

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

STRATEGY 2021



BARNSELY
Metropolitan Borough Council

Foreword

This Customer Experience Strategy outlines the way the council will seek to support its customers in accessing the many services that we offer.

Since our last Customer Experience Strategy was issued cashless payments have overtaken cash, online access has become primarily via smart phone, and across the UK 90% of adults are now regular internet users, with the figure for Barnsley being closer to 85% and growing. This means that the way we offer our services is changing, with an increasing emphasis on transacting digitally in fewer physical locations. This is not only driven by environmental factors such as resource availability but also by our customers' expectations of how we utilise technology in the changing environment we live in.

This document sets out our strategy for reacting to these changes while continuing to provide the high-quality experience our customers have come to expect from us.

Success will mean that all communities will always know how to contact us and access our services, will find an excellent experience when they need us, will have clear expectations, receive timely updates and enable us to monitor and publish our performance. Excellent customer service works for the council by limiting avoidable contact, duplicate calls, repeat contacts and complaints, enabling us to ensure we concentrate our scarce resource where it is needed most.

Although we will work hard to develop our digital solutions, we recognise that not everyone can use or has access to the right technology. As such we will work to ensure that all of our services are accessible to all communities through the most appropriate method and channels, ensuring in particular that the digitally excluded have the same access to services.



Reflections

The way that we deliver Customer Services has changed at pace in recent years and reflects the changes in the environment at large. This includes:



Resilience through giving our contact centre advisors the ability to work remotely, reducing the likelihood of the council being difficult to contact



Simplification of our web content to better reflect customer expectations and accessibility requirements



Increased use of technology to simplify 'report it' type transactions through use of maps, web chat to allow people to stay online rather than have to pick up the phone

Responding to the market shift to mobile devices by making our content fully responsive to the device it is being viewed on



An increase in the percentage of customers transacting digitally to around 80% of the interactions we record

Rapid response to the COVID crisis during 2020 including the rapid establishment of new contact centre functionality



Support to front-line staff to give them the confidence to have conversations with people to really understand how best to support them

We recognise there are still areas for improvement, and the strategy sets out our outcomes and objectives designed to help us do that. This is in the context of a challenging financial position in future years, and while we will seek to improve quality, we will also seek to reduce costs which will mean difficult decisions around stopping some methods of delivery

Our Response to the Pandemic

Our response to the pandemic situation through 2020/21 taught us a lot about the ways we can potentially interact with our customers and our own organisational resilience. We also learned areas for improvement which the strategy seeks to tackle through delivery of its outcomes and objectives.

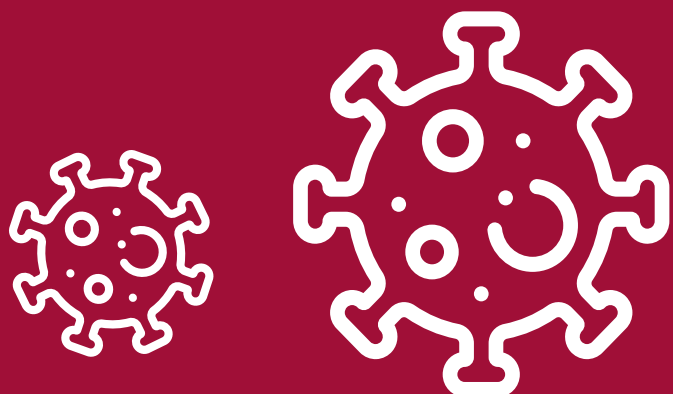
Our technology solutions prove to be fit for purpose, giving us the ability to work 100% remote within our call centres, something we'd prepared for but in response to business continuity incidents like snow. We've also learned that this way of working is challenging for our advisors who have had to deal with an increase in volumes without the everyday support of colleagues and 'water cooler' conversations.

