

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – THURSDAY, 18
JUNE 2026**



Title of Report	CUSTOMER SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26	
Presented by	Cllr Andrew Woodman Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder	
Background Papers	Customer Experience Strategy 2026 -2028	Public Report: Yes
Financial Implications	There are no financial implications arising from this report. Signed off by the Acting Deputy Section 151 Officer: Yes	
Legal Implications	None directly arising from this report. Signed off by the Interim 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	<p>This report is presented to the Committee as part of the agreed annual update on Customer Service performance.</p> <p>The report supports the Council's goals outlined in the Council 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.</p>	
Recommendations	<p>THAT CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:</p> <p>NOTES THIS REPORT AND PROVIDES ANY COMMENTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET ON 23 JUNE 2026</p>	

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1. 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 2025/26, 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.

2.0 POLICY & STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

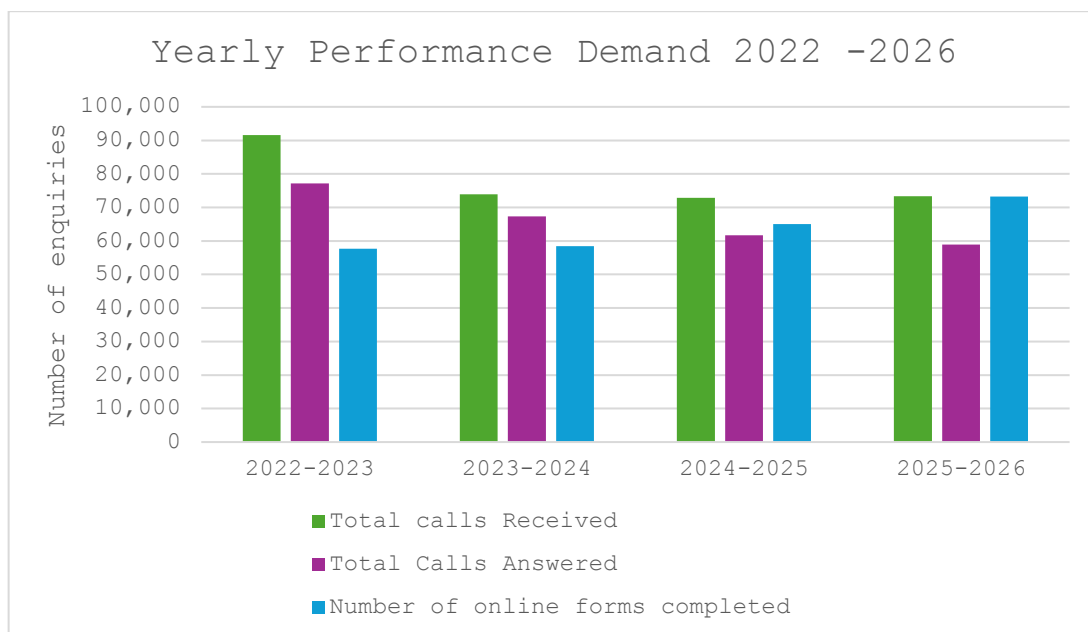
- 2.1 The adopted Customer Experience Strategy 2026-2028 sets the context for the consideration of Customer Service and its operation in the Council. The Strategy was refreshed in 2025 and approved on 16 December 2025.
- 2.2 In summary, the Strategy aims to transform how the Council interacts with its diverse customer base including residents, businesses, visitors, partners, and suppliers by:
- I. Modernising customer service through digital innovation.
 - II. Empowering staff to deliver excellent service tailored to customer needs.
 - III. Improving accessibility for all, including support for those less confident with digital channels.
 - IV. Ensuring value for money by streamlining services and using data effectively.
 - V. Embedding customer experience into the Council's core values and operations.
- 2.3 The Strategy builds on previous achievements such as website accessibility improvements, telephony upgrades and Customer Service Excellence accreditation, while responding to challenges such as reduced government funding and changing customer expectations.

