

# **Customer Experience Strategy Engagement Summary report of key findings**

**Date: 2 April 2024**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Pages</b>
Introduction	3 - 4
Responses and feedback – external engagement	5 - 14
Responses and feedback – internal engagement	15 - 17

## Introduction

We are developing a new customer experience strategy for the whole council, which has a clear goal of putting our customers at the heart of our service delivery.

Oxfordshire is a diverse county, and we have a mix of customers that need, or want, to connect with our services. We know that customers' expectations and needs are evolving, as they experience new ways of requesting and receiving services, and as new technology emerges. The pandemic and cost of living crisis has also affected the demand on services and the support customers need today.

Our new customer experience strategy which has been informed by extensive desk research and data gathering, is built on the following five key principles:

- Having a 'customer first' approach across the council
- Having a better understanding of our customers and what they want from us
- Improving customers' access to our services
- Designing an excellent customer experience from beginning to end
- Listening to, and learning from customer feedback and complaints

It strives to improve customer experience and ensure everyone's access to council services is easy and quick. And when people connect with us directly, they feel valued, and confident that we will get it right first time.

This report brings together the key findings from wide ranging internal and external engagement activity, which was carried out between November 2023 and March 2024.

Whilst there were two distinct audiences, the purpose of the engagement activity was the same for both internal and external stakeholders:

- to inform people of the new customer experience strategy and what it means to them
- to seek their views as experts by experience.

The focus of the questions was however different. Externally, residents and stakeholders were asked to provide feedback against three key questions:

- What does excellent customer service experience mean to you?
- How can we make it easy, simple and quick for you to contact the county council?
- Accessibility and inclusion are important. What can we do to make sure that everyone is able to contact the county council and its services?

Feedback and messages from the engagement activities are contained within this report and will influence the final strategy due for adoption in May 2024.

Whereas internally, employees and councillors were asked:

- their opinions on the wording of the principles in the draft strategy
- whether there are any key areas missing
- what a good customer experience journey looks like in their service area
- suggestions for a more innovative vision statement.

Some cohorts of employees were also asked to contribute to stakeholder mapping of the council's customers. All internal stakeholders were invited to share examples of ways of working which showcase good customer experience.

## External engagement

### Approach

Between 4 March and 1 April 2024, we engaged residents and external stakeholders through:

- An online survey hosted on Let's Talk Oxfordshire (47 responses)
- Ideas boards hosted online on Let's Talk Oxfordshire and physically in Woodstock library (31 ideas)
- 1-2-1 interviews in Oxford, Witney and Banbury

The 1-2-1 interviews were delivered by colleagues from the consultation and engagement team, and project team. They visited nine venues altogether, and also arranged for paper surveys to be completed by two other self-facilitated groups.

Altogether colleagues engaged with a diverse range of people, as show in the table below. In total 101 surveys were completed, with 109 different people:

<b>Date of session or date venue visited:</b>	<b>Venue/group:</b>	<b>Total no. of completed surveys (and total no. of people engaged with):</b>
Tuesday 12 March	My Life, My Choice, Oxford  (self-facilitated group)	2 surveys (2 people)
Wednesday 13 March	Donnington Doorstep, Oxford	10 surveys (11 people)
Wednesday 13 March	Rosehill Hill Community Centre, Oxford	11 surveys (11 people)
Wednesday 13 March	Westgate library, Oxford	11 surveys (11 people)
Wednesday 13 March	Blackbird Leys Library, Oxford	6 surveys (6 people)
Thursday 14 March	Witney library	14 surveys (16 people)
Thursday 14 March	Windrush leisure centre, Witney	8 surveys (11 people)
Friday 15 March	Banbury library	16 surveys (18 people)
Friday 15 March	Spiceball leisure centre, Banbury	5 surveys (5 people)
Wednesday 20 March	Parish councillors session at County Hall, Oxford	8 surveys (8 people)
Friday 15 March	The Hill Community Centre, Bretch Hill, Banbury  (3 self-facilitated sessions: men's breakfast club, bingo 50+, & ladies ceramics group)	10 surveys (10 people)

## Key themes

Everyone who took part in the external engagement activity, was asked for feedback against three key questions:

- What does excellent customer service experience mean to you?
- How can we make it easy, simple and quick for you to contact the county council?
- Accessibility and inclusion are important. What can we do to make sure that everyone is able to contact the county council and its services?

