



CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY

FOREWORD

In Derbyshire Dales we have redesigned what we stand for as a local authority, what our priorities are, along with our promise to you as residents of the Dales and our ambitions for the future. We are committed to being a modern, efficient Council which provides value for money and has the needs of you, our residents, at the centre of our decision making. Like all local authorities across the country, we are having to deliver against a reduced budget and an increase in demand for our services.

The District Council learned a lot during the COVID-19 pandemic about how we can better support citizens and customers to receive and engage with our services. This strategy sets out what we want to do to enable people to get the best out of the Council and will help ensure that everyone working for the Council:

- Understands their role and purpose and knows what is expected of them
- Has the right tools for the job
- Helps to create the right focus on the needs of citizens and customers of the Derbyshire Dales

Underpinning the strategy are three core principles:

- 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

This strategy contains a number of clear commitments to customers setting out maximum response times and our ambition to be a digital first Council providing excellent services to residents in a cost-effective way:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The quality of service, behaviour, attitude, courtesy and more, by any Derbyshire Dales employee or contractor is how citizens and customers judge the whole Council. We aim to get it right every time and all of the time, but we're not perfect and mistakes will happen. When we make a mistake, we will own that mistake immediately, say sorry straight away and put it right as soon as possible.

This strategy aims to deliver the following three outcomes:

Deliver a great customer experience:

- By providing clear communication and information, helping people make informed decisions
- By providing and improving the quality, search capability and accessibility of the Council's website
- By setting and managing expectations and be open and transparent about what the Council does and its service standards
- By measuring the customer experience in a meaningful way to continuously improve services involving citizens and customers in the definition and improvement of new and existing services
- By providing citizens and customers with choices on how they access services, whilst promoting digital uptake gathering appropriate customer insight and then using it to inform service improvements

Build the skills and capabilities in the workforce

- Lead by example and be consistent in what is said and done promoting the values and behaviours we expect from each other
- Role model great customer service behaviours providing staff with the digital and customer service skills needed to deliver great service across the whole organisation
- Involve staff in decision-making, in the design and improvement of services by promoting a culture of collaboration
- Redevelop relevant policies helping staff to take decisions and work confidently

Implement modern systems for data-driven decision making:

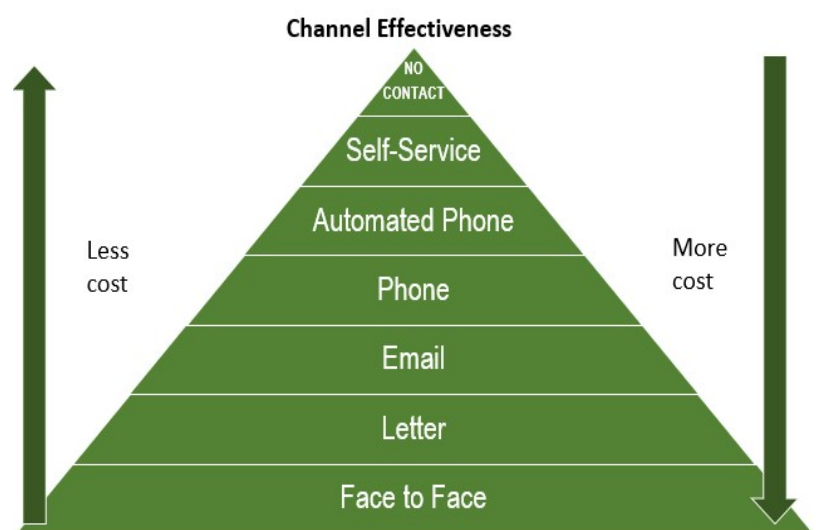
- Reduce the number of systems to simplify access to information
- Invest in the skills and capacity needed to integrate and perform analysis on data promoting the use of meaningful measures as part of the decision making process
- Enable data sharing through information sharing protocols with other organisations and publishing open data through a new website to better support communities and businesses
- A holistic view of the customer through the consolidation of systems and data

ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Derbyshire Dales District Council's Corporate Plan 2020-24 describes our vision for the area. It sets out our priorities and the commitments that have been made to the citizens and customers of the Derbyshire Dales. The Corporate Plan is more than a set of promises, it is the action plan for the Council and shapes what every team and member of staff does and how we can work together as one Council to achieve our shared ambition. Our Corporate Plan priorities are:

- Providing you with a high-quality customer experience
- Keeping the Derbyshire Dales Clean, Green and Safe
- Supporting better homes and jobs for you

Like all local authorities, Derbyshire Dales District Council anticipates facing significant financial challenges in the coming years. Reductions in public spending driven by the Government over much of the last decade has made it more and more difficult for council to deliver services. For this reason, Derbyshire Dales has been very careful with its budgets and have treated every penny wisely, as if it were coming from our own pockets.



We have listened to what our citizens say is important to them and done all we can to protect frontline services while keeping council tax low. Ongoing budget pressures mean we know we will have to make difficult decisions. We will continue to manage budgets carefully to ensure that citizens get good value for money from their council.

Over the past three years we have strived to improve the way we work to meet the needs of our customers. We have implemented some key improvements to the way customers interact with us and we communicate with them:

- Achieved WCAG accessibility status for our website
- Implementation of new telephony system offering greater functionality and reliability
- Implementation of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to bring online transactions and reporting into a single place through the Council's website
- Established a dedicated Customer Services Team

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

Our Customer Access Strategy has been developed to simplify the way we provide services to the citizens of the Derbyshire Dales. This strategy is about responding to current and future needs; tailoring services to meet local needs; improving access to services by engagement with the community and empowering them to be fully involved in providing solutions.

Our services need to be valued by those that use them and also be responsive to the changing needs of our customers and to emerging technologies that enable services to be delivered in new ways that are:

- Easily accessible
- Simple to use
- Streamlined
- Convenient
- Cost effective
- Reliable

If we are to ensure future service delivery meets the citizens and customers' demands corporate approach to customer services is required to collectively revise the structures and approaches to deliver services.

Who are our Customers?

In order to provide the best service we need to understand the make-up of the communities within the Derbyshire Dales and different needs of those residents and businesses.

The Derbyshire Dales is a largely rural area and this is reflected in the proportion of residents living in rural settlements. According to the most recent Census in 2021, 80% of residents in the Derbyshire Dales live in rural settlements. 58% of the population is aged between 16 and 64, with 28% of residents being aged 65 and over. An important breakdown of residential data identifies that 15% of all properties in the district being occupied by lone pensioners. We also know that 3.2% of our residents are ethnic minorities, which is a small but significant proportion of the population in the district.

Our customers are not exclusively residents, but also our businesses that drive the local economy. These businesses are overwhelmingly micro in size (0-9 employees) with 4,135 being in that category and 395 being classified as small (10-49 employees) out of a total 4,585.

The Customer Vision

Our Customer Vision is to make it easy for everyone living, visiting or working in the Derbyshire Dales to access our services where and when they need them. We will deliver a quality experience for all our citizens and customers, regardless of when or how they make contact.

Our approach will be to influence the way our citizens and customers interact with us and help them to move to more efficient means of accessing services. We will focus on developing high quality digital services from beginning to end which will be easy to use and delivered in a timely manner. Self-service will enable access to increasing range of information and services available 24/7.

We do recognise that some of our citizens and customers who have varying needs and/or more complex needs will continue to require our face to face and phone channels. We will assist these customers in accessing our services and will strive to gradually build their confidence, trust and skills enabling them to ultimately use self-service.

We are also aware that some citizens and customers may reach a stage in their transactions with us where they need to have the reassurance of speaking to a member of staff and we will ensure that this option is easily available to them.

Delivering our Vision

Delivery of our corporate priorities in the coming four years within this Customer Access Strategy will require significant work across a range of work streams across the Council.

