

# Customer Experience Strategy

## 2020-2024



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# A bit of background info

The political vision for SKDC is ambitious, modern, and progressive with a clear number one priority to grow the local economy and make South Kesteven a better place in which to live, to work and to invest.

The vision is supported by a strategic investment programme across five broad categories: commercial, arts and heritage; leisure and the visitor economy, retail and markets; public realm and living; gateways and transport; and skills.

A vital part of our journey is creating a modernised customer experience offer providing choice and delivering convenience to all customers, businesses and visitors. The service must maximise the use of all channels available to improve our hours of accessibility (24/7) by promoting self-service for all transactions and making it easy to do business with SKDC whilst actively supporting those most vulnerable.

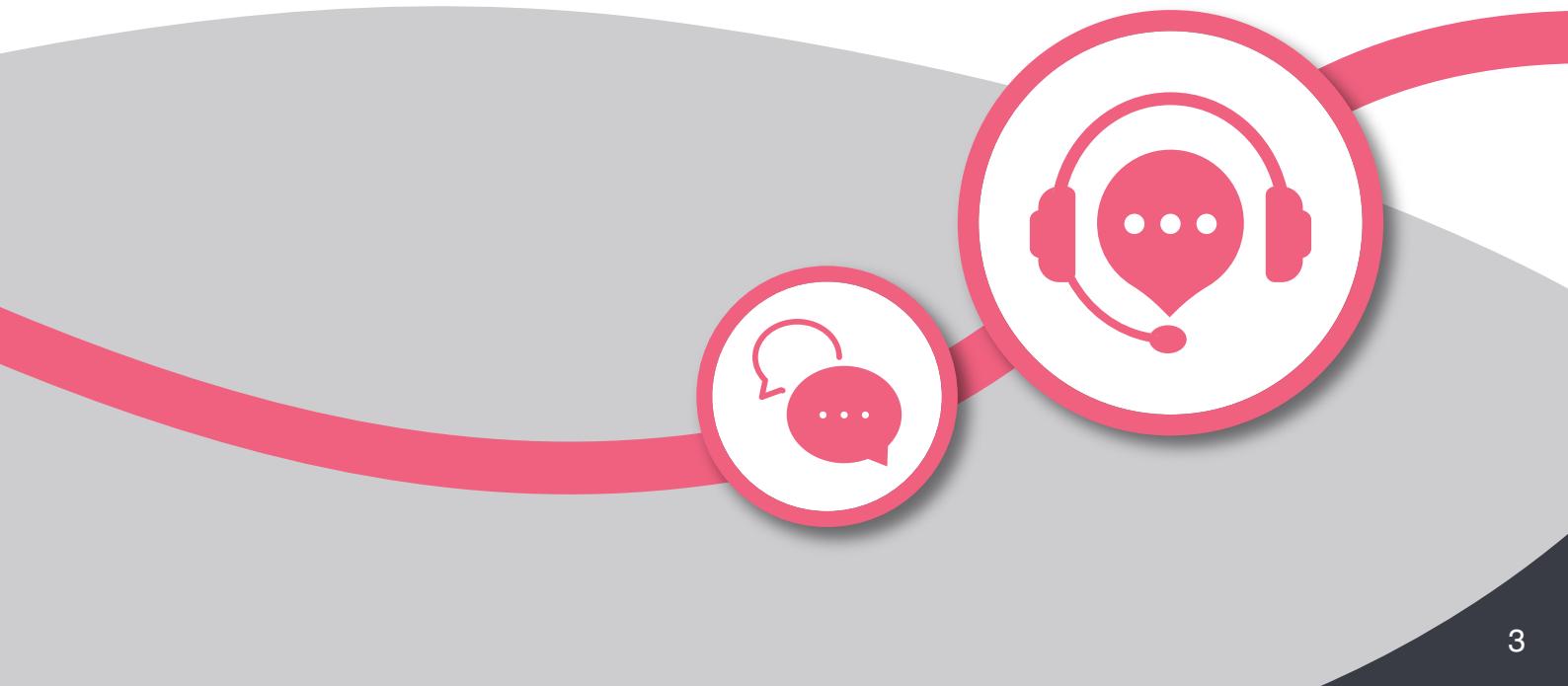
Our customers are traditionally those who have used our services, however, they are also others we have a 'transactional relationship' with. As a commercially-focussed local authority, our customers also include visitors, local, national and international businesses and partner organisations.

