



## Finance & Resources Select Committee Agenda

Date: Thursday 18 April 2024

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF

### Membership:

R Bagge (Chairman), M Walsh (Vice-Chairman), K Ashman, M Ayub, S Bowles, M Bracken, S Chhokar, P Cooper, D Dhillon, T Dixon, G Harris, I Macpherson, R Newcombe, C Oliver and S Wilson

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Agenda Item	Time	Page No
<b>1 Apologies for absence / Changes in membership</b>		
<b>2 Declarations of Interest</b>		
<b>3 Minutes</b>		<b>5 - 8</b>
The minutes of the meeting held on 22 <sup>nd</sup> February 2024 to be confirmed as a correct record.		

**4 Public Questions**

Public Questions is an opportunity for people who live, work or study in Buckinghamshire to put a question to a Select Committee.

The Committee will hear from members of the public who have submitted questions in advance relating to items on the agenda. The Cabinet Member, relevant key partners and responsible officers will be invited to respond.

Further information on how to register can be found here: <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/your-council/get-involved-with-council-decisions/select-committees/>

**5 Customer First**

**14:10**

**9 - 34**

The Committee will receive the Customer First Annual report, and Customer Service Centre Performance Update.

**Contributors:**

Councillor John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing & Resources

Councillor Tim Butcher, Deputy Cabinet Member for Resources

Sarah Murphy-Brookman, Corporate Director for Resources

Lloyd Jefferies, Service Director for Business Operations

Andy Hallsworth, Customer Improvement Programme Manager

**Papers:**

Customer First Annual Report 2023/24

Customer Service Centre Performance Update

**6 Work Programme**

**15:00**

The Select Committee has the opportunity to put forward ideas for next municipal year's work programme.

**7 Date and time of the next meeting**

The next meeting will take place after the Council's Annual Meeting where the calendar of meetings will be agreed.

The proposed date for the next meeting will be Thursday 18th July 2024 at 2pm.

**8 Exclusion of the Public**

To resolve that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the

meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

*Paragraph 3 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)*

**9 Capital Programme: Temporary Accommodation 15:10 35 - 90**

At the request of the Committee, a report on the capital programme and temporary accommodation will be considered.

**Contributors:**

Councillor Mark Winn, Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory Service

Councillor John Chilver, Cabinet member for Accessible Housing and Resources

Steve Bambrick, Corporate Director for Planning, Growth and Sustainability

Lisa Michelson, Service Director for Housing & Regulatory Services

John Reed, Service Director for Property & Assets

David Skinner, Service Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer)

**Papers:**

Temporary Accommodation Update (confidential)

Appendix A - Local Authority Housing Fund – Refugees: Freehold Acquisition (confidential)

Appendix B - Freehold Acquisition to support the Councils response to the Temporary Accommodation demand needs in Buckinghamshire (confidential)

Appendix C - Reletting Background and Financials (confidential)

**10 Confidential Minutes 91 - 94**

The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024 to be confirmed as a correct record.

If you would like to attend a meeting, but need extra help to do so, for example because of a disability, please contact us as early as possible, so that we can try to put the right support in place.

For further information please contact: Chris Ward [democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)  
01296 585807



Agenda Item 3  
**Buckinghamshire Council**  
**Finance & Resources Select**  
**Committee**

## Minutes

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & RESOURCES SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2024 IN THE PARALYMPIC ROOM, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 1.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 2.56 PM**

### MEMBERS PRESENT

R Bagge, M Walsh, K Ashman, S Bowles, M Bracken, S Chhokar, P Cooper, D Dhillon, G Harris, I Macpherson, R Newcombe and S Wilson

### OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

R Stuchbury (in part), G Cole (AVE), N Dicker (Consilio), R Harrington (BA), J Kingsnorth (Consilio), S Moore, S Murphy-Brookman, D Pearce (Consilio), M Preston (AVE), J Reed, D Skinner and C Ward

### Agenda Item

#### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Councillors Ayub, Dixon, Oliver and Tett, and Steve Bambrick.

#### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S Bowles declared a personal interest in Item 10 as the Chairman of Buckinghamshire Advantage.

Councillors R Newcombe and P Cooper declared personal interests in Items 10 and 11 as members of the Strategic Sites Committee which would be considering a planning application at the Stoke Mandeville former sports and social club having been deferred at its meeting on 15 December 2023.

#### 3 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 30th November 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

#### 4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

#### 5 BUDGET INQUIRY 2023 RECOMMENDATIONS: 12-MONTH REVIEW

The Chairman welcomed Councillor J Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources, who gave a summary of the report:

- Most of the actions detailed in the report had been completed.
- Capital schemes were in progress. Cabinet had not agreed to capital-based recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee in January 2024 as Cabinet Members had not wanted to create unrealistic expectations.
- The capital budget for the next 4 years had been agreed. There was uncertainty due to the unpredictability of government grants, inflation, CIL funds available and difficulties with supply chains.
- Recommendation 4 – Changes to Community Board boundaries would take place in 2025. The Cabinet Member for Communities would progress this with Members and Community Board Managers.
- Recommendation 5 – CCTV was in progress. £868,000 was budgeted for 2024-25 to digitise the control centre in High Wycombe. Town and Parish CCTV systems would be able to connect to the control centre.
- Recommendation 7 – There will be a Cabinet paper in March 2024 dealing with the re-location of the Archives and the museum’s reserve collection housed at RAF Halton. This should use funding available for high street development and be cost neutral to the Council.

Questions from Scrutiny Committee Members were invited. During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- The Committee would receive a confidential report on investment in children’s homes and temporary accommodation in due course.
- Members felt the recommendation relating to developing the business case for a CCTV framework was completed due to capital funding being allocated to the project. The Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources agreed that this project could now be shown as “completed”.
- The proposal for the new facility for housing the Archives and museum collection was welcomed. It was noted that plans for the re-development of the Halton site and the relocation of the museum collection should be integrated.

## **6 Q3 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2023-24**

The Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources introduced the report, highlighting the following points:

- The report set out details of revenue and capital and included figures from the quarter October to December 2023.
- There was an improvement in the deficit from £8.6 million to £4.5 million. This reflected prudent financial management combined with the successful delivery of planned savings.
- Inflation had meant that higher interest had been earned on investments.
- Demand-led services had continued to experience pressures, notably adult and child social care, temporary accommodation and home to school transport.
- Four portfolios were showing favourable variance from budget, notably Accessible Housing and Resources.
- From a target figure of £30.8 million savings, a £25.4 million saving had been achieved. This had been due to a reduced income from the Energy from Waste plant, which was affected by volatility in the electricity market.
- The overall forecast financial slippage from budget was £1.2 million, around 1% of the

total budget.

- Overall debt had fallen in the last quarter, aided by a debt reminder system. Prompt payment of invoices was currently above the 95% target.

Questions from Scrutiny Committee Members were invited. During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- It was noted that service risk contingencies had not been used. A Member asked if contingencies would be used in the last quarter of the financial year. £5 million spend had been set aside for road repairs which was offset by the extra £5 million from the government for adult social care. The anticipated position for the end of the financial year was positive and the Council was successfully reducing costs. There was some uncertainty in the costs for adult social care, but they were expected to be as forecast.
- The two projects which did not progress were related to property. Often, contracts had to be re-negotiated due to rising costs and this had caused a delay.
- There was a discussion on the unsecured debt relating to Adult Social Care (ASC). A Member asked if invoices were being issued frequently enough. Mention was made of the review into ASC debt, and it was explained that some debt had been re-categorised from secured to unsecured after the review. Process improvements were detailed in the report. Payments could be delayed by the court process necessary to secure a charge on a property. A new process had been helping but there was a backlog of work.
- All debts were pursued – some using payment plans, others are paid late. Most of the outstanding debt will be recovered. A Member asked for a written summary of debt including how much was lost and how much it was hoped could be recovered which the Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources agreed to.