- We will develop digital platforms and tools that allow 24/7 access for customers and businesses
- We will use customer surveys to measure each customer access channel to identify areas for improvement
- We will encourage smarter working practices to avoid duplication of future work and contact to avoid customers visiting unnecessarily
- We will increase joined up working with back-office services and data sharing to improve our customer services processes.

In order to achieve the above we cannot escape the impact of significant budget cuts on Council services. This means we will have to continue to look at new ways of doing more with less, including charging for some services, working with new and different partners outside of the Council, such as the voluntary and community sector and parish councils, and delivering value for money.

Understanding and Empowering our Citizens and Customers

Ensuring we understand who our customers are or may be, how they interact with us, what our customers think of the services we offer and how we offer them.

- We will deliver reliable customer insight allowing us to understand the characteristics, needs and preferences of the groups of current and potential users.
- We will coordinate customer consultations, using a range of methods appropriate to their needs, integral to continually improving our service. Our strategies and opportunities for consulting will be regularly reviewed to

ensure that the methods used are effective and provide reliable and representative results.

- We will set challenging targets for customer satisfaction and judging our performance against them by asking specific questions relating to the key areas identified in this strategy.

OUR BEHAVIOURS AND CULTURE

- We will define behaviours for both customers and staff through the introduction of a Customer Charter
- Our staff will be polite, friendly and professional and understand customer needs by using customer insight, including the experience from customer-facing staff, to inform policy development and service improvement activity that supports the right of all citizens and customers to expect excellent levels of service
- We will use feedback to ensure all customers and customer groups are treated fairly and by protecting customers' privacy both in face-to-face discussions and in the transfer and storage of customer information.
- We recognise that specific qualities are needed for those providing public services on behalf of the Council and we will ensure that those staff that we recruit meet the responsibilities and duties required to deliver modern and effective services to our customers.
- We will offer better choices to meet customer needs and preferences across our services with clear lines of accountability.
- We will provide accurate and complete information about the range of services available, including how and when people can contact us, how are services are run and who is in charge.

OPPORTUNITIES

As a Local Authority, we sit in the middle of a web of information. The range and diversity of our services generates a huge quantity of data held about our customers and across a variety of back-office systems. Understanding our data is hugely beneficial in helping us to; make services more targeted and effective, allocate resources to where we can have the biggest impact; save officer time in front and back-office processes, as well as providing insight into the cause of and solutions to costly social problems. We must consider ways to utilise this untapped information source when redesigning and developing our processes to attain the outlined benefits.

As an organisation we must harness the opportunity that digital technology provides us. Technology is advancing at a significant pace, providing exciting opportunities to streamline the ways we work and enabling customers to self-service at a time and place that meets their needs. The adoption of new technology such as Zoom and online shopping over the course of the pandemic has shown how customers behaviours and attitudes can change significantly in a short space of time. Customers have become used to the benefits and flexibility that 24/7/365 online services provide them, meaning they can access the things they want at a time and place that suits their individual needs.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly entering people's homes and now provides a new channel to access services. With Voice Recognition technology becoming part of people everyday lives. Robotic Process Automation (RPA) provides additional opportunities to free up our employees from repetitive tasks to focus on customer value adding activities by routing and manage customer requests and transactional services, improving accuracy and reducing costs.

The council has also changed the way it works. Hybrid working is now the norm, and we have also adopted a new model of working. This means more of our staff will be working from other locations. Maintaining responsiveness in a more fluid environment will continue to be a priority for the Council. In doing this, we will want to work with town and parish councils, as well as Derbyshire County Council and other public service providers, to consider how we can target our customer offer in specific localities in the District where we know that people are not digitally enabled.

