

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive

CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY 2019-20211. Purpose of report

To approve the Customer Services Strategy 2019 to 2021.

2. Background

The new Customer Services Strategy 2019 to 2021, set out in the appendix, details the actions that will be taken to continue the development of Customer Services throughout the Council.

The strategy outlines the developments the Council will consider over the next three years. Although a significant amount of this is linked to the Customer Services Team, there will be a requirement for the whole Council to embrace the strategy and the developments it proposes.

The Customer Services Strategy has been developed in line with the current Corporate Plan, Communications Strategy and the Digital Strategy.

If approved, it is intended to launch the Customer Services Strategy during Customer Services Week commencing on 7 October 2019.

This Committee is responsible for developing and approving the Council's Customer Services Strategy. Updates on the Customer Services activity and action plan progress in delivery of the strategy will be provided to the Finance and Resources Committee at least once per annum.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that the Customer Services Strategy 2019-2021 be approved.

Background papers

Nil

APPENDIX



Broxtowe
Borough
COUNCIL

Customer Services Strategy

2019-2021

Introduction

The way most people do business and communicate is changing rapidly. We use cash less and pay by card more, we go to the shops less and order things online more, we write letters less and use email more. Many of us contact organisations through social media now, rather than give them a call, email or visit in person. And, increasingly, we're doing all these things from just one device, be it a smartphone, laptop or tablet.

Broxtowe Borough Council, like other councils and central government, has made more and more of its services available over the internet, and this move to online will continue. Most people find it more convenient to get information or to access services in this way. For those who find this difficult, we will provide help to support the online transition. Where this isn't possible, we will continue to provide a support to customers to make all of our services inclusive.

The new ways of doing business also save us money, which is now more important than ever. We have far less to spend than we had a few years ago. Broxtowe has been very successful in maintaining front-line services while Government funding has been falling. We need to keep striving to make the most of every pound we get. Every time you access Council services online you are helping us save the money we need to maintain the public services on which thousands of people rely and enjoy every day.

This Customer Services Strategy has been developed in conjunction with the Council's Communication and Digital Strategy to enable a joint up working approach from all the Council's service, ensuring a better experience for all our customers. We will focus on ensuring our staff are fully trained, working smarter and develop our partnership working with other organisations, such as the Citizens Advice.

Scope

We want to put all of our customers at the heart of everything we do, reflecting their feedback in the design and delivery of services, and to provide appropriate support to those who need it ensuring that customer experiences are easy, effective and convenient.

Alignment to the Corporate Plan, Vision and Values

The Customer Services Strategy supports the Council's vision and Corporate Plan in assisting and developing services focused on achieving the Council's priorities and GREAT values, such as good quality housing, going the extra mile and valuing employees.

The Council's vision is:

“Broxtowe...a great place where people enjoy living, working and spending leisure time.”

It's priorities are:

- **Housing** - A good quality affordable home for all residents of Broxtowe.
- **Business Growth** - New and growing businesses providing more jobs for people in Broxtowe and improved town centres.
- **Environment** – The environment in Broxtowe will be protected and enhanced for future generations.
- **Health** - People in Broxtowe enjoy longer, active and healthy lives.
- **Community Safety** - Broxtowe will be a place where people feel safe and secure in their communities.

It's GREAT values are:

- **Going the extra mile** - a strong, caring focus on the needs of all communities
- **Ready for change** - innovation and readiness for change
- **Employees** - valuing employees and enabling the active involvement of everyone
- **Always improving** - continuous improvement and delivering value for money
- **Transparent** - integrity and professional competence

Context

Local Context

- Broxtowe has over 110,000 residents*
- 20% aged 0 to 17*
- 62% aged 18 to 64*
- 18% aged 65 and over*
- Broxtowe Borough Council Digital Strategy
- Broxtowe Borough Council Communications and Engagement Strategy.
- Supporting the most vulnerable in the community.
- Use of Social Media as communication channel.
- Alignment with other Council Services, such as the Digital and Communications Strategy
- Consultation with the Council's Chief Officers and Heads of Service
- Consultation with the Disability Forum.

National Context

- Welfare Reforms including Universal Credit
- Austerity measures introduced by the Government and their impact on local authority services.
- The impact of digital technology – customers now expect a 24/7 service.
- 87% of people spending almost a day a week online*
- 78% of people using smartphones, with 48% considering them the most important device to access the internet*

* The Customer Services Strategy has been informed by national research conducted by OFCOM Communications Market Report 2 August 2018 and the Office for National Statistics 2011 census data.

Where we are now?

In 2007 Broxtowe Borough Council introduced a Customer Services department to ensure it met Customer's needs whilst providing a high quality and consistent service.

The results of the latest Budget Consultation showed that 74% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received from the Council.

The Council is responsible for providing a wide variety of services. These services are all public focused and range from Housing through to Public Parks. All of these services are managed with the Customer in mind and ensure the best service is provided at all times.

In 2018/19:

- **118,000** phone calls were taken by the Customer Services Team
- **83%** of calls dealt with by the first person
- **13,000** emails received by the Customer Services Team
- **39,000** visits to the Council's Reception
- Access to the Citizen Advice (CAB) and Police teams within the Council Offices. Providing a Hub of services in one place.
- **505,086** visits to the Council's website.
- **437,117** online transactions – a **77%** increase in the last five financial years.
- **67,541** online and ATP payments – a **128%** increase in the last five financial years.
- **11,890** Broxtowe Borough Council likes on Facebook
- **9,648** Broxtowe Borough Council twitter followers

Our Objectives

Positive customer experiences

Customers will feel positive about the customer service they have received from the Council.

Digital inclusion

Digital is the first choice of most customers, with support available for those who aren't online.

