

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL

# Customer Service five year strategy



# Customer Service Strategy

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## Introduction by Councillor Ash Cartman

How we deliver customer service impacts everyone who comes into contact with us. North Somerset Council offers over 600 different services to our residents, businesses and partners.

We want to ensure that our customer service is consistently good across all our services. This document provides a vision of how we would like to engage with our customers and a plan to deliver improvements over the next five years.

We all experience customer service every day and we can't help but compare one experience with another. Whether it's a large multi-national with huge funds to invest in technology and customer service (such as the much-quoted Amazon) or whether it's the corner shop.

We are constantly having to manage our budgets to meet reductions in funding from central government and increased costs. We need to deliver the best service we can within the resources we have, be it people, assets or processes.

We plan to do this by putting the customer at the centre of what we are doing, to engage with you about what you need, and to use our limited resources effectively. We may not always be able to meet your every need in terms of the services we deliver across the council, but we will do the best we can and explain why if we can't.

To achieve our goals we need to strongly promote our digital services and encourage you to use them where appropriate. We recognise that digital cannot meet every need. However, promoting digital services allows us to use

our limited resources to support our most vulnerable or digitally excluded customers through other channels such as telephony and face-to-face. We recognise that we have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments for those who can't. In return, we need to make sure that our digital services are good enough and provide enough information so that you don't have to contact us another way to follow up.

This strategy will be constantly evolving, and we will be looking for more ways to improve our services as we better understand your needs.



## Scope

The purpose of this strategy is to review our customer service across the council – how we engage with you and how we can improve the way we do this

### What we do now



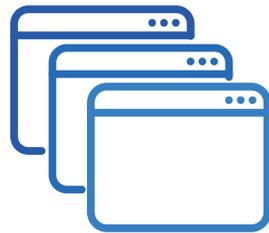
We support  
**215,574 residents**  
(population estimate mid 2020)



We have created online forms for over  
**70 of our services**

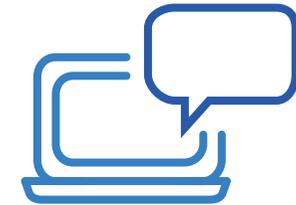
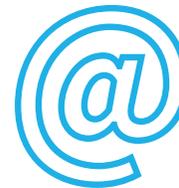


We currently offer over **80 telephone numbers** on our website



We have about **25,000 page views** a day on our corporate website

We currently offer over **100 email addresses** on our website



We have over **15 online customer-facing portals** for making applications and requests





We achieved **99.5%** **satisfaction** for our telephone services in 2021

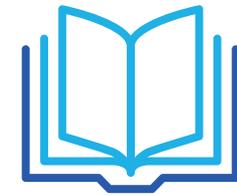
We receive about **1,140 calls** into our contact centres every day



We carry out an average of **80 face-to-face appointments** in the Town Hall every month



In 2019, **664,611 people** visited our libraries where

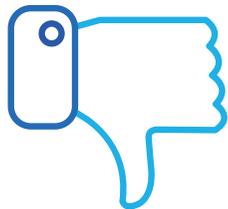


customers can access computers and WiFi

Over **90,000 customers** have set up an online account with us



In March 2021 we sent out **98,332 council tax bills**



The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman upheld **five complaints** about the council in 2020/2021



## Vision

We will put our customers at the heart of what we do, listening to their feedback and reflecting it in the design and delivery of our services

## Outcomes

We want:

- to provide a positive experience for our customers by being open, transparent and fair.
- our online services to be the channel of choice for most of our customers because they are so good.
- to use other channels such as telephony and face-to-face for those who need them.
- to create an environment where all officers are customer focused.

We will measure our progress over the term of the strategy and make sure we achieve our objectives. Our aim is to increase customer satisfaction and reduce the number of upheld complaints.

## Why we need to change

We recognise that our customer service is not always as good as we would like it to be.

We know from customer feedback that there are things that need to be fixed or improved. Here are some of the key findings:

- There are many contact points into the council, and it can be confusing
- We need to make our online service easier to use. We need to improve and expand the ways that we gather customer feedback
- We need to provide effective and timely feedback to our customers
- We need to improve the customer experience from first contact to resolution of the issue and make sure our processes are effective and efficient
- We need to ensure our face-to-face service meets the needs of those who require it
- By planning ahead we need to focus the right resources in the right place at the right time
- We should involve customers more when we are planning to change or start new services
- We need to be more proactive in our communications to keep customers informed



# Customer Service Strategy

## Our customer service themes

### Customer focused

We are a customer focused council, we will

- rethink the way we deliver our services, putting you at the centre of our design
- we will engage with a wide range of customers including those from equality groups
- create a culture where everyone strives to deliver good customer service
- be clear about how long it will take to get things done or to respond to you and keep you updated with progress
- treat you with empathy and professional curiosity because we want to try to understand what you want or need
- understand your experience of our services
- analyse data to understand you better and personalise services so that they meet your needs
- improve our data sharing practices so that you only need to give us your information once
- develop our online systems, helping us to understand your interactions with us so that we can be more proactive
- create a forum for residents to give us feedback on our services

- collect more customer satisfaction feedback from you and use it to improve services

### Connected

We connect with our customers effectively and efficiently, we will

- make sure that we get the basics right
- aim to resolve your query at the time you raise it, or in a timely manner
- make it easy for you to feed back to us
- keep you up-to-date so that you don't need to contact us again
- provide local access to face-to-face services where required
- tell you the most direct way you can access the services you need
- deal with issues raised with your councillor in a fair, efficient and consistent way

