



City of Wolverhampton Council's Customer Services Strategy

Improving the customer
experience 2015-2018

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1



**Councillor
Andrew Johnson**
Cabinet Member
for Resources



Sue Handy
Head of
Customer Services

Foreword

Cabinet Member for Resources

Providing excellent customer service is the acid test as to how we are performing as an organisation.

It is important that, as an organisation, we understand what we mean when we talk about our customers. They aren't exclusively traditional customers such as service users or other people with whom we have a 'transactional relationship'. As community leaders, our customers also include visitors, local, national and international business and partner organisations.

Whilst we undoubtedly face an organisational budget challenge it is vital that we not only deliver 'business as usual' but we continue to enhance our services in line with the customer expectations, evolving technologies and opportunities. This in turn will heighten the view that Wolverhampton is 'making it happen'.

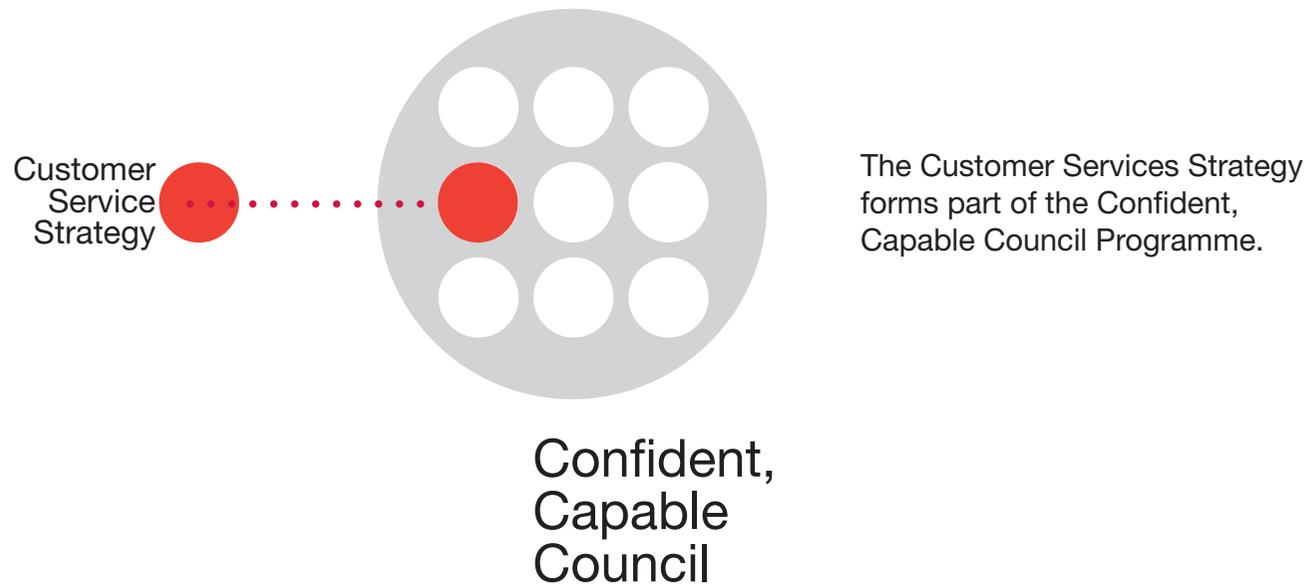
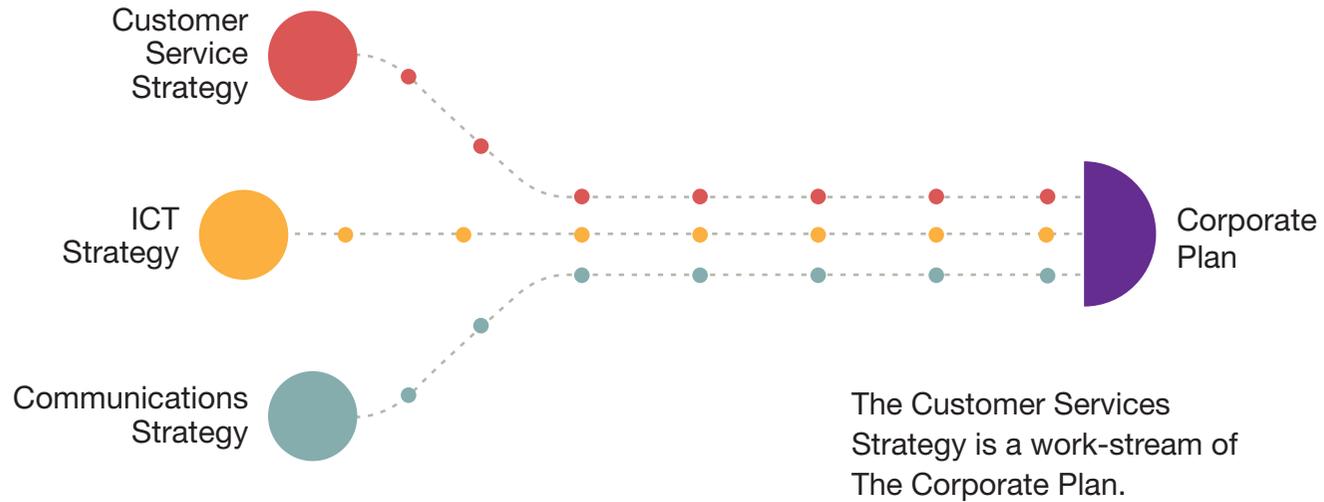
The Customer Service Strategy details how the City of Wolverhampton Council aims to offer joined up services which are designed for customers putting their needs at the heart of our business.

Head of Customer Services

In recent years of financial hardship many have said that across a number of industries customer service standards have been in decline. In reality, what we know, is that customer expectations have increased in regards to the quality of service available to them. This comes in the wake of a technology revolution across many channels – social media, online accounts and apps.

The City of Wolverhampton Council customers expect an 'Amazon' quality of customer service; information readily available to them regarding their area and business with the council. In order to achieve this it is vital that Customer Services is efficient and at the heart of it contains staff who consider the customer impact in each action they take. For these staff, it is about having the right tools at hand to do their jobs in the most efficient manner.

Our strategy is designed to ensure that over the next three years a coherent and ever-increasing depth of service is offered to Wolverhampton residents, visitors and businesses across all channels – firmly putting the customer first.