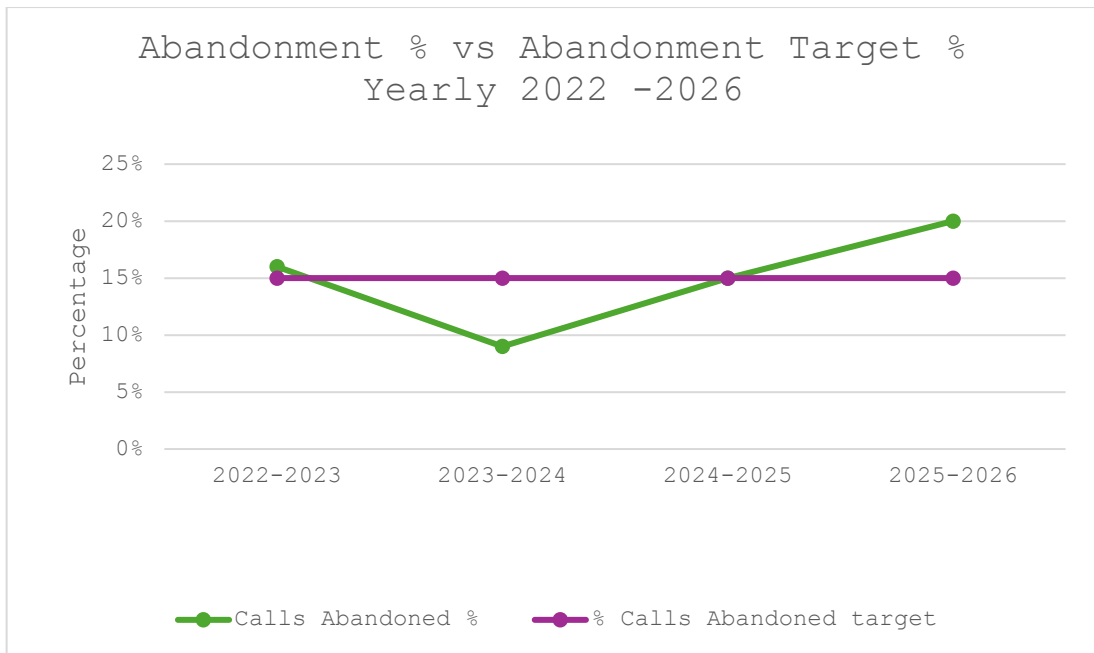
3.0 CUSTOMER SERVICE DELIVERY

- 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.

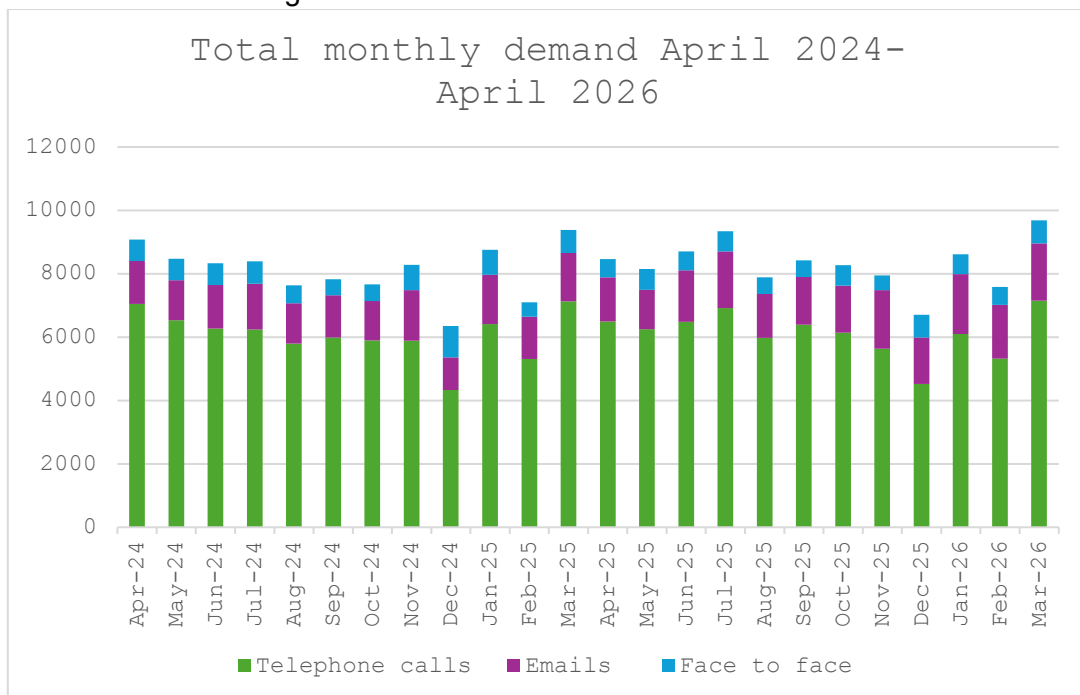
- Housing Choices – This team manages initial calls from customers seeking social housing, whether due to homelessness or a desire to join the choice-based lettings register.
- Waste services – Calls related to waste services are initially answered by the Customer Services Team, aiming for resolution 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 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 maybe transferred to the Revenues or Benefits team if the enquiry needs escalation or customer services is unable to answer the question presented.