Whilst we undoubtedly face an organisational budget challenge, it is vital that we not only deliver 'business as usual' in a more modern environment but we continue to enhance our services in line with the customer expectations, evolving technologies and opportunities to put their needs at the heart of our business.

Customers now expect a modern council, offering a range of access options to quality services. We have seen a huge growth in the speed of the technological change across all access channels. This includes advancements in artificial intelligence, intelligent websites, social media, online accounts, virtual webchat/chatbots and apps.

We provide access to self-service and maintain the option of face to face and telephony services. We also aim to support customers and businesses to self-serve 24/7 through online interactions.

There are a number of contributing factors that dovetail with this strategy (ICT capability, retaining our best staff, our approach to digitisation, a new website and online forms) which must be considered to realise savings and to ensure delivery of a modern, consistent and reliable customer service experience.



# Where we want to get to

The organisation is making a radical transition to develop new technologies to support the way its services will be delivered. Simultaneously, we are in the midst of radical reform nationally in the wake of Universal Credit which has introduced changes to welfare benefits including how they are paid and the move to the customer self-managing their payments and personal finances.

We'll be operating under a new model. We'll move even more of our customer interactions into our centralised customer service team. This will help to ensure consistency of service and also free up time in the back-office to focus on those tasks that often require a different set of skills. We'll do this by effectively blending people and technology together and triaging enquiries to make sure that they are responded to in the most efficient and effective way for both the customer and the council.

Ultimately, the strategy will see an improved service offer to our customers at a lower cost. It is backed by an action plan that will see ongoing investment into customer services to enable us to achieve greater levels of efficiency.

A vital part of the transformation of the council is the creation of a modern, flexible customer experience, offering choice and delivering convenience to all customers, businesses and visitors. To do this, services must maximise the use of all channels available. It is essential that the council improves its hours of accessibility by promoting self-service for all

transactions. This will make it easy to do business with SKDC whilst actively supporting those most vulnerable.

We need to ensure that our services are both affordable and sustainable. It is vital that we not only deliver 'business as usual' in a more modern environment but we continue to enhance our services.

Customers will increasingly expect to access services through a wide range of options. We will consider the appropriate application of modern technologies to support their interactions, whether that be through artificial intelligence, intelligent websites, social media, online accounts, webchat or chatbots and apps.

We will improve performance management across our customer interactions, making sure that we measure the right things and drive the improvements that our customers want to see. This will be supported by a range of new performance tools that will give us more insight into our customer behaviours and experiences than we've ever had before.

Our customers expect to easily access information and our staff need to have the right tools to make service delivery as easy and as seamless as possible. Ideally customers would like a joined-up service offer, with our channels providing consistent responses and connected signposting to partner