MEASURING OUR PERFORMANCE

We want our Key Performance Indicators to measure performance ensuring continuous development in key priority services is managed and reported. Below are the indicators which we will report against:

- the number of online transactions
- Percentage increase in the number of visitors to the Council's website
- Percentage increase in the number of online payments
- Percentage increase in the use of online forms
- Percentage of calls dealt with at first point of contact
- Reduction in calls as digital services are more embedded
- Number of complaints and compliments received

We will respond to Freedom of Information Requests (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulation requests (EIR) within 20 working days, as per statutory standards. We will also respond to General Data Protection Regulations requests (GDPR) within 30 calendar days.

Complaints

- We will acknowledge complaints on the same working day that it is received
- We will respond to stage one and stage two complaints within 10 working days

How do we know if we have got it right?

We want to ensure that citizens and customers are satisfied with their experience of our services and understand what they can expect from us.

- We will ensure that all customers are clear on what our services offer and the timescales in which we will respond

- Feel we are easy to contact and that all staff are knowledgeable, friendly and approachable
- Ensure that where possible enquiries are resolved at the first point of contact

CHANNEL SHIFT

Channel shift relates to customers moving from one method of contact, largely traditional, to another digital method and preferring to use it, not reverting back to previous behaviours.

We will develop access channels using customer feedback to identify customer contact preferences and to recognise that these preferences will change depending on the type of enquiry, interaction or transaction. Our aim is to be digital by default, which means increasing online availability that will reduce service delivery costs through efficiency savings. Many customers are used to accessing goods and services online in their daily lives and many businesses are only available online.

As further services become available online, take-up will increase in line with customer expectations and we have already made good progress in building our online, digital and customer access services. The next step is to expand the number of services online and maintain and enhance existing functions with channel shift progression.

A summary of the most expensive to the cheapest transactions are detailed below with explanation on how the Council will achieve cost savings and promote the channel shift objectives

Face to Face

These transactions are the most expensive therefore we will provide face to face services where is a specific need or a service is not available online or via the telephone. We will support our customers to use self service facilities.

Letter

- We will continue to reduce print and postage costs in line with ongoing work to improve back-office efficiency
- We will continue to develop and expand the use of text messaging from GOV.UK Notify to enable savings in print and postage for all services
- We will reduce the number of letters sent out as hardcopy and move to electronic solutions

Telephone

- We will continue to improve and streamline the use of the telephony system to route calls appropriate to the right service area or digital, automated information or customer services assistant

Emails

- We will continue to increase the use of online forms that are automatically routed directly to the relevant service area for action or response

Online web self-serve

- We will review and integrate customer journeys across the Council optimising use of our systems
- We will develop in-built customer feedback mechanisms and user testing
- We will implement the use of web chat in the Council, using it as a triage for customer contact. Increasing the availability of customers uploading their evidence online, including smart phones
- We will use internal electronic online forms that route directly to back-office services across the Council

CUSTOMER CHARTER

Derbyshire Dales District Council is committed to ensuring the district remains one of the best places to live in the country. Our customers are at the heart of everything we do and we welcome your feedback on how we can improve our services. Our Customer Charter sets out our promises to how we will deliver high quality service standards we will provide which enable us to meet your expectations.

Our Promises

We will:

- Provide you with high quality services when *you* need them and where *you* want them
- Ensure that we use plain language and have properly trained staff to answer your enquiries
- Be honest, approachable and polite, keeping your needs at the heart of everything we do
- Aim to answer your enquiry at the first point of contact
- Make sure that information we provide is accurate and up to date
- Deliver services in a way that offers good value for money for the community
- Treat all our customers equally

When you visit our offices we will provide:

- An accessible space which is open during published hours
- A reception area which is welcoming and friendly
- Trained staff who will aim to see you within 10 minutes (if you have to wait longer than we will explain why)

When you phone the Council we will:

- Aim to answer your call within 30 seconds
- Aim to answer your query at the first point of contact

If you write to or email us we will:

- Aim to respond to you within 48 hours by email and within 3 working days by letter
- Be clear and use plain English when responding to you

If we visit you, we will:

- Arrive at the agreed appointment time (unless we are running late and in which case we will contact you)
- Be helpful, polite and treat you with respect and dignity