4.0 PERFORMANCE DATA



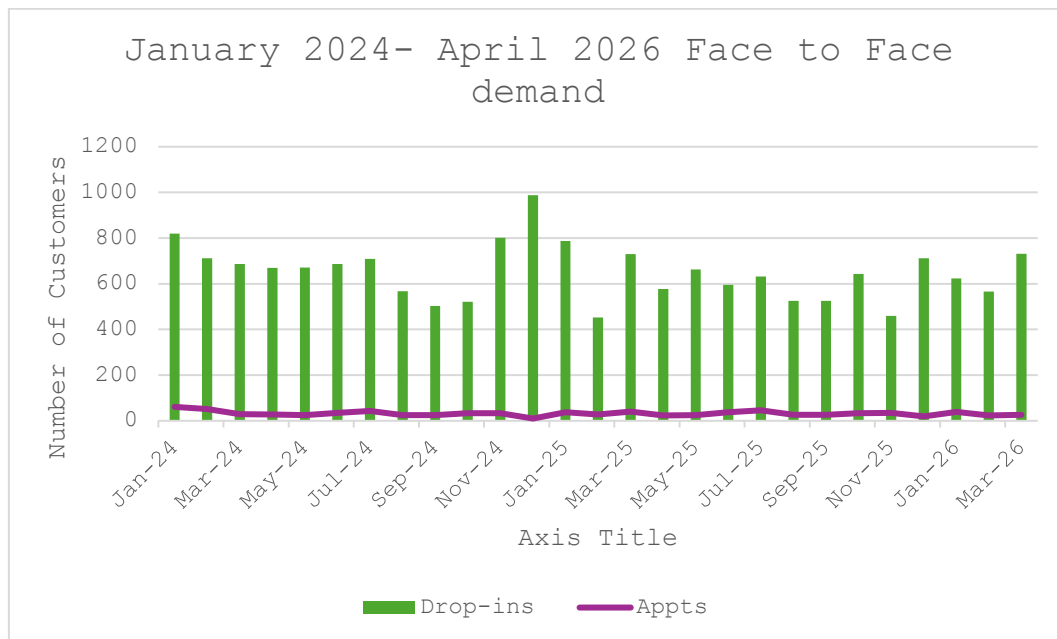


4.1 In 2025/26, call volumes (73,380) received by Customer Services were broadly unchanged from 2024/25 (72,845), suggesting that residents' preferred channels for contacting the Council may have stabilised. When comparing month-on-month demand for customer service interactions over the last two years, aside from the well-understood annual billing peaks in March and April, has remained consistent. During the year, the team resolved a higher proportion of enquiries at the first point of contact, indicating fewer repeat calls and a greater proportion of contact from unique customers. As a result, total call volumes provide a more accurate proxy for overall enquiry demand. The call abandonment rate increased in 2025/26 and, while this is outside the Council's target range, it is likely to reflect longer average talk times and reduced capacity arising from vacancies within the team and ongoing recruitment challenges.



