

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 14 March 2017
Report Subject	Customer Services Strategy
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Corporate Management
Report Author	Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise)
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proposed Customer Service Strategy (attached at appendix 1) is a replacement for the Customer Service Strategy 2010-13. This strategy proposes a strategic approach to transforming our customer interactions by delivering council services in the most modern and efficient way and embracing the potential of a digital shift.

The strategy is structured around the following three workstreams:

1. Face to face
2. Telephone
3. Digital

Each workstream lists high level outcomes to be achieved by the end of the strategy that will be supported by an annual action plan giving more details and precise timescales.

The strategy is closely aligned with the Digital Strategy and shares a Digital Customer workstream.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Cabinet adopts the Customer Service Strategy.
---	---

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY
1.01	<p>The purpose of the Customer Service Strategy is to set out a framework for how the Council will deliver modern and efficient face to face, telephone and digital services, with a commitment to providing excellent services to customers and value for money to the taxpayer.</p> <p>The Council's future service delivery must be focused on simplifying the way customers access services, understanding their journey with the council, giving customers control over the services they use, listening to and responding to feedback. Services which can be delivered digitally will be developed, allowing expensive resources to be focused on those services which cannot be delivered digitally to support the most vulnerable customers.</p>
1.02	<p>The proposed Customer Service Strategy complements the Customer Service Policy which describes what customers can expect when they contact the Council face to face, over the telephone or digitally. The implementation of this strategy will involve ongoing review of the customer service policy and changes will be made based on the needs of customers.</p> <p>The strategy is divided into the three workstreams which reflect the main customer access channels.</p>
1.03	<p>Face to face</p> <p>Face to face services will be in the main delivered through the five Flintshire Connects Centres in town centres across the county. There are a range of services available through the Connects Centres including Housing Solutions Triage, Blue Badge applications and benefit enquiries.</p> <p>The strategy recognises that face to face services are the most expensive customer channel. However, it is an important channel for a number of services where new or unexpected circumstances are presented, where human judgement is required and for our most vulnerable customers. The strategy aims to build on the successful development through Connects of services resolved at first point of contact and therefore removing duplication, multiple handling and further avoidable contact.</p> <p>A key outcome for the strategy is that face to face services are available across the county and delivered by highly skilled and knowledgeable staff to support the most vulnerable customers.</p>
1.04	<p>Telephone Contact</p> <p>The Council receives approximately 2.7 million calls per annum. There is the opportunity across the Council to develop contact centre working where calls are handled by dedicated and knowledgeable staff who can provide advice across a range of services and free up specialist officer time to focus on core business or priority cases.</p> <p>This approach enables the council to maximise efficient use of staff resources and manage peak customer demand effectively. The strategy</p>

	will aim to resolve customer enquiries effectively at first point of contact and reduce call numbers by making services available on line.
1.05	<p>Digital</p> <p>Evidence from other Councils shows that embracing digital services can save the Council money, improve accessibility of services for the majority of residents and free up resource to support the most vulnerable customers. Even where certain tasks are not able to be delivered digitally (e.g. pest control or bulky waste collections) in many cases it will still be possible to improve the service for customers through options for online booking, payments or the provision of enhanced levels of information.</p> <p>A large proportion of households are using technology and expect to be able to access services on line at a time and location that suits them. By enabling customers to carry out high volume, simple transactions on line, the council can free up staff resources to deal with cases more appropriately and sensitively managed face to face.</p> <p>A key outcome for the strategy is that customers are confident and able to access Council services at a time and location convenient to them and that services that can be offered digitally are available, user friendly and build confidence in digital as a customer channel.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The digital workstream of this strategy will require capital investment to further develop suitable digital solutions and a 5 year cost estimate has been submitted as part of the capital programme. The cost/benefit of each change will be assessed prior to commencement and the decision whether or not to proceed taken based on available resource and priorities at the time.
2.02	Realising the ambition of the strategy will require some service transformation. It is expected that some level of project management or support will be required to facilitate any large scale change.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	<p>The proposed strategy has been prepared jointly by Customer Services with involvement from officers across all portfolios.</p> <p>The strategy was presented to Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9th March and comments reported to Cabinet.</p>

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	Implementing the strategy should help to increase the accessibility of services and to reduce inequality.
4.02	The strategy itself will be subjected to an Equality Impact Assessment.

