



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL



Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

14 December 2023

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 Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 position for 2023/24 regarding customer interactions and call handling within the Customer Service team and high contact service areas. The report will also provide an update regarding various projects being undertaken by the service and review the Customer Service action plan.

Recommendations

That the Committee

1. Notes the report and are invited to ask questions relating to the report.

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	High performing 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, Chief Finance Officer

Legal and Governance

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

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

2. Background to the Report

2.1 The Council has a clear commitment in its Corporate Plan 2020-2023 to being a high performing council. This report, and the service provided through the Council's Customer Service Team and high contact service areas strives to delivery this priority.

2.2 A telephony and call handling report was presented to Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 July 2023. The report focussed on the position regarding call handling.

2.3 The Customer Service Team handle customer interactions in various ways for 18 service areas, as well as general public enquiries. The report will provide an update

to call handling actions undertaken since the last meeting (5 July 2023) and current performance for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 2023.

2.4 The report will also provide an update regarding the key projects which have recently been completed and are due to be undertaken during Quarter 3 and Quarter 4. Details of the Customer Service forward plan are provided in paragraphs 2.31 to 2.33 of this report, and will provide updates regarding: -

- Twin Stream Bin Rollout;
- Garden Waste Collections (2024);
- Relocation of the Customer Service Centre;
- Launch of the Citizens Access Portal (Council Tax) – Phase 1;
- Launch of the new corporate website;
- Implementation of Virtual Operator;
- Launch of the Citizens Access Portal (Council Tax) – Phase 2; and
- Customer Experience Strategy Working Group;

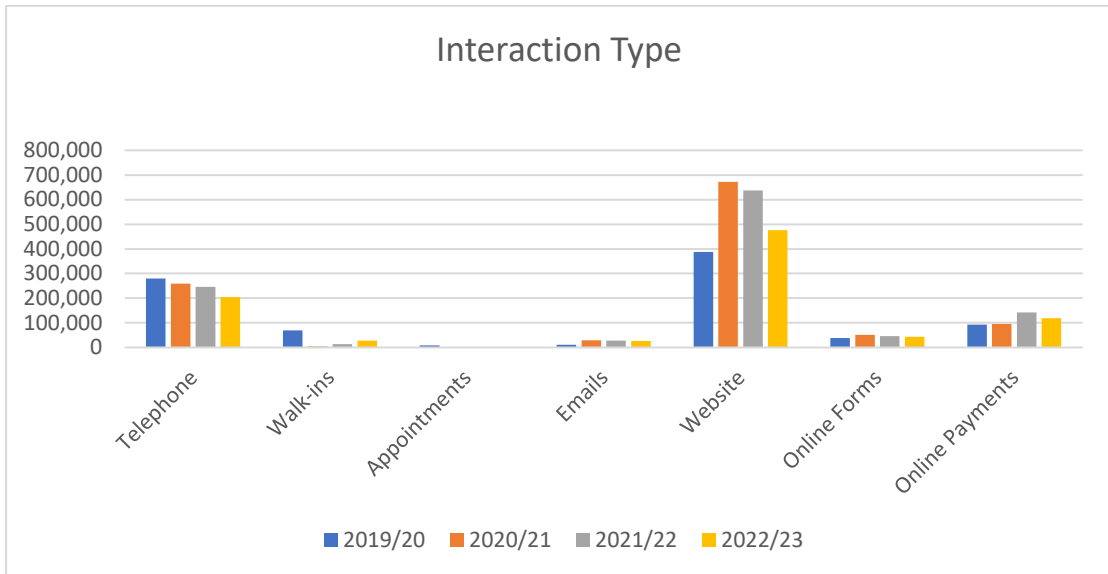
Customer Interaction type

2.5 The table below shows the number of customer interactions received into the Customer Service Team since 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023.

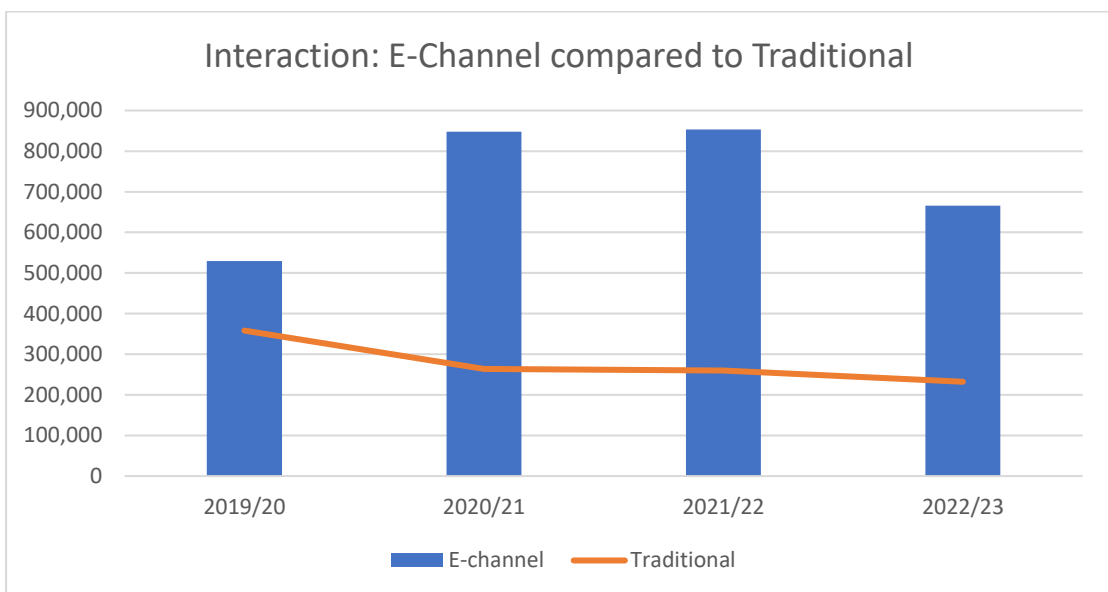
Table 1:

	Q2	Q1	2022/23
CS calls (ex switchboard)	30,629	34,505	108,201
Switchboard calls	9,377	9,900	42,039
Other service calls	9,507	9,100	53,622
Total Calls	49,513	53,505	203,862
Grantham walk-in	1,100	1,172	3,959
Bourne walk-in	197	162	1,021
Bourne Library	6,925	5,487	22,694
Deepings walk-in*	0	0	0
Stamford walk-in*	0	0	0
Total Walk-in	8,222	6,821	27,674
Grantham appt	109	106	464
Bourne appt	37	66	233
Stamford appt*	0	0	0
Total Appts	146	172	697
Total Emails	6,694	7,586	27,004
Website	Not known	126,871	476,589
Online Forms	9,523	9,522	43,196
Online Payment	33,966	33,966	118,820
Total interactions	108,064	238,443	897,842

2.6 The graph below shows the total interaction types (as detailed in Table 1 above).



2.7 The graph below shows the total interaction by e-channel and traditional. The bars show the e-channel interaction and the line shows the traditional interaction.



2.8 The information above, shows a total of 74.71% of interactions are via an e-channel method – this being email, website, online form, or online payment, with the remaining contact being by traditional method of telephone, walk-in or face-to-face (25.30%).

2.9 A quarter of our customers continue to contact us via the traditional method. Therefore, it is very important we are able to continue to provide a hybrid of contact methods for all our customers.

Customer Interactions and FTE Requirement – Q1 and Q2 for 2023/24

2.10 The table below shows the customer contact handled by the Customer Service Team during Q1.

Table 2: Customer Interactions and FTE requirement – Q1				
Contact Type	Contact Volume	Average time taken (mins)	Total time taken (hrs)	FTE available
Calls offered	44,403			
Calls handled	33,025	5	2,752	74.38
% Answered	75%			
Face to Face – St Peters Hill (walk-ins)	1,172	20	391	10.56
Face to Face – St Peters Hill (appointments)	96	45	72	1.95
Face to Face – Bourne (walk-ins)	104	10	17	0.47
Face-to-Face Bourne (appointments)	66	45	50	1.34
Face to Face – Bourne (library)	5,488	10	915	24.72
Emails – Customer Service	4,972	5	414	11.20
Emails – Housing evidence	1,611	5	134	3.63
Emails – Green Waste	854	5	71	1.92
Total customer contacts	47,420		4,848	131.03
Hours & FTE available			4,618	124.80
Difference (available less total)			-230	-6.23

2.11 On average for Q1, all customer contacts totalled 4,848 hours or 131.03 FTE. The actual staffing hours and FTE available were 4,618 hours or 124.80 FTE. As a result, the service was 6.23 FTE lower than the amount needed to respond to all customer interactions. This is due to factors such as annual leave, sickness absence (minimal) and training. This failure demand would be a combination of calls not being handled (over 75%) or emails being responded to beyond the 8 working day target.

2.12 Although 25% of calls were 'abandoned' this is a combination of calls received up to the IVR (press 1, Press 2) and during the IVR process. Current reporting is unable to provide a split between these two stages of customer interaction.

2.13 The table below shows the customer contact handled by the Customer Service Team during Q2.

Table 3: Customer Interactions and FTE requirement – Q2				
Contact Type	Contact Volume	Average time taken	Total time taken (hrs)	FTE available
Calls offered	42,734			
Calls handled	34,324	6	2,860	77.31
% Answered	81%			
Face to Face – St Peters Hill (walk-ins)	1,202	25	504	13.54
Face to Face – St Peters Hill (appointments)	94	45	71	1.91
Face to Face – Bourne (walk-ins)	218	10	36	0.98
Face-to-Face Bourne (appointments)	39	45	29	0.79
Face to Face – Bourne (library)	7,334	10	1,222	33.04
Emails – Customer Service	5,541	7	646	17.47
Emails – Housing evidence	1,429	7	167	4.51
Emails – Green Waste	231	7	27	0.73
Total customer contacts	50,412		6,132	165.72
Hours & FTE available			5,968	161.30
Difference (available less total)			-164	-4.42

2.14 On average for Q2, all customer contacts totalled 6,132 hours or 165.72 FTE. The actual staffing hours and FTE available were 5,968 hours or 161.30 FTE. As a result, the service was 4.42 FTE lower than the amount needed to respond to all customer interactions.