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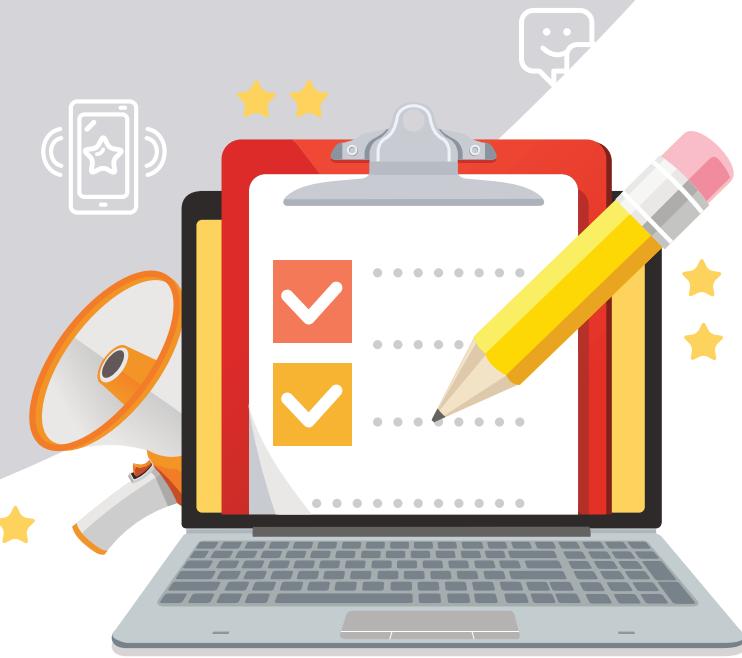
organisations. To achieve this, we need to provide an ever-increasing depth and breadth of service that is efficiently delivered across all channels – modernising our services to be fit for the future, firmly putting the customer first.

It is vital that Customer Services offer access to self-service, first time - every time, and we make this easy and consistently good in delivery. We will also maintain the option of face to face and telephony services for those most vulnerable, as well as supporting customers and businesses to self-serve 24/7, interact online and set up online accounts to meet current and future demand.

By investing in our staff and the tools we use to deliver our services, we will also become more productive. Gaining extra capacity gives us choice. We can improve and become more consistent in our service standards, redirect resources to priority areas, provide ‘back office expertise’ or reduce operating costs, all in a managed way.

The strategy will ensure that we have a sustainable organisation that meets customer expectations. This cannot be achieved by staying as we are.





# How we currently operate

We currently have four customer services centres located across the district. Our staff are multi-skilled, so are able to respond to a range of service requests through any access channel. However, the experience the customer gets will vary depending on the channel chosen.

Only some of the customer service offices have self-service kiosks. Currently, Stamford and Market Deeping do not have a self-serve payment facility. However, in Bourne, customers have been supported to utilise the three kiosks which enable access to a range of services including balances and payments for rent and council tax.

At Stamford all customers liaise with the customer service team directly to complete their enquiries because no other options are available to them. Payments represent 36% of those interactions, all of which could be managed through a kiosk, via the telephone or online.

We use a wide range of IT systems to deliver our services. This means that our staff interpret information in a range of formats and often only get a

partial view of the customers circumstances. This limits the customer's overall experience. Not all of our systems can facilitate the type of interactions that we now see as commonplace, such as sending a text message update to a customer. We often have to join systems together to achieve the outcomes that the customer expects. This can be costly and time consuming.

However, we've got over 100 forms online which help customers to transact with us at any time of day or night. Some of these are joined to automated back-office processes which enable prompt processing of work, or responses to enquiries. Work is already underway to extend this further.

We still have some duplication of work. Whilst we've made some improvements, we often have to rekey information into back office systems, and some frequently accessed services still rely on face to face or telephone conversations to be delivered. Often, customers have to understand how we operate in order to access our services.

# How many interactions do we have?

It's important to appreciate just how many interactions the council deals with each year. During 2018/19 we managed:



As the size of the district grows, demand for our services continues to increase. It is more important than ever that we take every opportunity to streamline our provision and ensure that each transaction is well designed and represents not only a good customer experience, but also value for money.

# What does it cost?

It is recognised that different access channels create different cost pressures on the council. We've had some great success in moving customers to what are typically cheaper, online transactions. For example, over 80% of those accessing the garden waste service now choose to do so electronically, rather than through traditional channels.

