



Creating a single digital front door

Somerset Council puts customers first by unifying five separate service organisations and empowering frontline teams



Somerset citizens used to be served by five separate authorities and multiple contact centres.

Now, consolidated on a Kerv cloud-based solution, a unitary Somerset Council is at the heart of public services delivery. Long, confusing IVR menus have been replaced by nine ultra-efficient digital assistants, halving abandonment rates and getting customers to where they need to be 47% faster. Other results include reductions in wait times, above-target CSAT ratings, and cost and time savings.





The Challenge:

Somerset residents used to be served by five separate authorities as well as Somerset County Council (SCC). Each had its own contact centre with different phone numbers, opening times, out-of-hours cover, and technology (telephony systems, case management systems, workflow/CRM lite, IVR options and routing strategies). Competencies like knowledge, skillsets and work practices varied too.

This fragmented approach caused confusion among customers navigating their way through 155 council functions and 1,073 separate services as well as internal management challenges. All negatively impacted contact centre performance, while duplicating cost and effort. The time to reach the right team and resolve issues added to customers' frustrations.

Known as One Somerset, a major change programme was launched to bring everything together under one unitary organisation, ending confusion over which council and department does what.

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Sharon Passmore

Service Manager, Customer Services,
Somerset Council

“Our aim was to put residents at the heart of how we deliver public services,” said Sharon Passmore, Service Manager, Customer Services at Somerset Council. “We wanted to create a single front door and phone number, while introducing AI-powered automation to free-up agents to apply the human touch where it mattered most. Like dealing with vulnerable and at-risk residents.”

As the biggest change management programme in the Council's history there was an immovable deadline. “Our new virtual contact centre had to be up-and-running within 14 months to coincide with 250,000 tax bills being sent out, with everything in place to manage high payment and query volumes.”



The Solution:

After a formal procurement exercise the Council selected a cloud contact centre proposal from Kerv Experience and Genesys.

“Kerv Experience stood out as a partner with a proven track record in managing other Genesys council and similar body migrations,” added Sharon Passmore. “As well as supporting our existing voice, email, web messenger and Facebook channels, the solution meant we could be more self-sufficient when it came to making better use of in-house skills and developing our own voicebots.”

Having defined its telephony architecture, the Council set about rationalising five separate IVR solutions. Each contact centre had handled processes differently and it was crucial that high priority calls, like adult and social care cases, weren't delayed by system complexities.

“Our systems used to rely on customers understanding how a council’s organisation worked to get themselves to the right place,” explained Sharon Passmore. “Also, they weren’t good at capturing data like why people were calling or the nature of their requests. So, general enquiries traffic was an impenetrable black hole.”

Determined to improve self-service the Council created its first digital assistant for the internal ICT Help Desk. The bot asked three questions to route calls to the correct person in IT, which improved handling time as key details had already been captured. Other self-help tasks were then added for things like password resets. Creating that initial assistant had the additional benefit of allowing the Council to get an understanding of the bot capability, before starting to look at bots that could be used for external customers.

“Very quickly we saw abandoned calls reduce by up to 50% and discovered bots are great at doing the legwork and gathering valuable data,” said Sharon Passmore. “We now have nine live voicebots efficiently triaging and fast-routing customer calls.”



The Result:

Successfully meeting its launch date, the newly-formed unitary Somerset Council is still supported by four contact centre locations but operates as a single service organisation.

Experience has been transformed by AI-powered digital solutions. When a call is routed to an advisor, they can instantly see the bot conversation and work out exactly why the customer is calling, allowing them to personalise the greeting and avoiding asking repeat questions. Managers especially like the solution’s real-time dashboard reporting, something they lacked before. Shared scripts ensure consistent processes and messaging, while helping with onboarding and training.

“Now customers only have one number to call, spend less time queuing, and no longer have to figure out our organisational structure to get the right support,” said Sharon Passmore. “And our staff are better prepared and start conversations on the front foot.”

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The Kerv solution means there’s only one platform to manage, leaving IT more time for service improvements. Similarly, contact centre teams are much more self-sufficient and spend less time less maintaining IVR menus and searching for call recordings.

The Council has also improved visibility of service levels. “Across our contact centres we now have a common set of KPIs that managers and agents can see at a glance,” confirmed Sharon Passmore. And those KPIs make impressive reading.

Before, with IVR, the average time to get customers into the right queue was 66 seconds. With the bot it's 35 seconds, a 47% reduction. The no-intent rate (instances requiring manual intervention, where a bot was unable to identify why the person was calling) is around 10% against an initial target of up to 25%. Callers are identified far faster with an average wait of between 7 and 12 seconds.

In addition, within the telephony sub-workstream, financial benefits have been forecast, starting next year. Also, customers can self-select to complete a short survey. This provides a CSAT score as well as speech-to-text comments, which are used both for celebration and identifying areas for improvement. "Our CSAT score on day one was 77%, and it climbed as high as 94% in the first week, way above our aspiration of 75%," concluded Sharon Passmore.



Final Word

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Get in touch with us

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