

The Best Customer Experience Programme

The Shropshire Plan commits to improving how customers access information and services from us. Some of these routes into the council have not changed for a number of years and there is scope for us to modernise and help more people to access the services they need more quickly and easily than they do now. The Best Customer Experience Programme is our plan to achieve this, whilst creating more time to care for and call vulnerable residents.

The need for change

Right now, many of our customer services transactions take place over the phone and are handled individually by call handlers. This is time consuming for our customers and for our colleagues. Many of these could take place online or using automation.

Making phone calls quicker and easier with automation

Voice automated technology has evolved considerably in recent years and offers an opportunity for customers to self-serve at any time of day. Over the course of the project, we'll work with transformation partners PwC to build a new, automated system that makes phone transactions for some of our general services more simple and convenient for our customers, starting with waste services and revenues and benefits.

Improving our online customer services

At the moment, customers are already able to access a number of services online, including making a claim for housing benefit or council tax support. Our plan is to develop this option further and roll out end-to-end online access across more of our services. Our research has shown that, where this option is available and when people are able to, this is the option that they would prefer to use most of the time. These improvements support the Council's Digital Strategy as presented to Cabinet on 15 February.

More time to call and care for vulnerable residents.

We know that there are customers who don't have access to the internet or the ability to contact us this way. This group are very important to us and our Customer Service Centre is available for this purpose. The changes will free up advisors' time for targeted outbound calling, identifying vulnerable customers, referring them to much-needed services and preventing them from falling into crisis.

Additionally, we have funding to extend our successful digital skills training for another three years, helping even more people to reap the practical and social rewards of digital literacy that go far beyond interacting with Shropshire Council.

The current model isn't just time consuming – it's also expensive.

On average, a phone transaction costs £2.83, whilst a digital transaction costs just £0.15. By changing behaviour residents can help us save money. As we work towards our spending reductions target of £51m for this financial year, the need become more efficient is clear. These changes could contribute £2.1m, all while providing a much better service to our residents.

Complex, sensitive cases will always be dealt with by a trained adviser.

Some parts of the customer service centre handle complex and sensitive issues for Shropshire residents, including adult social care requests and queries; concerns for children; risk of homelessness; or financial crises affecting families. Such inquiries will always require a dedicated, skilled advisor and so these will not change.

What next?

The first change we will make is to the opening times of the Customer Services Centre. From 21 August 2023, the opening times will be:

9am – 6pm on Monday

9am – 3pm Tuesday to Friday

The customer service centre will be closed on Saturday and Sunday

These new times reflect the CSC busiest times. Very few inbound calls are taken later on weekdays or on a Saturday.

Residents and stakeholders have been consulted about the changes, and this feedback helped shape this decision. The later Monday opening times will be run as a trial and reviewed after 12 weeks to monitor usage.

This is just the first part of what will be a real, positive change for customers, for vulnerable residents and for the council as a whole.