

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET – TUESDAY, 29 JULY 2025



Title of Report	CUSTOMER SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT	
Presented by	Councillor Andrew Woodman Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder <div style="text-align: right;">PH Briefed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></div>	
Background Papers	Customer Service Scrutiny report 2024 Customer Experience Strategy 2022 -2025	Public Report: Yes
		Key Decision: No
Financial Implications	There are no financial implications arising from this report.	
	Signed off by the Section 151 Officer: Yes	
Legal Implications	None directly arising from this report.	
	Signed off by the Monitoring Officer: Yes	
Staffing and Corporate Implications	None bar those addressed in the day-to-day management of the service.	
	Signed off by the Head of Paid Service: Yes	
Purpose of Report	This report is presented to Cabinet as part of the agreed annual update on Customer Service performance. The report supports the Council's goals outlined in the Corporate Delivery Plan to prioritise customer focus. It recognises that Customer Service enquiries offer a consistent and valuable source of feedback from residents, helping the Council to identify areas of success and opportunities for improvement.	
Reason for Decision	To ensure Cabinet Members are aware of Customer Services activity and transactions during the last financial year given the Service's cross-cutting delivery.	
Recommendations	THAT CABINET: 1. NOTES THE COMMENTS MADE BY CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON 19 JUNE 2025. 2. NOTES THE DETAILS OF THE ANNUAL CUSTOMER SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT.	

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. This report has come before Cabinet following an agreement by Corporate Scrutiny Committee in December 2022 to add an update report to the work programme on an annual basis. The scoping request previously was for the item to be focused on the overall levels of performance, the performance metrics used and what action has and is planned to be taken to address any areas of concerns.
- 1.2. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the Council's efforts to enhance customer satisfaction and responsiveness. It summarises key metrics and trends observed over the financial year 2024/25, highlighting areas of success and identifying opportunities for improvement. The report includes detailed analysis of customer feedback, response times, and resolution rates, offering valuable insights into how the Council can continue to improve its services and better meet the needs of its residents.

2. POLICY AND STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

- 2.1 The adopted Customer Experience Strategy 2022-2025 sets the context for the consideration of Customer Service and its operation in the Council. The Strategy will be refreshed in 2025.
- 2.2 In summary, the Strategy makes several key statements which provide the policy context for this report. These are that:
 - I. effective management of a customer relationship is not only about how responsive, efficient and technologically advanced services are, but is equally about the emotion, feeling and impression that an individual experiences.
 - II. the Strategy starts the journey of the Council moving away from a view that customer service is the responsibility of a team or department, but instead recognises that it is a cross-cutting theme that spans the whole organisation and links intrinsically with our wider plans, behaviours and values.
 - III. it emphasises the importance of digital experience, both to meet customer demand (and often preference), fits our future resources, but also to free up resources to help those who need more of our help, or need to access our services in different ways
 - IV. it begins the movement of the Council to one of customers being at the heart of what the Council delivers.
- 2.3 The Strategy also outlines a set of principles that the development of customer service (in all areas of the Council) will draw upon:
 - Customer First: Placing customers at the heart of the organisation. Empowering staff to provide their absolute best customer experience in a way that customers tell the Council that they want to.
 - Customer Access: A modern, fresh approach to customer experience and spaces, whether physical or digital. Light, clean and welcoming environments.
 - Digital by Default: Digital experiences so good that they are the channel of choice.

- Inclusion: Recognising customers' unique circumstances and in doing so ensuring that those that need Council services are not excluded.
- Customer Insight: Consistently measuring customer experiences. Knowing customers and their needs. Understanding why things go wrong and learning from this to improve our services.
- Value for Money, Efficiency and Return on Investment: Recognising the financial climate, benefit focused outcomes and business minded decision making.

