



**NORTH
NORFOLK
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Customer Service Strategy

**13 September 2021
Version 3.3**

Foreword

This customer service strategy has been designed to shape the nature of Customer Service across all of the Council's Services.

It is designed to provide a framework for the development of a council-wide Customer Service Improvement programme that will build on the existing commitment to the highest standards of customer service for all our residents, businesses and visitors.

It is influenced and informed by experiences and learning gained during the Council's changed service delivery model which was developed as a part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It aspires to harness the best features of emerging technologies to deliver as wide a range of methods to access the Council's services as possible without removing any of the existing ways of communicating with the Council

The strategy covers the medium and long term approach to delivering the highest quality customer service in a way that meets the needs of everyone the Council serves. It also incorporates a set of Customer Service Standards by which service delivery can be objectively measured and compared. These standards will be regularly reviewed and revised to ensure that the Council continually strives to improve the service it offers.

Signed

Name

Officer role

North Norfolk District Council

Cllr Name

Member role

North Norfolk District Council

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Executive Summary

The North Norfolk district covers an area of 360 square miles and has a population of over 100,000 people living in 121 distinct communities and settlements. Our main office is centrally located in Cromer and we have a small office in Fakenham. The public transport across the district is limited and many of our residents and customers find accessing the Council offices difficult. Our customers are also not a single group of people with singular interests in common – we provide a diverse range of services, both directly and through contractors and partner organisations, and our customers and service users are not only local residents, but also visitors and local businesses.

The Customer Service Strategy explains how we will continue transforming the services we provide to the residents, visitors and businesses of North Norfolk. It outlines our aspirations for the service quality and user experience we want for all of our customers.

This strategy provides a vision and direction to show how the Council can take advantage of new technology and new ways of working to deliver;

- Services of high quality,
- Improved access to our services and positive customer experiences, and
- Customers' needs.

1. Services of high quality

At the heart of our customer charter will be our commitment to improving the quality of service delivery to our customers and responding to their needs.

We will communicate better, consistent and high quality service standards across all of our teams.

We will provide good quality, responsive services.

2. Improved access to our services

We will make the Council's services as simple and easy to access as possible and will use a variety of channels to facilitate this – including self-service via the Council's website, and also for customers making personal visits to the Council's offices, or communicating with us by letter, telephone, web chat and online.

We will ensure that we have contact points which enable access to services by all.

3. Customers' needs

We will place customers at the heart of what we do and embed that focus in our service delivery.

We will work to understand our customer's needs.

We will establish strong mechanisms to encourage customer feedback and use that information to improve service delivery.

This Customer Service Strategy will, once fully implemented, allow the Council to provide a consistent 'one front door' customer experience across a variety of channels, meeting people's service expectations while delivering value for money.

This strategy details our vision for services to our customers, how the vision will be delivered through a range of investment and change, and how we will listen to our customers and improve.

Scope

This Strategy applies all aspects of customer service and customer contact throughout the Council.

1 Introduction

The Council is the only place to get local car park season tickets, hire beach huts, to organise essential financial support such as housing benefit, to register so that you can vote and ensure your waste is collected regularly. Our customers also come to the Council seeking help, advice and guidance often at the most critical and emotional points in their lives such as following the death of a close family member or when facing eviction or financial difficulties.

It is the place where elected councillors organise local resources to make sure they work for the people who live, work and visit here through services such as planning, housing, environmental services, parking, economic growth, coastal management and many others.

We want contacting the Council to be easy, helpful and friendly. We have all experienced bad customer service: being on hold for what feels like hours waiting for the call to be answered; having to speak to several different people for a simple query or request; receiving letters that don't clearly tell you what you need to know or do; completing lengthy and unclear online forms only to find you have to call or visit with additional information; having to chase someone repeatedly to do something they said they would do; or simply dealing with someone who was clearly not genuinely interested in your circumstances. These are not the experiences we want for our customers.

Customer service across the Council must recognise in its design and how it is delivered that it is about helping people and that it is our duty to do this in the best way possible and accepting that one size does not fit all.

2 Customer Vision

Through this strategy our aim is to make sure each customer's experience of contacting the Council is a positive one.

