



Tuesday, 7 October 2025

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

Customer Experience Strategy 2025 to 2029

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To approve the Customer Experience Strategy 2025 to 2029 and to commit to supporting the delivery of the customer charter, priorities, and approach to customer experience across all Council services.

Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to approve the Customer Experience Strategy 2025-2029 to complement the Council's priority "Effective Council".

Decision Information

Is this a Key Decision?	No
Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?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 direct budget implications associated in adopting this Strategy. Any future initiatives resulting in budgeting implications will be, in the first instance, be managed within existing service area budgets. Where additional funding is required, this will be requested formally, taking the appropriate action.

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

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 The implementation of the strategy complies with all relevant regulations. Data protection measures will align with UK GDPR and Information Governance standards.

Completed by: James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager

Risk and Mitigation

- 1.3 The risk of the strategy not driving change at a pace that matches the ambition of South Kesteven District Council will be mitigated through managed delivery and oversight of the Customer Experience Working Group, Senior Management and the Cabinet Member.
- 1.4 Digital inclusion – Digital literacy training via FAQs and help pages, accessible technology, and face to face support using self-serve desks in our Customer Service Centres.

Completed by: Tracey Elliott, Governance & Risk Officer

Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

- 1.5 The Customer Experience Strategy has been developed to ensure equal opportunities are provided for everyone and our customers diversity is recognised, respected and valued.
- 1.6 The action plan will take a data driven approach to understand the needs of the Council's customers and equip employees with relevant training. The plan also sets out to better understand the various channels different groups need to access our

services and where the Council can automate in some areas to spend more time on complex matters that require face to face or phone calls, so no one is digitally excluded.

- 1.7 In providing these comments, the Head of Service has consulted with one of the Councils Equality Champions (Carol Drury, Community Engagement Manager). Ongoing consultation will take place as the action plan is developed.

Completed by: Claire Moses, Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service)

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1. The report presents the refreshed Customer Experience Strategy 2025-2029. The Council has made good progress over the last four years, since the implementation of the first strategy, during which the Council faced challenges to customer contact as a result of Covid. The Council have invested significantly in a number of areas to improve its approach to customer service, such as with the development of the new website, the new Customer Service Centre in Grantham and online forms and portals.
- 2.2. The new Strategy provides a framework for the continued development of the Councils customer focus in the coming years. The Strategy sets out the Council's plans to achieve its vision to improve the customer experience as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of our services by providing excellent customer service, to all our customers (residents, businesses, partners, visitors and community groups), working with them to ensure that its services meet their needs and are inclusive and accessible for all.
- 2.3. The strategy aligns with the Council commitment in its Corporate Plan 2024-2027 to being an Effective Council. This report, and the adoption of the Customer Experience Strategy strives to deliver this priority. The Council ensures our services are digitally enabled and efficient to meet the expectations of our changing communities whilst not those excluding who are not yet digitally enabled. The strategy will also ensure that our staff have the skills needed to drive the organisation forward and meeting the changing expectations of our customers.
- 2.4. For the purpose of this Strategy, our "customers" are residents, businesses, people who work in or visit the area, community groups, charities and partners working with the Council.

Customer Experience Steering Group

- 2.5. The Strategy has been developed with insight and support from all front facing service areas, including IT (Digital Strategy) and HR (People Strategy). In Spring

2024, a Customer Experience Steering Group was established. The steering group consisted of a staff representative from each of the service areas.

- 2.6. The group was formed to ensure collaborative working on the Grantham Customer Service Centre, as well as the development of the Customer Experience consultation and subsequent Strategy.
- 2.7. The individuals in the group have now become Customer Experience champions for their service area. They will embed the Strategy within their teams, supporting the launch during National Customer Service Week (6 to 10 October 2025). They will ensure team members understand their responsibilities in delivering the actions within the customer charter, achieving the service standards and fulfilling the priorities – with the ultimate aim of ensuring the customer is at the heart of everything we do.

