

Customer Experience Strategy

Our customer service is your experience...



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Foreword

I'm really pleased to introduce Oxfordshire County Council's new Customer Experience Strategy.

Supporting our customers lies at the heart of our work. Whether you're applying for a parking permit, registering a birth, visiting a waste recycling centre, accessing social care, or using any other of our wide range of services, we want to provide you with the best possible experience.

We have a clear commitment to foster an environment where every interaction, whether big or small, leaves a positive and lasting impression on our customers. It provides an opportunity to deliver support, build trust, foster collaboration, and drive positive and lasting change.

The development of this strategy has been a collaborative effort, reflecting our determination to listen, learn and respond to the needs of our diverse communities. I'd like to thank everyone who has contributed to this important piece of work and shared their experiences with us. Your insight has enabled us to build a detailed picture of the changing needs and expectations of our customers and how we can work together to make a real difference.



Councillor Neil Fawcett
Cabinet Member for Community
& Corporate Services

Introduction

“Customer service is not just a department, it’s an attitude”

The secret lies in building a culture focussed on creating an amazing customer experience every day for every customer – [Shep Hyken](#)

In creating a Customer Experience Strategy, our motivation is simple: we want our customers to have an excellent experience in every interaction they have with us and to feel listened to and supported.

This is our first customer experience strategy. It aims to build on our existing set of customer standards and draw on the valuable insight we have gathered to improve your experience with us. We want to ensure a customer-first approach lies at the heart of everything we do in the council and is not just seen as the responsibility of the customer service or frontline teams. This strategy is about putting the customer front and centre of our work every day.

Why do we need a strategy?

Oxfordshire is a diverse county, and we have a mix of customers that need or want to use our services. We know that people’s expectations and needs are changing as new technology emerges. The pandemic and cost of living crisis has also affected the demand on our services and the support our customers need. We want your access to council services to be easy and quick. When you connect with us directly, we want you to feel valued and confident that we will get it right first time.

We are committed to understanding what you want from us now and in the future, and to change the way we work to respond to our customers’ expectations. This strategy is designed to ensure all our customers receive an excellent experience, no matter who you are and what you need from the council.

Introduction

What does customer experience mean?

Customer experience is the way that people feel at all stages of interacting with an organisation. As a council, it is vital that we treat our customers well when they are trying to access and receive our services.

This means you feel listened to, supported, and have genuinely positive interactions with us. This also means going above and beyond to understand what you need from us and to find a solution for you quickly and helpfully.

This could be whether you are calling our customer service centre as a resident, interacting with us as a business, or visiting one of our services like a library or a household waste recycling centre.

National context around customer experience

Our strategy aims to ensure a consistently excellent customer experience, no matter who you are and what you need from the council. We also want our employees to provide an excellent customer experience in line with nationally recognised standards.

[The Institute of Customer Service](#) defines an organisation which provides excellent customer services as:

“Honest, gives good value for money, has a high reputation, meets deadlines, has quality products and services, has easy to understand processes, responds to criticism, encourages complaints and handles them well, and demonstrates that it is passionate about customers.”

In addition, the [Customer Contact Association](#) highlights some of the skills needed by professionals across a range of sectors to support excellent customer experience:

These are employees who are knowledgeable about a range of issues and who are emotionally supportive.

Introduction

Polling across the UK, Spain, Germany and France by **Twilio** showed that there are three key building blocks to good customer service:

1. **Efficiency:** Particularly in today's fast changing world, it is important that good customer service is not just transactional or about speed but builds trust through being more personalised, responsive, and flexible.

2. **Expertise:** Providing expertise is not just about employees being knowledgeable but also requires the use of customer data behind the scenes. Employees can access real-time, data-driven insights and recommendations from analytics as they speak to you.

3. **Emotional connection:** Showing emotion demonstrates a "human touch" in an increasingly digitalised world.