### Empowered

We empower our staff to meet our customers' expectations, we will

- ensure that all staff have the right customer service skills, treating our customers with empathy, respect and courtesy
- instil a customer service culture across the organisation to improve the customer experience
- train our officers so that they can give you the information and support you need
- encourage our officers to use their judgment and discretion in resolving issues
- improve our training around disabilities to help our staff deal with all customers more effectively
- provide appropriate technology and systems for our staff, allowing them more time to spend with you, the customer
- learn from our mistakes and adapt our processes so that we serve you better next time
- improve how we manage customer service performance and promote transparency and accountability
- embed an approach of continuous improvement across the council



# Customer Service Strategy

- spend more time with those who need extra support by shifting transactional contact online
- train our officers to be better equipped to resolve your issues at first point of contact, keeping you informed of what to expect along the way

## Service delivery

We provide excellent quality and value to our customers through better designed services, we will

- ensure our officers are dedicated to the customer experience and making sure that our customer service works well for you
- make sure that you are clear about what to expect from us
- join up similar services for a seamless customer experience
- improve our customer satisfaction surveys to get more feedback on how we are doing from your perspective
- use data to understand the customer experience and use this information to identify issues and solutions
- review processes within priority service areas to make customer improvements across the organisation
- ensure that there is good management in place to maintain consistently high customer service and a culture of continuous improvement

- trial solutions at low cost before delivering them fully
- monitor best practice in customer service and look at industry trends to improve customer experience
- review our contracts with our providers to make sure their customer service standards and timescales are aligned with ours
- improve our forecasting and business planning processes so that we allocate our resources most effectively

## Partnership

We improve the customer experience by working with partners, we will

- use our professional curiosity to understand your needs and make referrals to 3rd parties where this would be helpful
- make it easy for you to find services offered by partners
- develop and test services with you to make sure the services we provide work for you
- work with the 3rd sector and regional partners to support those who need it the most
- work with town and parish councils to use resources efficiently and provide services where you need them

## Digital

We will improve digital technologies to support a 24/7 customer experience, we will

- promote and encourage the use of our online services
- continue to modernise, using digital tools and technologies to enhance the customer experience
- empower our digital team to make changes that benefit the customer
- use digital technologies to allow us to deal with your requests and enquiries more quickly
- listen to you so that we understand how you want to communicate and interact with us digitally
- pilot new technologies and test them with you first
- use technologies to help you navigate to the correct place online
- use technology to automate processes where appropriate
- invest in our websites so that we offer accessible services, our systems are easy to use and you can find what you need quickly
- make greater use of digital technologies and data so that more time is spent providing the services you need
- be aware of upcoming technological advancements so that we are aware of anything new which could help us deliver a better service



# Customer Service Strategy

## What you can expect from us

### Short term – Year 1

- We will ensure that our staff are competent in customer service and have an awareness of disabilities.
- We will develop and publish our customer service standards.
- We will use our Citizens' Panel regularly to see how we are doing and what we need to improve.
- We will ensure that issues raised with councillors are dealt with fairly, efficiently and consistently.
- We will provide local customer access for residents where needed.
- We will start to deliver customer service culture change.

### Medium term – Years 2 and 3

- We will continue to review our website and microsites and ensure that they all meet legal accessibility requirements.
- We will increase the volume and type of call handled by our professional contact centre so that you get a consistent and reliable service.
- We will review our processes to ensure that they are as good as they can be.
- We will review our most popular services and identify ways to simplify access.

### Long term – Years 4 and 5

- We will prioritise full digital access for the most popular service requests.
- We will put in place automated reminder texts and emails so you never miss a deadline or an appointment with us.
- We will ensure that our online systems will be a first choice for most, meaning that our digital offer is the most used channel.



# Customer Service Strategy

## How we will measure outcomes

Our vision is ambitious, and we need to ensure that we check and measure our progress across the five-year lifetime of the strategy.

We will do this by listening to you and learning from your experiences to keep improving our services. To measure our success, we will gather feedback from you and from our staff and analyse the data we collect. We will review this over the five-year period of this strategy, seeking improvements in our measures.

Your feedback:

- Customer surveys
- Public consultations
- Established community and disability groups
- Govmetrics customer satisfaction results
- Feedback from compliments, complaints and enquiries
- Feedback about equality issues

Feedback from staff:

- Engagement boards
- Responses to compliments and complaints
- Annual staff survey

Feedback from data:

- Web analytics
- Analysis of compliments and complaints
- Govmetrics responses
- Contact volumes and channels
- Analysis of themes and trends
- Service measures (key performance indicators and service level agreements)
- Channel shift data
- Mystery shopping

Each of these will have measurable targets. The targets will show continuous improvement.

A supporting action plan has been created which will contain a detailed plan of how the ambitions will be achieved and by when. This will be included in the council's annual business planning framework. The plan will span the period of the strategy and will define actions by date. The framework will assess progress against the action plan and is reported at Directorate Leadership Teams, the Corporate Leadership Team and to the Executive and Scrutiny Panels.

We welcome your feedback on this strategy to [cs.strategy@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:cs.strategy@n-somerset.gov.uk)



This publication is available in large print, Braille or audio formats on request.  
Help is also available for people who require council information in languages other than English.

Please contact 01934 888 802