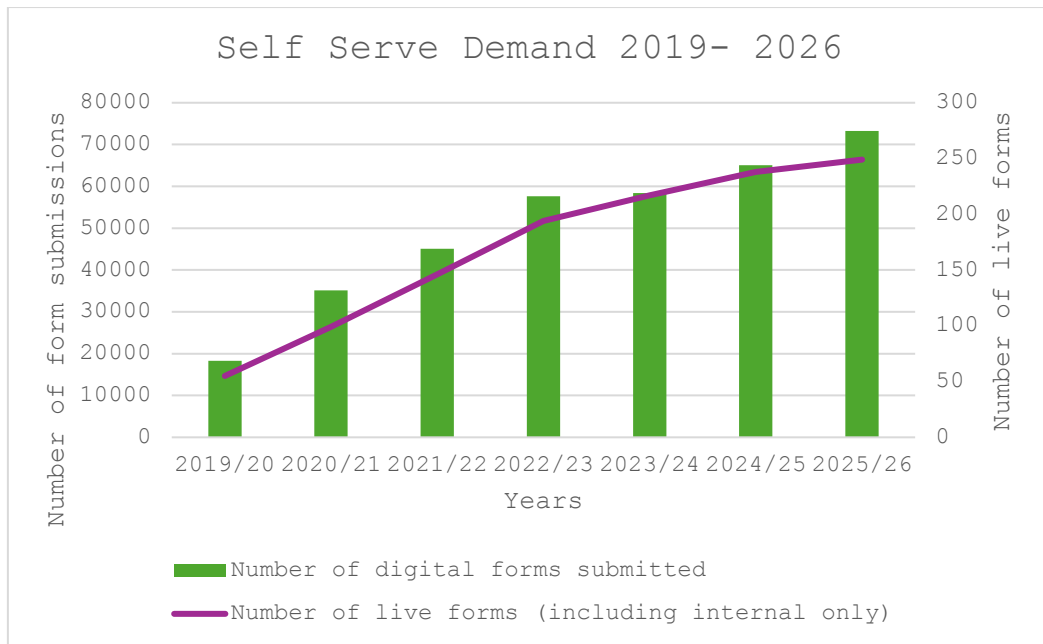
4.2 Since the opening of the Customer Centre in December 2023, the Council observed an initial peak in face-to-face interactions, with a significant increase in the number of residents 'dropping in' compared to the previous year. This surge was anticipated due to the Centre's more accessible location. The number of face-to-face interactions has now stabilised in the last financial year, averaging 632 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.

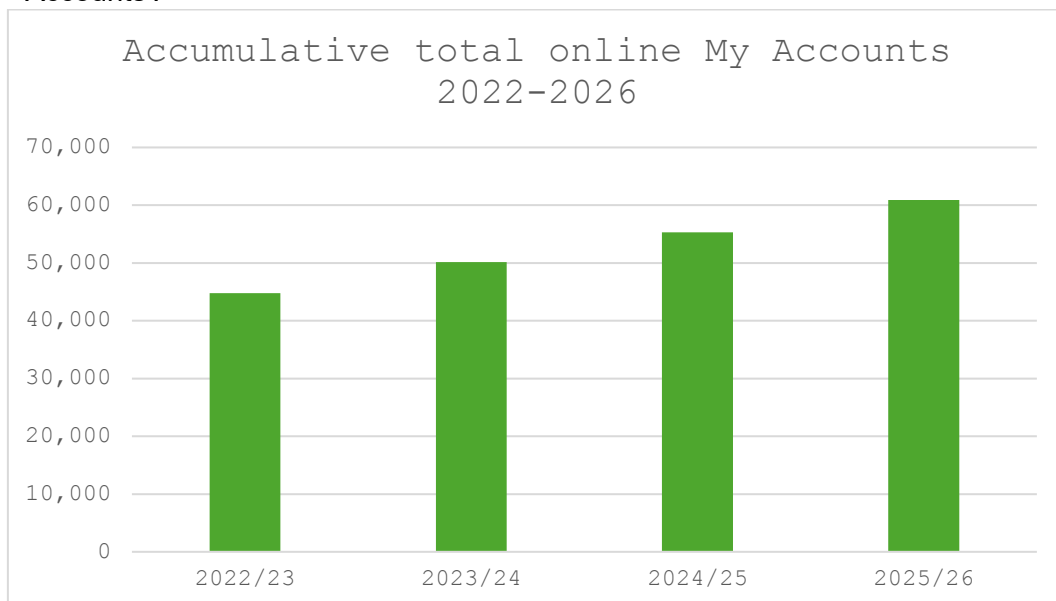


4.3 In 2025/26, average call handling times remained above previous year at six minutes 54 seconds per call (around one minute longer than in 2024/25). This is consistent with a shift towards digital self-service for routine transactions, meaning the contacts that still reach the contact centre are typically more complex, time-consuming and more likely to involve residents who require additional support. Longer handling times increase queueing and waiting times and have contributed to a higher level of call abandonment.

4.4 Over the past seven years, the Council has expanded its digital self-service offer. In 2025/26, 249 online forms were available across a range of service areas for internal use and public access, compared with 55 in 2019/20. While the initial increase was accelerated by the operational requirements arising from Covid-19, services have continued to develop and embed digital solutions to improve accessibility and enable customers to transact online where appropriate. As shown below, customer use of this channel has increased over the same period, broadly in line with the growth in forms available.