2.4 These principles are driving the changes to customer provision up to 2025.

3 CUSTOMER SERVICE DELIVERY

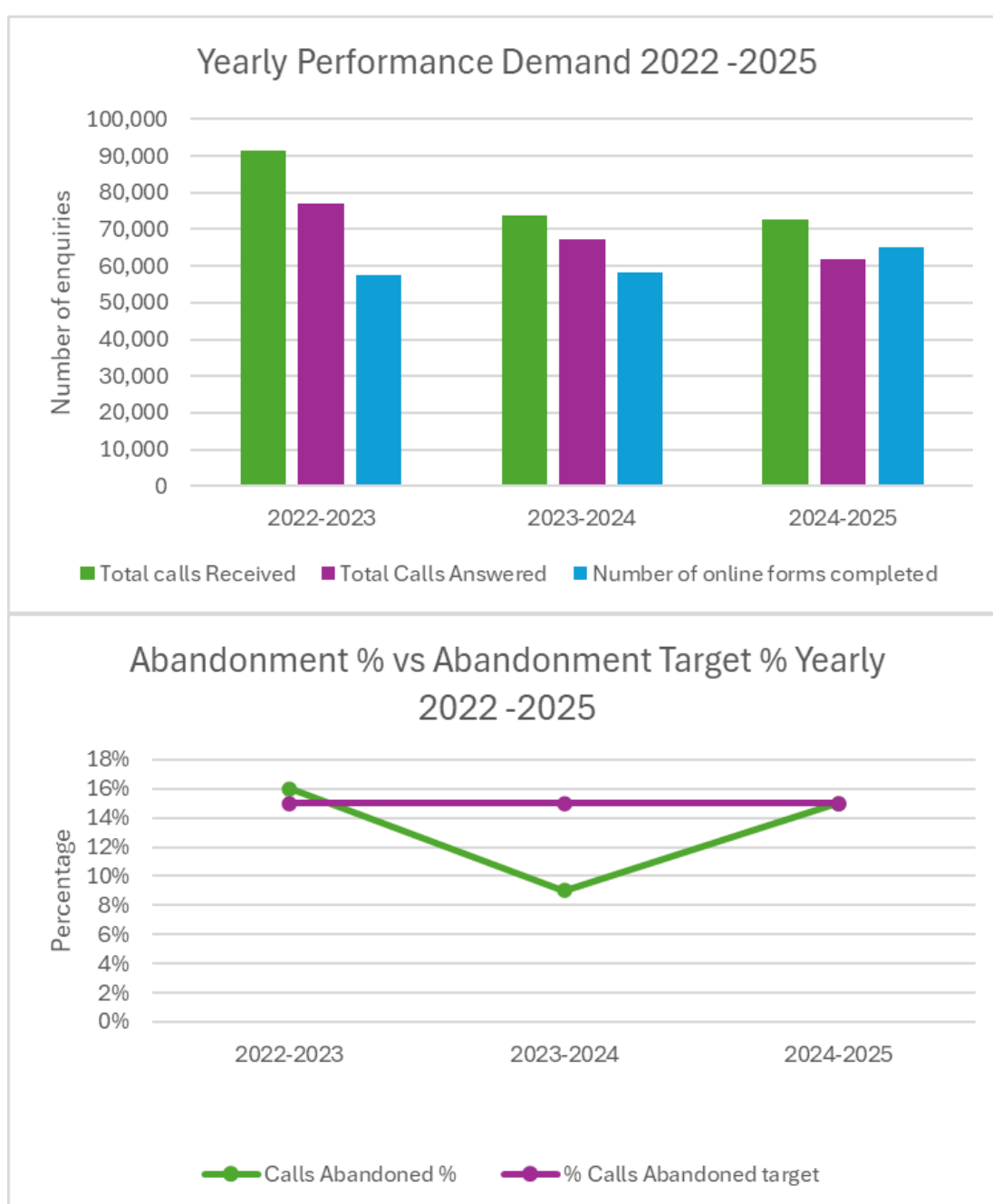
3.1 When discussing customer service provision, it is essential to recognise that this involves more than just the Customer Services Team, although they play a crucial role. All Council staff contribute to customer service in various capacities. While this report focuses on the performance of the Customer Services Team, below is a summary of the primary areas with significant customer interaction. It is important to note that every department within the Council engages with customers to some extent:

- Customer Services – this is the main front-line support providing the front-end contact for many Council services with much of the initial customer contact coming through this team either face-to-face or by phone and email.
- The Customer Experience Team – this team is responsible for capturing, analysing, and acting upon customer feedback, data, and insights at every stage of the customer journey. They share this valuable information with the other services to foster continuous improvement. Collaborating with back-office teams, they work to enhance the customer journey and improve services for both customers and the Council. This team also includes the Council's Feedback Officer, who administers and manages all corporate feedback, including complaints and member enquiries.
- Housing Repairs Team - this team handles initial calls from tenants reporting or following up on both responsive and planned works.
- Housing Choices – this team manages initial calls from customers seeking social housing, whether due to homelessness or a desire to join the choice-based lettings register.
- Waste Services – calls related to Waste Services are initially answered by the Customer Services Team, aiming for resolution at the first point of contact. These calls include missed bin reports, requests for new or additional waste containers, bulky waste collections, collection advice, and promotion of waste services and initiatives. Calls may be transferred to the Waste Team if escalation is needed or if the Customer Services Team cannot resolve the enquiry.
- Planning - calls regarding planning matters are answered by the Customer Services Team, with the goal of resolving them at the first point of contact or directing callers to appropriate digital forms or resources. Calls requiring specific

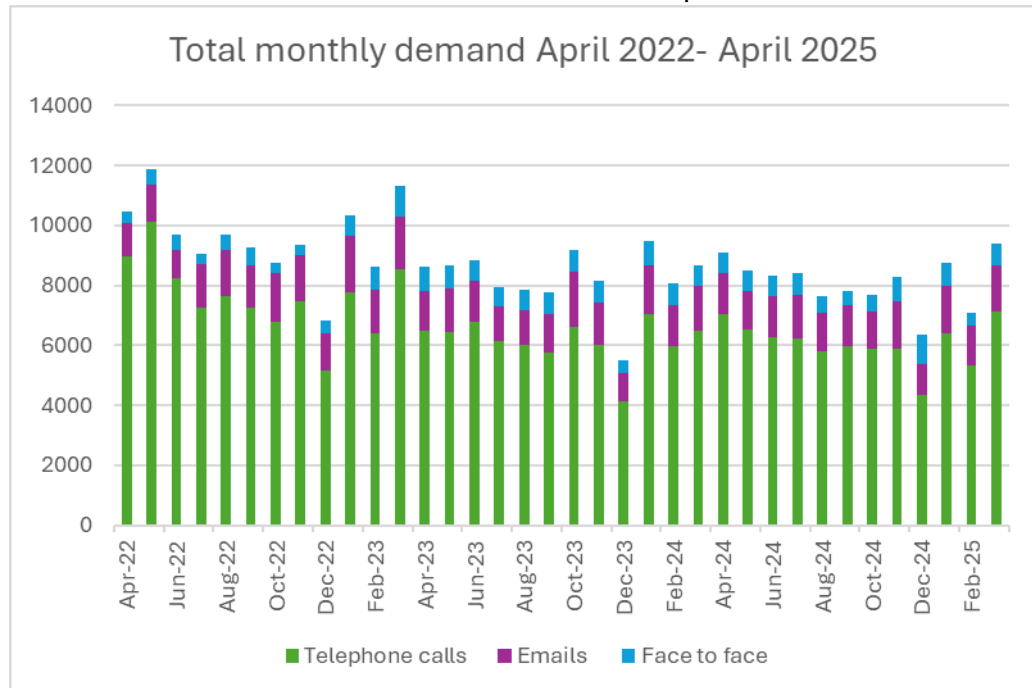
officers or related to certain applications are transferred to the Planning Support Team.

- Revenues and Benefits - being only the second team that touches every household within the district through Council Tax and therefore forms a considerable proportion of the Council's calls each year. These calls are answered by the Customer Services Team with the aim to resolve them at the first point of contact. Calls may be transferred to the Revenues or Benefits team if the enquiry needs escalation or customer services is unable to answer the question presented.