2

Introduction

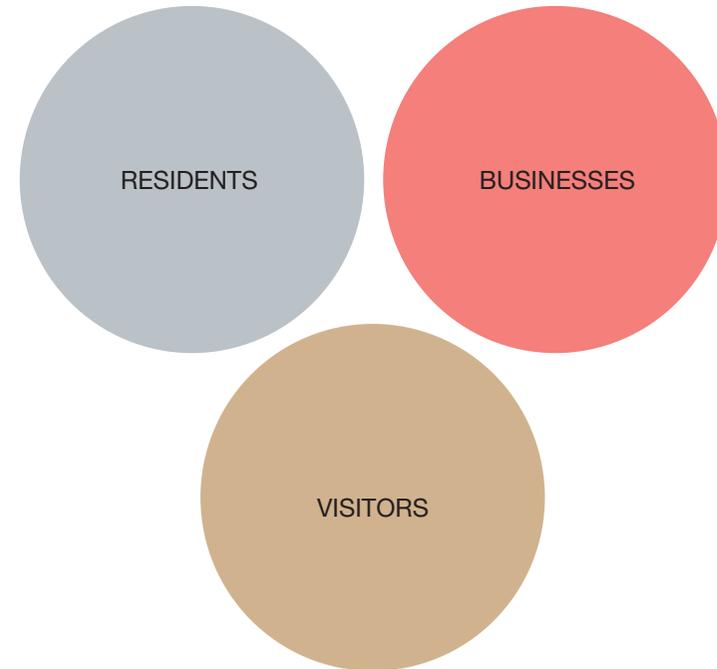
2.1

Our Customers

Wolverhampton has a diverse range of customers with varying needs. In the broadest sense, everyone who lives, works, visits or does business in Wolverhampton will use a Council service in some form, whether they are visiting one of our WV Active leisure centres, claiming a benefit or simply walking down one of the streets which we maintain.

As a council, we are also conscious of the need to provide excellent service to existing and prospective commercial partners so that they in turn start or continue to help us in developing Wolverhampton as a place to work, live, and as the first choice for inward investment.

The organisation is making radical changes in the way its services are delivered. Simultaneously, we are in the midst of radical reform nationally in the wake of Universal Credit and the Care Act which introduce changes to welfare benefits and care provisions respectively.



With these changes a-foot you can already begin to imagine the questions this creates for our customers and impact it has to our social fabric in the region. It is vital that the Customer Service offer across our face to face receptions, telephony and online is geared up to meet current and future demand.

3

The Bottom Line

3.1

Our Savings



During 2015-2018 Customer Service must deliver £1.5 million savings to contribute towards the £124m corporate savings target. A Customer Service Transformation Programme is already underway to ensure this is delivered.

There are a number of contributing factors that dovetail with this strategy which must be considered to realise the savings required and to ensure delivery of an improved customer service experience.

Customer Services supports:



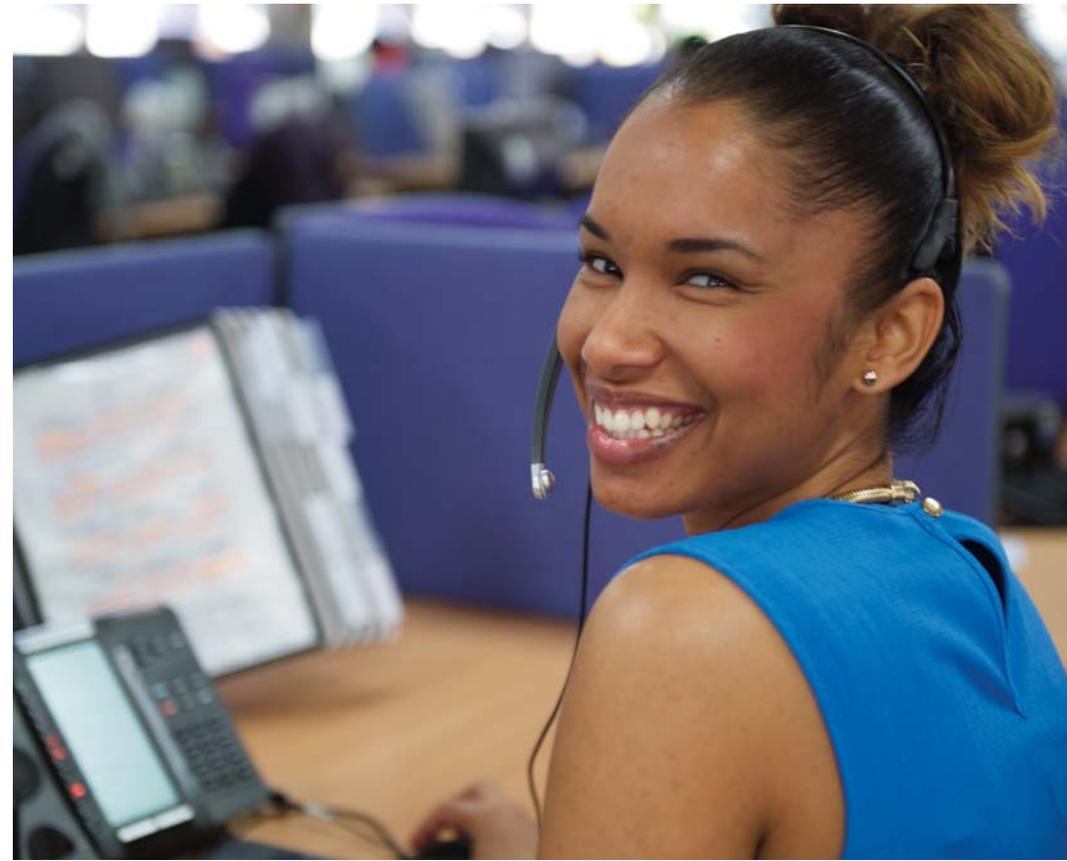
A stronger economy



Stronger communities



A confident capable council



3.2

Our Start

Currently Customer Services receives on average per month:



60,000

telephone contacts



57,000

visits to the Civic Centre office (7,000 visits) and WV Active (50,000 visits)



