



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 16 October 2024

Report of Councillor Rhea Rayside
Cabinet Member for People and
Communities

Customer Service update

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update regarding customer interactions within the Customer Service team and high contact service areas for Q1 2024/25 and call handling up to 31 August 2024.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

1. Review and provide feedback on the information contained in the report.

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Effective council
Which wards are impacted?	All wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

1.1 There are currently no financial or procurement implications to this report.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and s151 Officer

Legal and Governance

1.2 There are currently no legal or governance implications to this report.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Monitoring Officer

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1. The Council has a clear commitment in its Corporate Plan 2024-2027 to being an Effective council. This report, and the service provided through the Council's Customer Service Team and high contact service areas strives to deliver this priority.
- 2.2. A telephony and call handling report was presented to Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 December 2023. The report focussed on the position regarding call handling.
- 2.3. The Customer Service Team handle customer interactions in various ways for 17 high contact service areas, as well as general public enquiries. This report will provide an update regarding customer interactions for these service areas for Quarter 1.

Customer Interaction type

- 2.4. Tables 1 and 2 show the different methods and number of customer interactions received into the Customer Service Team during 2022/23, 2023/24 and Quarter 1 2024.

Table 1 – Telephone calls and face to face contact:

	Q1 (2024)	2023/24	2022/23
Customer Service calls	25,158	129,415	108,201
Switchboard calls	3,158	30,394	42,039
Other service calls	13,925	44,345	53,622
Total Calls	42,241	204,154	203,862
Grantham walk-in	1,238	4,540	3,959
Bourne walk-in	163	601	1,021
Bourne Library	7,712	26,528	22,694
Total Walk-in	9,137	31,669	27,674
Grantham appt	82	384	464
Bourne appt	46	203	233
Total Appointments	128	587	697
Total Interactions	50,752	236,410	232,233

- 2.5. Officers are currently undertaking work to be able to report on the number of online forms completed, which are issued to the relevant service area for response. Once available, this will be included in table 2 below. For clarification, website information is not available for 2022/23 as the old website was not capable of producing the required analytics.

Table 2 – Digital Channels – Emails and Website:

	Q1 (2024)	2023/24	2022/23
Emails	5,513	25,302	27,004
Website	382,833	872,256	Not available
Total	388,346	897,558	27,004

- 2.6. Table 3 shows the comparison of the different interaction types as 30 June 2024.
- 2.7. It is important for the Council to provide a variety of methods of contact for our customers. It is appreciated one contact method may not be suitable for all. Therefore, the method for customer contact provided by South Kesteven will continue to include all methods as shown in Table 3.
- 2.8. It is anticipated the relocation of the Customer Service Centre to The Picture House will improve the customer service experience. The Centre will have a dedicated self-serve area and increased presence of officers from high contact service areas.

Table 3 – Interaction comparisons

	Q1 (2024)	% of all interactions
Telephone Calls	55,729	12.31%
Walk in	8,386	1.85%
Appointments	127	0.03%
Emails	5,513	1.22%
Website	382,833	84.59%
Total	452,588	100%

Call Handling – April 2024 to August 2024

- 2.9. Currently, 82% of calls are handled (answered), with 18% of calls being 'abandoned'. This is a slight reduction from August 2023 of 85% handled and 15% abandoned. An abandoned call is where the call is received and is not connected to the Customer Service Team or Service Area. Call abandonment is monitored from 16 seconds into the call being connected to the Councils call queue.
- 2.10. There are numerous information messages for the customer whilst they are in the call queue, advising of other contact methods such as online, and the option to request a call back. Therefore, some assumptions do have to be made as to why customers abandon their calls – as the reason simply is not known. Analysis of abandonment rates continues to be undertaken by the Customer Service Management Team, with actions being considered where improvements can be made or channel shift can be considered.
- 2.11. Call handling statistics are produced and issued by the Performance and Change Improvement Lead on a monthly basis to the Councils Corporate Management Team and service areas. The information includes number of calls offered, handled, abandoned and average speed of answer.
- 2.12. Performance clinics with service are continuing on a monthly basis which enable both the Customer Service Team and service area to have a platform to be able to advise of pressure points and upcoming changes which may impact customer interactions.
- 2.13. The Customer Service Management Team is reactive to call queues. Where there is a high volume of calls for a particular queue, Customer Service Advisors will be moved to cover that queue. Currently, this is challenging as we have seven new staff who are learning the 17 service areas – this is detailed further in paragraph 2.17 to 2.23.

2.14. The graphs shown at **Appendix 1** show:

- Calls offered, handled, and abandoned (volume)
- Calls handled and abandoned (%)
- Calls handled – comparison between 2023/24 to 2024/25
- Calls abandoned – comparison between 2023/24 to 2024/25

Customer Experience Strategy

2.15. The Customer Service Management team is continuing to undertake a review of the existing Customer Experience Strategy. Meetings have taken place with the internal officers working group, which have been productive and resulted in positive engagement for all attendees. The feedback from the working group will be used to form the draft strategy.

2.16. It is important for all service areas to be included in this piece of work as recognition is needed that we need to adapt to how we deliver our services, particular when we move into the new Customer Service Centre. The aim will be to develop and embed a corporate customer service ethos that will positively transform how the council offers residents and customers excellent service.

2.17. The timeline for the production and approval of the strategy is as follows:

- August to October 2024: Draft strategy to be developed;
- 20 November 2024: Draft strategy to be presented to the Councils Corporate Management Team;
- 13 February 2025: Draft strategy to be presented to Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- March 2025: public consultation
- 20 March 2025: Presentation of strategy to Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- 6 May 2025: Presentation of strategy to Cabinet

Relocation of the Customer Service Centre

2.18 The relocation of the Customer Service Centre to The Picture House, St Catherines Road is progressing.

2.19 A verbal update will be provided by the Head of Service at the committee meeting.

3. Key Considerations

3.1. These are included throughout the report and members of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the report and are invited to ask questions regarding its content.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1 The report is for information only.

5. Appendices

5.1. Appendix One – Call Handling