**Action:** John Reed

- A Member had expected to see the quarterly performance report, including KPIs, which had gone before Cabinet. The Scrutiny Officer advised that these Cabinet reports were available for other Select Committee members to view.

## **7 WORK PROGRAMME**

- A Member noted that the academy had been mentioned a number of times during the budget scrutiny process. The main purpose of the academy had been to train social workers. The Member did not recall that the committee was notified that the academy had been discontinued and had heard various explanations for this. The Member wondered if the financial element of this topic could be considered in the future work programme.

**Action:** Scrutiny Officer

- A Member suggested a review of the council's capital investment programme, particularly regarding temporary accommodation and children's homes.
- A report on Home to school transport would be considered at the July meeting.

## **8 DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 2.00 pm in the Oculus, The Gateway

## **9 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

To resolve that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

*Paragraph 3 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)*

**10 EXTERNAL PROPERTY COMPANIES**

The Committee received a report providing an update on the Company activities and the work undertaken by the Council's Shareholder Committee in overseeing the activities. A number of topics were discussed including business plans, commercial activities and governance arrangements.

**11 ESTATES STRATEGY**

During the confidential discussion, Members commended the speed of the delivery of the Estates Strategy.





## Report to Finance & Resources Select Committee

<b>Date:</b>	<b>18 April 2024</b>
<b>Reference number:</b>	n/a
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Customer First Annual report, and CSC Performance Update.</b>
<b>Cabinet Member(s):</b>	Cllr John Chilver (Cabinet Member, Resources) Cllr Tim Butcher (Deputy Cabinet Member, Resources)
<b>Contact officer:</b>	<b>Lloyd Jeffries, Service Director (Business Operations)</b>
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	None specific

### Recommendations:

- To note the Customer Service Centre performance data and interventions for 2023/24.
- To note the high-level plans for using AI (Artificial Intelligence) to support customers when accessing Council services.
- To note the progress made by the Customer First team to embed a customer- centric culture at the Council, summarised by the latest Annual Report for 2023.

**Reason for decision:** n/a

### 1. Executive summary

- 1.1 2023/24 has been a pivotal period for the Customer Services team at Buckinghamshire Council, characterised by a return to stability and improved performance metrics. This report summarises the team's journey over the past 12 months, detailing the performance of Customer Services, the challenges faced, and

the ongoing initiatives to further enhance performance and the customer experience.

- 1.2 In the wake of unprecedented customer demand, the Customer Service Centre (CSC) has successfully reduced average call wait times from **10 minutes in the previous year to a more acceptable range of 3 to 5 minutes**. This achievement is a testament to the team's dedication and the effectiveness of the strategies implemented to improve service delivery.
- 1.3 The CSC has also maintained strong performance in other key metrics. Call answer rates improved from an average **85.2%** to a range between **91.1%** and **97.05%**. The high first call resolution rates, reaching up to **78.0%**, further underscored the CSC's commitment to resolving customer issues promptly and efficiently.
- 1.4 Innovation has been at the forefront of the CSC's approach to improving customer service. The Co-pilot trial has shown promising results in enhancing the quality and accuracy of service, contributing to a reduction in Average Handle Time (AHT).
- 1.5 Looking ahead, the report outlines plans to leverage AI in supporting customer access to Council services and celebrates the successful launch of a new CRM (Customer Relationship Management) platform. It also highlights the Customer First team's efforts to embed a customer-centric culture within the Council, as detailed in the latest Annual Report for 2023.
- 1.6 This report provides a snapshot of the Customer Services team's resilience and progress, reflecting their commitment to the 'Customer First' ethos and their dedication to ensuring that every interaction with Buckinghamshire Council is easy, helpful, fair, and honest.

## 2. Content of report

### CSC performance update

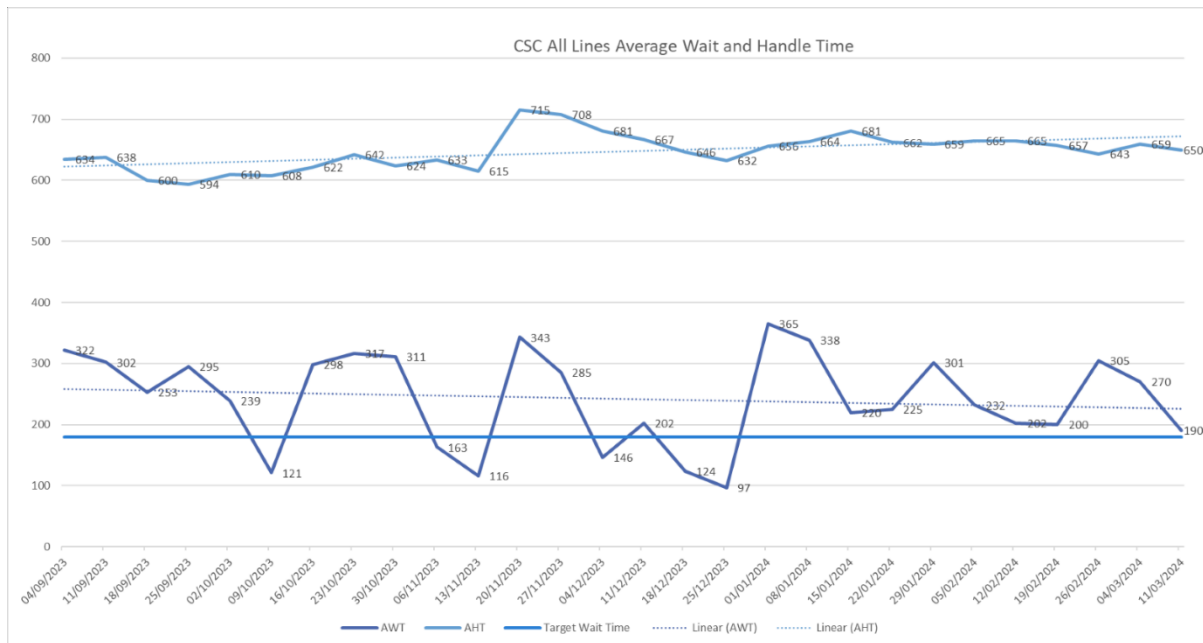
- 2.1 The Customer Service Centre (CSC) has shown significant improvement in performance over the last 12 months, particularly in terms of call wait times.
- 2.2 The performance indicators for the CSC across the last 12 months are detailed in the tables below:

Indicator	Target	22/23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23
Calls offered	-	440,428	32,646	34,507	35,222	33,681	31,924
Calls answered	-	375,255	27,983	31,598	33,259	32,404	30,719
% Calls answered	90%	85.20%	93.20%	91.57%	94.43%	96.21%	96.23%
% Calls abandoned	10%	12.81%	5.84%	7.27%	5.15%	3.58%	3.56%
Average call wait time	180 secs	594	226	311	312	230	208
First call resolution	51%	75.40%	75.20%	75.60%	76.40%	77.30%	77.40%