4. PERFORMANCE DATA

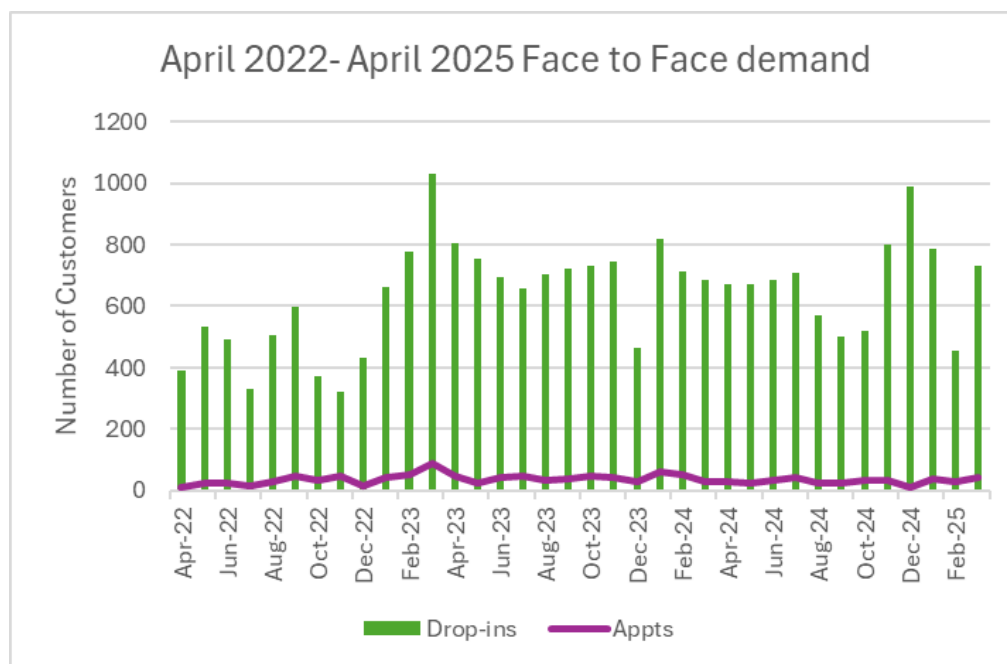


- 4.1 In 2024/25, the number of calls received by Customer Services marginally decreased by 1,031. This reduction may be attributed to several factors, including changes in how residents choose to access services. Despite the decrease in calls, the overall number of interactions remains consistent with an increase in those residents choosing to access online forms. Customer Services now handle more enquiries at the first point of contact, suggesting that the calls are from more unique callers rather than repeat callers. Consequently, the total number of calls is now a more accurate reflection of the number of enquiries.