Emails



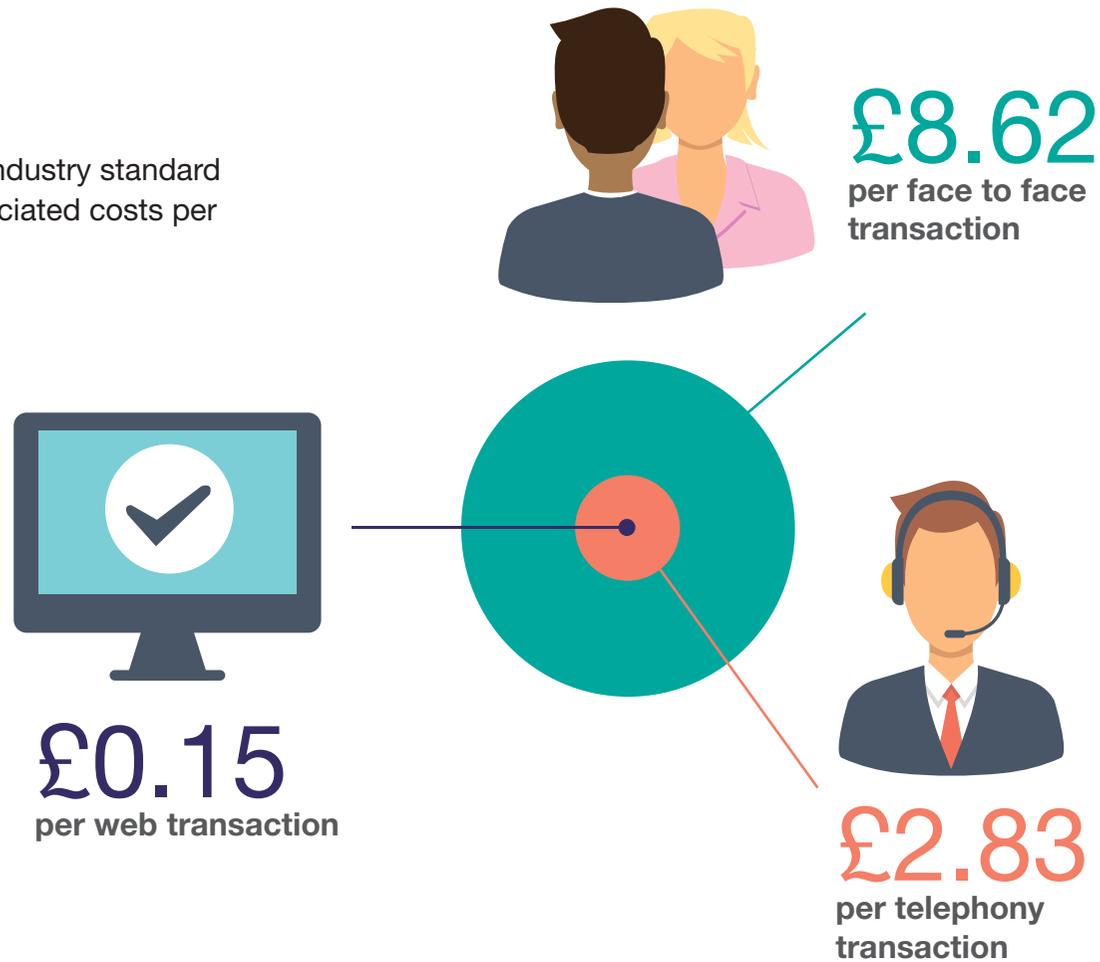
316,000

hits to website homepage
(data includes both wolverhampton.gov.uk - 300,000 and wvactive.com - 16,000)



hits on website forms

We know that the industry standard benchmarked associated costs per contact are:



We know there are more cost effective ways of providing services to customers and that there is appetite to access services in new and innovative ways.

3.3

The Challenge

The Customer Service team are currently organised in a large multi-skilled group of advisors. Our advisors are currently required to utilise and interpret a number of inwardly facing IT systems to provide customers with the information or service they require. These systems are often quite limiting in terms of the customer experience – down to the little things we have come to expect such as a text or an email to confirm you have ordered something or made a booking.

The current systems utilised also require back office duplication in loading or processing requests which in turn has a knock on effect on the efficient progression and updates of a customer enquiry.



The Customer Service team does front a large number of services offered by the council but there are equally some ‘top task’ council services where customer contact is still managed by officers in the back office service areas. This leaves customers trying to understand how we operate and who to contact.

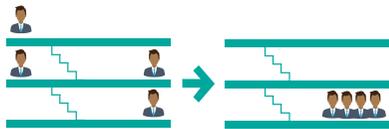
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Transformation Programme

4.1

Our Aims

The Customer Service Transformation Programme, which commenced in November 2014, aims to deliver:



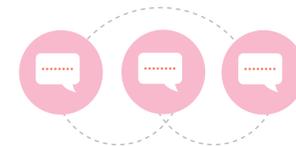
The creation of a single front office, dealing with all types of customer enquiries - transferring as much customer facing activity as possible into Customer Services



A Customer Service department which will be staffed by a range of multi-skilled customer and service specialists who will work with back office services to ensure customers don't need to know how the council works in order to access help and advice



A service where customers will have more of their enquiries answered at the first point of contact - wherever and however they choose to contact us



The removal of wasteful repetition and unnecessary process steps so that we provide a more efficient service to save money and protect front line services

4.2

Customer Champions

The Customer Strategy and Transformation Programme require senior managers to:

- Recognise its importance
- Believe in the strategy
- Be active in leading by example
- Take actions that support those charged with carrying it out.
- Hold services accountable
- Instil a 'shared governance' of this strategy council wide.

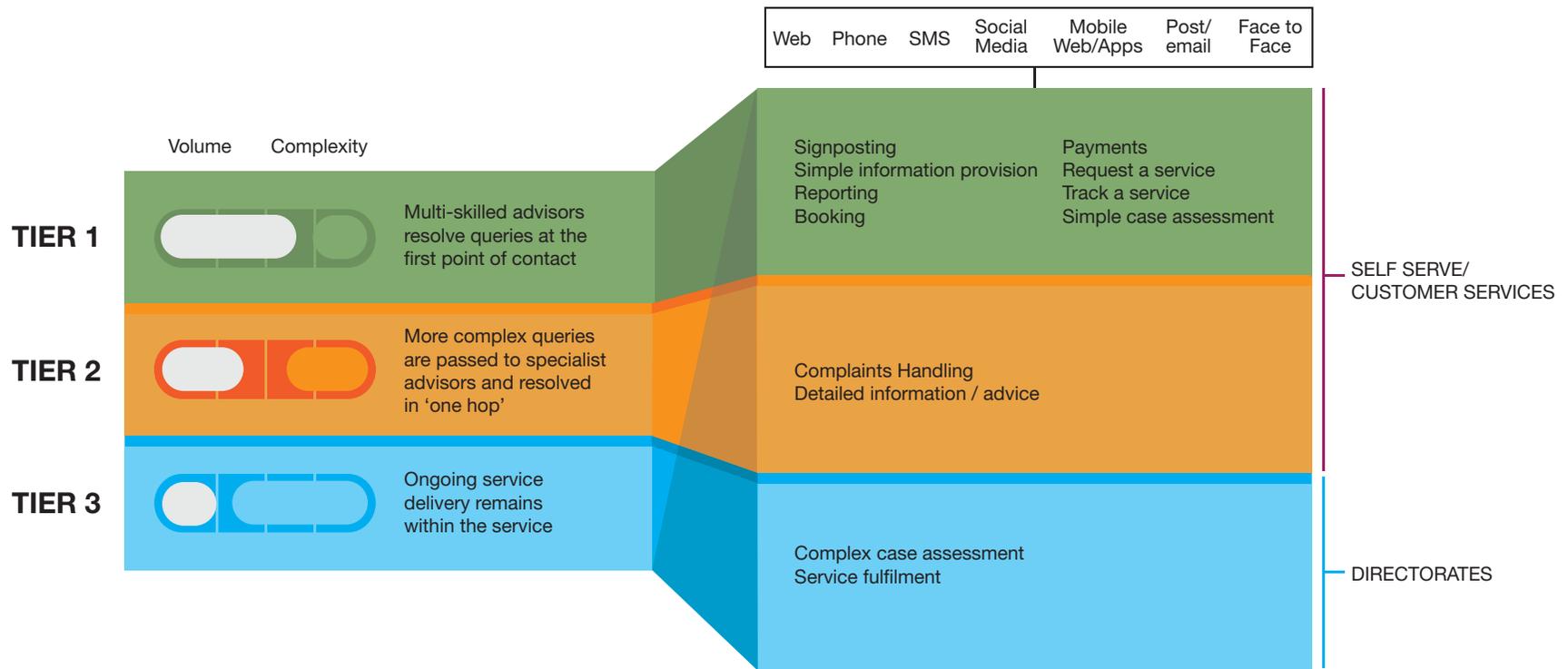
Equally this strategy requires employees to exhibit excellent standards of customer service throughout contact with our customers via any channel they choose to contact us on.