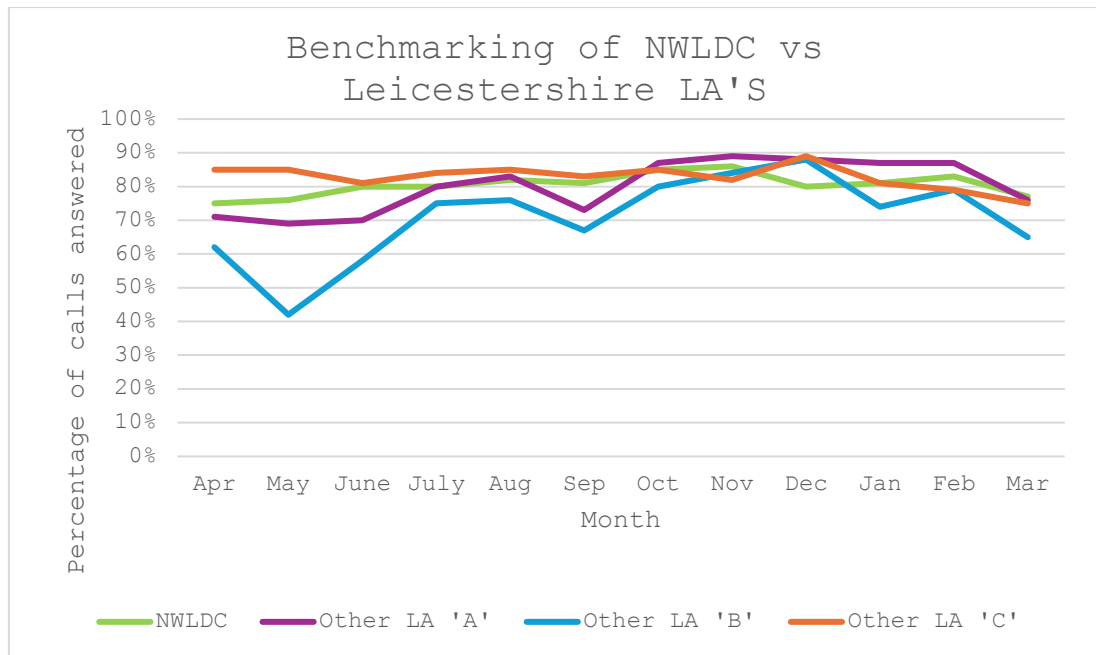


4.5 Over the past four years, the number of residents choosing to create online accounts to view their personal data, such as Council Tax and benefits, has steadily increased. As of the end of March 2026, there are 60,916 registered 'My Accounts'.



4.6 Out of the 249 live online forms, 78 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 37 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 two comparable local authorities and better than one other.