We want our customers to:

- Find it easy to get whatever service they need from the Council
- Feel reassured and confident that their needs have been understood, that action will be taken promptly and that their time has been well spent
- Find it easy to submit an online form or application

- The council believes when our customers contact us they want to:
- Feel they are treated as an individual, for their opinion to be heard and their Input and response appreciated
- Receive respect and kindness in all their interactions with the Council
- Feel their contact with the Council is a positive and compassionate experience
- Receive information that is clear and understandable and free from professional expertise, however well intended, that may lead to customers feeling talked down to
- Recognise their wider needs and circumstances are understood and taken into consideration
- Trust that action will be taken in a timely manner
- Have access to services online at all times
- Have access by phone and face-to-face Monday to Friday
- Have access to Emergency out-of-hours services
- View the progress and outcome of their requests
- Trust that information provided is correct, relevant, easily found, and accessible
- Feel social media is responsive, open and a two-way communication channel
- Have their issue resolved at the first point of contact – handoffs only where the issue is complex and the customer can be better helped by an officer from the back office
- Receive contact details of other agencies where the Council can't provide what's needed

The Customer Service Strategy explains how we will continue transforming the services we provide to the people of North Norfolk. It outlines our aspirations for the quality and experience we want for our customers.

This strategy provides a vision and direction to show how the Council can take advantage of new technology and new ways of working to communicate better and deliver improved services to our customers, alongside consistent, high quality service standards across all our teams.

In achieving this, there is no compromise in our commitment to understanding our customers and their needs. We aim to increase our customers' control over their experience with us while utilising digital channels as a way of delivering services in the most efficient way.

We will encourage those customers who are able to self-serve through online services to do so. This will enable staff to provide more support and help to those who are less confident, have multiple or complex needs or do not have access to technology.

The digital by design principles embedded in the strategy will move more of the simple transactional processes to our website and into our Customer Services Team.

The ability to do straightforward tasks online such as renew a parking permit, claim benefits or grants, notify us of change of circumstance, book an appointment or make an application for a licence are basic expectations and the most convenient way for most people to get what they need. We all do this in other aspects of our lives and people expect the same from the Council.

People also contact the Council about extremely personal and sometimes sensitive arrangements that are much more than transactional. At such times, when customers really need a conversation with the Council, this exchange should not add to the challenges they are facing but provide relief from them. It is essential that they can speak to someone who understands their circumstances and can organise the right support quickly, but also with genuine care and consideration.

We will dedicate time and resources into these conversations by improving our systems and delivering training to our staff to make sure everyone gets the service they need and can rightly expect.

We will ensure that wherever feasible services can be accessed online. The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that the ability to access and use technology

will play a central role in how well we can assist our customers to live safely and well during this crisis and beyond.

To deliver these improvements and to ensure customers can experience seamless consistent services we will move even more of our customer interactions to our Customer Services Team. This will also free up time for staff in the back-office to focus on tasks that often require a different set of skills.

Wherever possible we will design our systems and business processes to ensure that customers' needs can be resolved during their first contact with the Council. If we are unable to resolve the enquiry at the first point of contact staff handling the contact will be responsible to ensure the customer case is transferred seamlessly to a Council team who can provide the assistance they need. If their needs are better met by another agency the Council will ensure that they are provided with full information and it is made clear how they can resolve their enquiry from an alternative source of support.

We will continue to encourage our customers to share their feedback about their experiences with us and we will actively use their feedback to make real improvements to our services. We want our services to be valued by those who use them. Customers will be at the heart of what we do.

We want improved processes, buildings and staff that are focused on meeting our customers' expectations on every occasion we are able to. Key to this is the continued development of three key concepts:

- One Front Door
- Customer Experience
- Digital by Design

2.1 One Front Door

The One Front Door encompasses all channels that customers choose to access our services. It includes face-to-face, telephone, email/letter, automated phone, mobile, online, social media and other digital routes.

We will deliver online customer registration, so that we will be able to proactively communicate with customers about any service the Council delivers. This will enable customers to receive tailored information that is relevant and important to them.

We will welcome feedback from our customers and continue to improve how our customers can access and manage what they want online and will expand live chat so we can text talk to people as they are looking at our services online.

We will continue to simplify access to our services such as introducing a Customer App for reporting issues and accessing services.

2.2 Customer Experience

This is the experience a customer has with us when accessing a service. It includes how many contacts they have with us, be it online, over the phone or face-to-face with staff, across all parts of the organisation, and what their experience was along the way. It includes the technology used, the systems, processes and procedures adopted by the Council and the quality of staff that are involved throughout the process.

Our customers are increasingly meeting their non-council needs online, such as banking, utilities, benefits and shopping. Their expectations of customer service are now shaped by their day-to-day experiences to expect simple, intuitive, fast and efficient solutions when accessing council services. The Council recognises the need to meet our customers' expectations by providing easy to use, digitally accessible services at a time and place that is convenient to them using PC, smartphone, or tablet.

The ongoing development of our self-service channels will enable our customers to have greater control of the services they use. This will allow us to focus our most expensive telephone and face-to-face support on those who need it most.