We have been able to act swiftly to provide online solutions and enquiry forms, something we've had to do many times during response to the constantly changing measures and support available to residents. The take up of online solutions has been much better than expected, with over 80% choosing this over telephony when presented with the choice. This is a real positive as the cost of an online transaction is many times cheaper than voice, and we must work to capitalise on this through 'digital by choice'.

The opposite side of this is the reality of digital exclusion and poverty, and the disadvantage that this brings to those residents who can't use or have no access to digital. Work has started to address this through many initiatives including devices to care homes and school children and working with mobile telephony suppliers to bring connectivity to those without. Again, it's important that we maintain this momentum to reduce this digital divide and will work increasingly with partners to ensure this happens.

We have strengthened our use of data to drive decision making, and used our own data in conjunction with other public service providers to influence how we provide response services within the pandemic. We'll seek to build on this, and work to providing a seamless customer journey for residents dealing with multiple providers.

As we return to a 'new normal' through the course of 2021 we will need to constantly review our customer services offers to ensure that no one has difficulty in contacting us, getting the help they need and being able to access our services. Although technology provides some of the answers there are fundamental issues to address around standards, quality of services and involving customers in design that will allow us to not only capitalise on the positives arising from COVID19 but also make the continual service improvements our customers deserve to give a high quality of service to all.



Vision

Our vision is simple:

To harness **people, process and technology** to create an **outstanding experience** across all channels that is **recognised and valued by our customers.**



Barnsley 2030



The Barnsley 2030 vision and ambitions communicates the borough's aspiration to be leading in providing 'a good life for all'. The customer experience strategy helps in delivering all four main areas identified within the 2030 action plan:

Healthy Barnsley:

Healthy
Barnsley

- Leading in innovative digital solutions to allow anytime access to all our services
- Using digital to connect our communities
- Addressing digital exclusion to improve connectivity

Learning Barnsley:

Learning
Barnsley

- Helping to improve digital skills by encouraging channel shift to digital means
- Using technology to enhance access to our services
- Using customer feedback and intelligence to review and improve our services

Growing Barnsley:

Growing
Barnsley

- Better work life balance by allowing 24/7 access where appropriate
- Building digital capability

Sustainable Barnsley:

Sustainable
Barnsley

- Reducing our own carbon footprint through increased use of cloud technology in our Contact Centres and supporting services

A Customer Driven Council

The pace of digital change continues to increase, and we have harnessed some of this to be able to provide many more of our services online, in recent years, for example reporting issues online using a map to simply pinpoint your location or book Registration Services appointments online. We must continue to exploit technology to provide our services as efficiently as possible and in many cases to ease accessibility to them. However, we have to acknowledge that the digital journey is difficult for some and this document seeks to set our expectations around customer access for all, not just our digital natives.



To fulfil the aspirations set out in our 2030 plan, we'll abide by the design criteria laid out in our 'Be Even Better' Strategy, particularly helping customers to help themselves, moving transactions online to facilitate this, but also in allowing other methods of service delivery where people need it. Where other methods of service delivery such as face to face or voice contact are required and appropriate, we'll still deliver to the same high standards. In addition and where appropriate we will seek to improve our workforce experience using feedback and the tools made available through our Organisational Development Strategy and Smart Working initiative. We will also look to benefit from technology delivered as part of the Digital Barnsley Strategy, to which this strategy is closely aligned.

We are seeking a defined set of outcomes that we can use to realise our vision. We'll deliver projects and programmes to progress towards these outcomes and monitor this progress via the council's rigorous performance monitoring framework.

These simple but ambitious outcomes are:

Digital by choice

- tackling digital exclusion head on
- innovative use of technology to enhance accessibility
- built in accessibility to limit digital exclusion
- a recognition that digital isn't for everyone.

Simplicity and clarity

- designed in simplicity in all of our contact channels
- clear guidance on where and how to access services
- ownership of queries and transactions
- remove inappropriate channels of contact and transacting.

Listen and improve standards

- actively seek feedback and make improvements across all of our access channels
- make performance data easily available
- apply common performance standards across all our access channels based on what customers feel is important.