Indicator	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24
Calls offered	32,472	31,032	28,941	23,061	32,900	28,749
Calls answered	30,054	29,537	27,711	22,383	29,972	26,854
% Calls answered	92.55%	95.18%	95.74%	97.05%	91.10%	93.41%
% Calls abandoned	5.69%	4.04%	3.46%	2.33%	8.18%	5.85%
Average call wait time	331	257	227	156	230	242
First call resolution	76.10%	77.80%	77.40%	78.00%	78.00%	78.00%

- 2.3 The CSC has worked diligently to reduce the average call wait time. The average call wait time in the 22/23 period was nearly 10 minutes, which significantly exceeds the current average wait time across 23/24 which is 5 minutes.
- 2.4 Despite wait times still being slightly outside of the target of 180 seconds (3 minutes), there has been a consistent effort to maintain wait times within the 3 to 5-minute range.
- 2.5 This comparison highlights the substantial improvements made over the last 12 months, demonstrating the CSC's commitment to enhancing customer service and reducing wait times for callers. The efforts to streamline processes and implement new technologies have contributed to a more efficient Customer Service Centre, resulting in a more responsive and customer-friendly service.
- 2.6 Notably, there have been no official customer complaints regarding wait times, indicating a positive reception of the efforts to improve this metric.
- 2.7 The CSC has consistently met its objectives concerning call answer rates, with a percentage of calls answered ranging from 91.1% to 97.05% over the past year. This is compared to an average 85.2% across the previous 12 months.

- 2.8 The percentage of calls abandoned has seen a decrease, with figures dropping as low as 2.33% in December 2023, showcasing the CSC's commitment to addressing customer calls promptly.
- 2.9 First call resolution rates have remained high, with the CSC achieving rates of up to **78.00%**, reflecting the CSCs efficiency in resolving customer issues on the initial contact.
- 2.10 The CSC's performance indicators highlight a robust recovery from the 22/23 levels, with significant strides made in enhancing customer service efficiency. The dedication to improving call handling and resolution processes has resulted in a more streamlined and customer-friendly experience.
- 2.11 Customer Services has consistently navigated through a myriad of challenges to uphold performance standards. The team has faced pressures such as staff turnover and the subsequent need for retraining, which have been significant.
- 2.12 The **migration to the new CRM platform, Abavus**, has been another significant undertaking. The change process has been managed effectively to minimise disruption, although some impact on performance was inevitable as staff adapted to the new system. The transition has been well-handled, with staff retraining and learning new processes to ensure continuity of service.
- 2.13 Managing back-office demand has been a significant challenge, particularly in relation to the monthly cycle of Council Tax recovery – the Council issued over **100,000 reminders and final notices** as well as **over 20,000 summonses** over the course of 2023/24. This process generates a substantial volume of customer inquiries directed at the Customer Services team. There is careful planning to ensure the availability of resources to handle the surge in customer contacts following their receipt of a call to action. The team has been focused on aligning resources to effectively manage these spikes and maintain service levels as far as possible.
- 2.14 The team's proactive approach to managing challenges and disruptions has been crucial in maintaining service delivery and customer satisfaction. Despite these challenges, wait times have been relatively stable, as shown in the graph below. This period of relative stability is the result of the collective efforts of Customer Services and the back-office services to effectively manage demand.



2.15 We continue to use proactive measures for busy periods e.g. as we dispatch letters to residents eligible for council tax discounts, and we anticipate a rise in customer contact. To manage this, we've implemented various measures, including informative phone messages and an annual leave embargo period, especially as we approach the council tax annual billing cycle.

2.16 We are also exploring other ways to enhance our performance:

- We have continued with the Microsoft Co-Pilot trial to support the Contact Centre in several ways. The main benefit is that we can quickly summarise customer calls to be entered into emails or case management systems, either line of business systems or our CRM. This can save time and improve the accuracy of information entered into these systems. Additionally, Co-Pilot can support quality monitoring of calls and complaints and we have started to look at how we use Co-Pilot to analyse customer sentiment and identify emerging trends across calls.
- We have now issued new Operating Level Agreements with key services areas to formalise the relationship between Customer Services and the back office. To emphasise the importance of collaborative working and customer-centric culture at all points of the customer journey.

## Website Accessibility

- 2.17 As a local authority, we are committed to providing a website that is accessible to everyone, regardless of their abilities or needs. We believe that having an accessible website is not only a legal obligation, but also a moral duty and a social benefit.
- 2.18 By making our website accessible, we are complying with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018, which require public sector organisations to make their websites and apps accessible to people with disabilities. More importantly, we are ensuring that all our residents and stakeholders can access and use our website effectively, without facing barriers or discrimination. Having an accessible website also helps us to improve our customer service, enhance our reputation, and reach a wider audience.
- 2.19 Our website's accessibility scores are based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standards, which are the international benchmark for web accessibility. These standards measure how easy it is for people with different disabilities to access and understand web content. The higher the score, the more accessible the website is.
- 2.20 Our website has a high overall score of **92.8 out of 100**, which means that it is mostly accessible. It also meets the minimum requirement of level A rating, with a score of **97.7 out of 100**, which means that it provides basic access to the web content. Moreover, it meets most of the level AA rating criteria, with a score of **94.7 out of 100**, which means that it provides enhanced access to the web content.
- 2.21 However, we are aware that our website has some technical issues that affect its accessibility, especially for users of assistive technology, such as screen readers. These issues are related to headings and element IDs.
- 2.22 Headings are used to organise and label the web content, making it easier for users to navigate and understand the information. Element IDs are used to identify and link different parts of the web content, such as navigation menus, forms, and buttons. Some of our web pages have headings that are skipped or nested incorrectly, which can confuse users of assistive technology. Some of our web pages also have element IDs that are not unique, which can make it difficult for users to distinguish between different elements.
- 2.23 These issues are technical in nature and do not affect the content or functionality of the website. However, we are working hard to fix them and will update our accessibility statement accordingly when this is done. We are collaborating with our hosting provider, Torchbox, who is responsible for the technical aspects of the website and when they are implemented, will update our accessibility statement accordingly.
- 2.24 We have also just changed our accessibility target upwards from 80% to 90% for all forthcoming reporting periods from April 2024.
- 2.25 Further information can be found on our website in our accessibility statements [here](#)