Customer Experience Strategy 2025-2029

- 2.8. The Council believe our customers should be at the heart of all we do. Knowing our customers, getting feedback, taking this on board to improve services and moving forward with technology is vital in building a forward looking Customer Experience Strategy.
- 2.9. The Strategy is attached at Appendix A and provides a single corporate document that outlines the Council's vision and ensures point of reference, accountability and governance to a Council wide approach to Customer Experience.
- 2.10. The Strategy sets out the vision, priorities and approach for delivering an efficient and effective Customer Experience across the Council, working together to ensure there is a consistent experience.
- 2.11. In implementing this Strategy, **our core priorities** are as follows (these are expanded on within the document):
 - Priority 1: Our commitment to a customer first ethos
 - Priority 2: Access to multiple service channels
 - Priority 3: Accessibility and Inclusion
 - Priority 4: Regular staff training
 - Priority 5: Technology
- 2.12. The Strategy also sets out the **Customer Charter** which defines our responsibility to our customers, as well as what we would like from our customers. These responsibilities are linked to the priorities. The charters have been developed as a direct result of the consultation and they set out our promise as to how we will deliver high quality services whilst enabling us to meet our customers' expectations.
- 2.13. **Service Standards** featured within the feedback to the consultation, with customers asking the Council to introduce these – for the corporate contact centre and each of

its service areas. The strategy includes both operation standards and performance indicators.

- 2.14. This Strategy enables the Council to move away from 'customer services' being seen as the responsibility of a single team or department. Instead, it recognises the importance of 'Customer Service' as a culture for the whole organisation to implement, embed and achieve our overall goal to connect all objectives with the five priorities to improve customer experience and operational efficiency.
- 2.15. The Strategy ensures all services and staff provide an effective and positive customer experience who are aware of and understand their responsibilities in fulfilling the Customer Charter, Service Standards, Priorities and Vision to a high level.
- 2.16. An action plan is being developed and will support the strategy and its priorities. The plan will be presented to Rural & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee every six months, with the initial presentation taking place on 16 October 2025.
- 2.17. The Customer Service Management Team will be responsible for the strategic direction of the action plan, collaborating with the Customer Experience Steering Group who will have oversight of the strategy to enable effective co-ordination of delivery of the actions.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1. Improving our customers experience is a key area of focus for South Kesteven District Council. A significant amount of work has taken place across all front-facing services who interact with customers within our District.
- 3.2. The aim of the Strategy is to ensure interactions with customers are of a consistently high standard and placing our customers at the heart of everything we do.
- 3.3. The Strategy also sets the direction for how Council employees will interact with customers, as well as emphasising the importance of the Council's values and behaviours and ensuring the authority achieves its aim to put the customer at the heart of everything we do.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council has the option of not refreshing the existing Customer Experience Strategy and continuing to operate without a strategic focus on the needs of customers. However, as one of the organisation's priorities is to be an effective Council, this is not recommended.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1. The Strategy is an overarching document, developed by the Customer Service Management team, with the support of the Customer Experience Steering Group and engagement with customers and local stakeholders. It provides a framework, objectives and standards to further develop a consistent approach across Council services.
- 5.2. The Strategy demonstrates a clear commitment to shared objectives across teams to improving the service and engagement with our 'customers'.

6. Consultation

- 6.1. Public consultation of the Customer Experience Strategy consultation took place from 10 March 2025 and closed on 7 April 2025 and was open to a variety of stakeholders – those identified were:
 - Customers who contact the Council via the Customer Services Team
 - Other organisations that contact SKDC
 - Those who do not contact the Council (via SKToday – circa 3,700 and the Youth Council)
 - Local businesses
 - Community and Voluntary Groups
 - Staff working group
- 6.2. A total of 561 responses were received. This was made up of 540 public stakeholder responses and 21 Staff & Youth Council responses.
- 6.3. The purpose of the consultation was to:
 - Consult with a variety of stakeholders on how they interact or would choose to interact with the Council;
 - Inform a refresh of SKDC's Customer Experience Strategy;
 - Ensure SKDC's processes are fit for the 21st Century; and
 - To understand the technological advances that have taken place in customer interaction over the last 5 years.
- 6.4. A Members' workshop took place on 26 June 2025 where the outcomes of the recent stakeholder consultation were presented and discussed. During the workshop, Members and Officers discussed the actions to be taken forward which included the development of the Strategy, Customer Charter and Service Standards.
- 6.5. Customer Access trends show customers over time choosing to use online services for transactional service requests, with a consistent decline in the proportion of

contact away from telephone and face to face contact. For the year 2024/25 there were:

- Over 1.8 million contacts via online services
- Over 147,700 contacts via telephone to our customer service centre
- Over 133,000 contacts via telephone to our switchboard
- Over 112,0000 contacts via telephone using our virtual operator
- Over 56,500 contacts in person

7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix 1: Customer Experience Strategy – 2025 to 2028