



**OPEN REPORT  
COUNCIL**

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**Council – 27 July 2023**

**CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY 2023 - 2026**

**Report of Director of Corporate and Customer Services (Monitoring Officer)**

**Report Author and Contact Details**

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**Wards Affected**

District-wide

**Report Summary**

This report proposes the adoption and approval of a Customer Access Strategy which will codify for the way in which the District Council will offer a high-quality customer experience to residents, businesses and visitors to the Derbyshire Dales.

**Recommendations**

1. That the Customer Access Strategy for the period 2023 to 2026 be approved.
2. That an annual report detailing progress made in implementing the Customer Access Strategy be submitted to the Governance and Resources Committee for each year of the strategy.

**List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 Customer Access Strategy

**Background Papers**

None

**Consideration of report by Council or other committee**

Not applicable

**Council Approval Required**

Yes

**Exempt from Press or Public**

No

# Customer Access Strategy 2023 - 2026

## 1. Background

- 1.1 Over the last four years the Council, through the implementation of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system has made significant steps towards improving the outcomes experienced by our customers. The Council's commitment to providing a high-quality customer experience has meant it has introduced this new technology offering greater functionality and resilience, changed and updated processes to make things easier and quicker and invested in our employees to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to maintain standards of service.
- 1.2 However, much has changed over the last three years, and it is appropriate for the Council to now introduce a new Customer Access Strategy to make sure that it reflects the both the current and future needs of our customers and the organisation.
- 1.3 The most significant changes have resulted from the impacts of Covid, effecting our businesses, communities, customers, visitors and our way of life. We have seen people changing the way they do things at a pace never experienced before and we have a responsibility to respond to these changes and meet the ongoing needs of our customers.
- 1.4 Never before have technology and digital channels been more important, we have more people than ever utilising digital channels in their everyday life from social media and online shopping to banking, accessing health and medical care and Council services. At the same time, we recognise that there are people who either choose or do not have the skills required in order to interact in the digital world and so we must remain committed to ensuring we provide easy access to our services for everyone.
- 1.5 In addition, the difficult financial position caused by ongoing reductions in central government grants and impacts of the pandemic creates its own challenges for the Council, as an organisation we must strive to look for new and efficient ways to do things so we can maintain the services our customers deserve.

## 2. Key Issues

- 2.1 Providing a high-quality customer experience is integral to the way that the Council delivers its services – the Council is after all a primarily service-based provider. The new Customer Access Strategy sets out how the Council intends to deliver its customer service offering over the next three years to meet the changing needs of our customers. Delivering a positive customer experience is the responsibility of every officer and stakeholder across the Council, with each interaction providing the opportunity to develop productive relationships with our customers. The Strategy outlines how we will adapt to the changing needs of our customers and reinforces our commitment to providing fair and open access to our services
- 2.2 The Strategy recognises the challenges the organisation faces particular around our finances, advances in technology, changing customer behaviours and needs. In considering these challenges and the part they

will play in shaping our organisation for the future the strategy reinforces our commitment to our customers and identifies three principles that will guide the delivery of the strategy:

- Channel shift – our aim is to be digital first as our customers increasingly want online interaction with the Council and this will also reduce service delivery costs through efficiency savings
- Listening and responding to our citizens and customers so we deliver excellent services
- No one left behind – ensuring everyone can access the services and information they need recognising that not everyone will be able to access digital services

2.3 The strategy objectives provide a focus on putting our customers at the heart of what we do, reducing digital exclusion, harnessing the opportunities of digital technology whilst involving the whole organisation. It also sets out actions that will drive the delivery of this strategy. The Strategy also considers how we will work with our partners, in ensuring that they are also able to signpost potential customers to the best and available means of contact for them. In line with the extremely low desire for face to face contact the strategy does not pursue other models of provision such as distributed contact centres or access points as they are not where the demand from our customers sit.

### **3. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal**

3.1 The Council has the option of not adopting a Customer Access Strategy and continuing to operate without a strategic focus on the needs of customers. However, as one of the organisation's current corporate priorities is to provide a high-quality customer experience, this is not recommended.

