

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND CUSTOMER INSIGHTS UPDATE

Improvement and Innovation Advisory Committee – 29 February 2024

Report of: Jim Carrington-West, Chief Officer Corporate Services

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report provides Members with an update on the work of the Council's Customer Insights team and the effectiveness of the digital services that have been implemented.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Julia Thornton

Contact Officer: Amy Wilton, Ext. 7280

Recommendation to Innovation and Advisory Committee:

That the report be noted.

Reason for recommendation: To update Members on the progress with delivering digital services in response to high demand for services and the need to prioritise resources to those customers most in need of face-to-face support.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Council has seen a sustained increase in customer contact across all services, in recent years. Demand for services has increased by an average of 24% since 2019, with individual services experiencing increased workloads of up to 60% over the same period as the pressures of the cost of living have impacted individuals and households.
- 2 As public spending has been squeezed and savings have been required in the Council's budgets the size of the workforce to manage the increased demand has remained largely unchanged, and has reduced in some areas.
- 3 It has been essential for the Council to continually review its service delivery in order to maintain a high level of service to our customers.
- 4 Providing a greater range of digital services has been one solution that is beginning to prove highly effective in supporting services to deliver for their customers. The Council's focus is designing digital services to enable those customers that are able to interact with services in the way that best suits them and when convenient. In turn, this allows Officers to provide telephone

and face-to-face support to those that cannot interact digitally or are most in need and require in-person advice and support.

Customer Solutions

- 5 The first point of contact for the majority of customer contact with the Council is through the Customer Solutions team. The team answer customer enquiries predominantly over the telephone, by email and face-to-face at the Council offices. The table below shows the average annual contact volumes for the Customer Solutions team.
- 6 Since 2019 the overall demand on the Customer Solutions service has grown from 97,628 interactions to 130,050 at the end of March 2023. An increase of 33.2% in demand for service. Current figures show these are beginning to reduce, with average levels of demand shown in the table below for 2023/24.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Average phone calls p.a. | 100,000 |
| Average emails p.a. | 10,500 |
| Approximate Reception visits p.a. | 10,500 |
| Total | 121,000 |

- 7 To serve our customers more effectively, more efficiently and through better use of data, IT and other technology we have been able to create more capacity to enable us to meet current and future challenges.

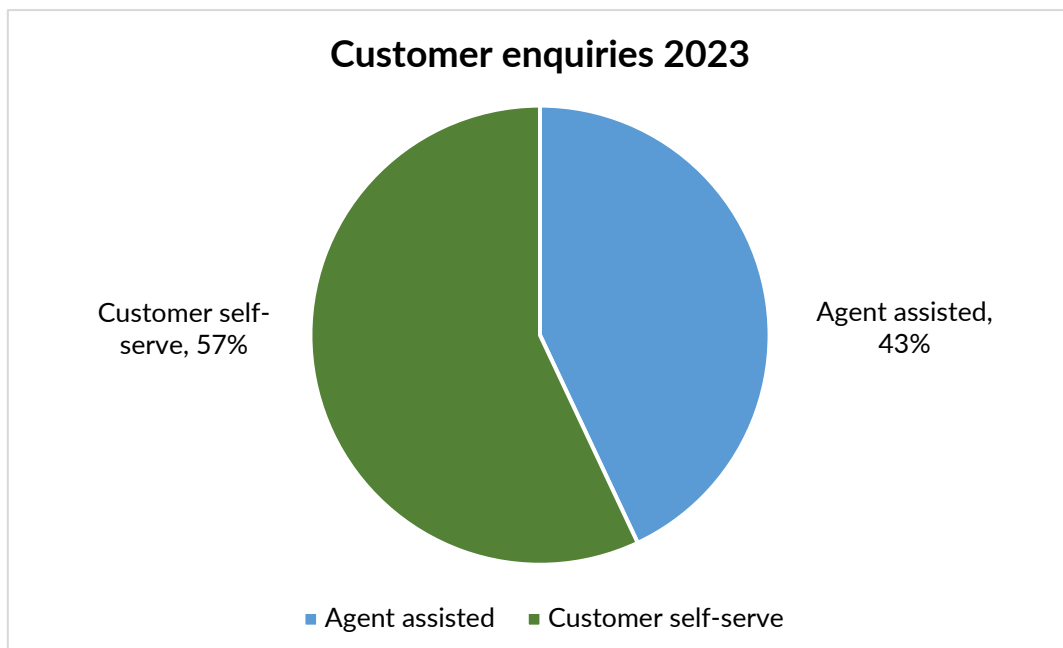
Customer Insights

- 8 The Customer Insights team was formed in 2022. The team brings together a range of skills such as digital development, customer data analysis and customer engagement and user testing to develop new digital services.
- 9 The team is integral to Sevenoaks District Council achieving its Digital Strategy, with a focus on enabling quick and easy access to services that are convenient to customers.
- 10 This in turn provides greater resilience within front line teams to be available in person, to serve customers who are unable to interact digitally or who require in person support to meet their needs.
- 11 The Customer Insights team works to an Agile projects methodology to achieve its aims of:
 - Reducing the levels of avoidable contact from customers;
 - Increasing the capability of officers to resolve a greater proportion of all customer contact at the first point of contact;

- Increasing the number of customers using self-service options, through improved digital technology; and
- Sustaining or improving levels of customer satisfaction.

Developing digital services

- 12 To improve access to services for customers, enable 24/7 self-service and provide greater efficiencies to the Council, the Customer Solutions and Customer Insights team have worked together to identify the high contact areas from customers over the telephone and by email.
- 13 The results of this work has informed and shaped a work plan for the Customer Insights team, providing a focus for projects and identifying the services with the greatest priority.
- 14 During 2023 the Customer Insights team created 42 digital forms, for use both internally to assist Officers in their work, and also made available on the Council website to enable customers to access council services online. These included (amongst others) large item collections, missed refuse collections, fly tipping, garden waste permits, and MOT bookings.
- 15 In total, approximately 22,400 customers completed their transaction with the Council online, using self-service, during 2023.
- 16 The following chart demonstrates the split between customer online self-service activity and customer enquiries answered on the telephone by a member of staff.



- 17 Future work will continue to be focused on services with the greatest demand and that will improve efficiency. Decisions will continue to be data led with a customer centred focus at all times.

Customer Satisfaction

- 18 An important focus for the delivery of all services is to ensure that a consistently high level of customer satisfaction is achieved.
- 19 During 2023 an automated survey was introduced on telephone lines, which enables customers the choice to take part in a very short survey to measure their satisfaction at the end of each call. In 2023 customer satisfaction was recorded at 86%.
- 20 Further work is being undertaken to explore a quick and easy way for customers to give their feedback when using online services.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report. The progress in delivering digital and online services is supporting the Council to manage its current budget position and over-time is likely to deliver cashable savings that can prevent budget growth or be re-invested in services.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

There are no legal or risk implications arising from this report. The Council continues to ensure that customers are able to access services face-to-face, by phone, email or online as suits their needs and their circumstances.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

Through the work of the Customer Insights team the Council is able to maintain its focus on the customer whilst achieving efficiencies in services, enabling greater levels of productivity, have a positive impact on the budget and deliver high quality in service delivery.

Digital services support a more effective working environment for staff and give our customers choice in how they interact with the Council. Our data shows that many

customers are choosing the flexibility that online services provide, which allows Officer to dedicate more of their time those customers that need to contact us in-person. This is creating additional capacity without the necessity on every occasion to grow the size of the workforce.

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

None.

Jim Carrington-West

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – Customer & Resources