The Customer Service Transformation Board will have direct oversight and governance of the work programme, chaired by the Managing Director.

The Customer Services management team will use the strategy as the driver for their service plan, performance indicators and staff appraisal.



4.3 The Target Operating Model for Customer Services



The implementation of the targeting operating model will result in having the 'right people, with the right skills, doing the right things at the right time in the right way' **(Confident, Capable Council)**.

4.4

Structure

The structure and function is now in place to deliver the target operating model





4.5 Empowering our customer - enabling transformation

As illustrated from the costs per contact on page 9, it is even more important that as well as aligning our customer service resource we must focus our efforts on the empowerment of our customers to self-serve.

Ofcom reported in 2012 that 94% of residents held an email address and we also know that more people are accessing the internet via their mobiles now than on a conventional desktop PC. In 2013, the Office for National Statistics reported that 72% of all adults bought goods or services online, up from 53% in 2008*.

However it is not simply a case of switching our customer contact online. We know from the council's Digital Inclusion Strategy that 36% of our households did not have access to a broadband connection at 2010. This was in spite of Wolverhampton being third highest in terms of broadband coverage across UK cities with availability high at 93%. There are technical, knowledge and skill barriers to overcome with our customers

Moreover, the cheapest channel is not always the most cost effective if it creates failure demand. If customers who require a particular service are not digitally enabled or it is not feasible to encourage or incentivise them to do so we need to be aware of this. This poses the question – what is Wolverhampton's approach to this digital dilemma?

* (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access---households-and-individuals/2013/stb-ia-2013.html>)

City of Wolverhampton Council’s approach to Channel Shift



4.6 ‘Channel Shift’ – the Wolverhampton Way
 Channel Shift is widely accepted to be the migration of customer contact from more expensive channels to less expensive channels.

We recognise that every contact counts – both in financial terms to the Council but more important to each customer’s individual needs. The cost benefits illustrated in Figure 1 are useful to consider but is only meaningful when customer insight is taken into account.

The City of Wolverhampton Council has adopted a ‘digital by design’ ethos. This is opposed to being ‘digital by default’. In simple terms what does this mean?

Channel Effectiveness - Digital by Design

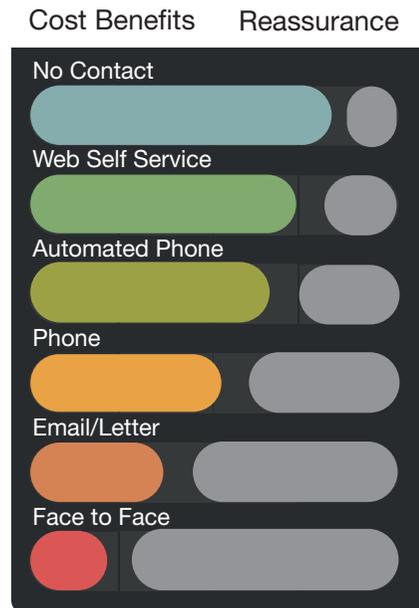
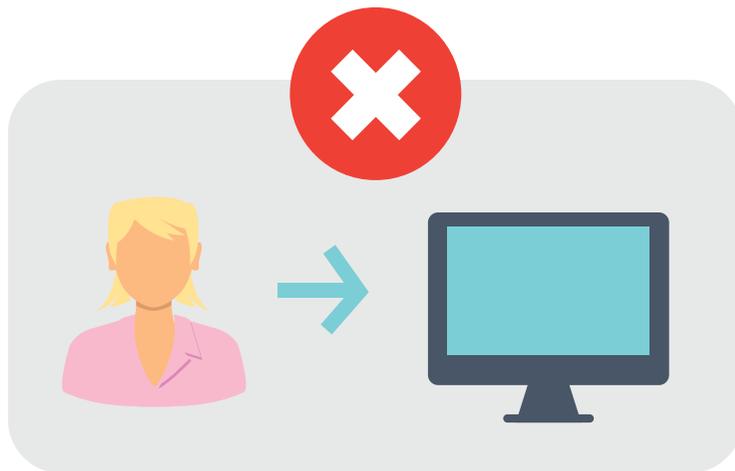


Figure 1

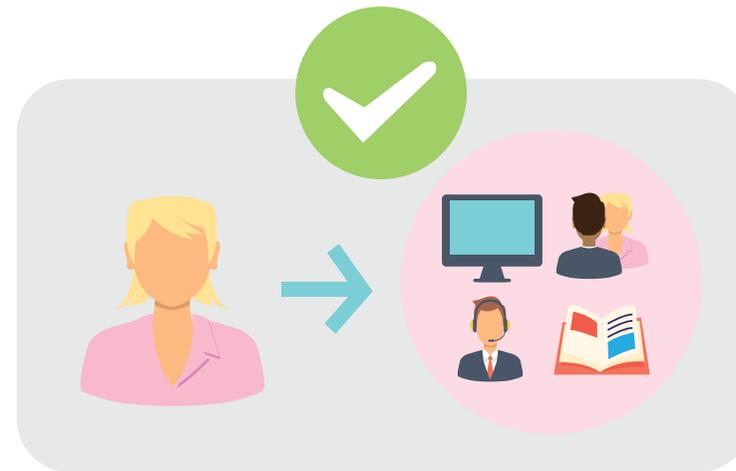
Digital by default is where customers are moved to digital channels by force. The business process is redesigned with the primary purpose being to remove any other channels for customers to contact or place a service request.



Rejected approach

Digital by design is where the end to end business process is reviewed in detail and areas deemed suitable for channel shift are identified. Digital options can be made available to customers at salient stages of the enquiry or transaction process or the entire process can be transformed to digital. This method places emphasis on due diligence and consideration of the demographic, processes involved and intervention required by the customer and the back office.