**This strategy sees the council continuing this work to not only reduce costs, but to increase choice.**

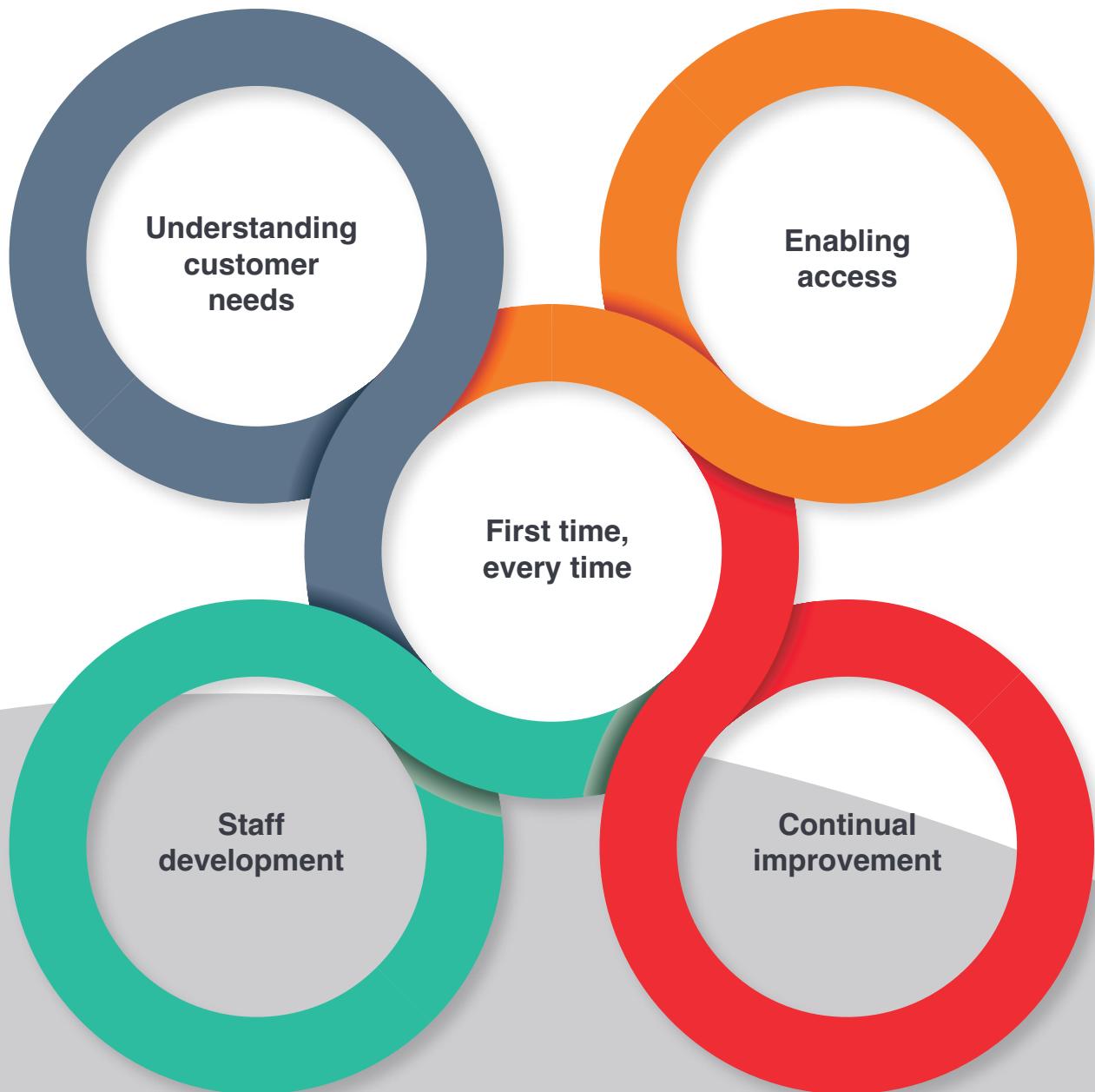
Latest industry benchmarks suggest that the average cost of a customer interaction is:



For South Kesteven District Council, simply switching 15% of our face to face demand to a web-based transaction could save us nearly £50,000 per year.

