



Policy and Resources Committee 12 October 2015

Customer Service Strategy

Purpose of report

This report recommends the adoption of a new Customer Service Strategy

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Customer Service Strategy

1.0 Background

1.1 The last customer service strategy was approved by Policy and Resources in November 2011. This strategy is now in need of review and as such a new strategy has been developed for Members' consideration.

2.0 Customer Service Strategy

2.1 The attached Customer Service Strategy has been put together with both the customer and the needs of the Council in mind. It has attempted to reflect the increased use of technology in the district and the use of different mediums to access services. It focuses on getting more of our services online in an easy to use way. This will allow the majority of customers to access our services at times that are convenient to them. It will allow us to be more responsive to customer needs and target our services accordingly.

2.2 If the Customer Service Strategy is approved, an action plan will be developed to implement it.

3.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

3.1 No equality or diversity implications have been identified at this stage. A key aim of the strategy is to recognise the differing needs of our customers and to provide services in the way that best meets those needs.

4.0 Legal Implications

4.1 No legal implications have been identified at this stage.

5.0 Risk Management

5.1 No risks have been identified at this stage.

6.0 Resource and Financial Implications

6.1 There are financial implications associated with this report, as part of an action plan that will supplement the strategy. Once implemented any costs will be fully established and will be within our current budgets. If any further finances are required they will be requested through a further report to policy and resources.

7.0 Constitutional Implications


7.1 There are no constitutional implications associated with this report.

8.0 Corporate Outcomes

- 8.1
- High Quality Service Delivery – the strategy will ensure we are customer focussed and responsive to the needs of our communities, whilst ensuring good value for money.

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1 That the Customer Service Strategy is approved.

Legal	Power:					
	Other considerations:					
Background Papers:						
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East
Northamptonshire
Council

Customer Service Strategy



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Change History

Issue	Date	Comments
0.1	August 2015	CMT, Middle Managers, Customer Services, Customers
0.2	September 2015	

NB: Draft versions 0.1 - final published versions 1.0

Consultees

Internal	External
e.g. Individual(s) / Group / Section	e.g. Stakeholders / Partners / Organisation(s)
CMT	
Middle Managers	

Distribution List

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Links to other documents

Document	Link

Additional Comments to note

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1.0 Introduction / foreword

This is a very important document for East Northamptonshire Council as it sets out how we interact with and respond to our customers.

Excellent customer service is everyone's responsibility and we want to ensure it is embedded across our organisation.

We put our customers at the heart of what we do and the services we deliver. We want to improve the way we interact with our customers across all of the services we provide, whether it's by using the internet, phone or face to face.

We want to make sure that, when our customers contact us, we are helping them get what they need in that first contact, and they are regularly updated where appropriate. We also want to encourage them to use the internet for more straightforward tasks so that we can concentrate on helping customers with more complicated queries.

We recognise that each of our customers is an individual and that people need different services, information and support from us. We aim to understand each of our customers' needs and to deliver services according.

2.0 Corporate Outcomes

2.1 The outcomes to be delivered by this policy are:

- Good value for money
- High quality service delivery
- Effective management
- Effective partnership working
- Knowledge of our customers and communities
- Employees and Members with the right knowledge, skills and behaviours







2.2 We know that many of our customers are used to carrying out transactions online with a wide range of other service providers, so we intend to make it easier for people to get what they need from us online too. We would like to achieve a 15% increase in self service by our customers in year one of this strategy, 20% in year two and 25% by year three.

3.0 Our Customer Service Strategy

3.1 Our existing Customer Service

- 3.2 We have, over the past few years, improved access to our services and designed them with customers in mind. We have launched a revised website that it is responsive to each device used to access our services. We have listened to our customers and mapped their journeys through our services, and recognised there are things we can do to improve.
- 3.3 Our current website serves our residents well with around 75,000 online transactions completed every year. However, the self service provision for our customers needs to improve.
- 3.4 We have lots of information on our customers but need to use this more effectively to target our services and meet people's needs better.
- 3.5 We are rated highly by our customers for the face to face and telephone services we provide to our customers. We are very proud of this and will strive to achieve excellence in this area.
- 3.6 Customer service is the responsibility of every person and every team working on behalf of or representing the Council.
- 3.7 **Who are our customers and what do they think?**

All residents, businesses, people who work in or visit East Northamptonshire are our customers. We already know:

	We have a population of around 88,000
	We have an ageing population
	There are around 2,400 businesses
	There are parts of our district that are very affluent
	There are parts of our district where people have low incomes and are at risk of ill health
	We think about 1.9 million people visit our district each year

We have asked our customers about our services and have found that:

- They feel well informed about services the council provides (86%)
- 11% contact us directly by phone, email or letter about our services
- They are satisfied with the services we provide (79%)
- They are satisfied with our telephone services (96%)
- 30% of our residents use the website to find out about our services
- Our website use increased by 13% in 2015 compared to 2014
- Only 26% of our customers are satisfied with our website
- 6% use Facebook and Twitter to find out about our services
- Only 25% feel they can influence our decisions as a council

3.8 Understanding our Customers

We aim to have a through understanding of our customers' needs and preferences, knowing what services they need or want and when, how and where they want them. We need to utilise the information we hold to gain a better understanding of our customers to enable us to deliver services in the way they want and need. This will allow us to personalise our services and deliver them in a way customers will respond to.