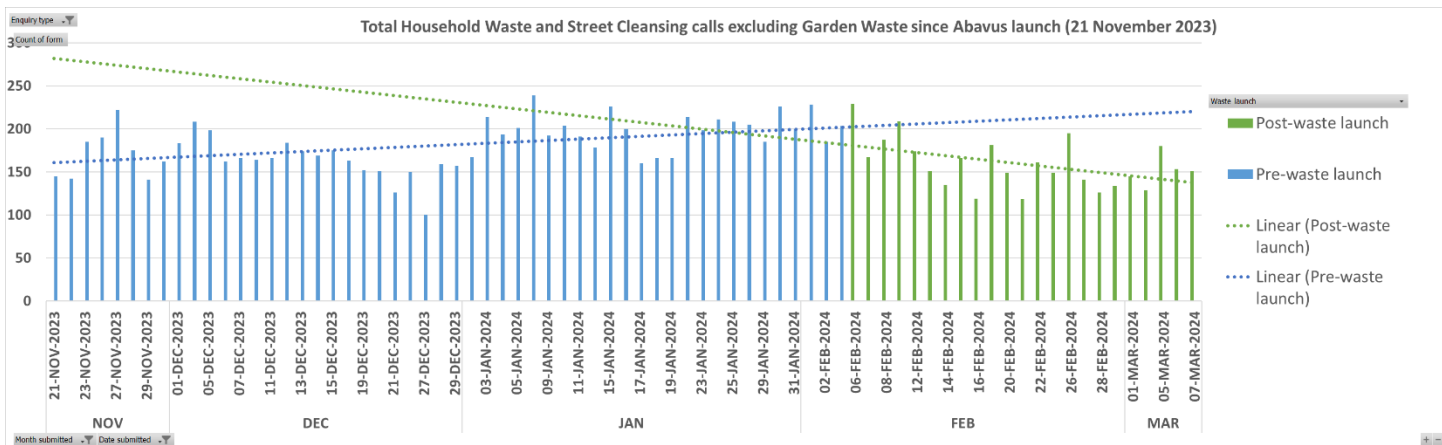
## CRM Implementation Update

- 2.26 The ongoing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) programme is designed to migrate our interactive web forms and processes from our legacy platforms to a single platform, provided by digital transformation company Abavus.
- 2.27 Key implementation activity to date includes:
- Most customer interactions through **contact us** forms (excepting some education enquiries) **October 2023**
  - Customer services – who are fully using Abavus for recording customer interactions. **November 2023**
  - The garden waste subscription service go live for residents in Aylesbury Vale area (all non-Veolia residents), has now surpassed **20,000** sign ups since launch **December 2023**.
  - **Waste and Recycling:** colleagues in both the North and South now use Abavus for resident interactions. This means the Southern team no longer use the GOSS Interactive platform for any communications. **February 2023**
  - The Northern team have begun the process of winding down the use of Salesforce
  - **Fix My Street** interactions are now also **integrated into Abavus**, giving more information to both customer services and the waste team as well as the communications that are sent to customers. **February 2023**
- 2.28 The new platform and processes have been met with positive reception, particularly by the Waste teams who have embraced the system with enthusiasm. The platform's ability to provide clear visibility of performance metrics, which were previously challenging to surface, has been a significant benefit.
- 2.29 In the first month following its implementation, the Waste teams efficiently processed 2,048 service requests through Abavus, not including garden waste payments.
- 2.30 An impressive 98.5% of these requests were either completed or are within the 10-working day service level agreement, demonstrating the team's commitment to timely and efficient customer service.
- 2.31 Similarly, requests received via Fix My Street have shown remarkable performance, with 1,649 requests received and 99.4% of them either actioned or within the 10-working day service level agreement.

An example of a typical fly-tipping report in FixMyStreet before the integration	An example of a typical fly-tipping report in FixMyStreet post the integration
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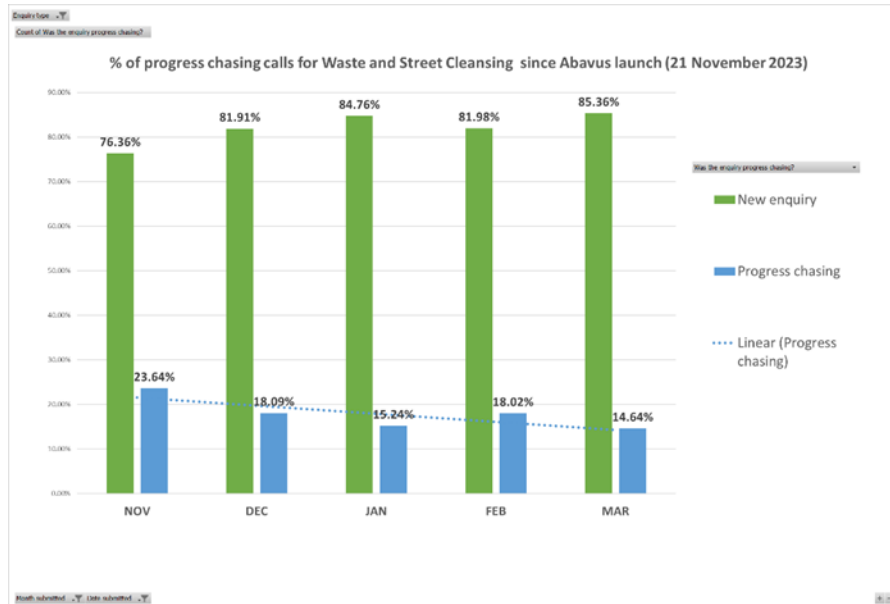
<p><b>UPDATES</b></p> <p>Reports of fly-tipping on public land are forwarded to the waste collection team for removal, and all reports are copied to the investigation team to review.</p> <p>Follow us on Twitter  <a href="#">@BucksFlyTipping</a></p> <p><i>Posted by Buckinghamshire Council at 08:43, Sunday 28 January 2024</i></p> <p>Please be aware that reports are automatically closed after 21 days to avoid duplication. Should you find for any reason that your report has not been actioned within this period; please resubmit your request and highlight the exact issue so that we can look further into the matter. We will ensure that this is dealt with as a priority.</p> <p><i>State changed to: Closed</i>  <i>Posted by Buckinghamshire Council at 01:12, Monday 19 February 2024</i></p>	<p><b>UPDATES</b></p> <p>Reports of fly-tipping on public land are forwarded to the waste collection team for removal, and all reports are copied to the investigation team to review.</p> <p>Follow us on Twitter  <a href="#">@BucksFlyTipping</a></p> <p><i>Posted by Buckinghamshire Council at 14:30, Tuesday 27 February 2024</i></p> <p><i>State changed to: Investigating</i>  <i>Updated by Buckinghamshire Council at 14:40, Tuesday 27 February 2024</i></p> <p><i>State changed to: Action scheduled</i>  <i>Updated by Buckinghamshire Council at 16:15, Tuesday 27 February 2024</i></p>
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- 2.32 This data not only highlights the successful adoption of the new tool by the Waste teams but also showcases the positive impact on customer response times, ensuring that residents receive prompt and effective service resolution.
- 2.33 Excluding garden waste sign ups, we have seen the average number of calls for waste and street cleansing drop by 12.5% since launch, compared to the preceding 2 months, highlighting how the improvements to web-content, webforms and back-office processes can reduce phone contact.



- 2.34 We are also witnessing a downward trend in the % of these calls which are progress chasing, suggesting that performance and communications to customers is improving.



