

Customer Experience

A review of 2024/2025

Cost of living/poverty/DI:

Databank:

We launched our Databank project in April 2024 as part of a six month pilot to understand the levels and impact of digital exclusion in temporary accommodation. During the pilot 43 households in temporary accommodation were supported with free mobile data through the National Databank, 26 households in Mid Suffolk and 16 in Babergh.

Of these,

- 92% were single people, 8% identified as part of a couple
- 42% were rough sleepers
- 49% had health conditions or a disability
- 2% did not have English as a first language
- 74% were unemployed
- The average age of people supported by the project was 37, with the youngest recipient being 19 and the eldest 64.

How people used their data

Surveys were sent to 35 recipients, of which 13 responded to tell us how they used their data, and the impact they felt it made.

People told us they used their data in a wide variety of ways;

- 100% used it to stay in touch with friends and family
- 92% used it to contact their housing officer regarding their homelessness application
- 85% used it to bid for social housing
- 77% used it to manage their benefits
- 77% used it to access advice and support services
- 77% used it to manage their health and medications
- 77% used it to pay rent and service charges for their accommodation
- 69% used it to access social media
- 54% used it to stream content
- 8% used it to search for work

The results of the pilot indicated that digital poverty is a fairly prevalent issue for households experiencing homelessness, and that the provision of free data alongside support had a significant impact on the wellbeing of residents in temporary housing. As a result the project will be continuing, and also exploring ways to scale

up support to include more locations and work more closely with Suffolk Libraries on their Databank project to ensure support is as accessible as possible.

Digital Inclusion

In the last financial year, our **digital skills team** supported 138 people to get online and feel more confident using their devices. 76 people in BDC and 62 people in MSDC.

We trialled a new digital skills session in Elmswell to complement our existing offer in Stradbroke. This was in response to the temporary closure of a local shop, and concern from residents about how those who are offline would do their shopping. Our digital skills officer attended the village cafe and offered drop in support with a range of skills, including online shopping. Feedback from the community was positive, as was attendance with 16 people dropping in for the first two sessions. In Babergh we worked with partners to provide more holistic support alongside digital skills sessions such as energy advice and support from Suffolk Centres for Warmth, as well as support for scams and fraud from our Community Safety Team. Our Digital Skills Officer also joined health colleagues on the Be Well Bus, joined local jobs fairs to offer support with the essential digital skills for work, and attended the Capel St Mary Pensioner Fair.

Additionally, given the link between digital exclusion and economic disadvantage, we upskilled our Digital Skills Officer to enable them to provide information and signposting to residents who are struggling with cost of living issues, including benefit entitlement, social tariffs, local financial assistance and debt support.

The **Digital Inclusion Operational Group** was launched last year to bring partners together across Suffolk to coordinate and collaborate on digital inclusion projects.

From this two task and finish groups have been established; one focused on **accessible information and design**, which has been working to deliver resources and guidance on best practice on writing accessible documents, the other group is focused on improving access to **devices and data**, and has created resources for professionals on the support available, as well as convening partners to shape a device redistribution pathway for Suffolk.

Residents in need:

Working collaboratively with SRP and housing colleagues we provided a Council Tax support scheme in Mid Suffolk for residents on low incomes.

71 households, 42 in BDC and 29 in MSDC, were also helped through the Household Support Fund, which supports low income tenants who are struggling with the cost of their housing. Our Financial Inclusion Team distributed £75,612.93 to tenants alongside benefits and budgeting support. A total of 41,622.70 was distributed in Mid Suffolk, while £33,990.23 was distributed in Babergh.

Communications & awareness raising:

We worked with communications colleagues to deliver campaigns which raised awareness of the support available to residents over the winter months. This included:

- Targeted letters promoting Pension Credit and the Winter Fuel Payment to 113 households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction who were eligible but not claiming (46 in Babergh and 67 in Mid Suffolk).
- Social media campaigns across the winter months on the support available to help heat homes, including income maximisations, support with alternative fuels, managing energy debt and grant support. The campaigns reached 33,002 people (19,584 in Mid Suffolk and 13,418 in Babergh) with help for alternative fuels and prepayment meters receiving the most views.
- Resources breaking down the fuel support available were also created and shared with parish councils, local newsletters, community groups and front line staff.

- Presentations and talks to professionals on the support available for households struggling with the cost of living over the winter months.
- Information on cost of living support was circulated to residents via the new Mid Suffolk newsletter to over 40,000 residents.

LIFT:

We've worked closely with colleagues in Suffolk County and D&Bs throughout 2024/2025 to progress the LIFT pilot. We have now signed our contract with Policy in Practice, who will begin to build our BMSDC dashboard, and have convened several partners from advice and hardship groups and internal stakeholders to form a network. This network will work collaboratively using a range of data tools, including the LIFT dashboard, to deliver campaigns and initiatives to help with income maximisation, vulnerability, and hardship reduction across the districts.

Customer experience:

Over 2024/2025 we have received **128, 431** calls, accepted **119, 571** (7% abandon rate) and achieved an average wait time of 1 minute 1 second.

Compared to the previous year, 2023/24 we achieved: 130655 calls received, 115660 calls accepted (11% abandon rate) and had an average wait time of 2 mins 15 seconds.

We have opened the Stowmarket CAP 5 days a week from Feb 2025.

We have opened a new CAP with Eye in March 2025.

We have created a new Customer Service SharePoint site which now contains all Customer Service resources, including information on digital inclusion and cost of living support for residents. In addition, we have successfully managed to map end to end processes for our whole Shared Revenues Partnership team, Housing Solutions, Elections and Waste teams.

At the end of the financial year, we have also commissioned our first Institute of Customer Service survey to better understand views from our residents who have recently engaged in our services. From this we hope to shape future improvements.

Letter review

We have commenced the letter reviews in housing and planning with a view to extending out more widely. The pilot will review the letters initially using co-pilot, with a view to then using a panel of lived experience experts to complete the accessibility review and make recommendations.

Complaints:

1st annual report for complaints and benchmark performance was presented to Overview and Scrutiny in early 2025.

Launch of the new complaints system (see Digital Transformation). Since the launch of the complaints system on the 26th June 2024, we have closed 120 complaints submitted, an average of one every 1.6 days. The outcomes of these are 41 upheld, 35 not upheld and 44 not considered to be a stage two complaint.

We have supported Asset Compliance directly, to improve their complaint handling and responses following a restructure with training and information provided to the team. Since this has been provided, earlier in 2025, we have seen an improvement in the standard of responses provided by the Compliance Team.

We have seen a reduction in the past six months of housing complaints being submitted due to transformation projects within those service areas. Recently, customer satisfaction scores have improved to 34% which is in the top quartile of all landlords who take part in customer satisfaction surveys.

Digital transformation:

New Compliments, Comments, Complaints system as well as our new FOI system was released. The implementation of this has produced an improved user experience for staff with more automatic templates, reminders, and increased functionality around note/attachment storage.

For customers using the complaints form, we have been able to capture reasonable adjustments, there is a section that asks customers if they need any help or support throughout the complaints process, such as verbal communication.

We have improved our data collection both on the form and during the complaint closure. For customers, we can now collect post code data, which in the future will allow us to increase our ability to map locations of complaints. For staff, we can now collect information relating to process, lessons learned, and remedies offered as part of the complaint.

We have continued to develop the complaints system since launching and have improved the reject allocation feature, address fields, and some other minor tweaks, with more planned over the coming months.

Waste's new check your bin day tool, created as part of our digital transformation journey was released on April 1st 2025.