Inclusive access

- respect privacy and dignity
- a human touch for transactions that need it
- accessibility at the heart of all of our services.

Get it right first time

- meet needs at first point of contact
- empower customers and give them control
- reduce unnecessary contact caused by service failure
- our officers will own customer contact

What will success look like?

The scenarios described below are designed to provide a few practical examples of how achieving our objectives and outcomes will benefit our customers.

Recognising and Reducing Digital Exclusion

At a simple level, the COVID pandemic has forced many institutions to rethink how they provide services due to the restriction imposed as part of tackling the pandemic. Many retailers are 'click and collect' only, Doctors provide video appointments rather than face to face, supermarket shopping can be ordered online rather than needing to leave the house and be in close proximity to others. For those that are excluded, all of these tasks are much more difficult and potentially less safe.

In addition, our economy is increasingly driven by digital forces and high value employment is provided by the industry. The speed at which new 'ways of working' are introduced is ever increasing, and robotics and artificial intelligence are increasing exponentially in their deployment.

By seeking to tackle digital exclusion and poverty we potentially realise benefits through, for example:

- Providing more cost efficient and effective council services
- Allowing people 24/7 access to some of these services when it's appropriate
- Giving our human resource time back to spend on complex transactions and contacts
- Realising the cashable benefits of being online eg through energy switching, insurance comparison, retail
- Introducing more people to an area that may one day provide them with high value employment

We also need to recognise that digital cannot be accessed by everyone. In doing so we can shape customer services that, whilst taking maximum advantage of technology, still allow us to interact successfully with excluded cohorts and individuals on the telephone or face to face where it is appropriate.

Successful use of technology

While we have made vast improvements in the last few years we are still very much on the journey of improving the way we use technology to improve our customer experience. For many people, there is an expectation now that the council should provide an online offer for the majority of services and this will be their preferred method of contacting or transacting with us.

We will only ever be able to offer a certain capacity to accept phone calls, or provide face to face appointments. This human intervention is entirely appropriate for many of the services that our customers may wish to access, for example complex care requirements. We want everyone that needs to speak to someone to be able to do so quickly, and for them to be given the time they need to discuss their requirements and leave the call satisfied with the resolution.

Effective use of technology supports this by ensuring that only necessary calls are routed to advisors. For simple reports or requests for service we will seek to employ digital solutions which still give a high quality resolution while removing the need for human intervention. In this way our advisors will have more capacity to deal with complex or sensitive calls or other interactions. We may also give higher priority to certain call types to facilitate this, leaving people waiting less time for certain types of call if they ring us.

Getting it Right First Time

When things don't go as they should there are many consequences including:

- Dissatisfied customers
- Time spent by customers in chase up or repeat contact and for the council in dealing with these
- Costs incurred in rectifying issues
- A potential increase in complaints and time / cost rectifying them

By driving a culture of 'right first time' throughout the council we can avoid these issues. Customer service applies to all parts of the organisation and processes need to be viewed 'end to end'

By seeking and listening to feedback, and learning from complaints, we can improve our end to end service offerings so that all parts of the process perform successfully. Costs are reduced throughout the lifecycle of a service, and our level of customer satisfaction increases. Crucially, we positively impact residents, partners and businesses by removing wastage for them too.

Inclusive Access

There is no 'one size fits all' way of providing many of our services. While we will seek to make our digital and voice services as accessible as possible to as many people as possible, there will always be some of our customers who are unable to access services in these ways. The strategy seeks to ensure that these customers are not excluded or provided with a degraded service as a consequence.

Successful implementation of our objectives will ensure that we use data and intelligence to understand exclusion, seek to minimise it where possible but also make provisions for when we can't.

Using this data and intelligence will also ensure we continually monitor the ways customers are accessing services and act on adverse trends. For example, if we have a 'spike' in requests of a certain type we'll seek to address the root cause as well as covering this increased contact. It may be that one of our contact channels has failed or is substandard, diverting customers to other methods – we need to fix this to maintain our service levels.