We will ensure that the customer experience is central to our decision making when we look at how our services are designed in the future. This will be led by every senior manager driving the delivery of this strategy as a core function in every service area.

The Assistant Direct for Organisational Resources will work with service areas on the planning, customer journey mapping, transforming and embedding of new and improved processes.

Design and development of customer focussed processes will include efficient service hand over points for when a customer needs to be assisted by more than one service. It will also ensure effective customer feedback and performance monitoring data are built into the systems used to interact with customers and the data that is generated will be made available to service managers to allow them to manage their service provision in accordance with the agreed Customer Charter standards.

Managers will be responsible for ensuring appropriate learning and training for all their staff which includes understanding and developing core customer service skills. This will help them to recognise customer service is a key skill to all roles in the Council and excellent customer service is a requirement of all job roles in the Council.

Communications will be essential to implementing the changes required by this strategy so that the benefits to our residents, visitors and businesses we aspire to are successfully implemented.

Alongside the changes in process and technology we will deliver an ongoing communications campaign designed to promote the uptake in digital service delivery and to generate effective engagement with customers to help shape the ongoing digital service improvements.

2.3 Digital by Design

To assist with the delivery of the One Front Door and Customer Experience improvements Digital by Design principles will be applied throughout the programme. These principles were designed by central government to help implement change to focus on the needs of the customer.

The 10 principles are;

1. Start with user needs

Service design starts with identifying user needs.

2. Do less

If there is a way of doing something that works, it should be reused and shared instead of reinventing the wheel every time.

3. Design with data

Learn from real world behaviour, look at how existing services are used, to inform decision-making, not hunches or guesswork.

4. Do the hard work to make it simple

It's usually more and harder work to make things simple, but it's the right thing to do. Don't take "It's always been that way" for an answer.

5. Iterate. Then iterate again

The best way to build good services is to start small and iterate widely.

6. This is for everyone

Everything we build should be as inclusive, legible and readable as possible. We're building for real long-term user needs, not to follow short term trends.

7. Understand context

We're not designing for a screen; we're designing for people.

8. Build digital services, not websites

A service is something that helps people to do something. Our job is to uncover user needs, and build the service that meets those needs. The digital world has to connect to the real world, so we have to think about all aspects of a service, and make sure they add up to something that meets user needs.

9. Be consistent, not uniform

We should use the same language and the same design patterns wherever possible. This helps people get familiar with our services, but when this isn't possible we should make sure our approach is consistent.

10. Make things open: it makes things better

We should share what we're doing whenever we can. The more eyes there are on a service the better it gets.

Through the application of the Digital by Design principles the Council will be able to create the tools to support staff to successfully develop the change in outcomes the Council is aspiring to achieve. New digital technologies and business processes will not only enable the majority of council services to be accessed online, but in a way that provides better outcomes for customers and the Council.

2.4 Summary

We are committed to providing services that are:

- **Easily accessible**
- **Simple to use**
- **Streamlined**
- **Convenient**
- **Consistent**
- **Cost effective**
- **Reliable**

Our aim is to provide customer focus by committing to the principle of the One Front Door for customer access, supported by services designed on delivering the best possible Customer Experience through the application of Digital by Design.

The future of retaining customer focus will be an iterative process of simplifying the way customers access our services, understanding their journey with us, giving them control over the services they use, and listening and responding to their feedback when implementing change.

Services which can be delivered digitally must be, allowing valuable resources to be focused on those services which cannot be delivered digitally and made accessible to our most vulnerable customers.

Both the One Front Door and understanding the Customer Experience will be critical to getting this right.

We recognise that some customers do not have the skills, knowledge or confidence to use online services or access to equipment and the internet to make this possible. We will need to plan how they are supported to build their skills and confidence and will seek to influence better digital connectivity across the district. At the same time, we recognise that we will need to provide direct help for other customers via the telephone or face-to-face.

We are confident the work we have started and our plan for the future will enable us to improve customer access and experience to our services, whilst at the same time reducing our costs.

3 Delivering the Vision

We will deliver our customer vision and improve our customers' experience by:

- Ensuring consistency in customer experience through our One Front Door, moving more tasks to our Customer Services Team, so that, wherever possible, their enquiry is resolved at the first point of contact
- Using customer insight data so we understand better what customers want and need
- Ensuring the customer has easy access 24 hours a day 7 days a week (24/7) to services, advice and information at times and in places that are right for them
- Listening and responding to customer feedback on all of our services
- Enabling customers to access services flexibly through digital channels, freeing up resources to directly support those customers who need it most
- Offering support to help people to access online services and working with our partners to improve local access to services

4 Consistency

A 'One Front Door' approach is where we ensure customers receive consistent advice, information and access to services irrespective of which channel they choose to use to contact us. We recognise that currently customers do not always receive consistent service when contacting different services, often resulting in confusion for our customers and a poor customer experience.