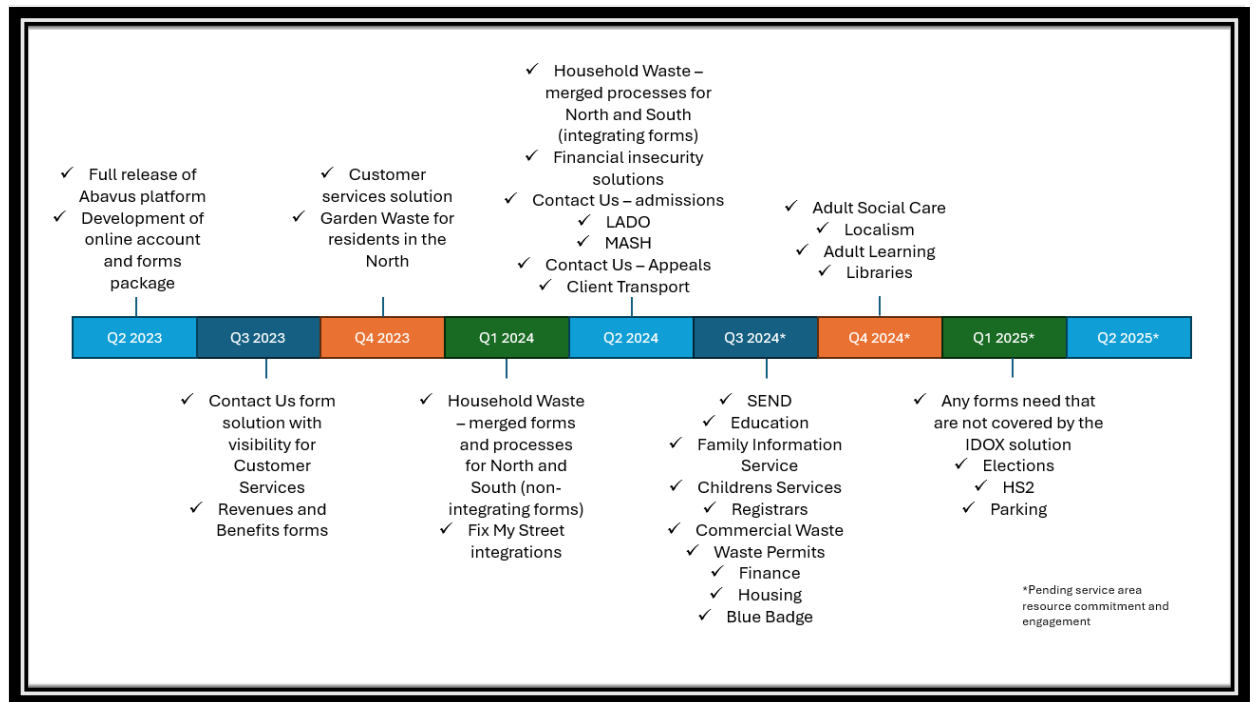


2.35 The CRM development roadmap for the upcoming months is summarised as follows:

Date	Task
<b>March</b>	A completion of the migration for waste processes – the forms that integrate with little to no officer intervention. This includes missed bins, ordering containers, garden waste for the South, and bulky collections of unwanted household items.
<b>April</b>	Offboard GOSS Interactive as a supplier.
<b>April</b>	Transition the final Salesforce processes to be moved to Abavus. The rest are all part of the ONE Uniform project.
<b>April</b>	Design, develop and deliver the webform and back-office processes for the Financial Insecurity project, replacing the previous Helping Hands form hosted on ServiceNow.
<b>April-June</b>	Continue the process of migrating Granicus processes onto Abavus (Five projects are already in train): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact Us form for Schools Admissions.</li> <li>• Contact Us form for Client Transport.</li> <li>• Contact Us form for Appeals.</li> <li>• The Multi-Agency-Safeguarding-Hub (MASH) – this is nearing completion.</li> <li>• The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) – this is nearing completion.</li> </ul>

2.36 The listed five projects above are set to complete by June 2024.

- 2.37 The next wave of processes to migrate will soon be scoped and allocated to the project team, with the migration from Granicus due to be completed by the end of the Granicus contract in June 2025.
- 2.38 The roadmap for migrating services from the legacy Granicus platform to Abavus is shown below:



- 2.39 We have already identified some future opportunities to onboard additional services and processes onto the CRM platform. Some potential areas for consideration include replacing the ‘Find My Child A School Place’ digital service, integrating the Housing system Locata, implementing an end-to-end Blue Badge service, and even replacing FixMyStreet as a place-based reporting tool.

### Using AI in Customer Services

- 2.40 As part of our commitment to enhancing customer service, Customer services has continued to explore opportunities where Artificial Intelligence can be deployed to support residents to access support and advice.
- 2.41 Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the way we interact with our customers and deliver services. We are exploring how AI can assist our customer service agents, by capturing and summarising customer conversations automatically. This will help them to quickly and easily update our various systems, reducing errors and saving time.

- 2.42 By using AI to enhance our customer service, we aim to improve customer satisfaction, efficiency and quality. But please be assured that any decisions will always be taken by a human – not AI.
- 2.43 We have already successfully deployed a rules-based chatbot that handles over 2000 queries per week, providing quick and accurate answers to common questions and requests. The current solution is not using AI. Instead, it uses pre-defined rules and presents customers with set of options or buttons to choose from.
- 2.44 Conversational AI goes beyond rule-based chatbots. They leverage advanced technologies like natural language processing and machine learning to create more human-like interactions.
- 2.45 We are actively looking at ways to expand the use of AI on our website and phone services to support customers across a wider range of services. For example, we're planning to trial telephony AI to assist customers who call us, by finding information, directing them to the correct team, or helping them complete an action. This frees up our customer service agents to focus on supporting vulnerable customers, those with more complex enquiries and those who prefer not to use digital services.

### **Customer First Annual Report 2023**

- 2.46 Within the Corporate Plan the Council clearly sets out its customer centric ambition which we describe as Customer First. The Customer First Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in September 2021, and the Customer First service standards are published on our website as three promises.
- 2.47 The Customer First Board has been in operation since November 2021 and has excellent engagement from attendees across the Council and Customer First Champions. The Board tracks the Customer First activities which are all aligned to our Customer First promises.
- 2.48 The Customer First Board meets monthly and is chaired by the Corporate Director of Resources, Sarah Murphy Brookman, and the Corporate Director for Communities, Richard Barker. All directorates are represented on the board through the participation of Service Directors.
- 2.49 The Board has now produced the second 'Annual Report' to share the progress made during 2023 and the priorities for the next 12 months. This was published on the Buckinghamshire Council website in February 2024, following approval by the Customer First Board and CMT.
- 2.50 The Customer First Annual Report 2023 outlines the progress and initiatives undertaken by the council to prioritise a customer-first culture. The report emphasises

the importance of delivering excellent customer service and details the various strategies implemented to achieve this goal.

## **Vision and Achievements**

- 2.51 The vision is to embed a customer-first culture across the organisation, ensuring every employee values and exemplifies this principle. The goals are to make interactions easy, helpful, fair, and honest, with a strong emphasis on security and GDPR compliance.
- 2.52 Efforts have been made to cater to the diverse communication needs of Buckinghamshire's residents, including enhancing digital proficiency, providing telephone support, and we are exploring the use of bookable meetings at Council Access Points.
- 2.53 Achievements across 2023 include:
- Launched **Year of Conversation** campaign to highlight the importance of good conversation in achieving faster outcomes and improving resolutions.
  - Introduced **mandatory Customer First training** for new staff and ongoing development for existing staff. The training is focused on providing a high-quality customer experience and includes handling complex conversations.
  - Implemented a **Digital Postroom** for efficient management of hard copy correspondence.
  - Rebuilt the **online contact us form** to guide customers through digital processes and contact the right teams if they are unable to self-serve online.
  - Deployed a **chatbot service** on the website to handle common queries and reduce telephone contact
  - Rolled out a new **document translation service** to assist customers whose first language is not English.
  - Expanded the use of **8x8 contact centre style telephony** to high volume, customer facing teams across the Council
  - Rolled out **Happy or Not digital surveys** across key services lines to gather customer feedback and identify areas for improvement.
- 2.54 The roadmap for the Customer First Programme includes several key developments aimed at enhancing customer service and experience:
- **Expansion of AI Use** - The council plans to further integrate AI technology into its website and phone services. This will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of customer service, allowing for quicker and more accurate

responses to customer inquiries. The use of AI will also help in managing a higher volume of interactions without compromising the quality of service.

