

Customer Service Strategy 2010 - 2013

Introduction

Our vision for customer service is:

Oxfordshire County Council aims to deliver excellent customer service by putting our customers at the heart of everything we do. We aim to meet the needs of our customers by making information and services accessible quickly and easily, through a variety of methods.

Our customers are the people who benefit from the services we provide, and are customers of the Council not just the service they contact. The principles of this strategy apply to individuals and groups of people who live in, work in or visit the county, community-led groups, groups that we give grants to, the community, voluntary and faith sector, charities or businesses located here.

We adhere to a range of policies and procedures to help us to engage with our customers, including:

Customer Service Standards – these are set out in Appendix A (see page 4). We will monitor these standards in a variety of ways, including by the use of customer feedback, and will work with our partners to encourage them adhere to these or equivalent standards.

Customer Complaints Procedure – the council values complaints as an opportunity to improve the way we serve the people of Oxfordshire. There is a simple two-part process of an initial response and if necessary a further review. In addition some of our services have their own, separate complaints procedures.

This strategy has four overarching objectives by which to achieve our vision:

1. Services are accessible for customers in a way that is cost effective for the council.
2. Services are inclusive and designed to meet customers' needs, working in partnership where better service delivery and customer service can be achieved.
3. Technology is used efficiently and effectively to support improved customer service
4. Staff are supported and empowered to deliver excellent customer service

Our Objectives for Customer Service

The following pages set out the Council's high level priorities for improving customer service. A detailed action plan for the delivery of these priorities is attached as Appendix B (see page 7).

1. Services are accessible for customers in a way that is cost effective to the council.

We will:

- Maintain a diverse range of ways by which customers can contact us including public access, telephone, online and email.
- Encourage greater use of cost effective ways of contacting us, such as online enquiries, transactions and payments.
- Develop and promote our Customer Service Centre as able to resolve the majority of customer queries by email and telephone at the first point of contact.
- Meet the needs of all of our customers as effectively as possible, while recognising that our most vulnerable customers and most complex services may often require a mix of costly and cost-effective methods of customer contact.
- Commit to maintain, publicise and monitor our customer service standards.
- Maximise the opportunities resulting from the Asset Management Strategy whilst maintaining our commitment to accessibility for customers.

2. Services are inclusive and designed to meet customers' needs, working in partnership where better service delivery and customer service can be achieved.

We will:

- Provide and support a wide range of opportunities for people to have their say and get involved with the work of the Council. This is in line with the statutory Duty to Involve.
- Use customer insight and customer feedback information to better understand our customers and to plan and manage service provision across the council.
- Use customer complaints to learn from our mistakes and take opportunities to improve our services.
- Work with partners to deliver and commission services jointly to improve outcomes for customers and deliver better customer service standards.
- Use equality standards and equality impact assessments consistently across the Council to ensure we meet the diverse needs of our customers, that all customers are treated equally, and to provide tailored support where required.

3. Technology is used efficiently and effectively to support improved customer service

We will:

- Use ICT to improve access to services and information for our customers and staff, streamline processes and reduce costs, including the introduction of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that integrates with existing technologies.
- Develop the public website as a single, reliable and consistent knowledge base for the Council, enabling people to access the information they require easily.

- Develop and enhance the website as a primary source of information, a facility for maximising on-line transactions and as a vehicle for interactive communication with stakeholders
- Use telephone technology such as Interactive Voice Response to direct calls to the most appropriate staff member and to avoid the use of long automatic menus where possible.
- Make better use of technology such as 'call hunting' within teams to minimise the use of voicemail.

4. Staff are supported and empowered to deliver excellent customer service.

We will:

- Ensure that all staff know what is expected of them when dealing with customers by any form of contact.
- Ensure that front-line staff and managers are provided with learning and development opportunities to develop their customer service skills.
- Ensure that training in customer service expectations and standards is included in the induction and appraisal processes for all staff and managers.
- Empower staff to take responsibility for dealing with customer inquiries, to increase the number dealt with at the first point of contact.
- Empower staff to ensure they do not have to tolerate threatening behaviour, verbal abuse or violence from customers.