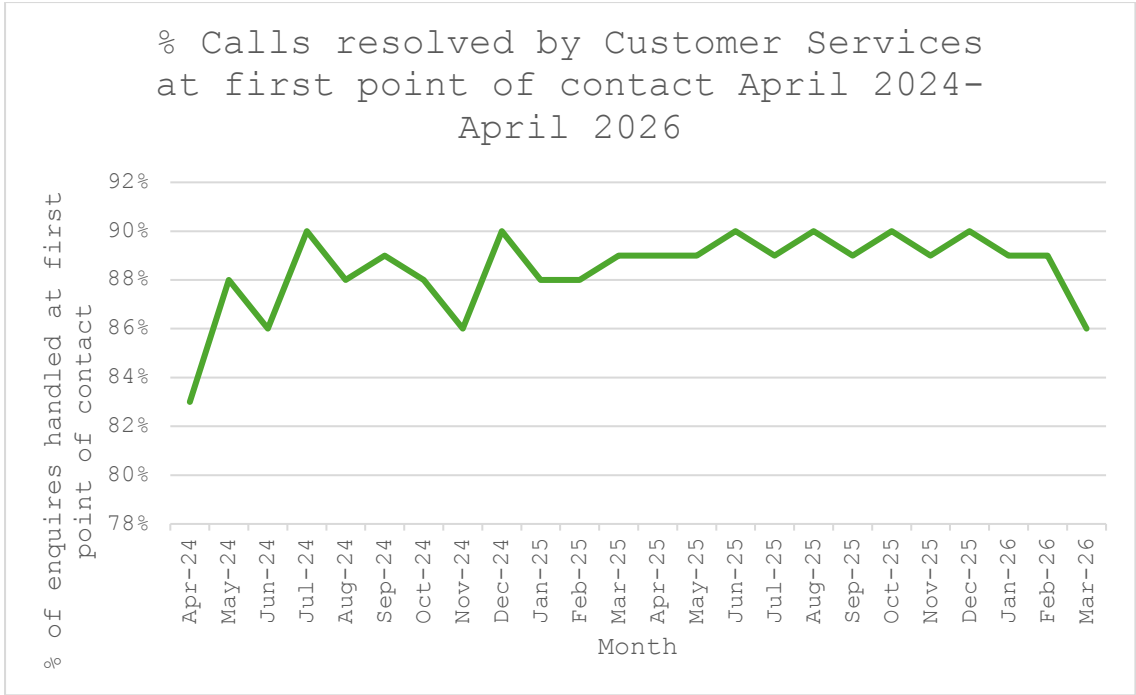


4.8 Benchmarking with comparable local authorities indicates a shift away from traditional telephony measures (for example, calls answered within 60 seconds and a 90% answering rate) towards outcome-focused measures, including 'right first time' resolution and a more holistic approach to managing enquiries. For example, where a customer contacts the Council in relation to a Council Tax reminder, the enquiry may provide an opportunity to consider whether:

- they are receiving the correct benefits and reductions;
- they have other debts or financial pressures; and
- a referral to debt advice or other support services is appropriate.

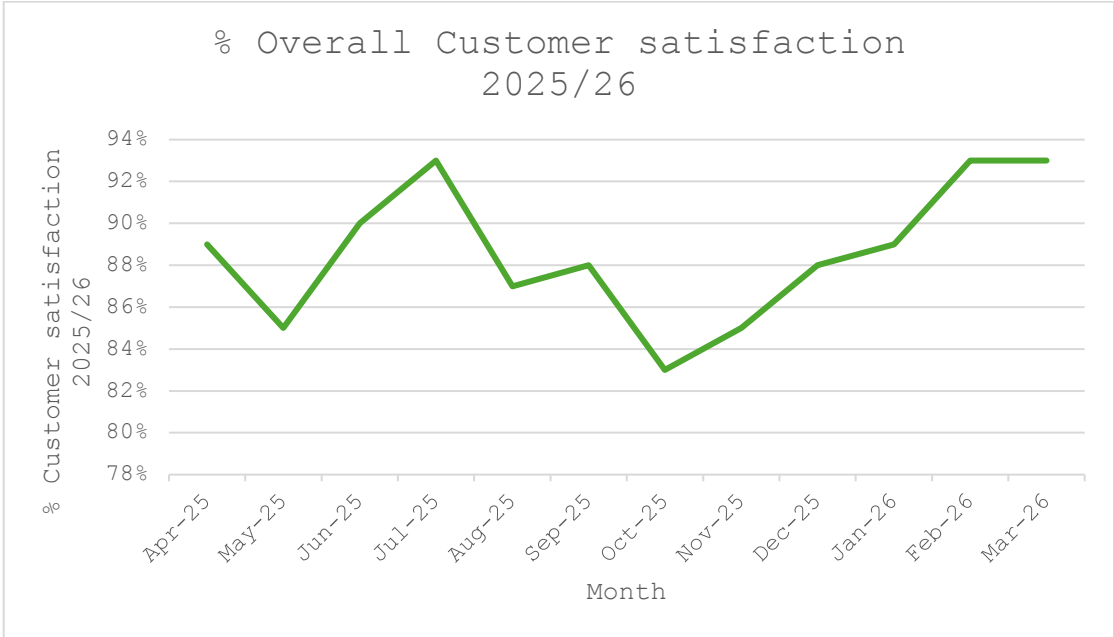
This is the approach the Council is adopting. Customer Services has been recording 'right first time' resolution for the last two years. Benchmarking also indicates that some comparable authorities apply a lower answering target during peak periods (for example, annual billing), with a target of 75% of calls answered, to support staff wellbeing and manage demand pressures.

4.9 In April 2024, Customer Services introduced a process to record whether enquiries were resolved at first point of contact or required referral to a back-office service for completion. These figures are recorded by Customer Services officers as part of their call-handling processes and reflect the outcome assigned at the time of contact. The Council set a monthly target of 85%, informed by benchmarking with other Leicestershire local authorities. Over the past year, performance has consistently exceeded this target, achieving an average first point of contact resolution rate of 88% per month.