- **Bookable Face-to-Face Appointments:** Recognising the need for personalised support, we are looking to introduce a service for vulnerable customers or those with complex service needs to book face-to-face appointments. This initiative aims to provide tailored support and ensure that all customers have access to the help they need, in a manner that is most convenient for them.
- **Continued CRM Implementation:** The rollout of a new comprehensive Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system will continue throughout 2024. This system is designed to manage customer interactions across the council effectively, providing a common customer journey across all service lines. The CRM will enable the council to track interactions, understand customer needs better, and deliver more personalised service.

2.55 These developments are part of the Council's commitment to improving customer satisfaction, efficiency, and service quality. The roadmap reflects an ambitious plan to leverage technology and innovative service delivery methods to truly put customers at the centre of everything that we do.

2.56 The full Annual Report 2023 has been shared alongside this report.

### **3 Other options considered**

3.1 Not applicable

### **4 Legal and financial implications**

4.1 Not applicable

### **5 Corporate implications**

5.1 Not applicable

### **6 Local councillors & community boards consultation & views**

6.1 Not applicable

## 7 Communication, engagement & further consultation

7.1 Not applicable

## 8 Next steps and review

W	Action
April	Continue exploring the use of AI tools, such as Microsoft Co-Pilot, to improve customer service performance and experience.
April	Prototype Microsoft Co-Pilot bot for internal staff
April	Integrating forms for Waste go-live on CRM
April-June	Phase 2 CRM Implementation
May	AI Business Case for Customer Services
Ongoing	Collaborate with Microsoft to develop a more effective and innovative approach to AI implementation.
Ongoing	Monitor the progress of key projects, such as the extension of 8x8, Translate, Happy or Not feedback, Visitor Management
Ongoing	Rolling out the Abavus case management system to service areas

## 9 Background papers

9.1 Not applicable

## 10 Your questions and views (for key decisions)

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone ] or email [



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Customer First Programme

# Annual Report 2023

# Introduction

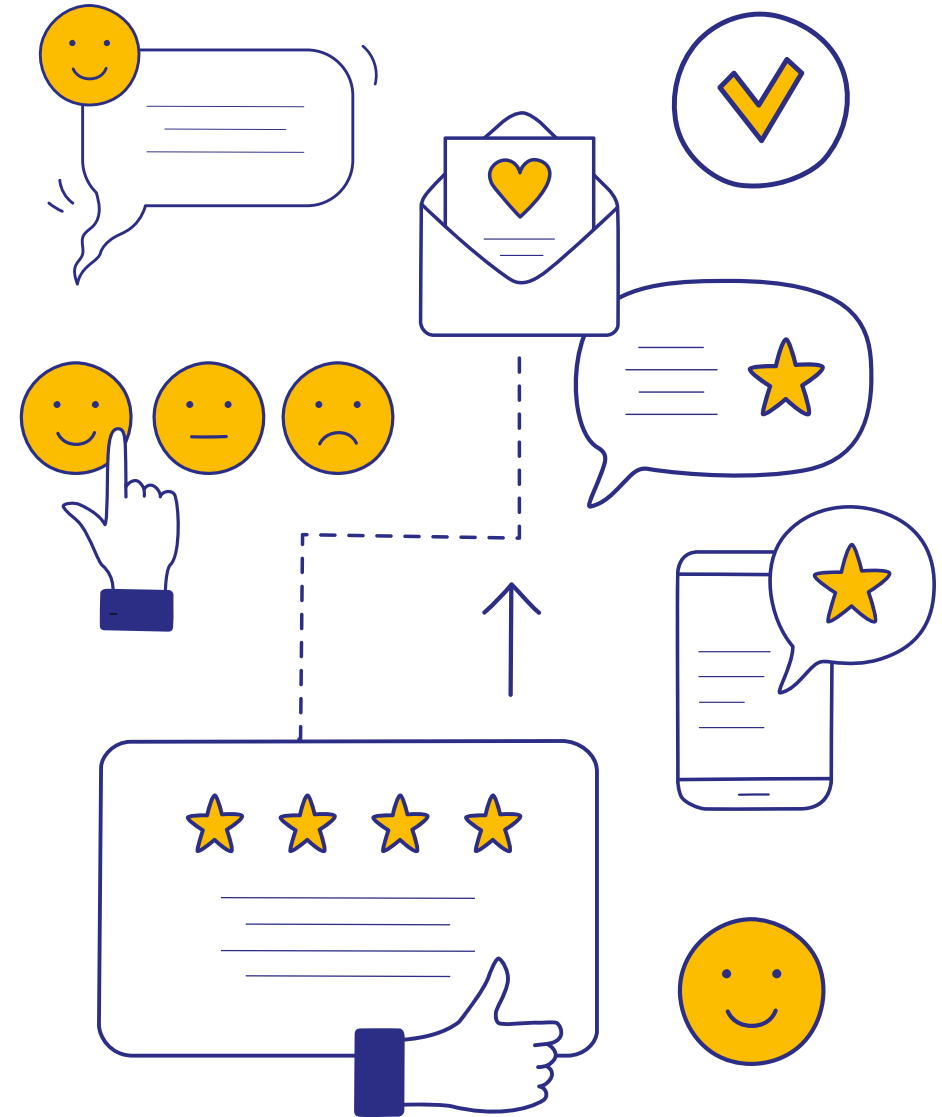
## The vision:

**A Customer First culture is prioritised throughout the entire organisation and every employee values, owns and exemplifies this.**

Page 24 A great customer experience from first contact with the Council through to the delivery of service is a corporate priority. However, to deliver this we know that it needs to be more than words. This report sets out our progress over the last year against our ambition to be a 'Customer First' organisation.

We are here to make people's lives better. That includes delivering the kind of customer service that we'd want for ourselves and our families and friends.

We know that behaviours matter. Even when things have gone wrong, providing the customer with a great experience can rebuild their trust and confidence in us.





# Our customer service goals

## Easy

### We make it easy for customers to get in touch with us.

To achieve this, we:

- Provide a number of ways to get in touch - in person, on the telephone or online.
- Join communications up, both inside the council and with our local partners.
- Help where tailored assistance is needed - for example where a customer has a disability or health condition.

## Helpful

### We get things right for customers first time.

To achieve this, we:

- Ensure customers feel confident that we've listened, understood and will take action.
- Always look for ways to improve how we do things.
- Deal with things quickly and tell customers when there is a delay.

## Fair and honest

### We are clear about what we can and can't offer, and the reasons why.

To achieve this, we:

- Treat customers with courtesy.
- Say sorry if we get something wrong and learn from our mistakes.
- Clearly explain our actions, so that customers understand our decisions.
- Keep customer information and data secure in compliance with GDPR.



# Improving how customers contact us

Buckinghamshire is home to a diverse population of 550,000 residents, each with unique needs and preferences in terms of communication. To ensure we address these needs effectively, our goal is to design customer journeys that cater to different groups:

- For digitally proficient individuals, we aim to create processes that intuitively guide them to the most suitable channel of contact.
- For those who are nervous or uncertain about digital platforms, we strive to provide a telephone service that assists them to become proficient with our digital offerings.
- For residents who are unable to use our digital tools, our future focus is on telephone calls or arranging bookable meetings to offer expert guidance at our Library Council Access Points and Council Access Point+ sites at our Council offices, or through online meetings.