	Changes to services (especially within the digital work stream) will need to be assessed for equalities and impact on future generations as part of the scoping exercise.
--	---

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix One – Customer Services Strategy

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>None.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Katie Clubb, Customer Support Manager Telephone: 01352 703518 E-mail: katie.clubb@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Contact Centre –a team of employees using specialist telephony software that enables the Council to effectively manage call volumes and call waiting times to ensure resources are managed according to service demand.</p> <p>Flintshire Connects – five town centre offices across Flintshire which provide a face to face service for customers to access more than 30 Council services</p>

Customer Service Strategy

Putting the customer at the heart of everything we do



2017 - 2022

Foreword

by Councillor Billy Mullin:

Cabinet member for corporate resources

I am very pleased to be able to bring you Flintshire County Council's Customer Service Strategy 2017-2022 which sets out how we are going to deliver and improve our services for customers across the county over the next five years.

The delivery of excellent customer services, tailored to the needs of Flintshire residents is of the utmost importance to the Council. The implementation of Contact Centre working to improve telephone call handling, the opening of Flintshire Connects Centres to provide access to services in town centres are just a couple of examples that show this Council's continued commitment to the development and improvement of customer service. However, more needs to be done. As technology develops and more homes benefit from broadband, the expectation of customers about when/how services are available will change. The demand to be available online and accessible 24/7 will increase as people choose to move away from more traditional contact channels.

This important strategy outlines the Council's plans for customer service and how this will be developed to ensure services are delivered in a fair, considerate and caring way that will ultimately make our customers feel respected and valued. I look forward to seeing this strategy being implemented over the next five years and the positive results this will have for all Flintshire residents.



Cabinet member for
corporate resources

Introduction

The public sector is striving to deliver excellent customer service at a time of significant change in the way services are delivered as a consequence of unprecedented financial challenges. Flintshire County Council is not unique and is committed to delivering modern and efficient services in the face of these challenges.



The purpose of the Customer Service Strategy is to set out a framework about how the Council will deliver modern and efficient **face to face**, **telephone** and **digital services**, with a commitment to providing excellent services to customers and value for money to the taxpayer.

The strategy explains how the Council will transform access to Council services and it outlines its ambition to embrace the opportunities that technologies offer. This means providing customers with access to digital services wherever possible to ensure that they can take advantage of all the benefits technology may offer them.

Future service delivery will be focused on simplifying the way customers access services, understanding customer journeys, giving the customer control over the services they use, listening to and responding to feedback. The Council will utilise digital channels as a way of delivering services in the most efficient way. Customers who are able to self-service through an online account will be able to do so, building on key principles within the Digital Flintshire Strategy to empower customers to access the services and information they need online.

Customers should have the best possible experience when they access Council services and in providing alternative customer access channels that meet both the demands and efficiencies required of the Council, there is no compromise in the Council's commitment to understanding customers and their needs.

This Strategy is supported by the Digital Flintshire Strategy which is fundamental in transforming customer access channels.

Customer Service: The Vision

The Customer Service Strategy sets out how the Council will embrace opportunities to review, assess and implement changes to the way customers can contact Flintshire County Council. The Council will deliver modern and efficient services enabling customers to access services flexibly through digital channels, freeing up resource to support the most vulnerable customers.

The Council want to improve and simplify access to services, providing customer focused services that meet customer expectations. The Council recognise that “one size fits all” is not an appropriate response to the public service offer in Flintshire. The vision in providing access to services is that regardless of the channel, services will be:

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

Customers can access Council services in many ways, sometimes resulting in confusion and a poor customer experience. The Council will simplify the number of ways a customer can contact services, taking advantage of the rapid developments in technology wherever possible to provide digital access channels, ensuring the customer receives the right service first time.