Strategic Alignment

This strategy sits within the golden thread that links all of our work from top level objectives through to service delivery. This Strategy's objectives will help the council deliver our overall strategic objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan 2010/11 – 2014/15:

- World Class Economy
- Healthy and Thriving Communities
- Environment and Climate Change
- Better Public Services
- and Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation (a cross-cutting theme)

The Corporate Plan includes a priority for action to improve customer service and specifically to ensure that services are responsive to customer expectations, as well as a commitment to implement a new Customer Service Centre to make it easier to contact the council and access information.

The Council's six Values include Customer Focus. This means putting the needs of our customers first and improving opportunities for local people to have their say and get involved with council decision-making. This complies with Duty to Involve legislation.

There are also a number of other **policies and strategies** that have a bearing on this Strategy and our overall approach:

- **The County Council Business Strategy** [hyperlink] which sets out the way we will streamline services and improve cost effectiveness across the council, including introducing new ways of working.

- **The Asset Management Strategy** [hyperlink] which is developing a new approach to ensuring we make best use of our buildings, and that they support new ways of working across the Council.
- **The Marketing Strategy** [hyperlink] which sets out how we communicate the work and ethos of the council to engender a sense of trust from our customers and communities. This includes how we will use targeted marketing to ensure that all of our customers are aware of the services the county council provides and how they can access them using the right channels.
- **The Digital Engagement Strategy and Ask Oxfordshire Strategy** [hyperlinks] which set out the ways in which we ensure that the community knows what we are planning to do, how we will consult, involve and communicate with them; and how we measure their satisfaction with the Council and its services.
- **The Web Strategy** [hyperlink] which sets out our intentions to provide a single public website for the organisation to make it easier for customers, staff and partners to access services, engage with the Council and find the information they need
- **Closer to Communities Strategy** [hyperlink] which sets out the way we work with our local communities to better understand their needs and how services may be coordinated to meet those needs, including with partner organisations.
- **The People Strategy** [hyperlink] which aims to ensure that we recruit, retain and develop the right staff to meet our objectives, including the delivery of excellent customer service.
- **The Corporate ICT Strategy** [hyperlink] which sets out the way technology will support the Council's strategic objectives over coming years.

Delivery and Governance

For the interim period, monitoring of the Customer Service Strategy will sit with the Head of Strategy. Once the new structure is in place we will agree responsibilities between Customer Services and the Chief Executive's Office.

Key internal stakeholders will meet on a six-monthly basis initially to discuss progress and the Head of Strategy will report this progress to the County Council Management Team. These stakeholders are:

- Head of Strategy
- Deputy Head of ICT Services
- Customer Service Centre Programme Manager
- Head of Communications, Marketing and Public Affairs
- Marketing Manager
- Consultation and Involvement Manager
- Assistant Head of Property
- Corporate Facilities Manager
- Assistant Head of Finance (Procurement)
- Head of Human Resources
- Corporate Policy Manager
- Research and Information Manager

Customer Service Standards

Our commitments

- We will use our customer service commitments to guide the way we work.
- We will ask for permission to collect and share your information within the Council, and keep information about you as accurate and up to date as possible, with your help. If the information we collect is personal data, we will comply with the Data Protection Act.
- We will consult with you regularly, welcome your involvement, take your views into account and provide feedback.
- We will ensure that all documents are written in plain English.

When you telephone us

- We will answer our main contact numbers as quickly as we can. We aim to answer at least 80% of calls within 20 seconds. We aim to improve how quickly we answer calls, and we will publish detailed statistics for our main publicised numbers.
- We will use technology to ensure your call is directed to the advisor with the best skills to help you, and will avoid using unnecessary 'menus' of options.
- Staff will give their names and department/service area when answering the telephone.
- If we pass your enquiry on to another department, we will pass on your details and the nature of your query so that you do not have to repeat it to another person.
- If we have to transfer your call, wherever possible we will transfer you to a person not a voicemail.
- We aim to answer telephones and avoid the use of voicemail. Where voicemail is used staff will respond to messages in 24 hours, will leave a greeting to indicate when they are away from the office and an alternative contact person.
- We will continuously review the opening hours of the Customer Service Centre in order to respond to customer demand for out-of-hours services or extended opening hours.

When you write to us

- We will acknowledge all letters and faxed messages within five working days of receipt. A full response will usually be given within ten working days. If this is not possible we will let you know when you may expect a reply.
- Acknowledgements to emails and contact via social media channels will be made within two working days with a full response within ten working days.
- Replies will include contact information a named member of staff and will use a 12 point sans serif font e.g. Arial.