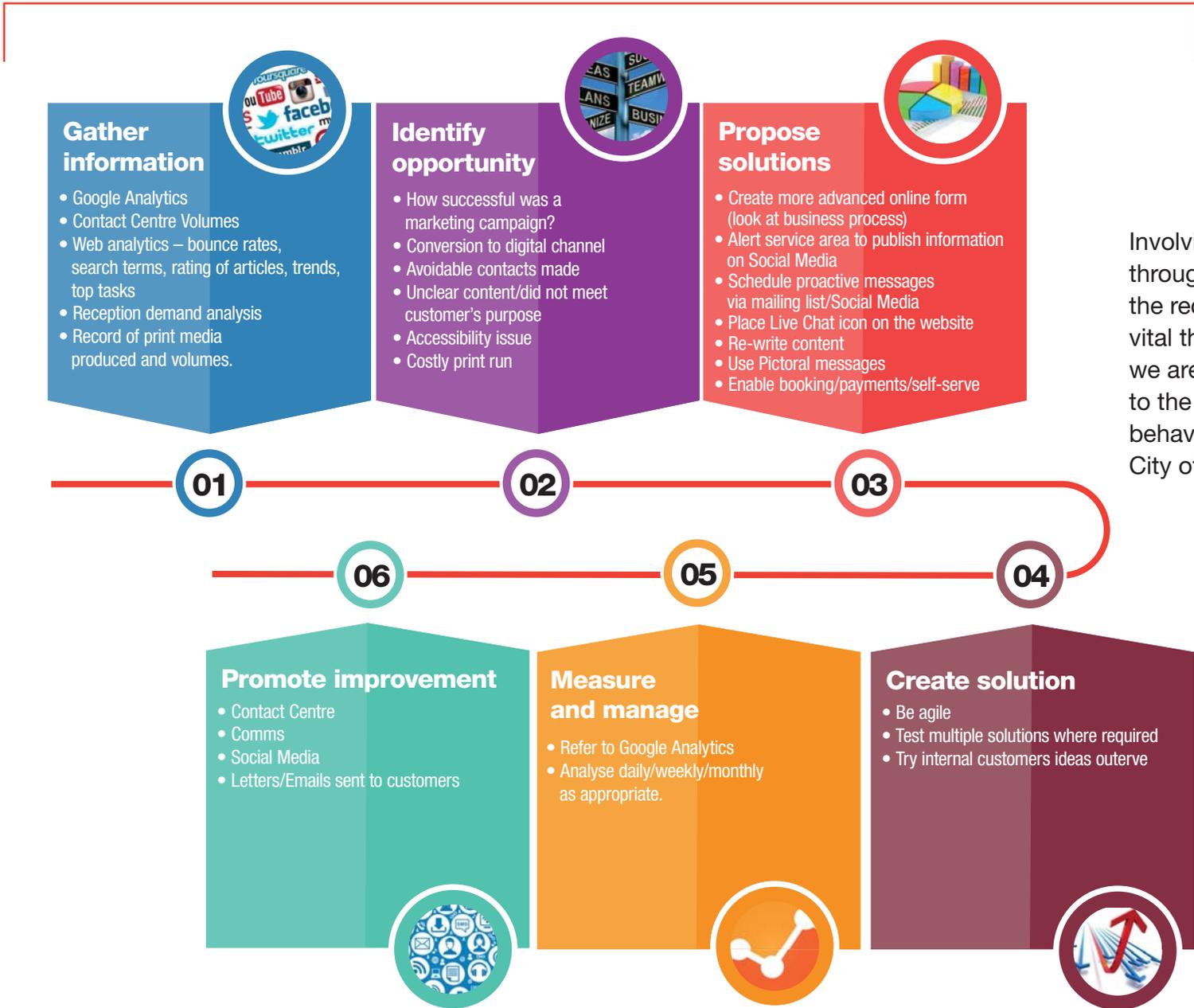
The consequence of this is opening channels rather than shutting them down. Customers who still wish to contact us via conventional means will always be able to do so should they choose to.



City of Wolverhampton Council's approach

Our approach to Channel Shift

COMMUNICATIONS



Involving our customers throughout this process will be the recipe for our success - it is vital that we question whether we are building services in tune to the reality of how customers behave and wish to contact the City of Wolverhampton Council.

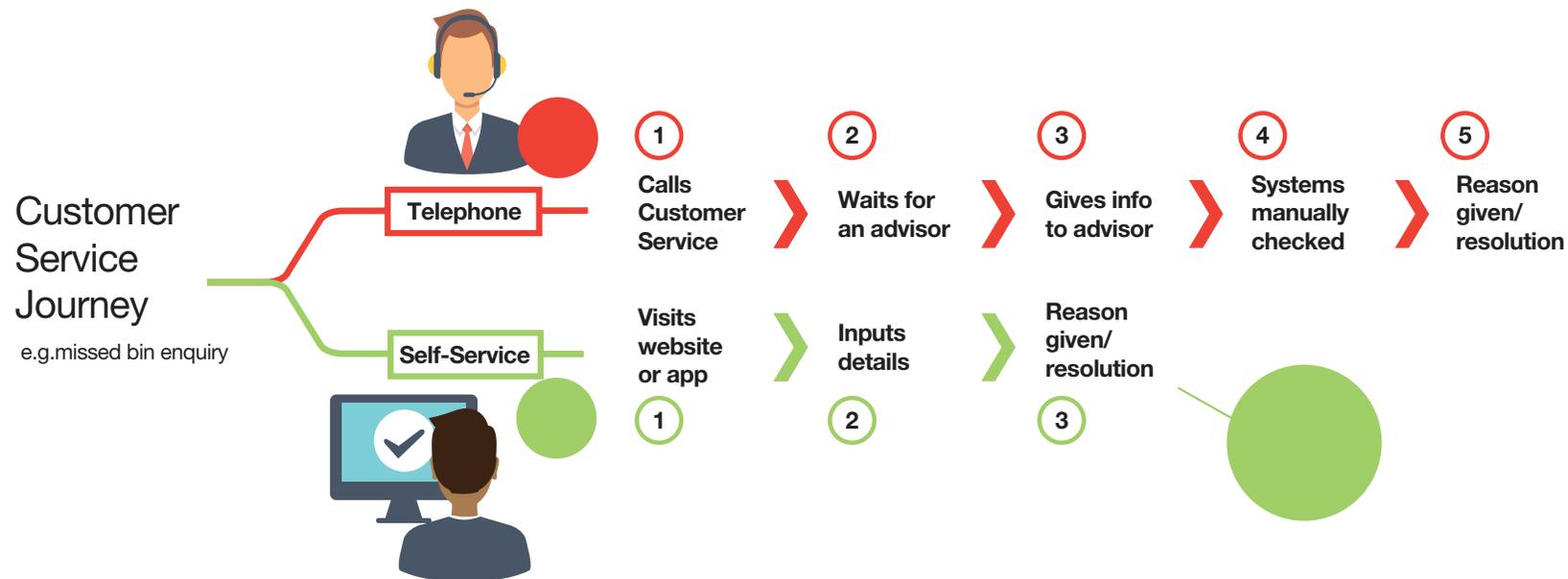
Four strategies to support
our vision

4.7

Interdependencies

As the City of Wolverhampton Council commits to becoming a 'stronger council ready and able to deliver change', it is important that we understand internal programme dependencies and synergies and the competent, capable council transformation programme.