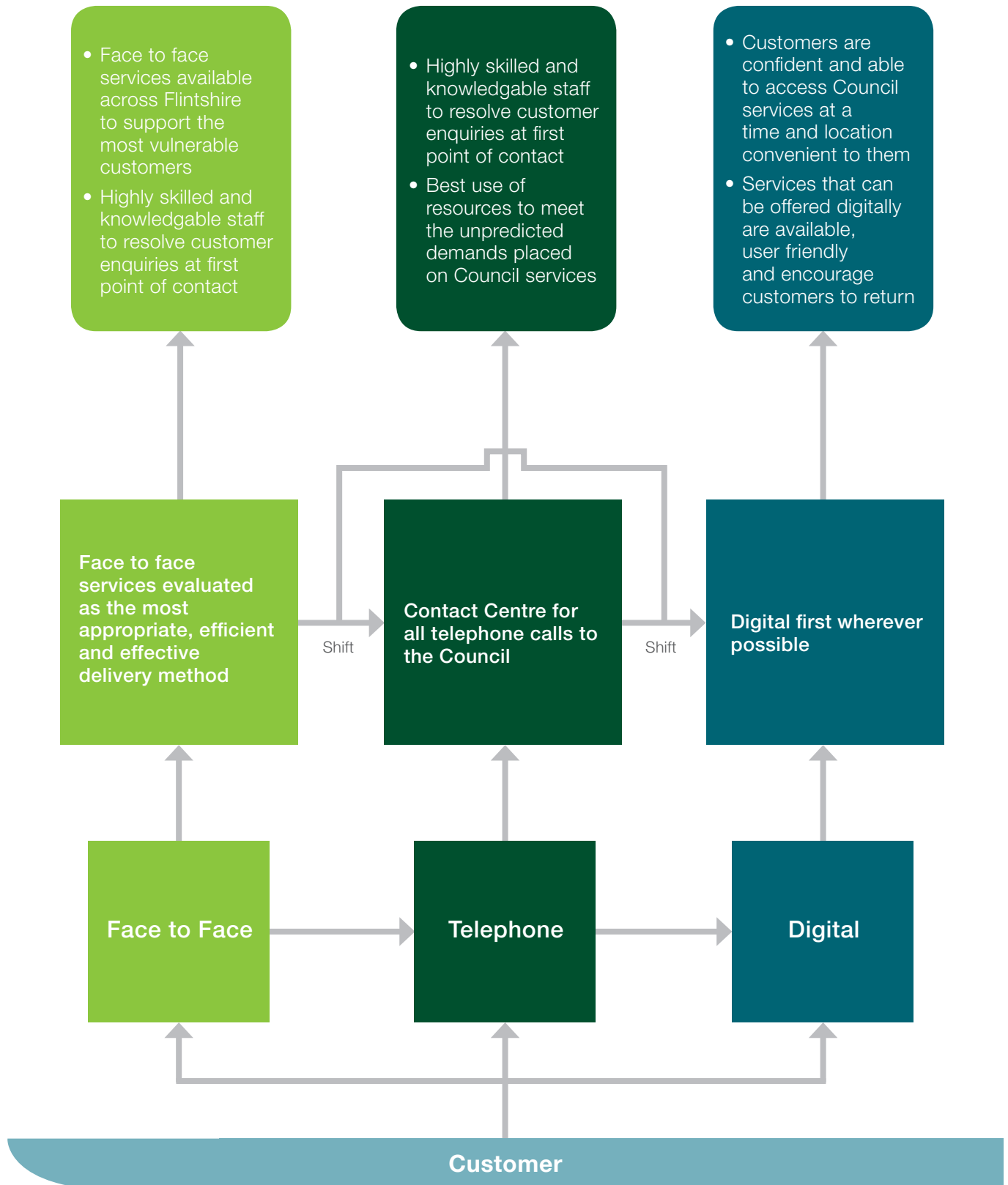
In asking those customers who are able to self-service through an online account to do so, the Council will work with local training providers, partners and the third sector to help those customers who are less confident in accessing digital services, or do not have access to technology. Services which can be delivered digitally will be, allowing expensive resources to be focused on the most vulnerable customers or for services where face to face delivery is the only realistic option.

Through all of the different access channels, the service a customer receives will be consistent regardless of whether this is through online self-service, telephone or face-to-face.



How the Vision will be achieved?

The customer experience when contacting Flintshire County Council will be a positive one and key to this is the review of three customer access workstreams which the Council will focus on to ensure we deliver our vision.