Our strategy sets out to achieve these various aspects, expanding and improving our services and frameworks to support customer experience as well as upskilling our employees to be prompt as well as knowledgeable and emotionally connected.

Challenges

Our Customer Experience Strategy acknowledges the many challenges involved in delivering exceptional service to our diverse communities.

From navigating complex processes to addressing varying levels of digital literacy, we recognise the barriers that may affect customers' access to, and satisfaction with, our services.

Moreover, technological advancements and shifting demographics mean we need to continuously adapt and innovate. By confronting these challenges head on, we can create a more inclusive, responsive and effective customer experience.

1. Decreased customer satisfaction nationally and locally

Across the UK we have seen a decline in customer satisfaction levels, particularly as customers expect more with new technology. The 2024 UK Customer Satisfaction Index currently stands at 76.0 (out of 100), which is a decline of 1.7 points compared to a year ago and 2.4 points below its 2022 level.

21 per cent of customers who rated an organisation 1 – 4 for customer satisfaction said the experience had made them trust other organisations less, while 45 per cent of customers say poor use of technology has made them avoid an organisation.

Our local residents' survey has also given us an insight into how our customers feel.

Over the last two years we have seen a reduction in satisfaction levels with Oxfordshire County Council.

In 2023, 40 per cent of respondents said they were satisfied with the way that the council runs things compared to 49 per cent in 2021. Fewer residents were satisfied with the services provided by the council (39 per cent in 2023, down from 53 per cent in 2021), while the number of residents who felt the council provides value for money dropped from 30 per cent to 25 per cent. The percentage of residents who felt the council did not act on residents' concerns increased from 48 per cent to 57 per cent.

To improve customer satisfaction we need to work on being responsive, acting on residents' concerns, creating value for money services, and keeping our residents well informed.

Understanding what's important to our residents means we can better anticipate their needs and how to support them.

Challenges

2. The COVID-19 pandemic

We know our communities have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and their needs have become more complex. The means of contacting organisations and the ways to access and deliver services have also changed - flexible and online interactions have become the norm.

Oxfordshire's health and wellbeing strategy reflects that some services are still recovering from the impacts of COVID-19, while the impact of COVID-19 continues to affect the health and wellbeing of our communities. For example, 44 per cent of children and young people in west Oxfordshire said COVID-19 impacted their mental health.

We need to ensure that we are delivering in the way that our customers expect in this post-pandemic world and that all customers are supported during changing circumstances.

3. The cost-of-living crisis

In this period of severe financial challenge, we need to deliver extra support to those who are struggling financially while making sure we provide value for money for council taxpayers.

We are therefore looking at different ways in which we can deliver services as flexibly and cost effectively as possible.

For example, we are increasing our range of online channels to provide greater choice for customers, while reducing the costs pressures on the council.

Online transactions often cost less than 50p whereas a telephone call can cost more than £2 and an in-person conversation can cost £8+.

Through this strategy we aim to make our online services quicker and easier, thereby giving customers more choice and flexibility while reducing costs for the council.

4. Digital exclusion

Technology is developing at a rapid pace and there are a range of new ways of interacting online with customers. However, some of our customers still face barriers to accessing online resources and support – whether it's a lack of internet connectivity, limited digital literacy or financial constraints.

We aim to ensure everyone has the same access and consistent service when contacting us whether they are using technology or not and our recent digital inclusion strategy reflects this. We are also committed as a council to supporting people with improving their digital literacy, including upskilling our employees on new technology.

Challenges

5. Increased demand for services

Demand for services is increasing across councils in the UK and Oxfordshire is no exception. Whether it's healthcare or social care, the demand for essential services continues to rise, while the funding available simply cannot keep pace.

Meeting this increased demand requires a strategic approach, which enables customers to self-serve or use partner services where appropriate while allowing the council to focus on more complex cases where greater support is required.

By reducing overall demand in this way, we can ensure we deliver consistent customer service and support those who need us most.

We acknowledge this shift will take time and this strategy will be the first step in supporting that transition.

