



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 12 March 2025

Report of Councillor Philip Knowles
Cabinet Member for Corporate
Governance and Licensing

Customer Service Update Q3 2024/25

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 Q3 2024/25 and call handling up to 31 December 2024.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended 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Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?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? **Connecting communities
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 no specific financial comments arising from this report.

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

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 There are no significant legal or governance implication arising from 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 Connecting Communities and 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 these priorities.
- 2.2 A telephony and call handling report was presented to the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 October 2024. The report focused 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 provides an update regarding customer interactions for these service areas for Quarter 3 2024/25.

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 2023/24 and each quarter during 2024/25.

Table 1 – Telephone calls and face to face contact:

	2023/24	Q1 (2024)	Q2 (2024)	Q3 (2024)
Customer Service calls	129,415	35,515	31,892	27,342
Switchboard calls	30,394	4,040	4,129	3,011
Other service calls	44,345	16,174	14,037	13,130
Total Calls	204,154	55,729	50,058	43,483
Grantham walk-in	4,540	1,242	834	790
Bourne walk-in	601	138	106	59
Bourne Library	26,528	6,982	7,608	6,577
Total Walk-in	31,669	8,362	8,548	7,426
Grantham appt	384	79	142	176
Bourne appt	203	48	62	48
Total Appointments	587	127	204	81
Total Interactions	236,410	64,218	58,810	51,133

- 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.

Table 2 – Digital Channels – Emails and Website:

	2023/24	Q1 (2024)	Q2 (2024)	Q3 (2024)
Emails	25,302	5,513	4,901	3,474
Website (unique browser)	975,997	382,833	363,091	541,739
Total	1,001,299	388,346	367,922	545,213

- 2.6. Table 3 shows the comparison of the different interaction types as 31 December 2024.
- 2.7. It is important for the Council to provide a variety of methods of contact for its 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.

Table 3 – Interaction comparisons

	Q1 to Q3 (2024)	% of all interactions
Telephone Calls	149,270	10.12%

Walk in	24,336	1.65%
Appointments	412	0.03%
Emails	13,888	0.94%
Website	1,287,663	87.26%
Total	1,475,569	100%

Call handling – April 2024 to December 2024

- 2.8. Currently, 83% of calls are handled (answered), with 17% of calls being 'abandoned'. This is a slight reduction from December 2023 of 84% handled and 16% abandoned.
- 2.9. 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 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.
- 2.11. Call handling statistics are produced and issued by the Performance and Change Improvement Lead on a monthly basis to the Council's 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 areas 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. Customer feedback via the Council's corporate feedback process is monitored, specifically where the customer has indicated an issue regarding the "ability to contact the council". Between July 2024 and December 2024, 19 feedback requests were received, of this 11 were comments, and the remaining were service request. None were reported as a complaint.
- 2.14. 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.
- 2.15. Some assumptions do have to be made as to why customers abandon their calls – as the reason simply is not known. However, it is anticipated the Customer

Experience Strategy consultation may provide insight regarding this. This will launch in early March and is detailed in a separate report to this Committee.

Website – feedback and improvements

- 2.16. Each page on the Council's website has a "was this page useful" function. A customer can choose 'yes' or 'no' by clicking on the relevant 'happy or sad face' icon at the bottom of the page. In doing this, the customer is then given the option to provide and submit their comments, along with their name and email address.
- 2.17. A report has been produced each month by the Performance and Customer Improvement Lead, for the period from the new website Go Live (October 2023) to 31 December 2024.
- 2.18. During this period, there have been a total of 1,076 individual feedback received. Officers meet regularly to review the feedback and agree actions to be taken; amendments to the website, liaison with service areas and feedback to the customer (where contact details have been provided).

Relocation of the Grantham Customer Service Centre (CSC)

- 2.19. The relocation of the Grantham CSC has been a positive experience for both customers and staff.
- 2.20. The CSC is a multi-functional space, supporting residents and tenants with face-to-face, telephone and online services. Customers are able to book an appointment, between 9am and 1pm to see a specific service area, or they can see a member of the Customer Service team anytime between 9am and 3pm. In addition, customers are able to use the self-serve computers, of which there are four. Customer Service staff are on hand to support the customer and help them as needed.
- 2.21. The CSC also provides a welcoming corporate waiting area and meeting room which can be used by all staff. The use of the meeting room has been positive and provides a functional space for internal and external meetings.
- 2.22. There is a meeting room which is available for all staff and customer appointments. This is a secure room which enables private and confidential discussions to take place.
- 2.23. During the first month of opening, staff who use the CSC were asked to provide feedback. The responses were positive and reflected the experience they had over

the first month with 72% of stating the comfort and functionality of the centre for customers and staff was excellent, with the remaining 28% stating it was good. In addition, 97% of staff agreed that the new centre achieves the Council's goal that every customer will be valued, listened to and supported.

- 2.24. General feedback from customers has also been positive, however, to fully understand their experience, exit polls will be undertaken with customers during the period the Customer Experience Strategy Consultation takes place (March 2025). The feedback will focus on asking customers about access, the environment, the service they received and improvements which they feel should be considered. The responses will be included as part of the consultation feedback.
- 2.25. Officers continue to review the use of the CSC, and this will develop further, aligning to the development and introduction of the Customer Experience Strategy later this year.

Benchmarking performance

- 2.26. Benchmarking data is currently being gathered, with the Council issuing a Freedom Of Information (FOI) to forty Councils to inquire about Customer Service performance. Three comparator groups were identified and contacted:
 - Geographic neighbours
 - CIPFA Peers
 - Authorities with a similar population size (assessed as within 5% boundaries of the total households (62,850) in South Kesteven.)
- 2.27. As of 31 January 2025, responses were received from twenty seven authorities. These included all SKDC's Lincolnshire neighbours, eight of SKDC's CIPFA Peers (total thirteen), and twelve responses from authorities with a similar sized population.
- 2.28. Follow-up questions were issued by SKDC to the councils requesting clarification regarding some responses and FTE information relating to specific questions.
- 2.29. Analysis of the FOI will be undertaken and linked to the development of the Customer Service Standards as part of the Experience

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.