

Appendix A



Customer Service and Access Strategy

1. Introduction

The Council aims to put the customer at the heart of everything it does by providing consistent, high quality services that meet customers' needs, and by offering choice in how those services can be accessed.

The Council Plan details the priorities, outcomes and activities of the Council over the next few years. These priorities are:

- A clean, safe and sustainable borough
- A borough of opportunity
- A healthy and active community
- A co-operative council, delivering high-value, community-driven services

The Customer Service & Access Strategy ("The Strategy") has been developed to support these priorities by responding to our customers current and future needs; driving change in customer service delivery; tailoring services to meet local needs and improving access to services through the use of customer knowledge gained from sources such as customer consultation. The Strategy also addresses the need to deliver high quality services at a time of reduced resources.

In order to meet the needs of customers, the Council must provide services that are:

- easy to access
- simple to use
- streamlined – providing end to end transactions
- convenient – available at times and in ways that reflect customer preferences
- efficient and cost effective
- consistent across all services

2. Aims of the Strategy

The aims of the Strategy are:

- to deliver consistent , nationally recognised standards of customer service across the whole of the organisation
- to reflect and respond to the changing needs of current and future customers by increasing current access methods or introducing more innovative means of access, which makes contacting the council easier, in line with customer expectations
- to maximise the usage of access channels by further exploiting the Council's investment in technology
- to inform future Service Plans for those customer driven services
- to help ensure that the Council's resources and those of the various services will be focused on achieving common objectives, to benefit both the organisation and the customers we serve
- to inform the medium to long-term investment that the Council requires in meeting customer demand

3. How will we deliver the Strategy?

The Strategy will be delivered through five themes, based on the nationally recognised Customer Service Excellence standards:

- Customer Knowledge
- Culture of the Organisation
- Information and Access
- Delivery
- Timeliness and Quality of Service

Theme 1: Customer Knowledge

Understanding our customers is essential for the future delivery of services tailored to fit their needs. The Council understands there is no “one size fits all” approach to knowing its customers. Developing insight and a deeper understanding of our current customers’ needs and preferences is critical in enabling the Council to tailor and develop future service delivery to meet those needs and preferences.

Therefore, we will:

- Extend the usage and increase the functionality of the new Customer Relationship Management system to other areas of the Council and use collated information to build a ‘single view of the customer’.
- Evaluate barriers to digital inclusion and develop an approach to improve accessibility. This means encouraging people to use and realise the benefit from the use of the Council’s web facilities and ensuring those facilities are easy to access.
- Share the ‘single view of the customer’ with partner organisations to determine opportunities for joint working whilst ensuring compliance with data protection principles.
- Develop reporting to improve understanding of customer groups and their locations and use of services.
- Build proactive services through consultation with customers to improve our understanding of their immediate and future needs.

Theme 2: Culture of the Organisation

The Council is committed to putting customers at the heart of everything we do. All employees and elected members in our organisation will be encouraged to actively support this.

Therefore we will:

- Challenge the way we work; creating a truly customer focused culture throughout the Council by adhering to recognised standards of customer service delivery.
- Ensure feedback obtained from our customers is used to inform and tailor service delivery and to ensure that all customer groups are treated fairly.
- Use customer knowledge to inform policy and strategy development and service improvement that helps ensure excellent levels of service.
- Deliver consistent high levels of customer services irrespective of the service our customers choose to deal with. Staff should be polite, friendly and professional and understand customer needs. Staff delivering front line services across the whole organisation will be fully trained; customer service professionals to ensure these high standards are maintained.
- Protect customer privacy both in face to face and telephony discussions and in the transfer and storage of customer information.

Theme 3: Information and Access

Over the last five years, the Council has focused on updating and improving much of its front line provision through greater utilisation of its Customer Service Centres, increasing access to partner services and upgrading and improving its IT support services. The significant challenges on resources to local government over the next five years will also challenge the Council's ability to meet the varying demands of its diverse customer base, and the emphasis will be on minimising the cost to serve whilst striving to meet that demand.

Increasingly, customers expect to do business with the Council via electronic means at times that suit them, 24/7, whether this is by web or email and it is anticipated that face to face and telephony services will reduce as a result. The Council's website has a crucial role in providing up to date, accurate, robust information to customers and the public generally across a wide range of Council services.

Whatever the access method chosen, it is essential that customers are provided with accurate, consistent, reliable and detailed information across all service areas.

Therefore we will:

- Continue to provide face to face contact through our Customer Service Centres, whilst ensuring that these mirror customer demand and preference.
- Encourage customers who visit the Centres to use 'self service' facilities on site, and to look to extend these facilities.
- Build on the existing working arrangements and facilities we currently have with the Police and extend these to other community partners to improve and increase joint working.
- Increase automated advice via the telephony service by offering up to date information on relevant topics and services thereby reducing the potential for any unnecessary repeat contact or delay in resolution.
- Consolidate all existing Council telephone numbers into one unified number for all public contact with the Council to support easier access to services.
- Increase the take up of digital services, such as web and email, to reduce cost and focus more expensive access channels, such as face to face, to resolving complex service needs.
- Revise and continue a programme to update the content and technical functionality of the Council's website to ensure it reflects customer needs and priorities; is easy to navigate and is expanded to further incorporate end to end transaction delivery.
- Develop options and deliver solutions for mobile working within services to improve staff efficiency; to improve the time taken between officer action and system update; to improve customer response times and avoid duplicate or unnecessary calls.
- Introduce solutions that improve the customer experience such as enabling customers to directly interact with front line Council employees via the web, introducing smartphone apps, providing enhanced telephony and social media facilities.
- Adopt a consistent approach to web delivery that will ensure its efficiency and usage as the primary means of access to Council and partner services.

Theme 4: Delivery

The provision of high-value customer services is about more than delivering effective information and access channels. The Council must ensure that customers are satisfied with both the outcome of their contact and how the requested service is actually delivered.

The Council must ensure that services learn quickly from any mistakes and continue to maintain the trust of customers.

Therefore we will:

- Work with elected members as a valuable source of feedback from customers and residents, and ensure they have the opportunity to develop the same customer service skills as front line Council employees in working with their constituents.
- Consult with customers and ensure that we meet the standards expected by them, together with any national standards and internal targets.
- Monitor and challenge how standards and key departmental performance targets are met and ensure that the Council informs its customers about its performance.
- Clearly detail the service standards that can be expected by customers and reporting on those standards. The standards will be available as our 'Customer Promise' to view at all Council sites.
- Benchmark against other similar organisations and learn from best practice to continually incorporate change and improve our services.
- Regularly reviewing our complaints, comments and compliments process with a clear commitment to deal with problems fully and solve them wherever possible.
- Undertake "mystery shopping" to ensure that there is a consistent customer experience regardless of access channel chosen.
- Work with focus groups such as Locality Action Partnerships to help inform service delivery.

Theme 5: Timeliness and Quality of Service

The development of a customer focused culture requires our customer service standards to be visible and embedded. This means ensuring services are delivered within specific timeframes and are of consistently high quality.

Therefore we will:

- Utilise customer service delivery standards that are measurable including timeliness of response and ensuring these are advertised.
- Monitor our performance against our own and other organisations standards for timeliness and quality and take action to improve when required.
- Respond to enquiries and requests within the timescales detailed in the 'Customer Promise'.
- Evaluate service offering through self-assessment using the Customer Service Excellence standard.

4. Review of the Strategy

We will review the Strategy, and the underpinning plans to change the services, regularly in consultation with our customers and partners.