

Tensator helps Derby City Council improve services and save money



The importance of customer service

Derby City Council looks after the interests of over 240,000 residents living within its boundaries. The Council prides itself on its exceptional customer service standards and is dedicated to improving and modernising public services.

The customer services team at the Council has very clear guidelines on the level of service that residents should experience whenever they make contact, whether by phone, letter, email or face-to-face.

These guidelines also cover instances when individuals visit Council buildings in person to get help and assistance with particular services. For this form of contact, the customer services team lists an accessible, welcoming, safe and friendly environment, clear signage, appropriate self-serve facilities, and being greeted within three minutes of arrival as being amongst the main priorities.

Although, on the whole, these standards were being met, the Council knew that changes could be made to make things even better. Waiting times for particular services were longer than desired, with some residents waiting for over an hour to see a housing benefits adviser. It was also felt that the current queue management system being used did not provide the management teams with sufficient information to provide service improvements.

When the Council embarked on its 'one Derby, one council' transformation programme to create new central teams and ultimately save £32m by working more efficiently, it was felt that the time was right for a change.

A major part of the project was to redevelop the Council House, bringing all frontline services together in one large customer area on the ground floor.

With such major improvements taking place and an increased customer footfall anticipated, the Council required a new queue management system to help make the customer experience exceptional.

With precise requirements in mind, the customer services team made contact with queue management and customer journey specialist Tensator.

A solution to meet a precise brief

"Over the course of numerous meetings and site visits, Tensator's specialist team were able to completely understand the Council's requirements. It was clear that a fully integrated Virtual Queue Management System (VQMS), with some bespoke elements, would be required to help Derby City Council meet its goal."

From initial discussions between Tensator and Council representatives, the ultimate goal was clear: to provide a solution that offered the best possible customer experience whilst maintaining cost within budget.

The Council team also had a clear vision of what they wanted the system to achieve and how the new customer services area within the Council House would operate. Key requirements included:

- Clear zones on the ground floor with a combination of services that could be easily altered as and when required
- Ticket dispensers within each zone and call forward facilities
- The ability to offer appointments of different types and lengths or a mix of appointments and a drop-in function for some services
- The ability to book appointments via telephone as well as the self-serve ticket dispenser system
- Providing customers with the ability to check themselves in on arrival
- Improved management information
- A reduction in customer waiting times

Over the course of numerous meetings and site visits, Tensator's specialist team were able to completely understand the Council's requirements. It was clear that a fully integrated Virtual Queue Management System (VQMS), with some bespoke elements would be required to help Derby City Council meet its goal. The solution presented not only ticked all of the required boxes but also included added functionality, whilst remaining within budget.



Upon arrival at the Council House, customers are swiftly directed to the relevant area for their required service, using ticket dispensers, especially developed for Derby City Council, to book their appointment. The requirement for the customer to enter contact details (name and number) is also built in, allowing staff to personally welcome the individual by name. For those appointments pre-booked by telephone, agents have the ability to log further information and notes from customers, before verbally giving them a unique code. Customers then enter this code into the ticket dispenser on arrival. The system dynamically informs staff to call forward pre-booked service appointments, amongst non-scheduled tickets waiting.

As well as freeing up staff resources to be used for front line services, the virtual queue management system also allows the customer to feel that they are being served within minutes of entering the building.

"With the plans in place, the development and installation process began, and the VQMS solution at the Council House was ready to welcome its first customers on schedule."



With the appointment scheduled or ticket taken, the customer then moves on to a designated waiting area, removing the need to join a physical queue.

For over-the-counter services, 40 service points are configured, allowing members of staff to call the next customer on their PC from the virtual queue at the click of a button, with ticket numbers displayed on screens within the waiting area. Each of the screens also has its own in-built media player, allowing messages and

information relevant to the service being waited for to be played, helping to engage the customer during the waiting process.

The extensive back office function also allows management teams to control the number of available appointment slots and services, monitor the number of individuals waiting for each service and make quick changes whenever needed to improve efficiency and reduce waiting times.

For Derby City Council, this was the solution that its customer services team had mapped out for their new building. With the plans in place, the development and installation process began, and the VQMS solution at the Council House was ready to welcome its first customers on schedule.

Even more benefits to come for an award-winning Council

"The VQMS solution provided by Tensator has played an intrinsic part in Derby City Council's project to save money and centralise services. Not only has the Council saved money, but Tensator has helped to ensure that service levels have not been impacted upon and that the customer now actually enjoys a heightened service."

Since launching, Tensator's VQMS solution for Derby City Council has had a big impact. On a weekly basis, an average of 1,800 visitors are using the system to take a ticket or schedule an appointment.

The Council is now able to offer a mix of drop-in and appointment-based options as-and-when required for each service. This has helped to dramatically reduce waiting times. Whereas, those requiring to see a housing benefits adviser were often previously waiting for over an hour, that waiting time has practically been eradicated, with the waiting time now limited to 15 minutes prior to the appointments.

Since initial installation, further developments have also been made. These include the implementation of iPad's with the system for Meet and Greet staff. This allows staff to use an iPad to book appointments for visitors, capture footfall, add people to the queue, view the status of the queue and provide accurate information to visitors, as well as queue bust by being able to deal with some services and close tickets without customers actually having to go to a counter. Ultimately this creates an even more flexible service and reduces waiting times even further.

"We are delighted with how the team at Tensator worked with us to improve the customer experience at the Council House. The implementation of an appointment system has meant that we can offer customers a guaranteed appointment time whilst making the best use of our resources. The flexibility within the system means we are able to tailor how the system works to best support the needs of each service delivered within the customer area of the Council House."

In line with the Council's ethos of constantly evolving, plans are also in place for a text message reminder service for those who have used the system to pre-book an appointment.

The VQMS solution provided by Tensator has played an intrinsic part in Derby City Council's project to save money and centralise services. Not only has the Council saved money, but Tensator has helped to ensure that service levels have not been impacted upon and that the customer now actually enjoys a heightened service.

The 'one Derby, one council' transformation programme has been so successful for Derby City Council that it recently won the national Business Transformation Award from the Local Government Chronicle.

Commenting on the success of the new customer service area, Bernard Fenton, Head of Customer Management at Derby City Council, said:

"We are delighted with how the team at Tensator worked with us to improve the customer experience at the Council House. The implementation of an appointment system has meant that we can offer customers a guaranteed appointment time whilst making the best use of our resources. The flexibility within the system means we are able to tailor how the system works to best support the needs of each service delivered within the customer area of the Council House."

Alan McPherson, Chief Executive Officer at Tensator, added:

"Like many other businesses and organisations across the country, Derby City Council found itself in a position where it needed to save a significant amount of money. What this process has demonstrated is that, even with budget constraints, customer service levels do not need to be compromised and cost effective solutions are available that can produce big results.

"Derby City Council is an authority that has got its streamlining of services just right and the team at Tensator is delighted to have been able to contribute to a well deserved award win for the Council."