Identify and minimise cases where contact with the council is not needed

Early intervention, preventative techniques and signposting

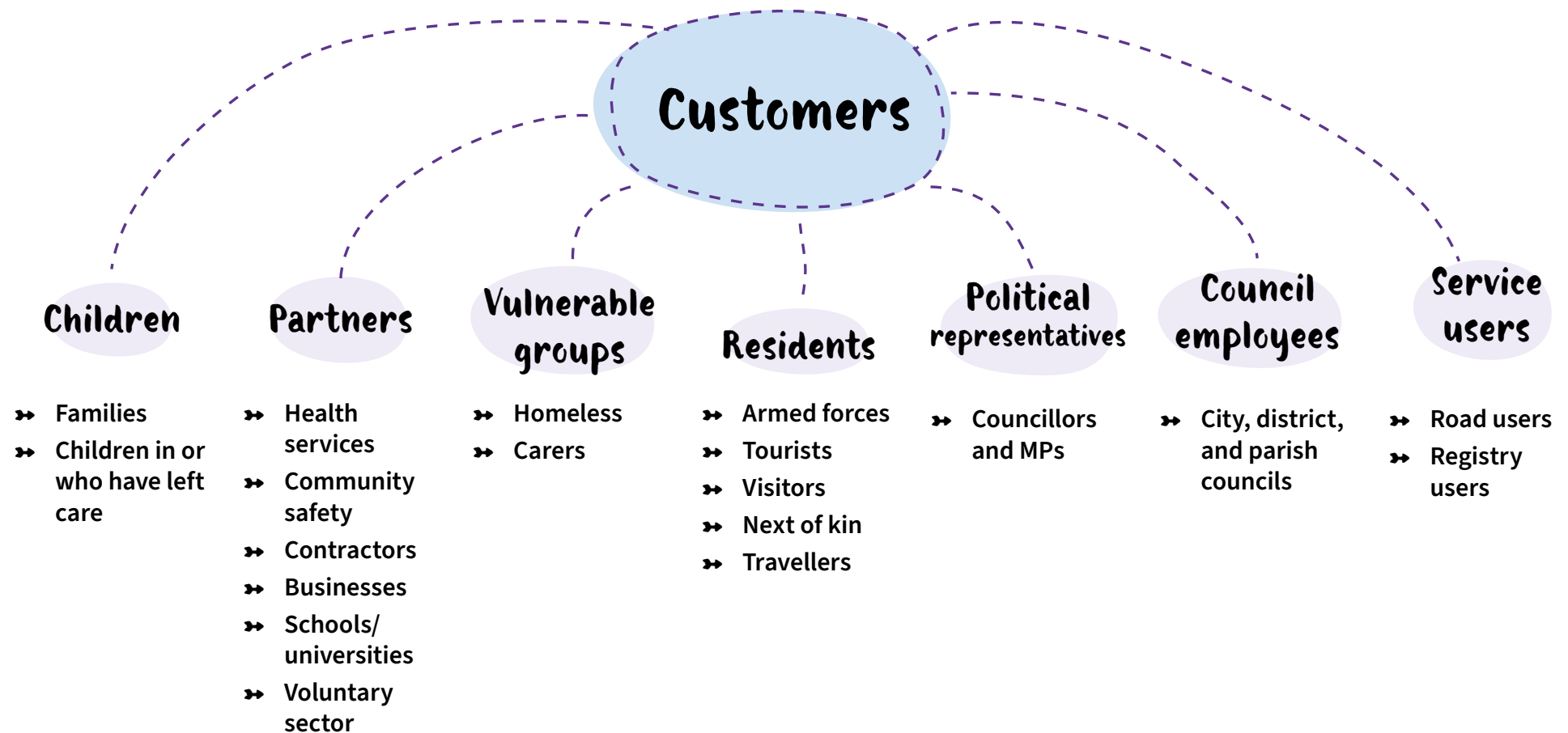
Community empowerment and involvement of partners

