

Mystery shopping report 2024

Introduction

Mystery shopping of the Customer Contact Centre at West Kent was previously completed in 2022. For 2024, we have followed a similar format to 2022 for telephone calls to the contact centre but, for the first time, have also included email as an increasingly popular way for residents to contact West Kent.

Mystery shopping is a way for us to involve residents in shaping the delivery of a service that is designed for them. Our mystery shoppers play a very important role by giving us a true picture of how West Kent interacts with residents.

Plan

The mystery shopping programme plan involved recruiting six residents to complete one phone call a week, and six residents to send one email a week to our customer services team, over a period of four weeks.

Residents were given a range of suitable scenarios to use for their calls, or they could use a real-life scenario of their own.

Online surveys were created for residents to complete feedback about their phone calls or email exchanges with customer services.

Before mystery shopping, the recruited residents attended a 30-minute training session with the Customer Services Manager, Customer Services Team Leader and Resident Involvement Team. This covered the aims of the mystery shopping programme and type of feedback we would be looking for.

Residents were offered a £25 voucher each on completion of their calls and feedback surveys.

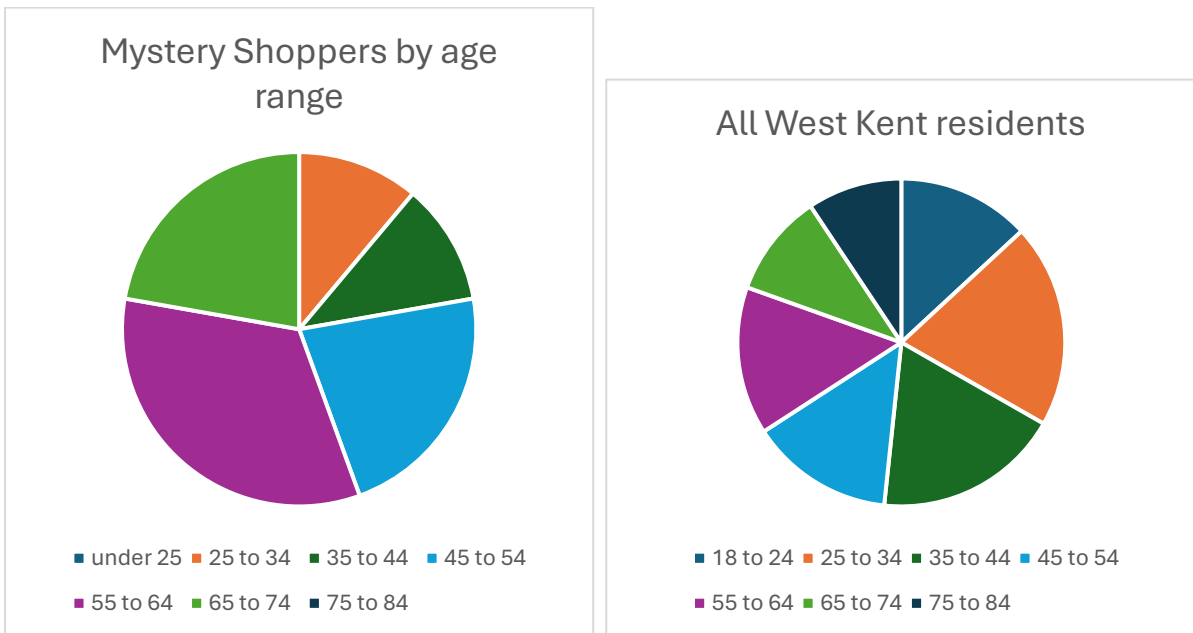
Recruitment

All resident involvement opportunities were widely promoted at the beginning of 2024 and from this, five new residents were recruited for mystery shopping. These were added to the existing list of 59 residents who registered interest in 2022 but were not successful.

We carried out a series of internal checks around issues such as complaints to ensure residents were suitable to volunteer for the programme and contacted 46 residents to see if they were available to take part.

We informed them of the training dates and planned four weeks for shopping so that they knew in advance what the requirements would be. We explained the first 12 to respond would be confirmed for mystery shopping. From this we recruited 11 suitable residents, of which 9 went on to complete the Mystery Shopping task.