When you use our website

- We will have an accessible and useable website, with up to date information. We will make it easy for you to find what you want on the website.
- We will continually work to improve technology to enable you make payments, complete forms and make bookings online.

When you visit us

- We will keep offices open and available to the public from 9.00am-5.00pm Monday to Thursday and 9.00am until 4.00pm Fridays (currently under review).
- Our staff will wear a name badge.
- Reception staff will greet you promptly. If the person you need to see is not available, you will be contacted within the next working day to arrange an appointment.

- If you have an appointment with us we will do our best to see you at the appointed time, but if we are delayed we will explain why, tell you how long you may have to wait and give you the option of making an appointment for another day and time.
- All reception areas will be clearly signposted and will include a seated waiting area for customers and private interview facilities.

If you have particular requirements

- We aim to meet the particular requirements of all our customers including those with physical and learning disabilities and impairments, those whose first language is not English, and those with any other diversity requirements.
- We will provide an interpretation service for customers whose first language is not English, by arrangement.
- We will ensure that alternative formats of written documents are available on request, including other languages, large print, Braille, audiocassette, CD, EasyRead or email.
- We will provide hearing enhancement systems in the main county council buildings, including reception areas.
- We will ensure that all reception areas in main county council buildings are accessible to customers with mobility requirements and we aim that 90% of our buildings (excluding schools) will be accessible by 2015.

If we visit you at home

- We will inform you when we are running late for an appointment or if an appointment has to be cancelled.
- We will let you know what we will do as a result of the visit and the timescales.
- If we visit you without a prior appointment, we will provide a clear explanation of why we are visiting you.

Occasionally, a service may not be able to meet the targets set out above (for example where there is a seasonal peak of requests for information). We will tell you if this is the case.

If we fail to meet your expectations

- The council values complaints as an opportunity to improve the way we serve the people of Oxfordshire.
- We have a Corporate Complaints Policy. This states that when we receive your complaint we will acknowledge it in writing within five working days and say how we propose to resolve it. After investigating your complaint we will normally give you a response within ten working days of our acknowledgement.
- If you are not satisfied with the outcome after the Initial Review, you should let us know why within 28 days. We will acknowledge your concerns within five working days. We will then make a further investigation and reply, normally within 20 working days of our acknowledgement.

What we expect from you

- Oxfordshire County Council pledges to treat its customers fairly and honestly, with dignity and respect. Our staff have the right to receive the same respect in return.
- We will not tolerate the use of physical or verbal violence in any form, including the use of foul and abusive language against our staff. We will consider withdrawing services from customers if they abuse our staff and we will support staff who wish to pursue legal action where it is appropriate.