5.0 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. Below are the overall customer satisfaction results for the last year, out of the 3504 customers who completed the telephone survey.



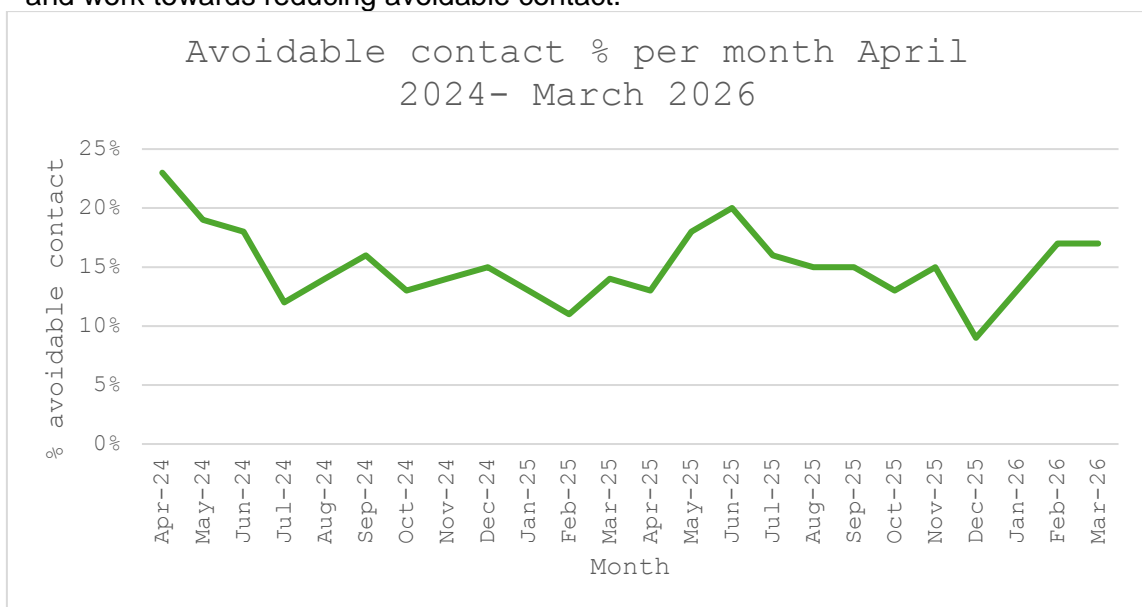
5.2 Independent mystery shopping surveys were carried out on a monthly basis throughout 2025/26 to provide objective insight into the quality and consistency of customer interactions. The overall satisfaction score achieved was 86%, reflecting a strong standard of service delivery. Particular strengths were identified in active listening skills and the ability to ask appropriate and relevant questions, both of which achieved an excellent score of 97%. In addition, staff demonstrated consistently high levels of customer-focused soft skills, with enthusiasm, empathy, positivity, helpfulness, friendliness and professionalism collectively scoring 93%. These results indicate a well-embedded customer service culture and provide assurance that residents are being supported in a respectful, attentive and professional manner.

6.0 AVOIDABLE CONTACT

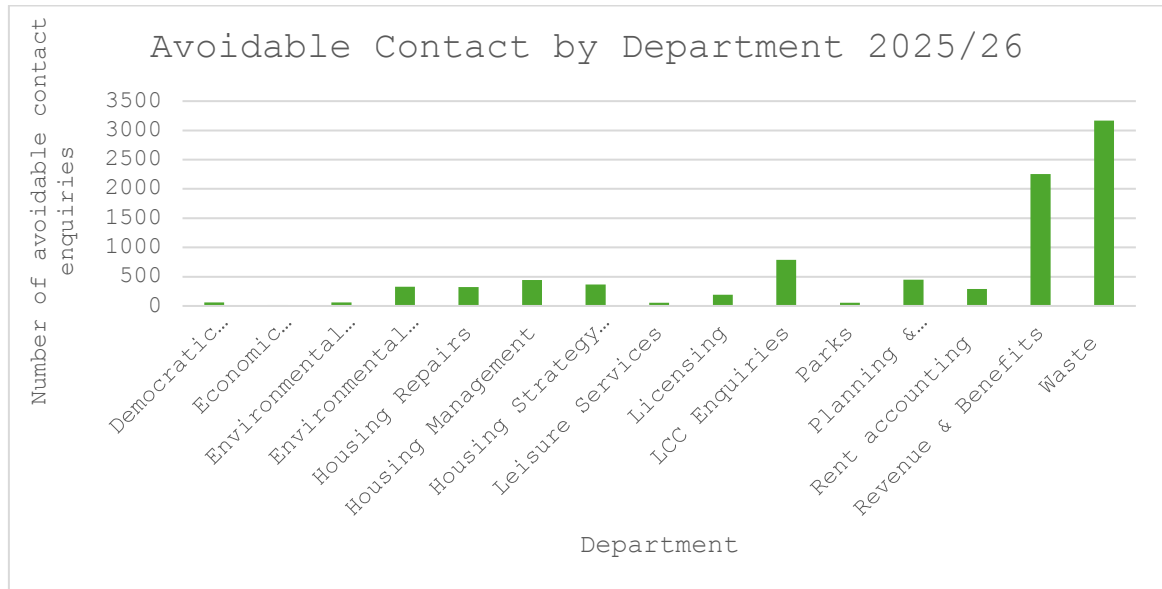
6.1 Avoidable Contact in the context of customer service and the Council operations, refers to interactions between customers (or residents) and the Council that could have been prevented through better information, processes, systems and officer behaviour. These contacts often arise due to issues such as unclear communication, process inefficiencies, or lack of accessible information.