# Our Customer Experience Vision

Our vision is split into a number of key themes which combined will improve customer experience as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of our services. The themes are based on 5 key principles:



# Theme 1: Operating model

Our target operating model recognises how humans and technology can work seamlessly together and both contribute in different ways. We know that technology is great at delivering high volume, repetitive rule-based tasks, whilst people are better where empathy or subjective judgement is required. We'll reconfigure our offer to effectively triage interactions and ensure that they are handled in the best possible way across all of our contact channels, including virtual assistants, phone, text, social media, mobile apps, online forms, post and email as well as face to face where it's really needed.

Our operating model is based on the principles of digital by design. This is where each of our processes are reviewed in detail, and where necessary, remodelled to support digital interactions in the future. The customer will get an improved outcome and will have greater choice in how to access a service. The council will see lower operating costs through greater levels of automation and a reduction in repeat contacts from customers.

This work will improve the number of ways customers contact us, not just closing channels down. If a customer wants to contact us through a traditional route, they still can. However, the onward journey for their transaction will still be utilising the new improved processes.

We'll involve customers throughout this process to ensure that we are building services that are in tune with the reality of how customers behave and wish to contact SKDC. Our model is based on three tiers of access.

Tiers one and two would typically be managed by our customer service team, with only those falling into tier three being referred to a back-office service. There is a requirement to upskill our staff and improve our knowledge-base as part of this shift.

**Tier 1:** typically managed by virtual workers, and where necessary, supported by multi-skilled officers to resolve the enquiry at the first point of contact. This would typically be interactions that involve sign posting, simple information provision, reporting of

faults or booking a service. It also includes making payments, requesting service provision, or seeking updates on progress.

**Tier 2:** more complicated enquires that require a specialist to respond. This could be where detailed advice is required, or where we need to respond to a complaint or customer feedback.

**Tier 3:** ongoing cases that are being managed by the back-office service. Typically, the most complicated of cases where detailed assessments are required to enable the service to be delivered.

## Key activities include:

- data gathering – through tools like google analytics, contact centre monitoring reports, web analytics, reception demand and print / post volumes etc
- customer engagement and consultation to better understand current and future requirements and how proposed changes will affect them
- deployment of kiosk solutions for each of our market towns
- reviewing approach: identifying how successful our activities are at driving interactions or behaviours and seeking opportunities to do things differently in the future
- testing and launching new solutions: we will incrementally develop new solutions, utilising the latest agile development techniques. This will ensure that the customer receives regular improvements in service provision that is focussed on the things that matter the most to them

# Theme 2: Technology

The implementation of the model will see new technologies introduced to help ensure that we make the best use of our resources – allocating the people with the right skills to the right tasks at the right time in the right place.

The Customer Experience Strategy dovetails with our emerging ICT strategy. We'll be focussing on utilising best in class technologies to better support our customers and simplifying the way that we go about doing business. We'll better leverage relationships with suppliers to implement solutions that improve our customers lives and remove many of the barriers and blockages that currently exist within our processes.

Technological advancements are moving faster than ever and have a significant impact on customer expectations. There is no such thing as standing still. If we don't invest then in reality our services will be going backwards and won't be moving at the pace our customers expect. We need to fundamentally review the type and configuration of technologies used to deliver services across each channel.

## Key activities include:

- evaluate, procure and implement a new digital engagement / CRM platform
- enhance our website 'my account' functionality
- introduce a virtual operator solution
- deploy new booking solutions to provide greater customer choice, independence and automation
- commission a new council website
- develop our knowledge-base for use by customers, staff and virtual assistants
- deploy chat technologies, including chatbots in high volume, repetitive environments



# Theme 3: Embedding a customer first ethos

We will create a network of customer champions, backed by senior management to drive the delivery of this strategy. We will ensure that the customer voice is central to our decision making when we look at how our services are designed in the future. We'll also share learning and best practice across the organisation.

The Customer Services management team will work with service areas on planning customer journey mapping and performance monitoring. They will also be responsible for agreeing and monitoring Customer Experience Business Charter Agreements with service areas to embed the transformed processes, service hand off points, customer feedback and performance.