Investing in our team

Council employees understand what good customer service looks like and are focused on delivering excellence for our customers.

Positive customer experiences

Customers will feel positive about the customer service they have received from the Council.

The service will provide customers with confidence that they have had they have been listened to, had their request dealt with and been communicated with appropriately. There will be times that the outcome is not always to the Customers satisfaction but they should still feel that they were listened to and any decisions should be communicated appropriately.

Actions

1. Establish new service standards so that Customers are clear about the service they will receive and what we expect from them. These service standards will be published on the Council's website and performance will be monitored.
2. Review feedback mechanisms and conduct regular surveys to benchmark performance and establish areas for improvement. We will provide clear "you said, we did" feedback.
3. Use performance data and the expertise of the Customer Services Team to develop customer profiles to establish the best ways to support them with their enquiries.
4. Develop a modern reception area, which allows customers to access the Council's services using different channels.
5. Continue our partnership working the CAB and Police in the Council Offices but also look at ways of even further partnership working to provide better customer services.
6. Provide a Modern Council with Modern Services. The Council will continually evaluate the development of new technology and opportunities to improve services.
7. Review the Council's current payment methods to ensure they meet the needs of our customers.
8. Continue to reduce the levels of abandonment rates when telephoning the Council.

Customer Service Standards

What our customers can expect

- Clear greeting explaining the department they have called and who they are talking to.
- Calls returned within one working day.
- A telephone interpreting service for people with disabilities or those who speak other languages.
- Clear written communications which follows the 'Communications For All Principles'

Focused – clear, concise and jargon free.

Open – communications should be factual, accurate, reflect the position of the council and be approved by relevant Senior Managers.

Relevant – Communicated to the right people, at the right time, in the right way and be informative and useful.

Accessible – easy to access through appropriate channels and in a variety of formats suitable for those with disabilities and inclusion needs.

Listening – provides opportunities for feedback and two-way conversations wherever appropriate.

Linked up – internal stakeholders and partners should hear about changes or issues before they reported by a third party or in the media.

- Accessible services.
- Waiting times are kept to a minimum.
- To be treated fairly and with respect.
- Requests resolved at the first point of contact in 80% of enquiries.

What we expect from our Customers

- Our staff to be treated politely and with respect.
- To provide us with the details we need to help resolve your enquiry
- To provide constructive feedback so we can continue to improve.
- To consider the use of digital methods with our support.

Digital Inclusion

Digital is the first choice of most customers, with support available for those who aren't online.

Working in line with the Council's Digital Strategy, taking advantage of technological improvements and on-going customer and organisational needs; making digital our customer's access channel of choice. Where digital is not an option for customers, the Council will support them through the process or keep other channels such as telephone or face to face accessible.

Actions

1. Launch a new Customer Relationship Management System to Council's Contact Centre. The Development of this system will provide the Customer with greater facilities to self-serve but also receive an improved service when contacting the Council
2. Work with the Corporate Communications Team to review how social media enquiries are dealt with and how this can be improved in the future. The Council understands that Customers are using social media more frequently to interact with the Council.
3. Explore the use of additional software, such as instant messaging, customer portals and web chat to help make services more accessible. The aim is to provide those that can access services digitally are able to do so.
4. Promote digital first to customers and work with those who aren't online to ensure they are helped to do things digitally if they can and that their needs are still met if they can't.
5. We will provide support to those individuals that wish to use digital methods but do not have access by providing digital facilities at the Council Offices and trained staff to assist.
6. Recognise that not all customers will have the resources available to them to interact with the Council digitally. Where this isn't possible then we will continue to provide telephone and face to face services.

Our Team

Council employees understand what good customer service looks like and are focused on delivering excellence for our customers.

Customer Services goes far beyond the output of the Customer Services Team and each phone call, email and face to face interaction with stakeholders has the ability to shape their perception of the Council and what it is trying to achieve. Employees are our biggest asset and creating clear, consistent and effective communications channels with them will have a positive impact on our external relationships and reputation.

Actions

1. Establish a Customer Service development programme to ensure that employees have access to training and development opportunities. Continue to develop the Broxtowe Learning Zone training facilities with focus on Customer Services training courses.
2. Support team members gaining professional qualifications through organisations such as The Institute of Customer Services and The Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation.
3. Develop a performance framework to ensure the Customer Services Team have clear targets to work to and promote a positive and proactive service.
4. Undertake monitoring of call handling and performance data, providing feedback through regular meetings with individuals in the team.
5. Become a member of the Institute of Customer Services and work with them to develop the service provided with the view to achieving the Institute's Excellence recognition.

Action Plan

Action	Responsible	Target Date
1. Develop and Publish Customer Service Standards	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	October 2019
2. Conduct regular Customer Service satisfaction surveys	Customer Services Team Leaders	September Annually
3. Conduct regular 1-2-1 meetings with the Customer Services Team providing feedback on performance and identifying training needs.	Customer Services Team Leaders	Monthly
4. Develop a modern reception area	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	August 2020
5. Investigate areas for further partnership working	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	October 2020
6. Implement a new Customer Relationship System	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	November 2019
7. Evaluate the potential use of additional software such as web chat.	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	April 2020
8. Promote digital first with support from Council staff.	Customer Services Officers and Assistants	April 2020
9. Develop the Council's Broxtowe Learning Zone with additional Customer Service specific modules	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	June 2020

10. Support staff in gaining professional qualifications.	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	April Annually
11. Provide clear targets and communicate these with the team through 1-2-1 meetings	Customer Services Team Leaders	November 2019
12. Membership of the Institute of Customer Services with the aim of gaining the institutes excellent recognition	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	April 2021
13. Review the Council's current payment methods	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	April 2020
14. Take steps to reduce the levels of abandonment rates when telephoning the Council	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	April 2020