6.2 The data analysed spans from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026, covering the first full two years 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 between April 2024 and March 2026. Over the course of 2025/26, the average avoidable contact is 15% of all contact, which translates to approximately 736 calls per month at an average of six minutes 54 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 2025 and March 2026. Notably, Revenues and Benefits and Waste services have the highest number of avoidable contacts, with 2,252 and 3,166 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 has so far involved 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.

7.0 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 behavior through increased communication and signage.
- **Root Cause Analysis:** The team is investigating the underlying reasons for these behaviors to prevent future occurrences.
- **Review of Customer Contact Standards:** The team is ensuring the Council's standards are consistent and aligned across the organisation, setting clear expectations for both staff and customers.
- **Resilience training:** The Council reached out to colleagues in the NHS and GP federation to obtain training for officers around building strategies for their own mental health and wellbeing and improving their resilience.
- **Security guard:** Introduction of a security guard at the Customer Centre initially for a six-month trial period until the end of August 2026.

These pressures have had an impact on the health and wellbeing of the Customer Service team, resulting in higher levels of sickness absence and a temporary reduction in overall capacity. In addition, the team has experienced several retirements, creating vacancies within the service. While recruitment campaigns have been undertaken on multiple occasions, some successful candidates have withdrawn prior to taking up their roles, and others have decided, following initial training, that the position was not the right fit for them. Due to the specialist nature of the service, new Customer Service Officers typically require between six and nine months of training before they are fully competent to manage all customer contact queues. Consequently, the loss of experienced, fully trained officers has had a short-term impact on performance. However, recruitment efforts continue and the service remains focused on building capacity, supporting staff wellbeing, and maintaining service resilience over the longer term.

- 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 six "compliance plus" areas which is an improvement by three on 2024/25.
- 7.3 In recognition of the importance of consistent, high-quality customer interactions, mandatory customer care training was introduced during the 2025/26 period for all Council Officers. Every officer attended a face-to-face training session delivered by an external specialist provider, incorporating scenario-based learning with professional actors. This approach was designed to reflect real customer experiences and ensure learning was impactful, practical, and directly applicable to day-to-day interactions.
- 7.4 In addition to the formal training programme, the Customer Services Team Manager has developed and is delivering a face-to-face workshop focused on "walking in the customer's shoes." This session is designed to raise awareness across the Council that every role within the Council contributes to the customer experience, regardless of whether officers have direct contact with residents. The workshop encourages staff to consider the cumulative impact of actions, decisions, and internal processes on customers, reinforcing shared responsibility for service standards and promoting a more joined-up, customer-centred approach across the organisation.

8.0 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.

8.3 Overall, the Customer Services team demonstrates a clear and ongoing commitment to improving customer experience across the Council. Through targeted training, strong leadership, and a focus on shared responsibility, the Customer Services team is fostering a culture where customer needs are better understood and consistently considered. While challenges remain, the steps taken to invest in staff development and promote a customer-centred approach provide a solid foundation for continued improvement, service resilience, and positive outcomes for residents.

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 Engagement:	None.
Risks:	None.
Officer Contact	Nichola Oliver Customer Services Team Manager nichola.oliver@nwleicestershire.gov.uk