Please see below the breakdown by location and age range of the **final nine mystery shoppers**, and how this compares to West Kent residents overall:



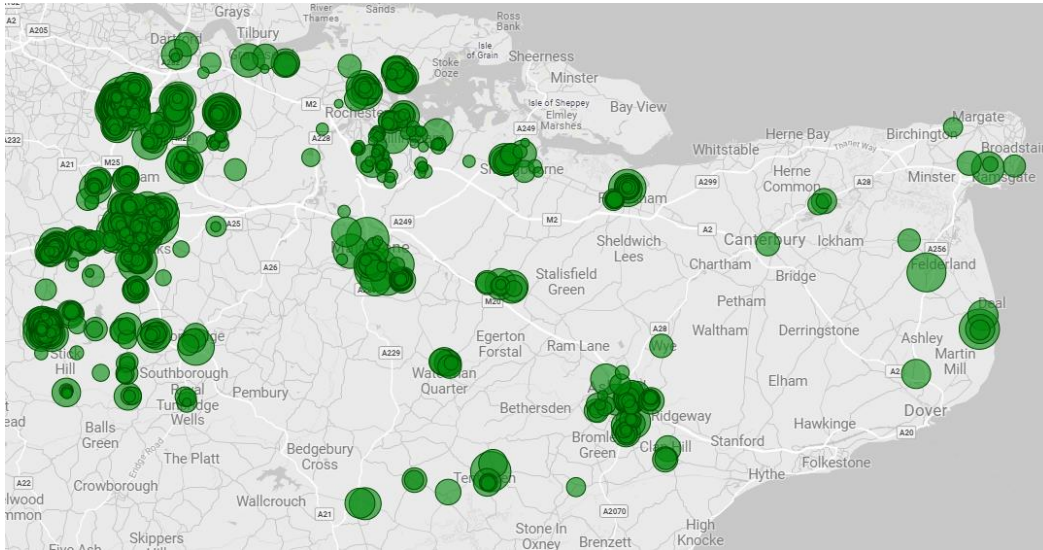
The charts show that we had no mystery shoppers from age ranges of 18 to 24 and 75 to 84. These two age ranges combined, account for 22.45% of our total residents (not including under 18s living in West Kent homes) that were not represented in this round of mystery shopping.

With such a small number of mystery shoppers involved, it would be hard to represent all the areas where West Kent have homes. However, the map below shows the overall distribution of homes, and it is therefore unsurprising that the mystery shoppers predominantly reside within the Sevenoaks District Council area (Sevenoaks, Edenbridge, Swanley) as this is where 70.22% of West Kent properties are located.

Resident Involvement



Places to live. Space to grow.



All mystery shoppers are tenants of general needs rented homes.



Findings

Telephone shop – five residents

Five out of the nine mystery shoppers were assigned scenarios for telephone calls and were given an online survey (appendix one) to complete after each of their calls.

One mystery shopper only made a call during week one before deciding not to continue. The other four completed calls for all four weeks, and one made an extra call in the third week, so overall we received **18 feedback surveys** for the telephone shop.

Greeting

Regarding the speed and greeting of the calls we asked the mystery shoppers to mark ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on a number of areas, including the greeting they received, if the customer service advisor gave their name and the name of the organisation or department (either West Kent or Customer services). We also asked the mystery shoppers if the relevant security checks were carried out and if the call was transferred if needed.

	No	Out of	%
Call answered	18	18	100%
Good morning / afternoon	18	18	100%
Name given	15	18	83%
Organisation name given	17	18	94%
Relevant security check carried out	15	18	83%
Call transferred as per guidance	1	1	100%
Telephone 'Speed & Greet' KPI	84	91	92%

In three of the calls, the customer services advisor did not *clearly* provide their name, and the mystery shoppers had to ask for it to be repeated. A comment received was “*I could not hear the customer service advisor very clearly as I felt the microphone was too close to her mouth. The initial greeting felt very rushed and I had to ask her to repeat her name.*”

An example of more positive feedback about the greeting would be: “*I noticed a really slight pause after Jess gave her name, before continuing. This was really welcome as it*



gave the opportunity to process what she had just said. There is no reason to rush a telephone greeting answer to get through it.”

Employee manner

All the mystery shoppers reported that the Customer Services Advisor they spoke to was polite and responsive on the call.

	No	Out of	%
Polite	18	18	100%
Responsive	18	18	100%
Summarised situation to check understanding	15	18	83%
Telephone 'Employee Manner' KPI	51	54	94%

Customer care

In three of the calls, the mystery shopper felt that the customer services advisor they spoke with did not attempt to present solutions. There is no written feedback that directly relates to this response to offer more insight.

All agents used positive, jargon free language

All agents attempted to resolve any dissatisfaction, with the only exceptions being those that were scored N/A as there was no dissatisfaction to be resolved.

	No	Out of	%
Attempted to present solutions to the customer	15	18	83%
Positive jargon free language used	17	17	100%
Attempted to resolve any dissatisfaction during the call (if applicable)	7	7	100%
Customer Care KPI	39	42	93%



Email shop – four residents

Four out of the nine mystery shoppers were assigned scenarios for email enquiries to send to help@wkha.org.uk and were given an online survey (appendix two) to complete after each email response was received from customer services.