ICT Strategy

The ICT Strategy sets out to ‘deliver better, trusted public services’ and commits to being customer centric and not afraid to try new innovative ways of working. ICT will be procuring a new digital engagement platform which will offer the Customer Service team the desired single view of the customer and enable engagement through a number of contact channels – SMS, apps, a ‘My account’ function on the council website, social media and other emerging channels. This will further support the delivery of the Customer Service Target Operating Model (TOM).

This platform will be accessible to service areas within the council, partner organisations and outwardly by the public in the ways they would expect to do business digitally with any other service provider.

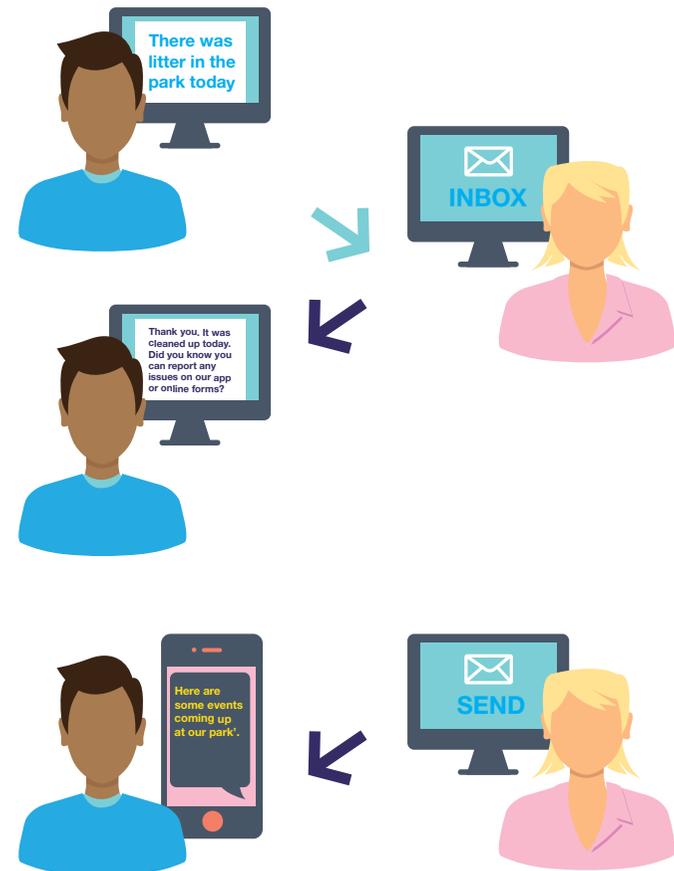
The Customer Service team will be able to locate relevant information in relation to a customer request in real-time, efficiently and be able to take customer’s contact preferences into account. In order to achieve this, the ICT team achieving integrations with back office technologies will be essential. This kind of intuitive technology will be vital in achieving ‘channel shift’ and the ‘digital by design’ approach.

Communications Strategy

Matrix working between Customer Services and the corporate communications team is imperative to ensuring our customers get the messages they want and that they need to hear instantly. It is also essential to market any digital offer as efficiently and as effectively as possible.

The joint implementation of an email marketing solution by both the corporate communication team and the web team within Customer Services will enable the council to conduct targeted marketing about events in the city, new policies/initiatives and promote new ways of doing business with the council across digital channels. The web team are also well placed in Customer Service to see what is trending in terms of call volumes and receptions, identifying new priorities for channel shift.

For example “You made a comment about your local park. Would you like to sign up to our list of events in the park?”



This vision is echoed across the social media channels and monitoring tools which are managed in unison with the corporate communications team.

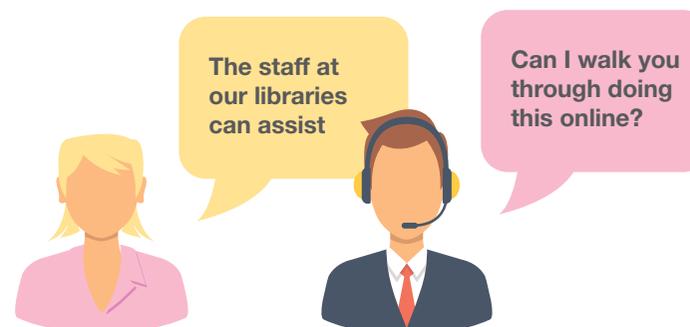
These avenues to ‘push’ information to customers are best utilised when customer insight is considered – what information have customers elected to hear, what are they already contacting us about, what pages do we know that they are already visiting on the website? The Customer Service team can pull a great deal of intelligence from these channels to determine new ways of working, service improvements, and can also consistently ask for feedback during every step of the customer journey.

This business intelligence between the two teams will ensure best value for money. If Customer Services know that posters in the city about an event/sign up campaign are not reaching customers we can review our strategy and refocus our in-house marketing resources and spend.

Digital Inclusion Strategy

It is in the Customer Service team’s interest to be well versed in the digital inclusion strategy and become the champion to increase public access, capability and interest in digital channels.

Frontline staff should be well equipped to support customers with the move to more cost effective self-service where services have been identified this is appropriate for.