We will make it easier for customers to contact us, ensuring they get to the right service the first time. Through the principles of digital by design customers can have access to most of our services 24/7 where and when it is convenient to them. We will continue to provide access to services via the telephone or face-to-face for customers unable or unwilling to self-serve online and we will provide a consistent standard of service across all contact channels.

Our One Front Door approach streamlines service access enabling customers to resolve a number of service requests in one place and we will increase this over time. Our staff will need the right skills and competencies to support our vision, so we will develop them to ensure they are equipped to support digital services.

Ensuring the consistency of customer experience through One Front Door requires us to have accurate, up-to-date and relevant advice and information held across all

services and accessible to the frontline Customer Services team. This will be achieved through an improved Customer Relationship Management system.

This will provide the staff with the knowledge, skills and tools accessible to help all customers through the One Front Door and give a consistent seamless positive experience, enabling them to access 24/7 the right services, through a single point of contact.

Only in the most complicated of cases, where detailed assessments are required to enable the service to be delivered or where it is in the best interests of the customer, will they be passed to a back office colleague.

5 Getting it right

We will improve the way we collect, collate and use information on customer contacts and satisfaction to understand our customers and their behaviours better, to help inform the changes we will be making to our services.

Through the delivery of all our services we collect data about our customers, from where they live, what services they use, and how they use them through to which services people use the most or the least.

We will use the information to shape the future delivery of our services, which services we deliver and how they are accessed through our One Front Door.

The information will help us design services and how they are accessed to give priority to the people who use our services over convenient organisational practice. We will develop our systems and processes so that customers do not need to speak to several different teams or officers to have straightforward queries or service requests resolved. We want to improve customers' access to services and make it easy for them to track progress on existing requests and get information without having to repeatedly contact us unnecessarily.

6 Customer choice

We will continuously analyse how customers can access our information and services, aiming to develop increased accessibility and functionality for the customer.

Through the development of customer self-service, we will ensure we have intuitive systems that are clear, simple and consistent, so the customer is confident of the outcome of their service request.

Research has identified that customers are looking for the following outcomes:

Accessibility / Intuitive – It's easy to access services, complete transactions and find information

Availability – I can deal with the council 24/7 in the way that suits me best

Responsive / Proactive – Services are responsive and I am kept up to date with progress

Personalisation / Needs based – Information is personalised and meets my needs

Right first time / Accountable – I only have to make a request or tell my story once and the job is done

Clear and simple – Explanations are clear and I know what to expect

We will introduce digital services to monitor all contacts on a consistent basis across all contact channels. This will help to enable customers to choose the contact channel that best suits them without disadvantage.

The customer will be encouraged to interact digitally with the Council so that we can then send them information or advice that relates to their ongoing service needs in the future. This means we can be proactive in dealing with the subjects our customers are interested in, ensuring they get timely and relevant information.

7 Improving what we do (Customer and Internal Feedback)

Customer feedback helps us know what customers think we are doing well, identify customers who aren't happy with our services, stop recurring problems and helping us increase our overall customer satisfaction.

We will make it easy for customers to give us feedback on our services and we will listen to what customers say. We will use customer surveys across all contact channels and will make these simple, focused and quick, the results will be used to make improvements.

We will improve the way in which we deal with customer complaints, recognising that failure demand is a real drain on our resources and that complaints often provide us with a chance to improve.

Continue to work with disabled and older people and residents from other groups to find ways to overcome barriers to physical and digital access and ensure that everyone in North Norfolk can easily access North Norfolk District Council information and services.

8 Offering flexibility (Digital channels)

We will use digital channels to enable customers to have 24/7 access to most services at times and places that work for them. More staff time can be given to those who need it most who are unable to access digital services or self-serve online.

When redesigning services, the principles of digital by design will be applied, so that customer service transactions are consistently delivered whether through self-service or assisted service.

We will seek to ensure that all services delivered online are computer, tablet and smartphone friendly allowing access from all digital devices and providing a consistent customer experience.

To make this as effective as possible for customers, we will make sure that online customer transactions automatically integrate with the back office systems, creating a smooth and seamless service to our customers.

9 Digital by Design - Journey

9.1 Current situation

The Council has incrementally increased digital services for customers to self-serve and the restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic has increased this pace, driven by the need to ensure the safety of customers and staff.