Customer self-service options

Consistent customer service delivery

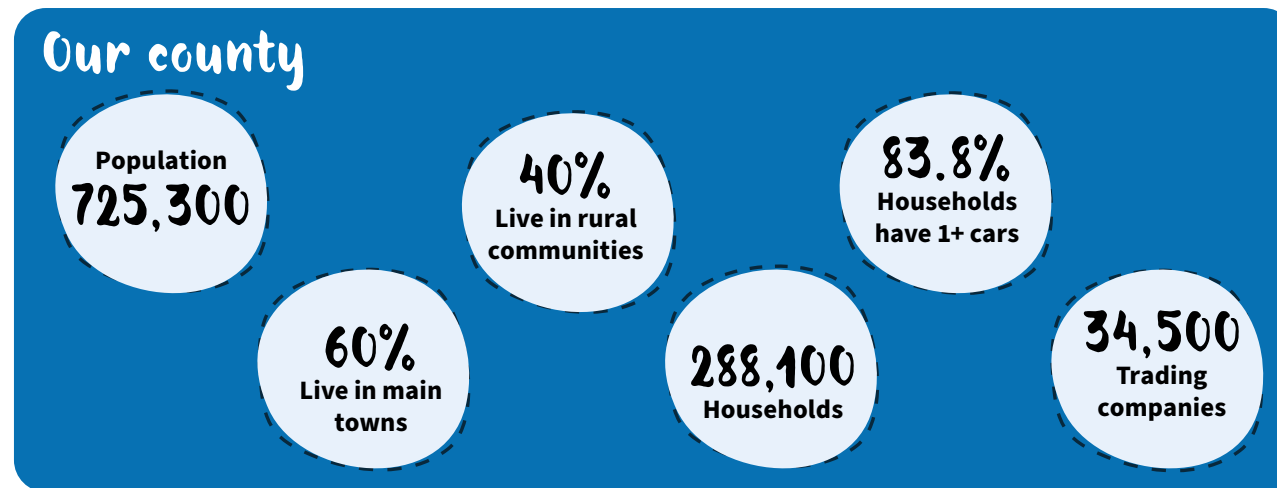
Our county, our customers

We asked our employees who their customers are.
This graphic shows what they said:



Our county, our customers

The below graphic showcases a high-level overview of our customers in Oxfordshire



A customer refers to any individual, group or organisation that interacts with or receives assistance, support or guidance from the council.

This includes residents, businesses, community groups, and other stakeholders who engage with the council to access services, seek information, or address concerns related to various aspects of community life.

The experiences, needs and feedback from customers are integral to shaping the quality, accessibility, and responsiveness of the services provided by the council.

We support customers over their lifetime, from birth to death and everything in between.

Many people may not know this support comes from the council as some customers interact with us more directly than others.

Understanding our customers better

In this section, we explore how we develop greater knowledge and insight about our customers.

We do this in many ways, from census data and insight to real-life case studies.

By examining customer interaction data, we discover valuable insights into the needs, preferences and challenges faced by our customers.

Complementing these statistics are conversations from our engagement with customers, highlighting the impact of our services on people's lives and the diverse experiences of individuals and groups that rely on our support.

Understanding our customer data

The profile of our county is changing, particularly as we have a growing and an ageing population.

We need to be aware of these changes and continuously update and refine our services to keep up with those changes.

Identifying the diverse range of groups across the county helps us tailor our services to meet the needs of those separate groups.

The images on the following page show some of the key facts about our county and our customers including a breakdown of income and rurality, provided by a tool called Acorn.

Our customers also include the most vulnerable within our society, those that need extra support and those that use our council services day in day out.

Gaining a good understanding of who our customers are and what they need is vital.

One way we have done this is through our community insight profiles, which provide qualitative and quantitative data on our ten most deprived ward areas.

To find out more, visit [community insight profiles](#).

Our aim is to use a number of different data sources to build a rich picture of our customers and use this information to tailor our services.

