

One team



Customer Strategy 2018-22



customers at the heart of everything we do

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1. Why do we need a Customer Strategy?



The Council is here to serve the people of Cumbria and is committed to putting customers at the heart of everything we do. This means it is important to provide a good quality customer experience, regardless of why customers get in touch with us or how they access our services.

With new technologies being introduced, reducing budgets for public services, as well as communities and individual's needs and expectations changing, it is the right time for the Council to look at opportunities to do things differently from the customers' perspective.

We need to look at who our customers will be in a few years' time – be it individuals, families or communities. We need to look at their needs, how we engage with them and the opportunities new technologies will bring for delivering services differently.

The Customer Strategy describes what we want to achieve over the next 4 years and the action we will be taking to make sure our approach is fit for the future.



serving the people of Cumbria

2. Our Vision



The Council Plan 2018-2022 puts our approach to customers as central to the Council's ways of working. This Customer Strategy sets out how, over the next 4 years, we are going to.....

..... put customers at the heart of everything we do, providing quality services at a reduced cost.

This will mean taking action to put customers right at the centre of the way we design services through to learning from the feedback they provide when things don't go well.

In developing our Strategy we have drawn on best practice from the public and private sector; as well as using feedback from customers, staff and Elected Members. We will keep our approach under review and change the way we do things. We will build on what customers tell us is working well and is good about our services; as well as things they think we can improve upon.

Our approach to customers will also support the delivery of all the Council's priorities and help us deliver the outcomes we want for Cumbria, as set out in the Council Plan. This will lead to improved customer experience, strong and resilient communities, and contribute to the savings the Council has to make.

The Council's approach to equalities is also fundamental to the successful delivery of the Strategy in a way that meets our public sector equalities duty, ensuring we actively seek out an understanding of the needs of people with protected characteristics and incorporating this into service design. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken on the Strategy and this will inform its delivery.

3. Where are we now?

The Council provides a wide range of services – used by many residents such as library services, school admissions, registrars, highways and Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service. We call these universal services. Some of these services can be accessed online, by telephone and through our offices.

Other people access more targeted services – such as support from social workers. This support is often accessed by phone or face to face, but sometimes through online and digital means as well.

The Council provides its services across the whole of Cumbria which has:



A population of just under **498,000**

A Black and Minority Ethnicity (BME) population of **3.5%**



20.3% of the Cumbrian population have a health problem or disability that limits their day to day activity



More than **50%** of its residents living in rural communities

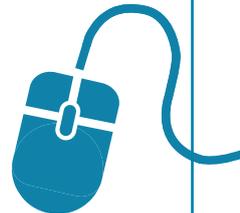


16.5 % of its residents between 0- 15 years



Almost one quarter (**23.5 %**) of residents are **over 65**

Challenges with **internet availability and speed** compared to other parts of the country; along with a significant population of residents who choose not to use the internet.



In terms of the Council's customers:

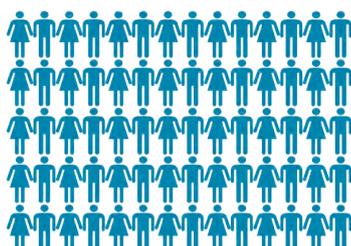


We have an estimated **19,000** telephone calls each year to Cumbria County Council's current general enquiries number **01228 606060**; 42% are in relation to Blue Badge queries, almost 18% linked to highways and around 9% relate to children.



33%

of all online transactions relate to library services.



Over **1,100** visitors to our **6** main reception desks each week.

National research shows the costs of transactions vary drastically from:

- £14.00 - face to face
- £12.00 - letter
- £5.00 - phone
- 17pence - online



We seek customer views in a wide range of ways – directly through Elected Members; through surveys and online; feedback forms and cards; complaints; compliments; focus groups and through groups representing or advocating for customers.

Some examples of the great feedback we receive includes:



Other feedback tells us:

- Correspondence and communication needs to be easier to understand.
- Just under one third of users, who provided feedback on the website, rate it as good.
- Complaints about web pages relate to the quality of the information; difficulties reporting faults online; as well as difficulty in navigating around the site.
- Customers only want to tell us once about an issue – particularly if it is about something personal.
- Common themes in complaints are poor communication, staff attitude or conduct, issues with service provision and delays in response times.



4. Where do we want to be?

Our vision is to put customers at the heart of everything we do providing quality services at a reduced cost.



The outcomes we want to achieve are:

- **Customers' and communities' needs are put at the heart of designing and improving services.**



- **Customers are able to access services and information easily, through a range of channels.**



- **The Council's digital services are so good they are our customers' channel of choice.**



- **The Council is clear and honest about what customers can expect and is consistent in its delivery of this.**



- **Council services are delivered at a reduced cost and provide value for money.**



In the 2018-2022 Council Plan we make a commitment to:

- Understand our customers and their needs.
- Deliver a consistent, quality customer experience across all services.
- Involve customers in the design of services.
- Encourage customers who can, to self-serve.
- Offer high quality digital services which meet the needs and expectations of our customers so that most of our customers choose to access our services online - enabling us to ensure our resources are focused on those who need them the most.

Our aspirations for the development of a range of communication and delivery channels are:

- **Digital** – for our digital channels to be so good they are our customers' channel of choice; providing support to those who need it.
- **Social Media** – to explore how this can be used to share information proactively, receive feedback and engage with particular communities of interest.
- **Telephony** – to channel all general telephone enquires through fewer published numbers and we will aim to resolve queries at first point of contact wherever possible.
- **Face to face** – to make sure those customers who wish to visit our offices and access services in communities enter a welcoming environment, are treated in a friendly and helpful way and are supported to access services themselves.
- **Frontline targeted services** – to provide professional, person focused support.