We recognise our website is information based and is not a place where customers can consistently transact easily. We want our website to be designed to give priority to the people who use our services over convenient organisational practice or professional bias.

9.2 Overall Desired solution

This is very much a refocusing of a journey that has already begun as we overhaul our services to enable digital end-to-end transactions by our customers, while at the same time recognising the principles of not excluding any customer who may not be able to easily access online services because of poor signal or broadband speed or is unable or does not wish to.

We want to encourage as many customers who are able to use our online services whenever they wish 24/7. In order to achieve this, we will consider how our processes can be streamlined, automated and offered online. The principles of Digital by Design will be utilised which will be an iterative process delivering customer service improvements that reflect the changing expectations of our customers.

The principles of digital by design require each of our processes to be reviewed in detail and where necessary remodelled to support digital interactions in the future. This work will be programmed focusing on the areas that bring the highest volume of queries to our Customer Services Team such as council tax, benefits, licensing, housing options, waste and electoral services.

Once a service has been remodelled the customer will remain able to contact us by phone or face-to-face. However, the onward journey for their transaction will utilise the new improved processes.

9.3 Technology

Customers increasingly expect access to services through a wide range of options. We will consider the appropriate application of modern technologies to support their interactions, whether that be through artificial intelligence, intelligent websites, social media, online accounts, web chat, chatbots and apps.

The Customer Service Strategy will need to dovetail with our ICT Strategy so that the tools required can be implemented using the best technologies to simplify our processes to better serve our customers. This will include;

- Implementing and extending new digital engagement /CRM platforms as technology evolves.
- Implement as far as practically possible a single 'My Account' functionality, which allows customers to manage their digital engagement in a single secure way.
- Develop a Customer Mobile App, and integrate it with the CRM to ensure seamless issue handling and resolution.
- Evaluate emerging technologies to identify those that will add value to the Customer Experience.
- Implement service and appointment booking solutions, to allow Customers as much choice as possible when accessing council services.
- Implement customer satisfaction surveys across all digital platforms.
- Commission a new customer focused Council website supported by clear operational responsibilities throughout the Council.

10 Supporting online services for those who need it (Digital Inclusion)

The increased use of our online services during the covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the ability and appetite of customers to access help and support online including those who are isolated and/ or vulnerable. Customers are learning the skills and increasing in confidence as they daily use online services to order groceries, prescriptions, book medical appointments, holidays, claim benefits and grants, set up utility accounts, pay bills and manage their bank accounts. Online digital delivery is becoming the way most organisations prefer to deliver their services.

As we develop our digital services those who use them will have greater choice, control and access to our services and the information they would like to receive.

We recognise that not everyone has the skills, access to the online services or equipment to take advantage of this or the knowledge of what online services can offer. We also understand that some people simply do not wish to access services in this way.

For those customers who are unable or unwilling to make use of self-service digital access our staff will be trained to support those customers by offering Assisted Digital access to our services.

We understand that we need to work with our customers and other agencies so we can increase the confidence of those who are digitally excluded and increase their ability to use online services. Information on what can be done online and the benefits of doing this will be made as widely available as possible raising customers' awareness of what they can do online as and when they want to.

Ensure that our digital web content is accessible regardless of people's ability, disability or literacy skills or whether English is their first language.

Strategy Statement

This strategy will take effect from the 1st of January 2022

The master copy of this document, a record of review and decision making processes will be held in the corporate online Records Centre and made available for public viewing on the Council's website. All documentation will be available for audit as necessary.

Equality Impact Analysis

In Appendix One we have included the Equality Impact Assessment which will influence and inform the action plan to enable the Customer Services Strategy to deliver on outcomes in support of all residents, visitors and businesses within North Norfolk.

Review Process

Customer outcomes across all contact channels will be regularly monitored and will be reviewed annually.

We will know we have been successful in placing the customer at the heart of our service delivery when the customer:

- Finds it easy to access our services and information
- Gets the service delivered or issue resolved first time
- Has a high level of satisfaction with the service/information they received
- Has a high level of satisfaction with the attitude, skills, knowledge and professionalism of our staff
- Is offered complementary services by us without them having to work it out for themselves

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

Published separately.

Appendix 2 – Customer Standards Charter

Published separately.

Document Information and Version Control

Document Name	CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY
Document Description	The corporately approved Strategy which guides the approach to ensuring the delivery of consistently high quality customer service across all of the Council's services.
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Lead Officer	STUART HARBER, CUSTOMER SERVICES MANAGER
Sponsor	CLLR LUCY SHIRES
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Version	Originator	Description including reason for changes	Date
0.01			