Understanding our customers better



A breakdown of Acorn's general categories for Oxfordshire

Learn more about the groupings [here](#).

How do our customers contact us?

As a county council we deliver a range of services, including adult and children's social care, some education services, public health, fire and rescue, libraries and museums, roads, trading standards, and waste disposal and recycling.

Our customers therefore request information and advice from us on a wide range of topics, from applying for a blue badge to requesting social care.

Figures from:
January to December 2023



County Hall

1,555 visits to County Hall reception of which **1,025** were enquiries from members of the public



Bus pass

18,089 contacts across email, telephony and webchat
8,803 bus pass applications processed

School admissions

29,906 contacts across email and telephony



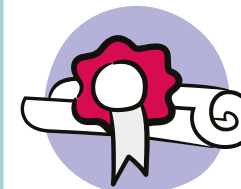
Adult social care

67,969 contacts across email and telephony
25,278 referrals made into adult social care



Blue badge

19,874 contacts across email, telephony and webchat
17,315 blue badge applications processed



Registration

14,520 calls across births, death and certificates plus **100** webchats

How do our customers contact us?



Children's social care

17,847 calls received

2,817 requests for information checks completed



Household support fund

4,295 household support fund enquiries across email and telephony



Visitors to Union Street

1,265 customers since October 2022

Voice of the customer

1,803 complaints handled

1,633 FOIs received



Parking

20,693 contacts across email, telephony and webchat

26,749 residential and visitor permit applications processed



Highways

27,551 highway enquiries across email and telephony

1,368 street lighting enquiries across telephony and webchat

3,016 waste and permit enquiries across telephony, email, and webchat

10,489 waste recycling centre permits processed



Community safety

8,701 trading standards enquiries across email and telephony

4,583 fire and rescue enquiries across email and telephony



Ukraine response programme

17,158 Homes for Ukraine enquiries across email and telephony

Our performance data and complaints

As the figures on this page demonstrate, we know customers are satisfied with their contacts across all channels in the customer service centre (CSC) in the council, but customer experience is wider than just the contact centre.

To enhance wider service delivery performance, our strategy focuses on improving council-wide processes and systems. By implementing better mechanisms and technology we aim to have a higher standard of quality. Continuous monitoring of performance measurements will enable us to identify areas for improvement.

Additionally, investing in employees' training and development will empower our teams to deliver exceptional service consistently, further contributing to improved performance and customer satisfaction.

In March 2024:

The number of corporate complaints (stage 1 and 2) responded to within timescales



The overall customer satisfaction rate for the customer service centre (telephony)



First contact resolution for customer enquiries received by the customer service centre



The percentage of customer telephone calls abandoned at the customer service centre



The number of Freedom of Information requests responded to within timescales



Complaints trends

Lengthy response times, lack of clarity in communication, and inconsistent outcomes are trends we see in complaints. To address these challenges, our strategy emphasises proactive measures aimed at prevention and resolution.

This includes implementing robust communication channels to provide timely updates and clear guidance to customers, thereby reducing frustration. Additionally, we will enhance employee training around policies and procedures, enabling more effective problem-solving and quicker resolution of complaints. By fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement, we aim to not only address current complaint trends but also anticipate future issues and implement pre-emptive measures to mitigate them, ultimately fostering greater resident satisfaction in council services.

The Customer Experience Strategy

Our strategy is built around three key elements: our values, our customer commitments, and our principles.

Values: Our actions align with the five corporate values of the council.

Customer commitments: We have eight key commitments to ensure our standards are consistently high.

Principles: Our five principles set the direction for council-wide improvement when interacting with customers.

Customer commitments:

- **Inclusivity:** We welcome all customers without discrimination.
- **Continuous improvement:** We work hard to improve our services for you.
- **Expertise:** We have the skills needed to support your needs.
- **Personalised care:** We cater to specific requirements you may need and swiftly address any barriers you face.
- **Accuracy:** Our material is up to date and accurate.
- **Transparency and accountability:** We are transparent in our decision-making processes and accountable for the outcomes and we are honest with you.
- **Feedback-driven:** We welcome feedback and learn from it.
- **Positive experience:** We ensure you are supported and want you to have a positive experience.