The team will explain the need for change, and then work with the service teams themselves to agree and collectively own how that happens within the framework of the Customer Experience Strategy and guidelines that leadership and management provide.

We'll utilise our project governance methodologies to implement improvements to our customer service, with our customer champions ensuring that our initiatives are properly communicated both internally and externally to gain buy-in and the maximum positive impact.

Our HR plans place a focus on learning and development, seeking to increase the performance and potential of each of our employees. We will work with our managers to create individual learning plans for each employee, with tailored learning paths to support ongoing personal and professional development. This includes developing core customer service skills, recognising this as a specialism, as well as becoming more outward looking as an organisation and learning from what others are doing.

We'll also be working closely with colleagues in our communications team to make sure that our customers get the right messages, in the right place at the right time. We'll utilise feedback to improve the way we communicate and make better use of existing tools to market new opportunities to our residents, visitors and businesses as well as providing improved service updates that are targeted to individual's needs.

We'll also be looking at ways that we can better market some of the amazing things that the council does, and that goes on in our district. We want our residents to truly value the contribution that their council makes as well as help the district to thrive.

## **Key activities include:**

- staff learning and development plans
- identifying and implementing service marketing plans
- reviewing existing customer accounts to enhance the breadth, depth and utilisation of this channel
- creation of customer champions with launch of the strategy
- commission market research to identify how the best in class organisations do things

# Theme 4: Measurement and management

The council has already made great progress in improving the way it manages performance. We need to ensure that the customer voice is central to that. This voice needs to be heard across all areas of the council and truly understood and listened to.

Through consultation with our customers and service areas, we will better understand what matters the most to our customers. We will use their feedback to design and develop services, test solutions prior to implementation and re-evaluate how well we're doing.

We will work across local government and with the private sector to benchmark our performance and identify opportunity to improve further. We'll be looking at what others are doing, how and why they are doing it, and how this could help in the delivery of services at SKDC. Our customers don't just compare us with other parts of the public sector, so we need to look wider and develop new relationships if we are going to keep pace.

We will regularly talk and reflect on our customers experience and views of the services that we provide. We'll use this gift of information to identify ways that

we can improve. The improvements will be promoted and supported to engage customers and staff members to utilise new solutions.

## **Key activities include:**

- consultation and engagement exercises
- creation of dashboards
- benchmarking with others – both in the public and private sector
- training and development plans to respond to feedback and improve our offer
- embedding the customer voice into our performance appraisals across the authority

# High Level Action Plan

The Customer Experience Strategy is underpinned by an action plan that runs from 2020 until 2024. Each activity will progress through four phases: Discovery, Define, Develop, Deploy. Each deployment will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis through the performance framework and ongoing customer consultation and engagement to ensure it meets current needs and is developed further to accommodate future requirements.

Theme 1: Operating Model	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Data gathering	Ongoing activity			
Customer engagement and consultation	Ongoing activity			
Deployment of kiosk solutions	Completed			
Reviewing approach	Ongoing activity			
Testing and launching new solutions	Ongoing activity			

Theme 2: Technology	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Digital engagement / CRM platform	Scope and produce	Implement		
My account		Completed		
Virtual operator solution	Completed			
Booking solution	Completed			
New council website	Completed			
Develop our knowledge-base	Ongoing activity			
Chat technologies		Completed		

<b>Theme 3: Embedding a Customer First Ethos</b>	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Staff learning and development plans	Develop/Deploy	Ongoing activity		
Service marketing plans	Ongoing activity			
Customer account enhancements	Develop	Deploy		
Customer champions	Ongoing activity			
Market research	Ongoing activity			

<b>Theme 4: Measurement and Management</b>	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Consultation and engagement exercises	Ongoing activity			
Creation of dashboards	Completed	Ongoing reviews		
Benchmarking	Ongoing activity			
Training and development	Ongoing activity			
Embedding the customer voice	Ongoing activity			

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