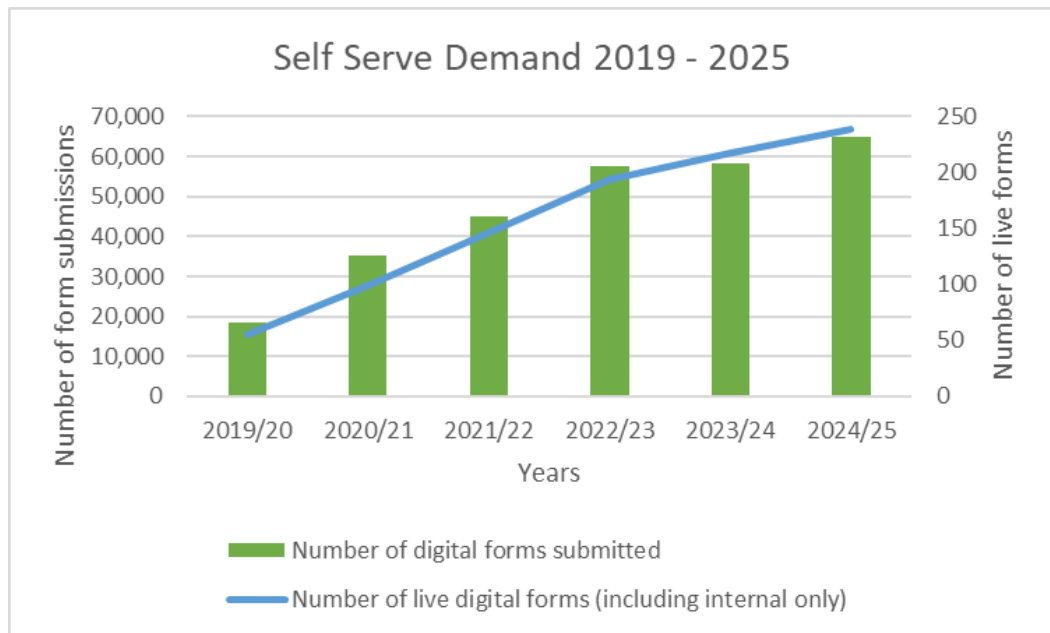


- 4.2 Since the opening of the Customer Centre in December 2023, the Council observed an initial peak in face-to-face interactions, with a significant increase in the number of residents 'dropping in' compared to the previous year. This surge was anticipated due to the Centre's more accessible location. The number of face-to-face interactions has now stabilised in the last financial year, averaging 674 residents per month. These enquiries tend to be more in-depth and are often from residents with more complex needs.

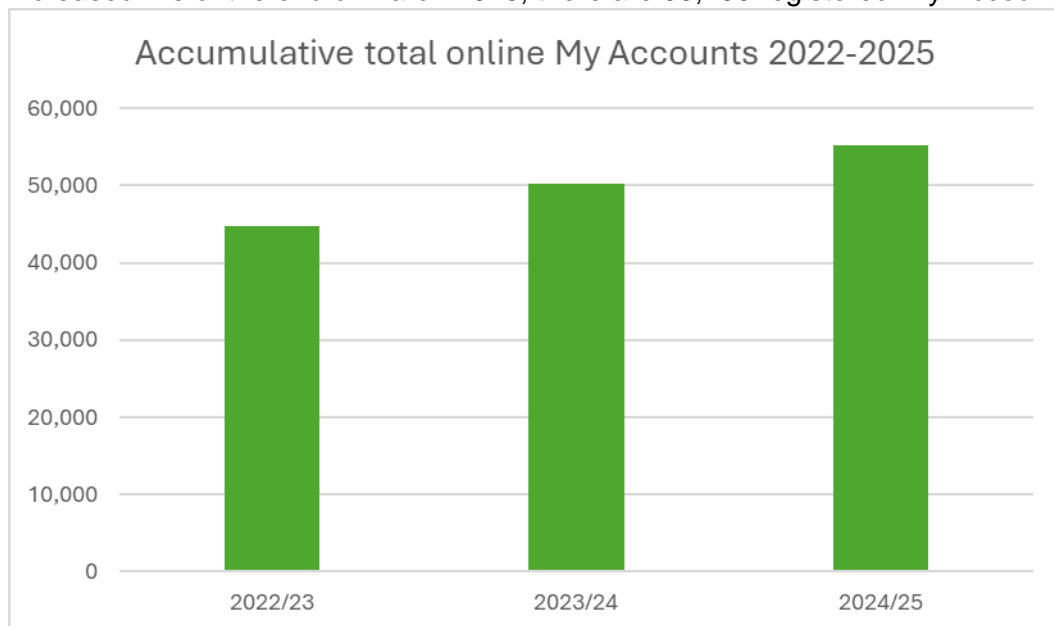
The Customer Centre also provides an excellent opportunity to inform attendees about digital service options for future use, where applicable.