Our values

Delivering the Future Together is the council's programme which underpins everything we do: how we work together; how we make decisions; how we manage organisational change and development; and how we serve our customers.

We have five organisational values, which apply to how we interact with both our customers and colleagues:

Be kind and caring: e.g. colleagues are highly trained and take an empathetic approach.

Always learning e.g. we join up our data and channels, so customers only need to tell us things once.

Taking responsibility: e.g. we follow up promptly on customers' concerns until they have a solution.

Daring to do things differently: e.g. colleagues are empowered to make changes to their processes and try new technologies.

Equality and integrity in all we do: e.g. we understand the needs of our vulnerable customers.

Our principles

Our five key principles have been developed following engagement with our customers and are designed to help us deliver our customer vision.

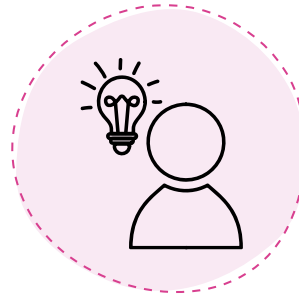
For each of these principles we have identified what we want to change for the future and how we are going to do it.

Our values,
our commitment



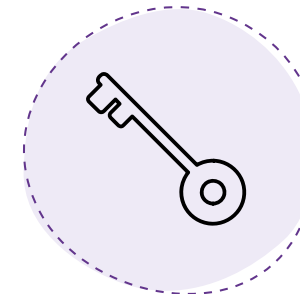
Principle 1

Having a 'customer first' approach across the council



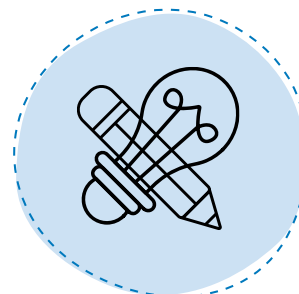
Principle 2

Having a better understanding of our customers and what they want from us



Principle 3

Improving customers' access to our services



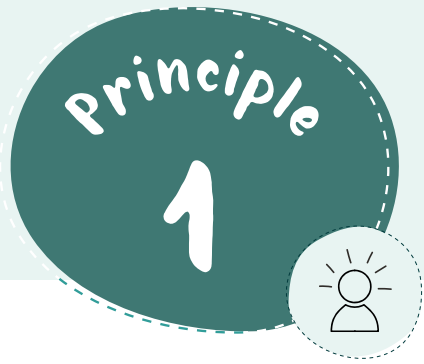
Principle 4

Designing an excellent customer experience, from beginning to end



Principle 5

Listening to and learning from customer feedback



Having a 'customer first' approach across the council

Delivering excellent customer service shouldn't just be a goal, but our guiding principle. It needs to be woven into the fabric of our services and the approach of all our employees. We're committed to going above and beyond to meet the needs of our communities, ensuring that the customer lies at the heart of every interaction.

Objective
We will ensure that delivering customer excellence is at the heart of our services and our approach.

How we will do it

Be clear about what customers need to do, and what they can expect from us.


Create a workplace culture where giving customers a good experience is part of everyone's job.

Give our employees the support and confidence to make changes that will improve customer experience.

Train our employees so they know how to do this, including giving people the opportunity to get qualifications in customer experience.

Learn from our employees about what stops them from delivering excellent customer experience so we can continuously improve.

Principle 2



Having a better understanding of our customers and what they want from us

Our customers have different needs and preferences in what they want from the council and how they want to interact with us. We want to develop the way we deliver our services to ensure that we understand and cater for the needs of our different customer groups.

Objective

We will use data and insight effectively and innovatively to better understand and support our customers' needs.