4.8

Other partners and their contribution

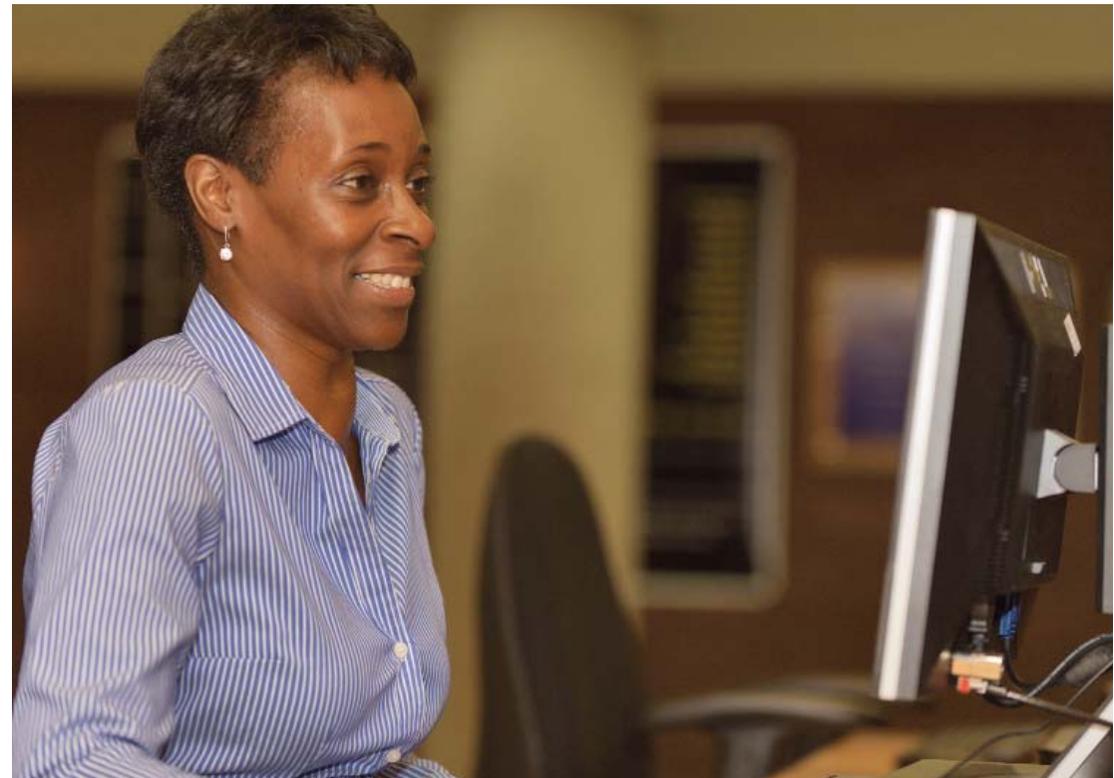
To give our customers the best experience the Customer Service team is committed to working alongside the following community partners:

Credit Union Wolverhampton	Citizens Advice British Legion
Information Network	Wolverhampton Homes
Equality and Diversity Forum	Public Health
NHS	West Midlands Police
Business in Wolverhampton	

As our strategy is delivered, these stakeholders will be brought along the journey and their insight sought where appropriate and joined up working occurring when beneficial to our customers.

FutureSpace

For those customers who wish to visit our offices we plan to work with our colleagues to achieve a face to face service whereby self-service kiosks are in situ and those vulnerable customers who need face to face support get their additional time that they deserve. There will also be additional provisions made in respect of courtesy PC access and payment kiosks.



5

The five principles of excellent customer service

In order to deliver our vision we have identified five key customer service principles:



Customer
Needs



Access to
Council
services



First Time
Resolution



Employees



Improvement

Customer Needs

1

We will put the user at the heart of service design and delivery to ensure that we provide responsive, joined-up services that are inclusive and customer focussed.

Overview

Through the Customer Service Transformation Programme we will look to baseline current customer contact activity across the organisation and broaden the service provision. Opportunities to best meet customer needs will be identified, defined and business processes re-designed as a consequence.

This process will be repeated, continually evaluated and built upon aspiring towards a fully integrated approach to customer service across the organisation.



Commitments

- Listen and understand customer intentions and trends.
- Customer satisfaction surveys will be conducted and reviewed across all channels regularly.
- Operating hours will be reviewed to meet customer needs.
- Process redesign will be with the view to customers only having to contact us once wherever possible.
- Ensure the council is business friendly.
- A single view of the customer will be created so that customer needs can be best identified/ remedied.
- Services and facilities for customers at the Civic Centre will be reviewed through the Future Space programme.
- We will ensure information security and data privacy is at the heart of any service redesign.
- Any essential handover to back office services will be conducted seamlessly.

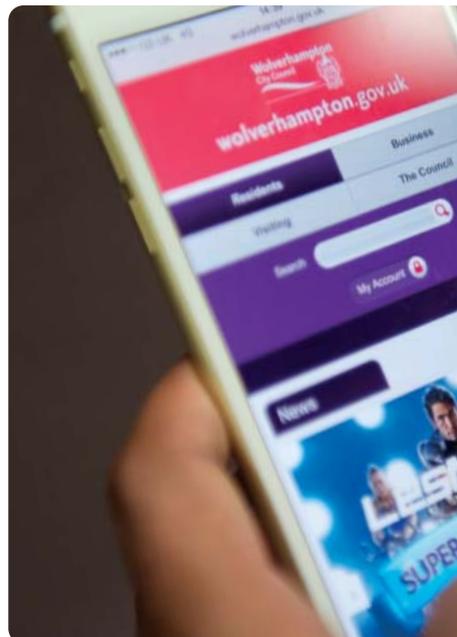
Access to Council Services

2

We will provide easily accessible services and information promptly and in a way that reflects our customers' choices, needs, and circumstances. This will include as a priority the development and implementation of a Channel Management System for the Council's website to facilitate channel shift when this is desired by our customers.

Overview

The 'digital by design' ethos will be embedded across the development of all channels of communication. Communication channels shall not work exclusively but in co-ordination with one another to support our customer needs.



Commitments

- Effective branding will be in place to ensure customers have confidence in knowing when they are conducting business with the council.
- To engage and reach people and respond real-time through the social channels of choice.
- Digital inclusion will be assured in any development of customer services.
- The telephony system will be continually evaluated and developed. For example, numbering, menu options, call back functions.
- Translation services will be provided across all channels.
- Customer service standards will be set and reviewed for any written communication ensuring customer-centric language/approach.
- To promote and assist with online self-service and other digital channels to customers to improve customer experience.
- The Government Digital Service (GDS) will be referenced to share best practice locally and nationally on upcoming technologies and platforms.
- All projects and initiatives will be subject to equalities and data privacy impact assessments.

First Time Resolution

3

We will reduce the need for customers to repeatedly contact us because we have failed to deliver a service or information by getting it 'right first time'.

Overview

Customer Service will undertake effective internal and external stakeholder engagement, ensuring that advisors and channels have the most up to date and relevant information to assist in a customer enquiry or service request.



Commitments

- To deliver the 'Tier 1' and 'Tier 2' functions in the Target Operating Model across the whole of the organisation.
- Data will be joined up across services to remove unnecessary delays in providing information/ updates to customers.
- Where technology can be put in place to enable first time resolution on digital channels this will be prioritised to give customers greater choice and access to services.
- First point of contact and repeat contact will be measured to better understand and identify areas for improvement.
- Transparent performance management information and reports will be made available to senior managers and the public.
- Effective guidance for all enquiries and diagnostic tools will be made available to customer service staff.
- Where further investigation is required we will collect contact details and record customers preferred method of contact.
- When something isn't working, we will look at the business process from start to finish – no plaster fixes.
- We will signpost customers to appropriate organisations where we cannot assist.

Employees

We will ensure that employees have the skills and abilities to deliver effective, customer focussed services, are encouraged to work in a collaborative way and have a role in identifying and developing improvements.

Overview

Customer Service will champion standards of excellence across the internal department and wider organisation.



Customer Service has been recognised as an Investors in People (Gold) employer since **month year here**.