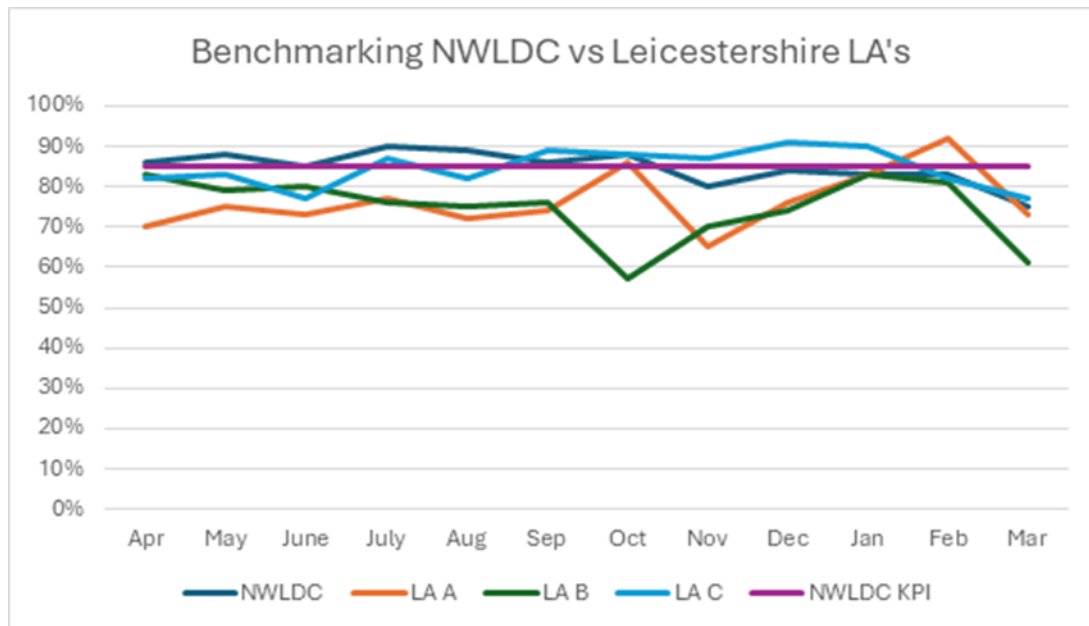
- 4.3 In 2024/25, call handling times remained higher than in previous years, averaging six minutes and one second per call. This increase is expected due to the rise in digital self-service demand, leaving the remaining enquiries more detailed and time-consuming. Consequently, the routine enquiries officers now receive are more complex and often involve assisting more vulnerable residents. As a result, call handling times have increased, leading to longer wait times and a higher number of abandoned calls.
- 4.4 Over the past six years, the availability of the Council's digital online self-service platform has significantly increased. By 2024/25, there were 238 forms available across various service areas for both internal use and customer access compared to 55 in 2019/20. This growth was initially driven by the demands of Covid-19, but more broadly, services have been progressively working to provide digital solutions and utilise online forms to enhance service accessibility for customers. As illustrated below, the number of customers accessing this digital channel has also increased over the last six years, in line with the rise in available digital forms.



- 4.5 Over the past three years, the number of residents choosing to create online accounts to view their personal data, such as Council Tax and benefits, has steadily increased. As of the end of March 2025, there are 55,290 registered 'My Accounts'.



- 4.6 Out of the 238 live online forms, 77 of these are fully integrated end to end processes for example missed bin collection and fly tipping, over the last year it is estimated that there has been an average time saving of 34 hours per week.
- 4.7 Benchmarking abandonment call rates against other local authorities within Leicestershire, (see below), shows that the Council is performing relatively the same as one local authority and better than two others. The purple straight line shows the target for abandoned calls within customer services.