Buckinghamshire Council launched the Year of Conversation in 2023 to encourage and advocate the importance of a good conversation to enhance relationships, get faster outcomes and improve resolutions. In a hybrid world, technology is a key tool for us, but there will always be a place for conversation. This is seen throughout the work that Customer First promotes, in improving face to face and telephony services for customers, providing training for staff on handling difficult conversations and encouraging the continued collaboration of service areas across the council.



# Customers we helped 2022-2023



Since July 2023

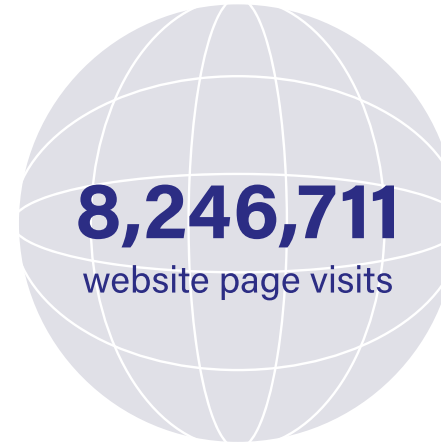
**14,651**

webchats have taken place directly with our Customer Services Advisors.



Since July 2023, our ChatBot has assisted customers

**31,835**  
times



**8,246,711**  
website page visits

**23,420**

visits to CAP+ and Library CAPs (Council Access Points)

**375,255**

incoming calls handled

**76.8%**

of queries were resolved on the customer's first call



**21,349**

online contact forms processed by Customer Services in 2023



# How we continue to embed Customer First values

## Educating new members of staff

We will ensure that:

- New members of staff complete the mandatory Customer First training as part of their induction.
- Customer focus is demonstrated in job descriptions.
- Call shadowing is offered in our Customer Service Centres to understand the breadth of customer enquiries and our services better.

## Training and mentoring existing staff

Existing staff will be provided with:

- Ongoing training and development options focused on providing a high quality customer experience.
- Access to and the opportunity to become a Customer First Champion for their service area to act as an advocate and encourage enhanced customer focus.
- Call shadowing opportunities.
- Access to performance and insight data monitoring reports and tools.

## Communicating with customers

We use plain English for communicating with our customers and aim to:

- Provide easy, simple ways to contact us online, through the telephone or in person.
- Provide the same great experience whichever channel they choose.
- Keep customers updated on their service request.
- Let customers know how long it will take to complete their request.
- Invite any Buckinghamshire resident over 18 to join our Customer Partnership Panel to get involved in service improvements and have the opportunity to input their opinions.
- Provide the opportunity to give feedback after receiving a service from us.
- Offer a voice and document translation service for customers who require it.



# Customer First improvements

## Handling complex and difficult conversations

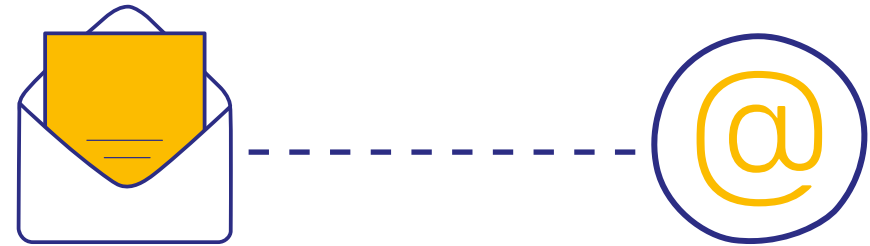
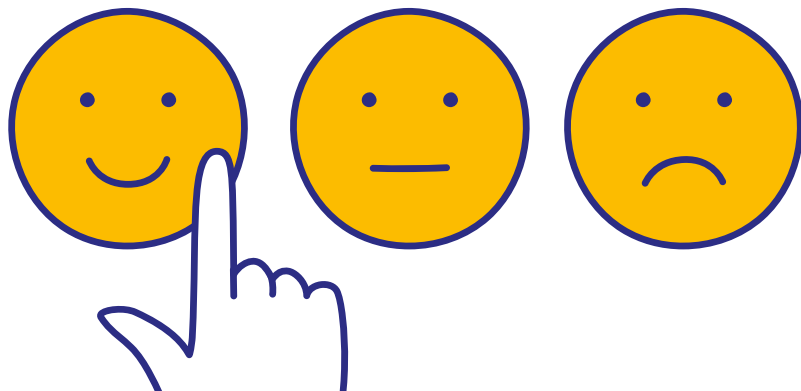
We've enhanced our customer service training offering to include a course aimed at equipping people with the knowledge and tools to deal with complex or difficult conversations in a calm and supported way. It gives people the chance to look at how they personally deal with conflict, and how they can understand the impact being in this type of situation has on them and the customer.

## Customer Partnership Panel

Customers views are vital to shaping the council's vision for the future. Our Customer Partnership Panel is an opportunity for residents, to give us advice on:

- Our website.
- Our forms.
- The other ways we communicate, such as letters, emails or updates.

We will listen to feedback and look for ways to improve further. Anyone who is over 18 and resident in Buckinghamshire is welcome to join. Visit our [website](#) for more information.



## Digital Postroom project support

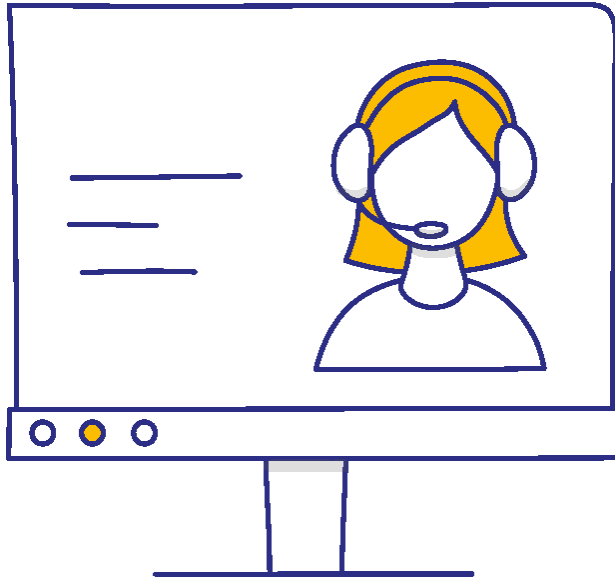
We want our hard copy correspondence to be managed as efficiently as possible. Our Digital Post Room was launched recently, with the first phase being the Digital Incoming Mail process. Scanning tens of thousands of pieces of post, delivered to colleagues digitally, meaning letters reach staff quickly to be processed and actioned.

The second phase of the project, the Digital Outbound Print and Post process, is currently going live. This allows colleagues to print and post a letter from any location where they are working. They can also customise the letter or even add a physical stock item such as a leaflet or pre-paid envelope to the letter before it is posted, providing a streamlined customer experience.

## Document translation service

Document translation is a vital service for our customers whose first language may not be English.

We're trialling a service, developed by another UK council and Amazon Web Services, that provides this translation in less than 10 minutes at a fraction of the cost by using open-source technology and machine translation.



## How residents contact the Council online

Our online contact form has been completely rebuilt in 2023 to help our customers to find what they need the first time they come to our website.

Sometimes, people may be overwhelmed by the website content and use the contact form instead. This means they ask a question when the answer could only be a few clicks away. The newly built form means the customer is now walked through our processes and are prompted to use our full suite of digital tools and guidance.