Commitments

- Skills and abilities will be measured through a balanced scorecard within the Customer Service department.
- To promote and be transparent about customer feedback policies and procedures.
- To lead in the development of customer service 'soft skills'.
- To produce and maintain mandatory e-learning and face to face customer service training for all frontline employees.
- To provide guidance on dealing with difficult or aggressive customers.
- To encourage employees to persuade customers of the benefits of online self-service and the 'best fit' for their needs.
- To quality monitor our employees regularly and have a clear process in place for feedback from service areas and peers.
- To aspire to our internal values and behaviours.
- To motivate, maintain morale and cultivate a forward thinking working environment where employees suggestions are encouraged.

Improvement

5

We will use customer and staff feedback, business intelligence and performance reporting to achieve continuous service improvement.

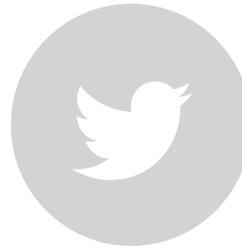
Overview

Whilst all principles are important we feel the last of our 5 is key and is what our customers expect. We expect to make intelligence driven decision making in regards to improvements.



Commitments

- Use customer feedback to improve services we deliver.
- To encourage instantaneous customer feedback.
- To create a framework for monitoring and improving customer service performance across the organisation.
- Pinpoint repeat issues and understand the customers these issues effect.
- Consult customers through focus groups and other mediums to glean desired improvements.
- Learn from our mistakes
- To improve the way we share customer service performance information enabling back office functions to improve end to end business process.
- To ensure consistency in our customer service standards.
- To have Service Level Agreements in place for those services which we front in order to ensure two way commitment to improvement.
- Use channel analytics such as Google Analytics/MOSAICs to understand customer behaviour and identify opportunities for improvement.
- Share and promote positive customer feedback and compliments.

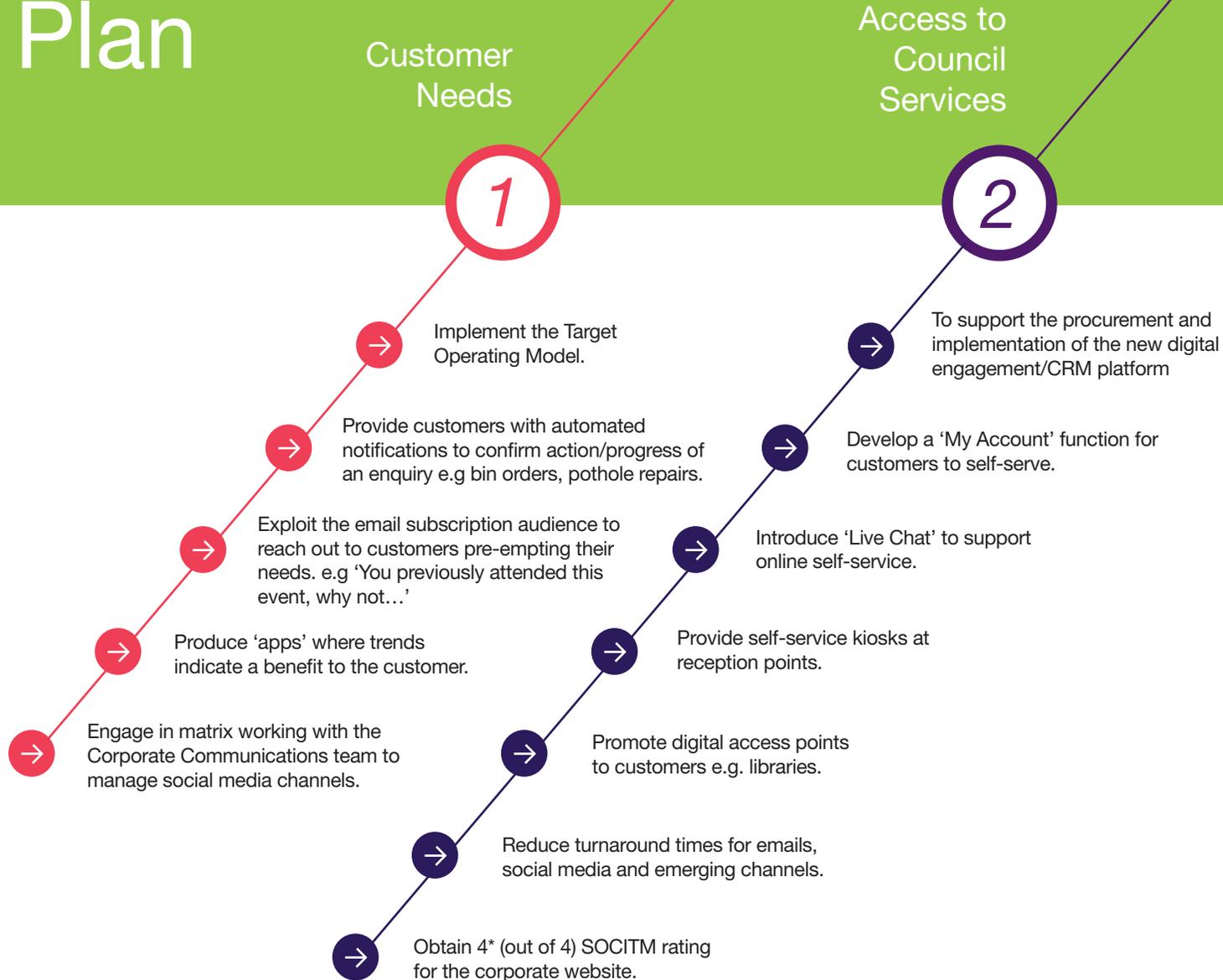


Vision Statement – Delivering excellent customer service first time, every time by providing smooth and efficient access to Council Services through the maximum number of channels.



Our Action Plan

6



First Time Resolution

3

- Reduce number of enquiries which require additional support at first point of contact.
- Automate simple administrative processes which enable low complexity high volume enquiries to be satisfactorily answered at the first point of contact.
- Migrate high volume customer contact into the Customer Service department so that customers do not have to understand how the Council operates.

Staff

4

- Use a balanced scorecard for customer service activity to manage quality effectively e.g. Measure resolution at first point of contact.
- Provide training for staff about digital services and channel shift.
- Make customer service training mandatory across the organisation.
- Monitor adherence to corporate customer service standards.
- Retain Investors in People (Gold) status.

Improvement

5

- Attract business enquiries from within and beyond the city boundaries by supporting a strong business identity across all channels.
- Produce monthly dashboards to highlight areas of success and improvements required.
- Look to reduce print costs for traditional in-house publications/ notices published e.g. Events publications.
- Build services that add value and market them such as an online events identity.

MISSION STATEMENT



To satisfy all customers both internal and external, through provision of high quality and quick responses to enquiries at first point of contact where possible; providing consistent accurate information / advice regardless of contact channel used.

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**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE** | Gold