3.9 What our customers would like:

- **A good experience when dealing with us**

We have talked and listened to many of our customers and plotted their customer journeys through our organisation. We recognise this can sometimes be complex and we need to design services with this in mind and ensure they are responsive and reflect the needs of the communities we serve.

- **To be involved in service design**

When changes to services are proposed or reviewed we will endeavour where appropriate to involve our customers and engage with them in a meaningful way to ensure they influence service provision.

3.10 What do we need to do?

We pledge that we will:

- Treat each customer as an individual
- Be polite, courteous and helpful, but we will not tolerate any form of abusive language or behaviour
- Aim to resolve queries at the first time of asking
- Communicate using plain English
- Behave like one council, so that customers only need to tell us anything once
- Communicate our decisions clearly

3.11 We are proud of the council and the services it provides; we have skilled staff who focus on the customer experience. We want to maintain this approach and make sure our services are excellent, easy to access and provide the help needed quickly and effectively.

3.12 We have to adapt our resources to deliver services in the most productive and cost effective ways. In order to do this we want to:-

- Put our customers first – ensuring they are kept up to date with their queries.
- Make every contact count – ensure our customers have the right information.
- Work with our partners – work more effectively with our partners such as the Police, Northamptonshire County Council and the Department for Work and Pensions to give a more joined up service
- Encourage more of our customers to go online – support our increased on line activity through increasing our self service offer designed to meet the needs of our customer.
- Offer an appointment service to those customers who request one.

3.13 How are we going to do this?

3.14 It is our aspiration to personalise our online service for our customers where, over time, they can access all of their Council services in one place, where they can pay their bills,

order services, make complaints and track progress. Residents will also be able to sign up for email and text alerts for services such as waste collection.

- 3.15 We will increase the range of services accessible online and make it as easy as possible to use them.
- 3.16 Social media is a powerful tool that we can use to communicate quickly and openly with our customers. We need to use this much more effectively. We will embed its use within the customer services team. We will develop ways to use this as a means of recognising issues of concern to communities so that we can act on them. We will also use it to promote our services and provide alerts.
- 3.17 We will create a 'You Said, We Did' page on our website to show what changes we make as a result of customer feedback.
- 3.18 We will provide a specialised central point of contact for all of our business enquiries.
- 3.19 We will invest in our staff to ensure they have the right knowledge, skills and behaviours to provide our services in a customer focused way. We will embed customer services from our induction process and undertake continuous assessment to recognise any additional training needs.
- 3.20 We will ensure our complaints and compliments process is robust and ensure we review and learn from the complaints we receive.
- 3.21 We will explore opportunities for providing joint services, such as co-location with our partners, so a range of services can be accessed at the same point.
- 3.22 We will look at adopting the social prescribing model in the county to help us spot problems our customers may have and provide support to help them. This will involve working with key partners such as Northamptonshire County Council, Health Services and the Police to adopt a Countywide scheme.
- 3.23 We will encourage self service. The internet is used daily by many people. We know many of our residents are very active on the internet. However, our website is limited in terms of what can be done easily on line so customers end up calling us to resolve their query. We also know some people prefer to access our services face to face and by telephone, mainly because they do not have the knowledge or confidence in the use of a computer. However, the cost of providing telephone and face to face services is significant. We will encourage more self service to allow us to focus our face to face and telephone services on those that need support and have more complex matters to deal with.

To help make this happen we will:

- Explore how we can help customers become more confident in computer use
- Increase the level of Wi-Fi hotspots in our buildings
- Provide on line training guides to our website
- Show customers how to get on line when they visit us instead of waiting to speak to one of our staff
- Explore opportunities to increase access to our services via video and audio link
- Make improvements to our computer systems, including introducing an appointment

booking system for those customers who wish to use it. This will also allow us to monitor our service levels and respond to service demands

- Create 'one customer record' so we can provide a holistic service. This will link to our understanding of our customers and allow us to provide targeted services to those that need it
- Provide a 'tell us once' approach for residents and businesses. We will also work closely with our partners to try to limit the number of organisations to whom our customers have to provide the same information
- Redesign our reception areas to ensure they are welcoming, encourage self service and meet the needs of our customers





3.24 We will reinvest time saved through those that use self service to develop our outreach services in libraries to help provide face to face support to those that need it.

3.25 Putting customer service at the heart of every decision

We want our customers to feel listened to so we will commit to take the customer into account when making decisions. We will build a customer service impact element into our decision making process at Committee and at our Corporate Management Team.

3.26 Customer Service Standards

It is important that customers know what to expect when dealing with the council. We therefore have our customer service standards that make it clear to the customer the service they can expect.

	Face to face	we aim to keep you waiting no longer than five minutes before somebody deals with your enquiry
	Telephone	we aim to answer your call within seven rings
	Letters	we will respond to your letters within 10 working days of receipt
	Email	we will respond to your emails within five working days of receipt.

In all cases, where a full response cannot be provided to your first contact with us, we will advise you when a full response can be expected.

3.27 Action Plan

We will produce an action plan to ensure this customer services strategy is delivered and publish it on our website with annual progress updates for our customers.