All the feedback was qualitative, and a coding framework was created to analyse people's responses. All comments were recorded, read and coded against this. More detailed analysis has been undertaken for codes which received 10 per cent or more comments in any section.

### Question 1: What does excellent customer service experience mean to you?

156 people responded to this question, which included 291 different comments.

#### The most frequently mentioned themes were:

- Employee attitude (89 mentions)
- Being quick and efficient (46 mentions)
- Employees have the knowledge to resolve the query (34 mentions)

Over thirty per cent of comments focused on the importance of employee attitude in creating a positive customer experience, with an emphasis on taking the time to listen and understand the customer's needs as well as being friendly and approachable.

“Really being listened to. Helpful, friendly informed good advice.”

The efficiency of the service was also highlighted as a key factor in an excellent customer experience, with many of these comments referencing long waiting times for replies to emails and waiting on hold during phone calls as markers of a negative experience.

“Quick and efficient - time is important.”

Many responses also spoke about the importance of employees being knowledgeable and having up to date information so that they are able to resolve queries. A number of these comments linked this to not being 'passed around' departments.

“Not being passed around - dealing with people who know what they're talking about.”

#### Other themes mentioned at least 10 times were:

- My query is resolved / I can get what I need (27 mentions) "Efficient and effective, so if there's an issue, it gets resolved."
- Good communication from organisation to individual (19 mentions) "Being recontacted if I've been in touch, in a timely manner."

- Being able to talk to a real person (17 mentions) “Being able to speak to a person - not a machine, and someone who knows what they are doing.”
- I am valued as an individual (11 mentions) “Have to come across as if you're treating each customer as an individual, and not as a generic.”
- Have a variety of options (e.g. online, in person) to suit different people (10 mentions) “Easy to access customer service in a variety of ways.”

**Other comments:**

- Having direct access to the service I need (8 mentions)
- Easy to find accurate information (8 mentions)
- Speaking to the right person first time / not being passed around departments (7 mentions)
- Organisation does what it says it will (7 mentions)
- Organisation can do what I need (3 mentions)
- I feel satisfied after the interaction (3 mentions)
- Employees do not express or physically represent (e.g. through badges or lanyards) "ideologies" (2 mentions)
- Longer opening hours (1 mention)
- No background noise on calls (1 mention)
- Accessible information (1 mention)

**Question 2: How can we make it easy, simple and quick for you to contact the county council?**

140 people responded to this question, which included 199 different comments.

**The most frequently mentioned themes were:**

- Being able to talk to a real person (41 mentions)
- Quick and efficient (26 mentions)
- Having direct access to the service I need (22 mentions)

The most significant theme with 40 comments was the desire to be able to speak to a person, with comments reflecting a dissatisfaction with services only being available online. Several comments also spoke negatively of numerical phone menus, with people finding them confusing and inaccessible.

“Talk to a person - not having to listen to a menu selection and wait and be able to talk to a person.”

Related to this, people also expressed a preference for being able to contact services directly, rather than having to go through a central phone or email service and be re-directed.

“Direct phone numbers and email addresses not a phone number to an automated machine.”

Another theme of note was the desire for a quick an efficient service, with short waiting times and quick responses.

“Have more people on phones, so not so long waiting on phone.  
Main thing is to avoid being in a queue.”

“In the end you just don't bother if no one answers.”

**Other themes mentioned at least 10 times were:**

- Have a variety of options (e.g. online, in person) to suit different people (21 mentions) “I suppose a range of ways – eg drop in places, phone and e-mail. Not everyone can use the same method.”
- Website, web chat or app contact (19 mentions)  
“Apps, that are simple, quick and easy to use”
- Easy to use website (18 mentions) “Change the website - make it more user friendly.”
- Speaking to the right person first time / not being passed around departments (13 mentions) “Phone - transfer - transfer - transfer before I can speak to someone. Stop passing my call on.”
- Employees have the knowledge to resolve the query (12 mentions) “Have knowledgeable employees who can promptly solve”
- Easy to find accurate information (11 mentions) “Need to know how to find things easily”
- No numerical phone menus (11 mentions) “Lose the menu system on the phone - have real people who can answer basic questions or who can quickly transfer the call to the right place. The voice menu system says you believe your time is more valuable than your customers.”
- Good communication from organisation to individual (10 mentions) “Call back if you say you will.”