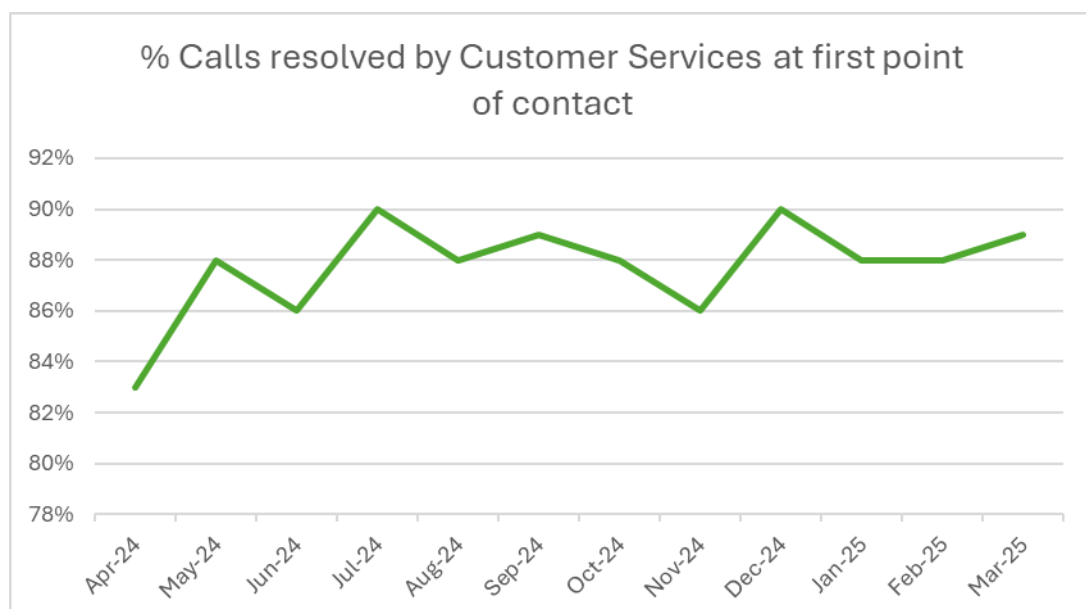


4.8 Benchmarking against other local authorities has shown a move away from traditional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of calls answered within 60 seconds and 90% call answering, and instead working towards calls being dealt with right first time and taking a holistic approach to how the Council deals with enquiries. For example, if the customer is calling regarding a Council Tax reminder –

- are they getting the right benefits
- do they have other debts and
- need referring for debt advice.

This is the approach the Council is taking and has been recording resolution within Customer Services for the last year.

4.9 In April 2024, the Customer Services team started recording call resolution as to whether a call had been resolved by the Customer Services team or if it needed to be passed on to a back-office service to completed. The Council set a target of 85% per month by benchmarking against other Leicestershire local authorities. Over the past year, the Council has consistently exceeded this target, achieving an average of 88% first point contact resolution per month.



5. Customer Satisfaction

5.1 Customer satisfaction is a critical aspect of the Council's operations, as it directly impacts the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery. By capturing customer satisfaction, the Council can gain valuable insights from residents' feedback, which helps identify areas of success and opportunities for improvement. High levels of satisfaction foster trust and confidence in the Council, enhancing its reputation and encouraging community engagement. The graph below shows the overall customer satisfaction results for the last year, out of the 3824 customers who completed the telephone survey.

5.2 The Council achieved an average satisfaction rate of 94% for the year 2024/25. This performance is notably higher compared to a comparable local authority in Leicestershire, referred to as 'Local Authority A'.

In terms of survey participation, the Council had a higher engagement, with 3,824 customers completing the survey, compared to 2,841 customers for 'Local Authority A'. Furthermore, 'Local Authority A' reported an average satisfaction score of 85.40%, which is significantly lower than the Council's 94%.

These results indicate that the Council is performing well in terms of customer satisfaction and survey participation within Customer Services. The Council is actively exploring ways to increase and encourage more face-to-face feedback, including trialling the use of handheld devices for customers to complete the survey instead of the current QR code system.



6 Avoidable Contact

6.1 Avoidable Contact in the context of customer service and the Council operations, refers to interactions between customers (or residents) and the Council that could have been prevented through better information, processes, systems and officer behaviour. These

contacts often arise due to issues such as unclear communication, process inefficiencies, or lack of accessible information.

6.2 The data analysed spans from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, marking the first full year of recording avoidable contact. Contacts are categorised based on their resolution status as documented by the Customer Service team. It is important to note that this data focuses solely on avoidable contact received into the Customer Service team and does not account for avoidable contact occurring elsewhere within the Council.

6.3 The graph below shows the percentage of avoidable contact received by the Customer Service contact centre each month. Over the course of the year, this averages out to 15% of all contact, which translates to approximately 785 calls per month at an average of five minutes 51 seconds per call. This baseline provides the Council with a foundation to understand and work towards reducing avoidable contact.



6.4 The graph below illustrates the number of avoidable contacts across various Council services between April 2024 and March 2025. Notably, Revenues and Benefits and Waste services have the highest number of avoidable contacts, with 2,252 and 1,841 contacts respectively. This is expected, as these two services directly reach every household, providing a broader perspective on their impact.



- 6.5 As part of a transformation project aimed at improving customer contact, the Council is collaborating with various services to reduce avoidable contact. This involves reviewing the corporate customer contact standards, conducting root cause analysis to understand recurring issues, and assessing the content and quality of the Council's website. Additionally, the Council is examining the letters it sends to ensure they are written in plain English, with the ultimate goal of enhancing customer understanding.