18 Month Delivery Plan

Objective/Aim	Action	Delivery timescale	Delivery by	How delivery will be measured
1. Services are accessible for customers in a way that is cost effective to the council.				
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintain a diverse range of ways by which customers can contact us including public access, telephone, online and email. ▪ Encourage greater use of cost effective ways of contacting us, such as online enquiries, transactions and payments. ▪ Develop and promote our Customer Service Centre as able to resolve the majority of customer queries by email and telephone at the first point of contact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communicate the new Customer Service Strategy to all staff ▪ Implement Phase 2 of Customer Service Centre ▪ Implement Phase 3 of Customer Service Centre to include seeking opportunities to work with partners. ▪ Generate awareness and advocacy of the new Customer Service Centre internally, externally and with relevant stakeholders. ▪ Effectively communicate to the public new and fewer ways of contacting us, e.g. selected numbers for customer service centre. 	<p>October 2010</p> <p>November 2011*</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing to December 2012 dependent on timescale of CSC</p>	<p>Head of Strategy</p> <p>Customer Service Centre Project Manager</p> <p>Marketing Manager / Customer Service Centre Project Manager</p>	<p>Increased use of the CSC internally; by the public; higher volume of calls; reduction in number of face to face callers in particular among target groups. Reduction in costs associated with customer service as a result in drop in number of face to face callers. Customer</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meet the needs of all of our customers as effectively as possible, while recognising that our most vulnerable customers and most complex services may often require a mix of costly and cost-effective methods of customer contact. ▪ Commit to maintain, publicise and monitor our customer service standards. ▪ Maximise the opportunities resulting from the Asset Management Strategy whilst maintaining our commitment to accessibility for customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continually monitor and evaluate the level of customer service received by callers; seek ways to improve customer service levels and identify ways of measuring success ▪ Use intelligence about customer demand, to investigate increasing the opening times of the Customer Service Centre ▪ Use a communications campaign to launch to the public the revised customer service standards. ▪ Use marketing and communication and our Channel Management Strategy to encourage use of the website as the primary means to contact the Council ▪ Inform the implementation of the Asset Management Strategy to ensure that it considers the needs of customers and customer service standards as well as effectively meeting the financial targets of the council. ▪ Ensure that all locations where the council provides a face to face service are accessible including meeting the needs of 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Commence Jan 2011</p> <p>End Oct 10</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Autumn 2010 and ongoing</p> <p>By end 2011</p>	<p>Customer Service Centre Project Manager</p> <p>Marketing Manager</p> <p>Assistant Head of Property</p> <p>Corporate Facilities Manager</p>	<p>Feedback.</p> <p>Increased hits on website and increased use of online self-services.</p> <p>Customer feedback</p>
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	complex cases and vulnerable customers			
2. Services are inclusive and designed to meet customers' needs, working in partnership where better service delivery and customer service can be achieved.				
We will:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide and support a wide range of opportunities for people to have their say and get involved with the work of the Council. This is in line with the statutory Duty to Involve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Embed the appropriate use of consultation and involvement as an integral part of service management and delivery ▪ Raise awareness and support colleagues to use the eConsult Portal (consultation calendar) to ensure we publically promote our consultation and involvement activities, feedback their outcomes and resultant action 	To end of Ask Oxfordshire Strategy (Sept 2011)	Consultation and Involvement Manager / Ask Oxfordshire Lead Officers	<p>Increased awareness of Duty to Involve.</p> <p>Greater use of eConsult portal</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use customer insight and customer feedback information to better understand our customers and to plan and manage service provision across the council. ▪ Use customer complaints to learn from our mistakes and take opportunities to improve our services. ▪ Work with partners to deliver and commission services jointly to improve outcomes for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Carry out an annual residents' survey to test overall satisfaction with the Council and associated factors. Present this information in a Reputation Dashboard and monitor resultant action on a quarterly basis. ▪ Provide Councillors and managers with quarterly briefings sharing the outcomes of key consultation and involvement activities and resultant action. ▪ Use performance information and customer insight data to understand and meet the 	To end of Ask Oxfordshire Strategy (Sept 2011)	Consultation and Involvement Manager	Residents survey carried out successfully
		Dec 2011	Consultation and Involvement Manager	Quarterly briefings delivered
			Consultation and Involvement	Continued use of insight data;

<p>customers and deliver better customer service standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use equality standards and equality impact assessments consistently across the Council to ensure we meet the diverse needs of our customers, that all customers are treated equally, and to provide tailored support where required. 	<p>diverse needs of customers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Set up a county-wide Customer Service Working Group with representatives from the main contact centres and helpdesks, to work on specific projects to improve customer service. ▪ Engage with Elected Members to ensure that local knowledge and needs are reflected in the delivery of services. 	<p>Autumn 2010</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Manager / R&I Manager / Customer Service Centre Project Manager</p> <p>Customer Service Centre Programme Manager</p> <p>Corporate Policy Manager / all</p>	<p>customer feedback</p> <p>County wide working group set up</p> <p>Feedback from elected members</p>
<p>3. Technology is used efficiently and effectively to support improved customer service</p>				
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use ICT to improve access to services and information for our customers and staff, streamline processes and reduce costs, including the introduction of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that integrates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support the specification, procurement, implementation and ongoing operation of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to ensure it is efficient, effective, meets wider Council needs and integrates with existing technologies 	<p>Spring 2011</p>	<p>Deputy Head of ICT Services / Assistant Head of Finance (Procurement)</p>	<p>CRM system in place</p>