2.15 Quarter 2 sees an increase in customer contact from 47,420 contacts to 50,412. There was also an increase in the average time taken for some activities due to staff training – these were:

- Call handling increased from 5 to 6 minutes;
- Grantham - drop ins increased from 20 to 25 minutes; and
- Emails increased from 5 to 7 minutes.

2.16 Although there has been an increase in contact, the failure demand is much less than in Q1 (75%) and call handling has increased to 81% (a 6% increase). This is due to the successful recruitment and training of new Customer Service Advisors.

Customer Service Advisor Training

2.17 The Customer Service Advisors are trained in 18 different service areas – to handle customer contact via email, face to face and telephone.

2.18 Any change to personnel within the team creates a significant impact and since March 2023, the team have seen staffing changes due to three resignations and significant internal recruitment into other service areas, resulting in career progression for those officers.

2.19 Due to recent staffing changes, of our 19 staff, 14 of these have a length of service which is one year or less. This puts a significant pressure on the team with regards to training of the 18 service areas the team are responsible for. The breakdown is as follows:

Length of service	Number of staff
Less than 6 months	8
6 to 12 months	6
1 to 5 years	0
5 to 10 years	2
10 years+	3

2.20 Training is undertaken in a variety of ways, which includes:

- A meeting every Wednesday from 4pm (phone closure) for 75 minutes. This is undertaken by the Customer Service Manager and Leads. There are often guest speakers from other service areas, as well as general customer service updates, awareness, and training;
- Bespoke service area training is planned in. Usually these sessions will take up to 3 hours and where possible, the training is provided to up to 4 staff in one session. This supports the service area (as it takes their time to provide the training) and enables staff to ask questions as a team, resulting in them learning together. These training sessions are recorded and used as guidance and a go-to by staff once they are handling customer interaction for that service area.

- 2.21 The Customer Service Management Team has successfully planned in training for all new starters. The training programme is intense and is planned meticulously to ensure FTE availability across service areas is balanced.
- 2.22 It is expected improvements will continue during Quarter 3 as the training continues. However, the team do have a significant period of change and increased customer activity during this time and Quarter 4. In addition, the team currently have two vacant posts, as follows:
- 0.57 FTE as a result of the officer moving into a fixed term secondment to another service area; and
 - 1 FTE as a result of the officer moving into a vacant permanent role within the CS Team.
- 2.23 The 0.57 FTE has been put forward as part of efficiencies savings agreed in 2023 budget setting. The 1FTE will be advertised as a casual vacancy to support with Twin Bin and Garden Waste interactions with start dates expected for early January 2024.

Call Handling

- 2.24 Statistics are produced and issued by the Performance and Change Improvement Lead on a monthly basis to the relevant service areas. The information includes number of calls offered, handled, abandoned and average speed of answer.
- 2.25 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.
- 2.26 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 18 service areas.
- 2.27 The graphs shown at **Appendix 1** show:
- Calls offered, handled, and abandoned (volume)
 - Calls handled and abandoned (%)
 - Calls handled – comparison between 2022/23 to 2023/24
 - Calls abandoned – comparison between 2022/23 to 2023/24

Customer Experience Strategy – Review and Refresh

- 2.28 The Customer Service Management team has undertaken a thorough review of the current Customer Experience Strategy, looking at the activities which have been achieved (and how), alongside those that have not been achieved, and most importantly why.
- 2.29 The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) will lead a working group from January 2024, with the inclusion of service areas to review the 'next steps' and work together to produce a new Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Standards. The objective of the working group will be to develop a new Customer Experience Strategy, seeking approval through committee process by December 2024.
- 2.30 It is important for 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. The aim will be to develop a customer ethos that will transform how the council offers residents and customers excellent service. More details are included in action 9 within **Appendix 2**.

Customer Service – Forward Plan

- 2.31 There are a significant number of projects taking place across Customer Service and individual Service areas which will impact customer interactions and the future of the Customer Experience Strategy.
- 2.32 The majority of these projects are aligned to be completed by 31 March 2024. It is important we understand these projects and how customer interaction will change as a result. Details of the projects are provided in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.33 There are periods where there will be multiple customer interactions taking place, along with staff training, which may impact response times to customer interactions. Careful mapping of all projects and activities has taken place and is constantly being monitored. The activities, key dates and expected customer interactions are detailed in **Appendix 3**.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 These are set out in the report.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 All options for improvement are included within the report.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

5.1 A Customer Service update report will be provided to this committee on a quarterly basis.

6. Appendices

6.1 There are three appendices included within this report:

- Appendix 1: Call Handling
- Appendix 2: Customer Service Forward Plan
- Appendix 3: Customer interaction – key activities and dates