One mystery shopper did not leave any feedback during the four weeks.

The other three all completed all of their shops, with the exception of one week missed for one resident.

Where there was a delayed response for one resident, they logged feedback a second time relating to the same email, and these have been reported on separately, making the total **12 feedback surveys** for the email shop.

Greeting

Unfortunately, two emails were misplaced bringing down the scores in this area. However, all other emails were responded to within the timeframe of by the end of the next working day.

Email responses did not all follow the suggested format. When asked to describe how the format differed, one resident responded “*Just said ‘Sorry for the delay. Could you confirm your address’*”. This occurred because the tenants did not include their name and address in their email, prompting the Customer Service agent to reply with a request for the necessary information to address their query. On checking CX, the emails that then followed were sent with the correct layout and scores for this have been adjusted accordingly.

	No	Out of	%
Email answered by end of next working day	10	12	83%
Email response followed suggested format	10	12	83%
Name given	10	12	83%
Organisation name given	10	12	83%
Contact details provided	10	12	83%
Email ending in suggested format	10	12	83%
Email 'Speed & Greet' KPI	60	72	83%

Employee manner

All emails that received a response were polite and demonstrated a clear understanding of the enquiry. Scores for this section have been recorded out of 10 to correspond with the number of email responses that were sent by customer services.

	No	Out of	%
Polite	10	10	100%
Responsive	10	10	100%
Demonstrated clear understanding of the enquiry	10	10	100%
Email 'Employee Manner' KPI	30	30	100%

Customer care

All emails received were written in positive, jargon-free language. An example of relevant feedback is *“Precise and to the point. Easily understandable.”*

In addition to two emails not receiving a response, one mystery shopper felt that the customer services advisor did not attempt to present solutions to a real-life enquiry about trees, and commented *“Just told me can’t tell me date of contractors coming out but had to be completed by end November”*. Although the advisor was scored down for this response, it is recognised that the information given was correct and it would not have been possible for them to provide any further clarification. The nature of the work is weather dependent and customer services advisors do not have access to contractor schedules.

All mystery shoppers responded, ‘not applicable’ when asked ‘did the Customer Services Advisor attempt to resolve any dissatisfaction?’

	No	Out of	%
Attempted to present solutions to the customer	9	10	90%
Positive jargon free language used	10	10	100%
Attempted to resolve any dissatisfaction	0	0	100%
Customer Care KPI	19	20	95%

Outcomes

Key learnings

- Audio quality from headsets is not consistent, with several comments about difficulty hearing and sound being muffled.
- The pace of telephone greeting can make it difficult to hear what the agent is saying. The question was updated this year to ask “Did the customer service advisor *clearly* provide you with their name?” following feedback in 2022 that names were not clear, so it is clear this is still a problem.
- Poor sound quality and clarity may also be attributed to the telephone system used in the contact centre, and not the fault of customer services agents.
- It was identified during the process that two emails were filed without any response being sent to the resident. Thorough attempts were made to find the cause, but West Kent’s IT department were unable to track when the files were misplaced or by who.

Recommendations for service improvement

- Feedback from the 2022 and 2024 telephony mystery shopping programs revealed that the sound quality of our telephony lines is insufficient. As a result, we have recognised the need to review our telephony system in 2025/2026, at which time alternative options will be considered. In the short term, call quality will be addressed in regular meetings with the telephony provider, with the goal of improving quality.
- The Shop revealed a 16% improvement (67% in 2022 compared to 83% in 2024) in the team’s ability to summarise requests back to the tenant compared to the 2022 mystery shop. Additional training will be provided to Customer Services staff to stress the significance of this metric for tenant satisfaction and the resolution of queries at the first point of contact.
- The initial email mystery shop revealed that two emails were incorrectly misfiled without any response sent to the tenant. This led to an investigation, during which we were unable to ascertain the reason for the misfiling or identify who was responsible. Daily spot checks have now been implemented to ensure that all emails are captured and responded to within the established service levels.

Recommendations for future mystery shopping exercises

As this was the first mystery shopping program to include a shop of email contact with customer services, there are some improvements that have been identified for future rounds of mystery shopping.

Resident Involvement



Places to live. Space to grow.

- Training for email shoppers should highlight the importance of including their address in the initial email to reduce the back-and-forth emails required to confirm resident identity.
- Although it is expected that all emails will be responded to within the required timeframe, a filter question would be useful so anyone who does not receive a reply does not need to answer questions about the employee manner and customer care. This would reduce unnecessary time being spent by the mystery shopper and make final reporting more accurate.
- Resident Involvement staff should review all feedback as it is received from mystery shoppers to highlight any issues as soon as possible.