**Other comments:**

- Employee attitude (5 mentions)
- Easy to understand information (5 mentions)
- Easy to find how to contact the council (5 mentions)
- Negative about use of AI in customer service (2 mentions)
- Being clear and honest about what you can provide (1 mention)
- My query is resolved / I can get what I need (1 mention)
- Longer opening hours (1 mention)
- Have a single point of contact for all councils and all councils' services in Oxfordshire (1 mention)

**Question 3: Accessibility and inclusion are important. What can we do to make sure that everyone is able to contact the county council and its services?**

126 people responded to this question, which included 162 different comments.

**The most frequently mentioned themes were:**



- Have a variety of options (e.g. online, in person) to suit different people (29 mentions)
- Easily available translation services (21 mentions)
- Have non-digital alternatives (21 mentions)

Respondents emphasised the importance of having a range of ways for people to contact and interact with the council, to accommodate people's different needs.

“Don't make me talk to someone, it makes me anxious.”

“Having a variety of contacts means to suit people, means having phone, website, people.”

In particular, the need to have options which did not require digital connection or skills was highlighted both due to a lack of familiarity with computers and digital poverty.

“The more digital a process is, the more excluded they feel  
e.g. electronic display or sign-in vs speaking to a receptionist.”

The need to improve accessibility for people who do not have English as a first language was also emphasised, with respondents commenting on easy availability of translation services, sufficient notice of appointments/meetings to arrange for a translator to attend and the provision of key information in other languages as standard would all be key factors in providing an excellent and inclusive service.

“For a lot of people translation is a big issue. Translation into the main community languages is needed.”

“Provide Braille for those who need it. Important to think about people with hearing problems.”

**Other themes mentioned at least 10 times were:**

- Being able to talk to a real person (11 mentions) “Not everyone likes computers etc so having humans + real people to talk too.”
- Have drop-in centres (11 mentions) “A drop-in centre where anyone can come would be really helpful.”

**Other comments:**

- Employees speak clearly (8 mentions)
- Information in multiple languages as standard (7 mentions)
- Longer opening hours (7 mentions)
- Employees trained to understand and respond to individual needs (e.g. talking to someone who lip reads) (7 mentions)
- Contact details easy to find (7 mentions)
- Easy to understand information (6 mentions)
- Make sure that buildings are accessible (5 mentions)
- No phone menus (5 mentions)
- Make OCC provision/offer more visible (5 mentions)
- Easy to use website (5 mentions)
- Publicise departmental contact details (5 mentions)
- Speaking to the right person first time / not being passed around departments (4 mentions)

- Accessible information (3 mentions)
- Have a phone-free contact option (3 mentions)
- Have a freephone number (3 mentions)
- Use video calling (3 mentions)
- Employee attitude (3 mentions)
- Good communication from organisation to individual (2 mentions)
- Use community leaders to disseminate information (1 mention)
- Employees able to support people experiencing poor mental health (1 mention)
- Stop employees working from home (1 mention)

## Respondent profile

We asked a range of demographic questions to better understand whose views had been captured. People were under no obligation to answer any of these questions and could reply 'prefer not to say' or skip the question.

We received 162 responses in relation to how people were responding to the survey. Of these:

- 81% of people we had feedback from said they were responding as a county resident.

<b>I am responding to this survey as:</b> (Choose one option)	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
an Oxfordshire resident	132	81%
a member of the public living outside of Oxfordshire	3	2%
a business	5	3%
a representative of a group or organisation	7	4%
a parish, town, district, or county councillor	13	8%
Other	2	1%

The five people who responded as a business were:

- 2 childminders
- 2 HSBC workers
- 1 coach operator (and county council contractor)

The seven people who responded as a representative of a group or organisation, gave the following additional information:

- Residents Association member and school governor
- Donnington Doorstep
- Charity Director in Rose Hill
- Oxford Hub
- Yellow Submarine (learning disability charity) employee
- Yellow Submarine (learning disability charity) member
- Oxfordshire County Council - Banbury Library

11 of the 13 people who responded as a parish, town, district, or county councillor, gave the following additional information:

- 2 from Horton-Cum-Studley Parish Council
- East Challow Parish Council

- Abingdon Town Council
- Somerton Parish Council
- Wootton (Abingdon)
- Asthal
- Watlington Parish Council
- Swinbrook and Widford
- Fyfield and Tubney Parish Council
- East Challow Parish Council and Vale of the White Horse

Two people also responded with 'other', and they were both parish clerks.