Supporting Action Plan

Outcome	Initiative	Description	Performance Measures	Benefits	Date
Digital by Choice	Digital Inclusion and Poverty	Produce a plan to increase digital inclusion and poverty having investigated its prevalence	Number of engagements Reduced digital exclusion by 20%	Number of engagements Reduced digital exclusion	Mar 2023
	Modernisation of Contact Centre Systems	An upgrade to more modern, resilient and functionally rich software to manage calls to our contact centre	Customer quality measures Service Level performance	Resilience of solution leading to fewer outages More user friendly and reliable experience for advisors Superior Management Information	Mar 2021
	Automation of simple contact	Use of Chatbots and Robotic Process Automation	Call volumes Number of automated processes	Free up operative time to work with cases of genuine need	Sept 2021



Outcome	Initiative	Description	Performance Measures	Benefits	Date
Simplicity & Clarity	Agreed service standards	A simple way of customers understanding what to expect when they make contact with us, regardless of the chosen channel	Customer satisfaction KPIs	Managed expectations for all stakeholders Transparency of performance to all stakeholders	Mar 2021
	Access clarification	Publish clearly the correct access channels for our customers Review our offer for those customers with multiple disadvantages	Publication of simple guide to access	All our customers will know how and where to access services Reduction in complaints	Jun 2021
	Review of Contact Functions across the council	A review of contact centre functions and published numbers to ensure efficient and effective delivery of customer contact	Customer satisfaction Benchmarking KPIs	Remove duplication Facilitate adherence to standards Standardise customer experience across all services	Mar 2023



Outcome	Initiative	Description	Performance Measures	Benefits	Date
Listen and Improve Standards	Establish Customer Feedback Focus Groups	Ensure we collect feedback on performance and accessibility across all channels	Establishment of focus groups 'You said we did' responses	Increased customer satisfaction	Mar 2021
	Customer Services Governance	Establish BMBC governance across customer services to introduce standard ways of working where appropriate			Mar 2021
	Customer Charter	Documented standards to be adopted by all involved in customer services, including expectations of customers	Agreed document Published document	Expectation of customers managed	Mar 2021
	Service and Operational Level Agreements	Agreed performance measure against which contact functions can be held accountable	Will be detailed in OLAs/SLAs	Performance of Contact Centres can be measured	Jun 2021
	Connect complaints and compliments with service improvement	Work closely between front line customer contact and the council's Customer Feedback & Improvement Team to improve the feedback loop	Continual Service Improvement suggestions	Measurable improvement as a consequence of customer feedback	Mar 2022



Outcome	Initiative	Description	Performance Measures	Benefits	Date
Inclusive Access	Digital Skills	The council will signpost customers to the support they need to capitalise on the opportunities digital brings	Channel shift Digital skills engagements	Efficiency through increased use of digital channels Digital skills in our customers	Ongoing
	Accessibility	Ensure our digital services are accessible	Meeting requirements of accessibility regulations Website accessibility score	Increased customer satisfaction Regulatory compliance	Ongoing
	A central prevention hub	Bring together relevant services who would collectively support vulnerable individuals	Early interventions Reductions in eg presenting for homelessness	Early intervention results in cost efficiencies	Mar 23

Outcome	Initiative	Description	Performance Measures	Benefits	Date
Get it Right First Time	Reduce the number of 'hand offs'	Review end to end processes to facilitate resolution at first point of contact, empower advisors to make appropriate decisions	Number of repeat contacts	Increased customer satisfaction Efficiency through avoiding repeat 'follow up' contact	Mar 22
	Reduce number of follow up calls	Be transparent when setting service standards	Reduced avoidable contact	Capacity for advisors Increased quality of service	Mar 22

Find out more:

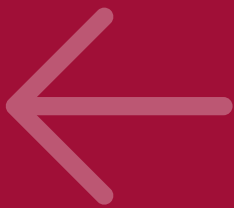
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