How we will do it

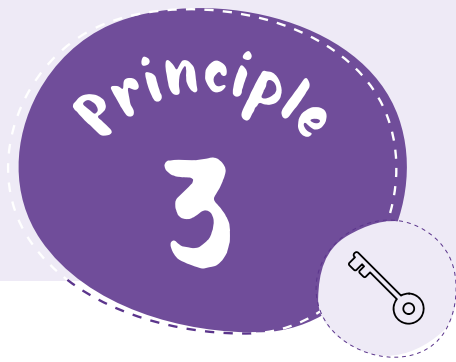
Use information from lots of sources to help us understand who our customers are.

Make sure that we understand the needs of vulnerable people in Oxfordshire.

Listen to our customers to understand how and when they access our services, and what gets in the way.

Use this knowledge to inform improvements, and make sure our services are accessible to everybody that needs them.

Principle
3



Improving customers' access to our services

The rapid increase in new technologies means that customers now engage with services and products in new ways. We are embracing these changes to enhance customers' access to our services to deliver a consistent experience.

Objective

We will ensure that all customers are able to contact the council and access services quickly and easily across a range of channels and receive consistently excellent service.

How we will do it

Have a range of ways for customers to contact us or find information, including digital channels that can be used 24 hours a day.

Work in a more joined-up way so that customers only need to tell us things once.


Make transactions simple and easy.

Make it easier for customers to find information, while making sure that we keep private data safe and protected.

Keep our phone and face to face services, whilst making it easier for customers to find our contact phone numbers.

Be consistent so that all customers receive excellent service.

Principle
4



Designing an excellent customer experience, from beginning to end

We want to ensure that our customers have a great experience, from the first point of contact to when they receive services.

Objective
We will ensure an excellent customer experience from start to finish.

How we will do it

Use what we learn about customers to make sure their needs are at the heart of how we work.

Focus on 'getting it right first time', and where we can't solve things right away, getting all the information needed to help.

Make sure our ways of working are clear, straightforward and don't leave anyone out.

Improve the way our services communicate, including keeping in touch regularly when needed.

Develop resources to help us answer queries at the first point of contact.

Principle 5



Listening to and learning from customer feedback

We want to actively seek feedback from our customers. Whether it's through surveys, reviews, or social media, we encourage them to share their thoughts and where we can improve our customer interactions. As Bill Gates wisely said, "Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning." We value their insights and use them to improve.

Objective

We will commit to learning from the feedback of our customers and resolving their queries quickly and helpfully.

How we will do it

Put in place a new and better way of managing complaints.

Learn from customers' feedback so we can find ways of working that give everyone an excellent customer experience.

Encourage customers to share their experience in a range of different ways.

Work with our customers to design and develop services with them.

Learn from the complaints, comments and compliments we receive so that we understand what is working well and what needs to improve.

How will we know if we've got it right?

Our customers will:

- Tell us and others about their excellent experiences. They will say that our staff listen to them and are empathetic.
- Find it quick and easy to access council services. They will say that they could do what they wanted, when they wanted to do it.
- Feel empowered to tell us about any problems they have and be confident that we will listen and respond.

Our employees will:

- Tell us that delivering a good customer experience is 'just part of the job'.
- Feel empowered to tell us if something stops them delivering a good customer experience and feel able to do something about it.

The data will show:

- Customer satisfaction with services has increased.
- More people are accessing council services in the ways that they told us they wanted to.
- Services are easier for our customers to access and the council can deliver them at good value.
- We receive fewer complaints about customer experience.
- We get regular feedback from lots of customers.

Feedback on this strategy:

We welcome feedback on any part of this strategy. Please email **customer.feedback@oxfordshire.gov.uk** with any comments you may have. We are very grateful to all the customers and employees who have helped contribute to and shape this strategy.

[Find out more in our video.](#)

Alternative formats:

If you require this document in an alternative format, e.g. easy read, large text, audio, Braille, or a community language, please get in touch.