3.2 The recommended approach is to adopt the Customer Access Strategy for the period from 2023 to 2026. In doing so, it is recommended that the implementation of the Customer Access Strategy is monitored annually by the Governance and Resources Committee.

### **4. Consultation**

4.1 The development of the strategy has primarily been informed by customer feedback in recent years. As an organisation that wants to be responsive and reflect the needs of the communities it serves, this feedback has been helpful in shaping the standards that the proposed strategy outlines.

4.2 Consultation also took place with the Corporate Leadership Team and the Senior Management Team to understand the implications for services across the Council, as well as testing the standards that are outlined within the proposed strategy.

### **5. Timetable for Implementation**

5.1 In the event that the Council adopts the proposed Customer Access Strategy it will take effect immediately and will be in operation for a three-year period. The Council should review and seek to adopt a refreshed Customer Access Strategy in 2026.

5.2 In implementing an agreed strategy it is anticipated that the following actions will be required in year 1:

- Continue development of online form offer to increase opportunities for customers to apply, pay or report to the Council
- Create a customer focus/feedback group to inform and update our Customer Charter and inform service process redesign
- Initiate work with town and parish councils to establish what services can be offered or sign-posted through local councils
- Continue Digital Transformation to ensure that more end-to-end customer facing processes and transactions are delivered

## **6. Policy Implications**

6.1 The current Corporate Plan for the District Council describes 'Providing you with a high-quality customer experience' as one of the three corporate priorities for the organisation. The adoption of this Customer Access Strategy is aligned to this priority and should be seen as one of a number of key documents underpinning the authority's ambition to be a modern and efficient Council.

## **7. Financial and Resource Implications**

7.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. No additional financial provision is required to meet the aims of this strategy, which will be delivered within the existing and agreed budget. The financial risk associated with this report and the Customer Access Strategy is therefore assessed as low.

7.2 There are no specific resources implications arising from this report. Existing resources are already in place to meet the strategic aims. Any actions arising which have resource effects will be subject to separate decision-making process and reallocation within existing budget.

## **8. Legal Advice and Implications**

8.1 The Localism Act 2011 gives councils a general power of competence by which they have power to do anything that individuals generally may do. The adoption of a Customer Access Strategy as described in this report is an exercise of those powers. Approval of the Customer Access Strategy is a function that is specifically reserved to Council in accordance with Part 3 of the Council's Constitution.

## **9. Equalities Implications**

9.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities to have due regard to a number of equality considerations when exercising their function. This process may be informed by an equality analysis

9.2 Pursuant to section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 Derbyshire Dales District Council has a duty to have due regard in its decision making processes to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct.
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
- (c) Foster good relations between those who share a relevant characteristic and those that do not share it.

9.3 The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. The Public Section Equality Duty also applies to marriage and civil partnership but only in relation to (a) above.

9.4 As the Strategy is far reaching across the entire organisation, for all major existing and future customer access projects, service areas will be required to carry out an impact assessment to fully understand how various parts of our communities will be affected by the introduction of redesigned services. Greater emphasis will be placed on those projects looking to phase out and close traditional engagement methods, the implications of such changes and the measures to be put in place to support the vulnerable in our communities to continue to access services.

## 10. Climate Change Implications

10.1 There are no high level climate change implications associated with this report. However, an increase in the use of digital channels will reduce the amount of paper and postage and therefore could have a positive impact on reducing our carbon emissions.

## 11. Risk Management

11.1 Strategic risks are managed through an existing framework of the Corporate Risk Register, the Contract Standing Orders and the Financial Regulations and Public Procurement Law. Adoption of the Customer Access Strategy will help to reduce associated risks for the council, for example risks concerning customer service, data security, service transformation and partnership. working.

### Report Authorisation

Approvals obtained from Statutory Officers:-

	<b>Named Officer</b>	<b>Date</b>
Chief Executive	Paul Wilson	17/07/2023
Director of Resources/ S.151 Officer (or Financial Services Manager)	Karen Henriksen	17/07/2023
Monitoring Officer (or Legal Services Manager)	James McLaughlin	18/07/2023