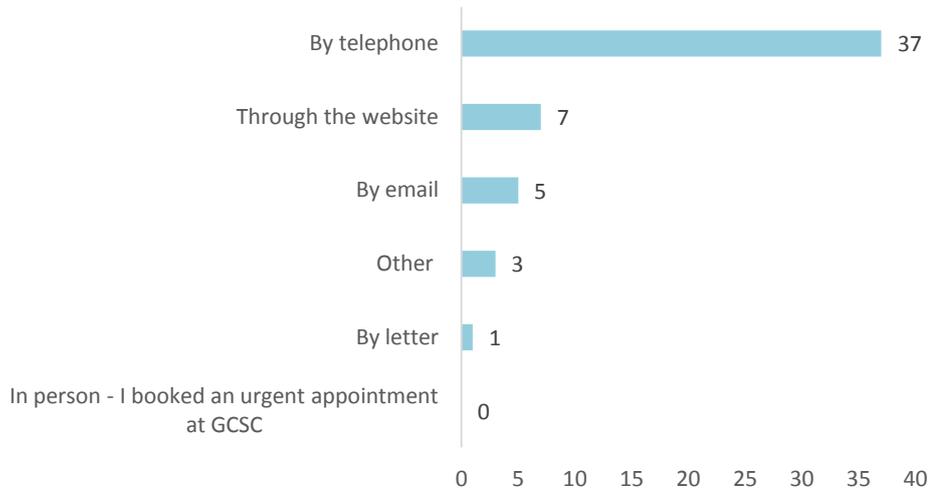
Just under half of respondents stated that they had contacted the council since lockdown commenced on 23 March. This is worth noting as it means over half of responses are from those who have not contacted the council recently, and as such will be commenting on the proposal with no first-hand experience of the arrangements that have been put in place to accommodate Covid-19.

Respondents who have contacted the Council since lockdown began



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 method of contact was by telephone, as outlined below:

How respondents contacted SKDC



Of the three people who specified other, one contacted the council using a combination of methods, and two said that they had visited (or tried to visit) the office in Stamford.

This is interesting as there are similarities to the data that is collected by the customer service centre on the number of calls being made to them, and the number of emails they have received. Analysis of this data revealed Customer Services experienced an increase of 10.8% in the number of calls being made this year when compared to the same time period in 2019, and an increase of 144.5% in the number of emails being received. Also worth noting is the lack of take-up of emergency appointment slots- these have been available since 6 April and from at the Grantham Customer Service Centre from 29 June but as yet, none have been requested.

n

respondents were then asked if their chosen method of contact had changed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Over two thirds of respondents said that the way in which they had contacted the council had changed as illustrated in the chart below:

	Number	Percentage
Yes, I would normally contact the council in this way	18	32.7%
No, I have changed the way I contact the council because of the Covid-19 pandemic	37	67.3%
Total	55	100%

Two thirds of the respondents who answered this question stated that they had changed the way they contact the council because of the pandemic. Comparing these responses to the degree of support (or not) for the proposal will enable us to understand whether this is through choice or necessity.

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. The three most popular options were to ask a question about council services, to report something or to make a payment as shown below:



An analysis of those choosing other revealed two wished to arrange a collection of bulky waste, one wished to complain about the Highways section (a Lincolnshire County Council function) and one was a member of staff.

21. When asked to describe how satisfied they were with the way in which their enquiry had been dealt with, just under three fifths of respondents (59.3%) were satisfied. Just over a quarter (27.8%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, with the remainder stating that they 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 Stamford. Nearly three quarters of respondents (72%) disagreed with this proposal, with just over half (55%) disagreeing strongly. However, if these results are compared to those obtained in February, it appears there has been a decrease in the proportion of respondents disagreeing with the proposal. This is illustrated in the table overleaf:

	Number (July 2020)	Number (Feb 2020)	Percentage (July 2020)	Percentage (Feb 2020)
Strongly agree with the proposal	9	15	9.0%	4.0%
Agree with the proposal	9	17	9.0%	4.6%
Neither agree nor disagree with the proposal	10	23	10.0%	6.2%
Disagree with the proposal	17	44	17.0%	11.8%
Strongly disagree with the proposal	55	274	55.0%	73.4%
Total	100	373	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, there does appear to be a shift in what people are thinking about the proposal. 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 80 respondents commented. The main themes were:
- a. People prefer to talk to someone face to face
 - b. Vulnerable people need direct access to services
 - c. No access to the internet
 - d. The suitability of Stamford Arts Centre as the location for provision
24. 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 60 respondents commented. The main themes were:
- a. Access to transport
 - b. The phone system
 - c. Preferring to talk to someone directly
 - d. Collection of parking permits, vouchers
 - e. Being able to pay bills
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	35.6	48.2	1.35
Female	64.4	51.8	0.80
Total	100.0%	100.0%	

The sample is representative in terms of females, but males are slightly under-represented.

Age

	Sample %	District %	Weighting
Under 18	0.0	21.4	-
18 to 24	0.0	6.3	-

25 to 34	4.6	10.7	2.3
35 to 44	5.7	12.0	2.1
45 to 54	26.4	15.8	0.6
55 to 64	25.4	14.4	0.6
65 and over	37.9	19.4	0.5
Total	100.0%	100.0%	

The sample is not representative in terms of age. Those aged under 45 are under-represented and those aged 45 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, 10.1% 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 representative in terms of female respondents, it is not representative of males, age or disability. Those aged under 45 are under-represented in the results and those aged 45 or above are over-represented. This should be kept in mind when considering the results as it is likely to have an impact on the responses given, particularly in respect of how individuals might want to be able to access customer services in Stamford.

sample is not 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. One in five respondents wanted to know more or to make their views known. Their comments included:
 - a. Suggestions for alternative locations alongside partner providers. These included Stamford Library and the Citizens Advice Bureau.
 - b. The quality of the current phone service
 - c. The Saturday morning refuse collection of waste from the Cattle Market Car Park which has not yet been re-instated
27. Some feedback has also been received independently to the survey. This has been anonymised and attached at appendix twelve.
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 establish the degree of support for changing the way customer services are provided in Stamford and 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.

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 as part of the consultation.

Prepared by Deb Wyles
Communication and consultation
5 August 2020