7 Recent challenges, achievements and improvements

- 7.1 Over the past year, Customer Services has experienced a notable increase in abusive and threatening behavior from customers, both in person and via telephone. Additionally, there has been a rise in the number of customers exhibiting mental health challenges, significantly impacting the Customer Services team.

To address these issues, the Council is implementing several strategies:

- **Enhanced No Tolerance Messaging:** The team is reinforcing its stance against abusive behaviour through increased communication and signage.
- **Root Cause Analysis:** The team is investigating the underlying reasons for these behaviours to prevent future occurrences.
- **Review of Customer Contact Standards:** The team is ensuring standards are consistent and aligned across the organisation, setting clear expectations for both staff and customers.

These challenges have also affected the health and wellbeing of the Customer Service team, leading to increased sickness and reduced capacity. In response, the Council is exploring various training options focused on staff wellbeing.

- 7.2 Customer Services successfully retained their customer service accreditation, which rigorously tests areas identified as priorities for customers. These areas include delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. The accreditation also emphasises developing customer insight, understanding the user experience and robustly measuring service satisfaction. To achieve this accreditation, full compliance in

at least 46 out of 57 elements is required, with the opportunity to demonstrate exceptional performance at a "compliance plus" level. Customer Services achieved full compliance in all elements and excelled in four "compliance plus" areas.

- 7.3 The Council has implemented a 'secret shopper' survey within Customer Services to gain external perspectives and feedback on customer interactions. This feedback is crucial for informing improvements in how the Council serves its customers. The survey focuses on key elements such as listening, understanding, empathy, enthusiasm, rapport building, clear communication and overall customer experience. The average score from these surveys is an impressive 90%.
- 7.4 The Customer Service Team Manager is collaborating with the Transformation Team to review and update the Customer Experience Strategy. Additionally, they are working with the Communications Team Manager on a project aimed at improving customer contact. This project focuses on:
- Reducing avoidable contact
 - Renewing website content
 - Enhancing the written word and tone of voice in letters sent to customers across the authority
 - Implementing mandatory customer service training for all officers.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The Customer Services team has made significant strides in enhancing the quality and efficiency of service delivery over the past year, despite facing challenges such as increased abusive behaviour and mental health issues among customers. The Team has implemented effective strategies to address these issues, including enhanced no tolerance messaging and root cause analysis.
- 8.2 The retention of customer service accreditation, with full compliance in all elements and excellence in several "compliance plus" areas, underscores the team's commitment to high standards. The introduction of the 'secret shopper' survey has provided valuable external feedback, contributing to an impressive average score of 90%.
- 8.3 Overall, the Customer Services team has demonstrated resilience and dedication in improving customer satisfaction and responsiveness, aligning with the Council's goals and principles outlined in the Customer Experience Strategy. Continued focus on staff wellbeing and customer insight will ensure sustained progress in delivering exceptional service to residents.

9 Comments from Scrutiny Committee 19 June 2025

- 9.1 The Scrutiny Committee highlighted several positive aspects of the report, particularly praising the benchmarking data related to abandonment rates. They noted that while a 15% abandonment rate might seem concerning in isolation, the data shows this rate is consistent across the sector. The Committee inquired whether the Council's current phone system supports a 'call back' feature, where customers are called back when they reach position 1 in the queue. Although the current provider does not offer this feature, it is being actively explored. Additionally, the Committee appreciated the customer journey mapping and root cause analysis efforts aimed at enhancing the customer experience. They expressed concern about the increased abuse towards staff

and endorsed the zero-tolerance policy, emphasising the importance of measures to support staff wellbeing

Policies and other considerations, as appropriate	
Council Priorities:	A well-run council
Policy Considerations:	None
Safeguarding:	None directly, but safeguarding is a consideration in some customer interactions
Equalities/Diversity:	None
Customer Impact:	Detailed in the report.
Economic and Social Impact:	None
Environment, Climate Change and Zero Carbon:	None
Consultation/Community/Tenant Engagement:	None
Risks:	None
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