For the remaining demographic questions, we received information from 116 people, who either providing some or all of their demographic details. For those who provided information, overall:

- Respondents were from a range of places across the county. The 3 postcode areas we received most feedback from, were: OX16 - Banbury area (22%), OX4 - East Oxford area, including Cowley, Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill (19%), and OX28 – Witney area (9%), which coincide with where we carried out in person engagement. (See map on next page showing where Oxfordshire respondents live.)
- We had feedback from a good spread of ages. The most represented age group was people aged 35 – 44 age (25%).
- More women (62%) than men (36%) had their say.
- The majority of people interviewed self-identified their ethnic group as 'white' (72%).
- A fifth of people interviewed (20%) stated that they had a long-term illness or disability, which impacted them either a little or a lot.
- Just under two in five people (39%) said they had children up to the age of 18 currently living in their household. Of these, 53% said they were of primary school age, 40% said they were babies/very young children, 33% said secondary school age, and 11% said they were aged post 16.
- 16% of people we had feedback from identified as a carer.



<b>What is your postcode?</b> Please provide the first four or five digits of your postcode (but not the letters at the end). e.g. OX1 1 or OX14 5 (Choose one option)	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Postcode provided Postcodes were from 20 different Oxfordshire areas (OX1, OX2, OX3, OX4, OX5, OX7, OX12, OX13, OX14, OX15, OX16, OX17, OX18, OX20, OX25, OX26, OX28, OX29, OX33, SN6), and 1 postcode was from outside of Oxfordshire (CV22 – Rugby area)	110	95%
Unknown	6	5%

<b>What is your age?</b> (Choose one option)	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
16 – 24	9	8%
25 – 34	10	9%
35 – 44	29	25%
45 – 54	12	10%
55 – 64	19	16%
65 – 74	20	17%
75 – 84	11	9%
85 or over	2	2%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Unknown	3	3%

<b>What is your sex?</b> (Choose one option)	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Female	72	62%
Male	42	36%
I use another term (please state here)	0	0%
Prefer not to say	0	0%
Unknown	2	1%

<b>What is your ethnic group or background?</b> (Choose one option)	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or any other Asian background)	10	9%
Black or Black British (Caribbean, African, or any other Black background)	8	7%
Chinese	3	3%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, and any other mixed background)	0	0%
White (British, Irish, or any other white background)	83	72%
Other ethnic group or background (please specify)	5	4%
Prefer not to say	0	0%

Unknown	7	4%
<b>Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a long-term illness, health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?</b> (Choose one option)	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes - a lot	13	11%
Yes – a little	11	9%
No	88	76%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Unknown	3	3%

<b>Do you have children up to 18 currently living in your household?</b> (Choose one option)	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	45	39%
No	63	54%
Prefer not to say	0	0%
Unknown	8	7%

Those who answered 'yes' to the previous question, then answered this follow up question:		
<b>Base: people who have children up to 18 currently living in your household (45)</b> (Choose all that apply)	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Babies and very young children	18	40%
Primary school age (Reception to Year 6)	24	53%
Secondary school age (Year 7 – 11)	15	33%
Post 16 (Year 12 – 13 or at college/in training)	5	11%
Prefer not to say	0	0%

<b>Are you a carer?</b> A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support. Both children and adults can be carers. (Choose one option)	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	18	16%
No	93	80%
Prefer not to say	0	0%
Unknown	5	4%

### Approach

Between November 2023 and February 2024 colleagues across the council and councillors were engaged through a wide range of different channels. This included:

- Communications shared widely with all senior managers and through governance boards.
- Internal communications using the intranet, employee newsletters and Viva Engage, where colleagues could provide feedback.
- Direct engagement with over 200 Delivering the Future Together (DtFT) Champions at a monthly network meeting
- Structured discussions at networks and team meetings, led by the project team or DtFT champions including with customer service teams, children's social care, strategic commissioning, corporate policy and the Oxfordshire Museum
- A lunch and learn session for colleagues in the environment and place directorate
- Two whole-council drop-in workshops (one online and one in person)
- Councillors were engaged through an all members briefing session and through Informal Cabinet and Performance Scrutiny.