Delivering the Vision

Workstream 1 - Face to Face

“Supporting our most vulnerable customers to access services”

Our commitment is:

- To understand and respect the needs of vulnerable customers
- To deliver services in full where they cannot be delivered digitally or by telephone
- To provide excellent face-to-face services in town centre locations
- To support and assist customers to access digital services
- To measure the performance of staff against customer service standards



Key actions:

No.	Action
1	Review customer facing services to identify those services which cannot be delivered digitally or by telephone, and provide accessible services in town centre locations.
2	Where face to face contact is required strive to deliver these services in full at first point of contact removing duplication, multiple handling and further avoidable contact.
3	Provide modern technology in Flintshire Connects Centres and Libraries for those customers digitally excluded to embrace digital technology e.g. self-service computers and touch screen pods
4	Signposting customers to the most efficient method of contacting the Council in the future to save them time and money e.g. the Council's website.
5	Advice and support to customers to ensure they have the confidence to use digital technology as a way of contacting the Council and other private sector organisations thus realising the benefits of the digital age.
6	Review the necessity of “home visits” and the option to provide face to face conferring as an alternate channel for ease and convenience to both the Council and the customer.
7	Provide appropriate technology for staff that must complete home visits to allow them to complete their work in modern and efficient ways.
8	<p>The Council will maintain its customer service standards as outlined in the Customer Service Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will greet customers within 5 minutes of their arrival at a council building / event; - We welcome customers to speak in English or Welsh and where there is no Welsh speaker available we will make alternative arrangements. - We will offer an appointment where this may be more appropriate, responsive or efficient; - We will make arrangements for customers who have specific requirements e.g. interpretation service, British Sign Language.

Outcome:

- Face to face services available across Flintshire to support the most vulnerable customers.
- Highly skilled and knowledgeable staff to resolve customer enquiries at first point of contact.

Workstream 2-Telephone

“A single contact for customers to access services”

Our commitment is:

- To develop the Council's experience to date to maximise the efficient use of staff resources
- To manage peak customer demand effectively
- To provide a joined-up approach to service delivery through single call resolution
- To promote services e.g. providing customers with information for self-service or automated processes
- To explore partnerships with other public sector Contact Centres

Actions to support delivery:

No.	Action
1	Develop Contact Centre working to maximise the amount of enquiries that are resolved at first point of contact for those people who cannot self-serve. This will relieve the pressure on services and create efficiency and capacity.
2	Develop Contact Centre operations to maximise the efficient use of staff resources and manage peak customer demand effectively.
3	Explore partnerships with other public sector Contact Centres. This could provide efficiency in staffing levels and could provide joined up working across the public sector.
4	Telephone customers will be advised about alternative methods of contacting the Council which could save them time and money.
5	Provide a bilingual service when customers choose to contact the Council by telephone.
6	Reduction in multiple handling of calls leading to single call resolution i.e. a customer can deal with one call agent to resolve multiple service enquiries.
7	<p>The Council will maintain its customer service standards as outlined in the Customer Service Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will answer telephone calls within 30 seconds; - We will deal with telephone calls in English or Welsh. Where there is no Welsh speaker available appropriate arrangements will be put in place to enable customers to deal with the Council in the Welsh language; - We will offer access to an alternative system (e.g. language translation services) if customers have additional requirements.

Outcome:

- Highly skilled and knowledgeable staff to resolve customer enquiries at first point of contact.
- Best use of resources to meet the unpredicted demands placed on Council services.



Workstream 3-Digital

“Empowering customers to access the services and information they need online”

Our commitment is:

- To continue to move transactional services to more effective digital channels by maximising self service
- To provide services and information online to customers in a user-friendly way
- To ensure customers have the digital skills to access services and information online
- To delivering accessible, inclusive services, supporting customers to adopt digital services
- To provide choice of contact method whilst balancing efficiency with service quality
- To ensure that customer needs and service efficiency are at the core of solutions development and implementation
- To deliver secure digital solutions so that customers trust the Council to protect their information

Actions to support delivery:

No.	Action
1	Continued development of the Customer Relationship Management database to enable single view of the customer.
2	Development of customer self-service facilities on the Council's website.
3	Effective signposting to information and online resources on the Council's website.
4	Working with services across the Council to ensure a “Digital First” approach.
5	Continue to move transactional services to more effective and efficient digital channels by maximising self-service.
6	Working with local training providers, partners and the third sector to identify and deliver effective customer training to ensure take up of digital services and support digital inclusion.
7	Identify further opportunities for use of social media to support service delivery.
8	<p>The Council will maintain its customer service standards as outlined in the Customer Service Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will acknowledge correspondence (e.g. e-mails, website enquiries and Tweets) within 24 hours (Monday – Friday); - We will respond to digital correspondence as quickly as possible; - We will guarantee a response within 10 working days; - We will respond in the language and format of the original communication.

Outcome:

- Customers are confident and able to access Council services at a time and location convenient to them.
- Services that can be offered digitally are available, user friendly and encourage customers to return.

Guiding Principles

- The way information and services are made available will allow customers to always be in control through their channel of choice.
- Customer feedback will be used to help the Council know what customers think it is doing well, identify customers who are not happy with services to stop recurring problems and help to increase overall customer satisfaction.
- Customers will find it easy to give feedback on services and the Council will listen to what customers say to make improvements.
- By developing digital services the Council will seek to provide a single customer account where everything for a customer is available and recorded in one place. Customers will be able to see every contact they have had with the Council and how services have responded, they will also be able to see services that may be of interest to them and request new services.
- The Council will maximise customer's ability to pay for services electronically.
- The introduction of email sign-ups will allow customers to decide when and on what subjects they would like to receive information from the Council. The customer will be in control of their choices and services will then send out to them information or advice that relate to these. This means the Council can be proactive in responding to the subjects customers are interested in ensuring they get timely and relevant information for them.
- As the Council change the way services are delivered, it will ask customers to test them and customer feedback will help to make improvements so that services are modern and efficient.

How will we deliver the strategy?

Governance Arrangements

The delivery of the strategy is the collective responsibility of the Council from Elected Members and the Chief Officer Team.

Customer Support Services is responsible for reviewing the three workstreams within the strategy and this work will be overseen by the Customer Service Strategy Review Group. The Group will report to the Customer Service Programme Board who will oversee and ensure the effective delivery of the Customer Service Strategy. The benefit of this approach is that the Board provides the mechanism to resolve any resource, capacity and prioritisation issues which could occur across the range of priorities and actions to be delivered.

- The Customer Service Strategy will be included in the Improvement Plan for the Council and the Board will report on progress through the appropriate channels.
- Business Cases for resources to deliver actions which support the delivery of the strategy will be considered by the Board.

Outcome

The Council will know it has been successful in placing the customer at the heart of our Customer Service Strategy when the customer:

- Finds it easy to access services and information
- Gets the service they need first time
- Is offered complementary services without having to work it out for themselves
- Can access services and view their contact history in one place at a time that suits them
- Is satisfied or very satisfied with the service/information they receive

Conclusion

Delivering the vision in this strategy will transform the way customers access Council services, they will have choice, control and access to services through different channels including a simple and easy to use website.

Customers will receive regular updates on services which interest them with information pointing to where they can see more. Council services will be working closely with IT to increase access and support to services and will have partnerships in place to help customers access services digitally. Success is excellent customer service and services which are fit for purpose and able to evolve as customers' needs change.

How success will be measured:

1. A reduction in the volume of face to face contact at public receptions and Flintshire Connects Centres for services where alternative access is deemed appropriate.
2. A reduction in the number of customers being assisted to access services online.
3. A reduction in telephone contact across the Council.
4. An increase in website usage.
5. The extension of online live chat to support customers as they access services online.
6. Offering single customer accounts online to promote digital take-up.
7. Maximising opportunities for customers to pay for Council services electronically.
8. Implementation of email sign-ups to reduce avoidable contact and place the customer in control of their choices.
9. An increase in customer satisfaction when contacting the Council for information or advice.

The Council's Customer Service Policy is attached in Appendix 1; this policy outlines the Council's commitment to the customer and level of service they can expect to receive. The Policy will be continually reviewed in line with the implementation of the Customer Service Strategy.

digitalflintshire@flintshire.gov.uk