<p>with existing technologies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop the public website as a single, reliable and consistent knowledge base for the Council, enabling people to access the information they require easily. ▪ Develop and enhance the website as a primary source of information, a facility for maximising on-line transactions and as a vehicle for interactive communication with stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop the website to ensure that customers and Customer Service Advisors can find the information they require easily and that content management systems support a self-service approach to keeping information up to date. ▪ Develop and implement a consistent approach to expanding on-line services and payments across a wider range of Council services, including payments, bookings, completing forms etc ▪ Develop and implement a Digital Engagement Strategy to maximise the use of contact via the internet and social media and to ensure that customers who are contacting us via the internet and social media channels receive a consistent message. 	<p>Spring 2011</p> <p>Phase 1 of web strategy approved and funded – Spring 2011</p> <p>Spring 2011</p>	<p>Deputy Head of ICT Services / Head of Communications, Marketing and Public Affairs</p> <p>Deputy Head of ICT Services / Head of Communications, Marketing and Public Affairs Consultation and Involvement Manager</p> <p>Deputy Head of ICT Services / Head of Communications, Marketing and Public Affairs / Consultation and Involvement Manager/ Customer</p>	<p>Increased number of hits on website; Greater prominence on search engines.</p> <p>Increased number of users of online services. Customer feedback inc. mystery shopping.</p> <p>Increase in customer use of social media and internet channels; customer feedback.</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make better use of technology such as 'call hunting' within teams to minimise the use of voicemail. ▪ Use telephone technology such as Interactive Voice Response to direct calls to the most appropriate staff member and to avoid the use of long automatic menus where possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve use of Group Hunting technology within teams to facilitate calls being picked up within teams rather than using voicemail (to meet Customer Service Standards). ▪ Continually improve Skills Based Routing within the Customer Service Centre to ensure that customers are directed to the most appropriate person to help them, and to avoid long menus of options. ▪ Monitor and report on the proportion of calls to the Customer Service Centre that are answered within the industry standard (80% of calls answered within 20 seconds). 	<p>Spring 2011</p> <p>Commence Autumn 2010</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Service Centre Programme Manager</p> <p>Deputy Head of ICT Services</p> <p>Customer Service Centre Programme Manager/ Deputy Head of ICT Services</p> <p>Customer Service Centre Project Manager</p>	<p>Decrease in calls from internal and external customers going to voicemail</p> <p>Customer feedback; continuous improvement in number of calls correctly directed.</p> <p>Over 80% of calls to Customer Service Centre answered within 20 seconds.</p>
<p>4. Staff are supported and empowered to deliver excellent customer service.</p>				
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that all staff know what is expected of them when 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inform the 'Changing the Way We Work' part of the business strategy, to ensure that 	<p>Summer / Autumn</p>	<p>Head of Strategy / Head of Human</p>	<p>Roll out of culture change</p>

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<p>dealing with customers by any form of contact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that front-line staff and managers are provided with learning and development opportunities to develop their customer service skills. ▪ Ensure that training in customer service expectations and standards is included in the induction and appraisal processes for all staff and managers. ▪ Empower staff to take responsibility for dealing with customer inquiries, to increase the number dealt with at the first point of contact. ▪ Empower staff to ensure they 	<p>staff understand customer needs, feel empowered to take responsibility for dealing with enquiries and see the council as one team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undertake continuous training and development, mentoring and learning programmes for Customer Service Advisors, including provision of NVQ qualifications. ▪ Include customer service expectations and e-learning packages for staff and managers into induction and appraisal processes to maximise participation. ▪ Regular use of the First Link Forum to help front line staff discuss latest plans and share good practice. ▪ Identify and examine issues around staff 	<p>2010 and ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Spring 2011</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Jan 11</p>	<p>Resources / Internal Communications Manager</p> <p>Customer Service Centre Programme Manager</p> <p>Head of Human Resources</p> <p>Customer Service Centre Programme Manager</p> <p>Head of Strategy</p>	<p>work and positive staff response.</p> <p>Increase in number of staff undertaking training and development activities inc. NVQ qualifications in Customer Service.</p> <p>Increase in number of staff undertaking training and development activities</p> <p>Regular meetings of First Link Forum.</p> <p>Fewer</p>
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do not have to tolerate threatening behaviour, verbal abuse or violence from customers.	abuse and work to promote to staff acceptable customer behaviour and courses of action staff can take.			incidences of staff abuse and greater staff empowerment.
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* Please note that dates for actions pertaining to the Customer Service Centre are subject to change to achieve alignment with the CSC Programme Plan. All dates for actions pertaining to marketing and related activities are of course dependent on the completion of CSC actions