Some cohorts of employees were also asked to contribute to stakeholder mapping of the council's customers, and this is reflected in the main strategy. All employees were invited to share examples of ways of working which showcase good customer experience that we can use for communications and training purposes going forward.

### Key themes from our internal engagement

Most of the feedback from employees and councillors focussed on the customer service principles or aligned to these.

#### Principle 1: Having a 'customer first' approach across the council.

##### Feedback:

There was recognition from employees that 'we' are integral to creating a positive customer experience.

"Customers are what keeps us in a job"

"There is no one size fits all approach when it comes to customer service"

As a workforce we need to:

- demonstrate a human touch
- always have a can-do attitude
- live our values
- uphold a non-transactional view of the customer, focussing on the person first
- use language our customers understand when interacting with them.

Employees also shared that managing expectations is important, and a good customer experience is more than the final outcome, it includes the whole journey and how we treat people.

“Listen, be human, don’t hide behind complicated language and jargon”

“We should always retain the 'human' aspects of our interaction and don't turn ourselves into AI Bots”

## **Principle 2: Having a better understanding of our customers and what they want from us**

### **Feedback**

Employees discussed the importance of data and systems and that we need to be comfortable to safely use, share and access data to better support customers.

“Having a way to access all the data we have as an organisation in one central place could really benefit people in their day-to-day roles”

“We need to use data better to implement meaningful change.”

“Make less assumptions and work more with data!”

At least one team talked about the value of customer profiles and of data. How using such insight can help teams to signpost customers to other services that the customer might find useful/benefit from and thereby maximise their interaction with the council.

## **Principle 3: Improving customers' access to our services**

### **Feedback**

Employees fed back that communication is key and recognised the importance of supporting the needs of all customers including those who speak English as a second language and those who are digitally excluded

“Ensuring customer voices are heard – how they can communicate with us is very important. We shouldn’t forget about the elderly who cannot manage everything online, bearing in mind a need to be inclusive.”

Technology was a key theme, including bringing in new technology whilst also having a range of non-digital options to meet the preferences of different customers.

“For our team - more investment in options for the customer to self-serve but also better options for customers to contact us by phone as we know some really value this.”



## **Principle 4: Designing an excellent customer experience from beginning to end**

### **Feedback**

“An end-to-end experience looks different for different types of customers, how are we going to determine what that looks like? This is also going to take time to perfect, how can we ensure it is done thoroughly and not rushed?”

Employees recognised the importance of being part of a team and business continuity including creating helpful handovers between employees, up to date case notes and centralised information on customer interactions.

Employees also identified training as a key theme, improving employee training programmes around customer experience and learning from best practice.

Some employees recognised the importance of putting the customer in control and others using systems to better understand our customers internally.

“Allow customers to track progress in system, CRM systems to give holistic view of customer”

## **Principle 5: Listening to and learning from customer feedback and complaints.**

This Principle developed because of our internal engagement.

Employees recognised the importance of listening to people’s experiences, through consultation, engagement, co-design, and co-production.

Employees found they learnt best when directly hearing from customers insights.

They also cited the importance of acting on feedback and resolving complaints in a timely manner.

Due to this we included a new principle about feedback when we consulted externally, and this principle is now a key strand of our strategy.

### **Councillors Feedback:**

In addition to the feedback above councillors also commented on the following points:

- Ensuring that the strategies principles are known and embedded by our subcontractors.
- Working to ensure clarity of contacts and clearly signpost these for customers.
- Auditing complaints and feedback regularly.
- Showcasing customer service successes internally and externally.
- Working closely with town, parish, and district councillors to implement the strategy.
- Further engagement with vulnerable groups as the strategy develops, including engaging with people who have English as a second language or come from a lower socio-economic background.