We are clear about the approach and change in culture we will need to take to achieve these outcomes, as well as the tools and infrastructure to facilitate this:

- **Organisational development** – to equip staff with the skills and knowledge needed to provide excellent customer service, no matter what their job.
- **Engagement and consultation** – to involve customers in the design of services so that we better understand their needs and preferences. Ensure we have, and use feedback, on their experience to inform improvements and to shape services in the future.
- **Customer insight** – to make sure we gather and use a wide range of customer data to better inform service design and delivery.
- **Standards to support customer experience** – to be clear about what customers can, and cannot, expect and ensure consistent delivery.
- **Service Centre** – to accelerate the development of the Service Centre to act as our customer hub for telephony and online transactions.
- **ICT and Digital Infrastructure** – to support digital access to services and digital inclusion.



5. How will we get there?

In order for the Council to put customers at the heart of everything it does, significant change is needed. There are examples of great practice across the Council, but more can be done to ensure our culture is customer focused, that we are clear and honest about our offer, and deliver this consistently in an affordable way.

Everyone in the organisation will have a role to play.

Elected Members will be critical in delivering our vision. Often Members are the first point of contact for local residents. They respond to queries, questions and complaints. Members gather customer insight and information which can help inform service delivery and improvements.

In their community leadership role, Members can also encourage customers who can, to self-serve; promoting and supporting customers to access our services online. They are well placed to explain to local residents that by doing this they will enable the Council to be more efficient.

We also recognise we cannot achieve the outcomes in isolation. Working with partners and collaborating with others will be important. There may be opportunities to work together as well as support and learn from each other. This will be explored through all aspects of delivery.

Our work over the next 4 years will focus on:

1 Developing a customer focused organisation – we will focus on developing the right culture, put in place staff training and support and develop our approach to customer insight and engagement. We will review and improve our approach to complaints and correspondence, support Members in their role, and make sure we have ICT solutions in place to support our ambition.



2 The redesign of priority services – we will put in place a rolling programme of services which will undergo a level of re-design from a customer perspective. The focus will be to improve the customer experience and increase value for money where possible. We will be prioritising services which have a high volume of customer interaction; those services where savings have been identified; and where there are higher levels of customer dissatisfaction.



3 Customer channel development and channel shift – we will put in place a programme of work to develop each of our channels, explore new channels, and provide support to those that need it so that online services become the channel of choice.



6. Delivering the plan

The Strategy will be delivered over 4 years. There will be an annual Delivery Plan setting out key deliverables and milestones for the coming year, with actions informed by the Equality Impact Assessment. The Year 1 Delivery Plan can be found appended to the Strategy. There will be a real focus in 2018/19 on developing an account for customers and developing the skills and behaviours of staff to support a customer focused culture.

Underpinning our actions and redesign of services is a commitment from the Council to:

1

Start with customer needs – put the customer at the forefront of service design and considering issues of equality.

2

Learn from customers – pilot and test with them, seeking feedback to help make improvements.

3

Understand context, environment and locality – build on established arrangements that are working well and co-design with communities.

4

Be open and willing to change – by learning and doing things differently.

5

Take proactive steps to reduce the demand for services – do what we can to get things right first time.

6

Do the hard work upfront – spend time making information and services easy to access, considering how to make systems and processes simple.

7

Be clear and consistent about our offer – be open, honest and clear about what customers can expect about the services we provide, our performance and eligibility for services.

8

Share information – across our systems so that customers only need to tell us once, respecting privacy and data protection regulations.

9

Provide value for money services – look for opportunities to do things more efficiently, in a cost effective way, avoiding duplication with others.

7. How will we know if we have been successful?



We will need to know from customers if we have got it right. So asking them what they think is important. What we hope they will tell us is:

- Services are easy to use and focused on the needs of the customer.
- The information available from the Council is helpful and easy to understand.
- They only have to tell the Council something once.
- Staff treat them with respect, are competent and understand their needs.



For the Council we want to see:



- Services using staff and customer feedback to inform improvements and redesign of services.
- All staff that engage with customers need to complete our customer services training.
- A year on year increase in the number of online transactions.
- An increase in the range of transactions available online.
- The cost of delivering services reduced.
- A reduction in demand for services.
- Improvements in our Socitm and YouGov website ratings.



The Year 1 Delivery Plan includes a range of milestones and measures, however there is also a commitment during Year 1 to undertake work to develop a more detailed range of measures, baselines and targets with a particular focus on understanding what matters most to customers.

Our approach to equality



The Council is committed to ensuring it meets the Public Sector Equality Duty in order to provide equality of opportunity through access to services for all and delivering services which meet the needs of the Council's customers; foster good relations by understanding the communities the Council serves and deliver meaningful engagement; eliminate discrimination through the Council's operational and work place policies and procedures.

To support the delivery of this Customer Strategy, the Council will build on its existing approach and publish an Equality Action Plan which will set out the objectives and related activities which will be undertaken to meet our commitments. The Action Plan will be informed by the Council's annual Equality Needs Analysis.

This approach will enhance the visibility and accountability for ensuring we meet our commitments.

If you require this document in another format (eg CD, audio cassette, Braille or large type) or in another language, please telephone **01228 226514**.

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