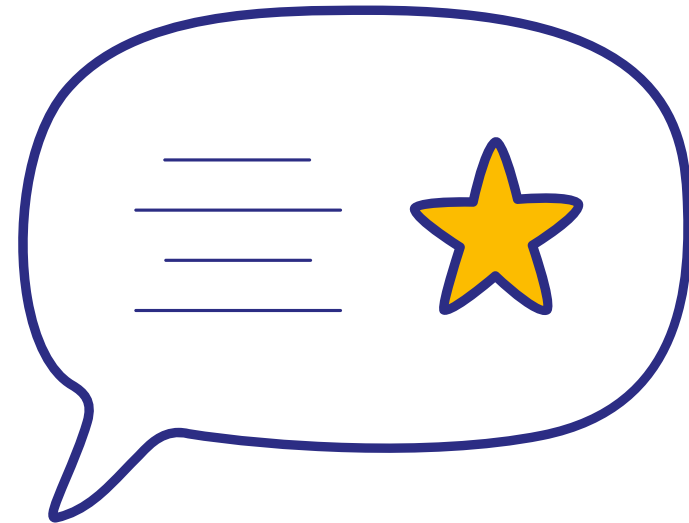
Throughout the process we promote webchat, utilising our virtual assistant feature. We nudge them in the direction of interactive web forms, encouraging them to self-serve. We channel the customer through this triage first, putting the answer at their fingertips and keeping them on their digital journey.

## Feedback directly from customers

How do you measure success? Or where we need to make improvements? It is important to listen to the views of our residents so we can find out what they like, and where things could be better. The best way to do this is through simple, instant feedback, to help gain a view of how people feel.

We do this through our Happy or Not feedback surveys. At the end of some of our service requests, the customer is invited give feedback digitally. This could be a smiling face, or an angry face, depending on their opinion. They are also encouraged to write a few words of text if they feel strongly about something.

This real-time data helps us to see hour by hour how residents feel. It helps us to identify 'pain points', where the customer experience needs improving. We intend to increase the use of these into 2024, to get a better understanding of customer opinion.



## Improving telephony across the organisation

We're in the process of implementing a new web-based telephone platform, designed to connect our customers with the professional help they need, across all service areas that talk directly to customers.

The platform enables better functionality such as call recording, better reporting to look at performance and training opportunities as well as gives the customers clearer expectations on call wait times, gives a call back function, and allows them to give feedback after the call.

## Maturity Assessments and Account Management

At Buckinghamshire Council, we recognise the power of conversation. It is important we keep a dialogue open between our service areas and the customer services team. We need to evaluate the effectiveness of the Customer First programme, and to further support service areas and teams to achieve their customer objectives.

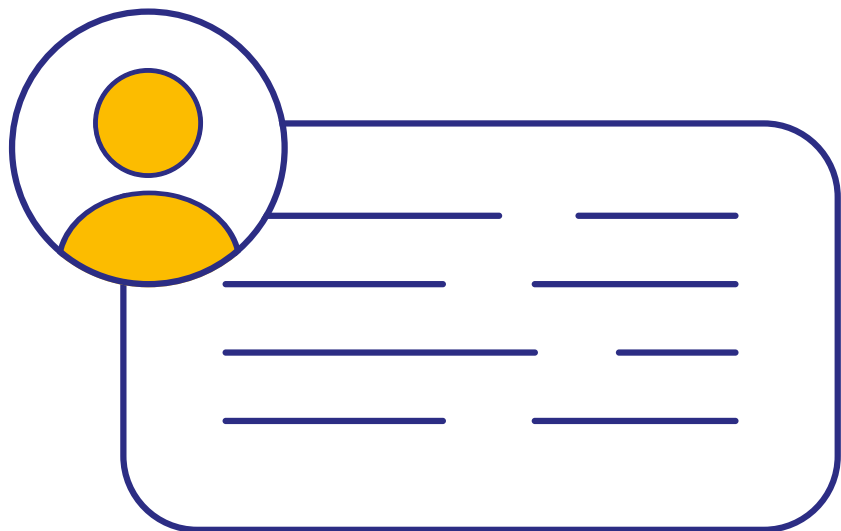
In 2023, we introduced Customer Maturity Reports. These work both ways; helping the Customer First team measure the extent to which the aims of the programme have been explained to services, and helping to establish where services may need extra support. We look at all aspects of customer delivery, suggest improvements, and celebrate success.

This is monitored throughout the year with regular account management sessions between service areas and customer services, to strengthen the bond of continuous improvement, to keep alive those conversations.



## Improvements in Fix My Street

Fix My Street is a map based website/app that allows customers to report issues that might happen on the roads, such as a pothole, broken street light, trees and fly-tipping. This system ensures the customer can accurately locate the place where the issue is occurring and allows the Council to direct the enquiry to the right place automatically, even if it's another organisation who has responsibility for the issue. 66,120 reports using Fix My Street in 2023, meaning customers raise their issue directly onto Fix My Street, and customers are kept updated with their report automatically, reducing ongoing repeated contact into the Council. During 2023, improvements in digital processes on Fix My Street saved the council £55,335 in staff processing time.



## Webchat/Bot improvements

Recognising the increasing demand for instant assistance and round-the-clock availability, we have invested in the development of a chatbot service. This virtual assistant providing prompt and accurate responses to the most common customer queries, improving response times and overall satisfaction.

## Notifications to customers

We help services keep residents informed and updated. We promote the use of 'push notifications', where an email or SMS text message is sent keeping the customer up to date. This has been used in Home to School Transport, Household waste services, and many other areas. We plan to use it more over 2024, particularly with our new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that will be shared across all parts of the Council.

## Using data to make improvements

We use data to help our teams work out what matters. It may be something small, like helping Environmental Health work out which type of household pest is reported the most. Or something major, like monitoring all telephone lines. All of this helps improve our understanding of our customers and how best to support them.

## Making improvements across the Council

Having all these tools in place to help find areas for improvement using data, make process developments and implement new systems means we are in a great position to help other services that need some support in making things better for their customers. For example, have worked with the Home to School Transport team to bring in a new payment and telephony system, as well as other process improvements, to improve the way customers can communicate with the team, the team can communicate with customers and bring their payments system inline with customer expectations.





# Future developments

## Chatbot/future AI

AI is transforming the way we interact with our customers and deliver our services. We have already successfully deployed a chatbot that handles over 2000 queries per week, providing quick and accurate answers to common questions and requests. We are actively looking at ways to expand the use of AI on our website and phone services to support customers across a wider range of services. This frees up our customer service agents to focus on supporting vulnerable customers, those with more complex enquiries and those who prefer not to use digital services.

But we are not stopping there. We are also exploring how AI can assist our customer service agents, by capturing and summarising customer conversations automatically. This will help them to quickly and easily update our various systems, reducing errors and saving time. By using AI to enhance our customer service, we aim to improve customer satisfaction, efficiency and quality. But please be assured that any decisions will always be taken by a human – never AI.

## Bookable face to face appointments for vulnerable customers or complex conversation

During a recent consultation with our Customer Partnership Panel, 53% of respondents expressed a positive interest in the concept of bookable appointments. They indicated a desire to connect with a professional officer for more complex service requests.

Our next phase will look at how this will work in practise and what services we can provide in the appointments.

## Customer Relationship Management

One of our major projects for 2024 is the use of our Customer Relationship Management tools. This is the software we use for our interactive web forms, and to capture information so our customer services team have everything they need to help our residents.

We have already begun this programme of work, and in 2024 we intend to normalise the use of this platform across the whole council. This will give a common customer journey for all service lines. We aim to provide accessible content, designed to give the best possible experience, in line with our customer contact strategy.



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