

# Customer Service Strategy

2021-2025



Making Barrow Borough a great place to **live**, **work** and **visit**



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# Our Vision

Our Council Plan sets out our vision and priorities for the next four years. Our Customer Service Strategy will serve the needs of the Council Plan and Growing Forward report ensuring all of our customer service teams are clear on how their role plays a key part in delivering the council's priorities.

Our **Customer Service Strategy** sets out how, over the next four years:

**“ We will put our customers at the heart of everything we do.**

**We will listen to our residents giving them a real voice - a chance to share their experience of their customer journey and from this we will design our services around our customers' needs. ”**

We will keep our Action Plan under review continually reviewing new systems and working practices. We will build on what our customers tell us is working well along with areas they think we can improve upon.

The Council's approach to equalities is also fundamental to the successful delivery of this Strategy in a way which meets our public sector

equalities duty, ensuring we actively seek out an understanding of our customers' needs shaping our services to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics and incorporating this into our overall service design.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken on the Strategy, this will inform its delivery.

## Our Vision and Values

Our vision is for our Borough to be a great place to live, work and visit. We will achieve this by putting residents at the heart of all we do. This is underpinned by the following values and behaviours which will be embedded into this strategy and our customer service offer.

- To focus on our community and provide excellent service for all our customers and colleagues.
- To demonstrate honesty and integrity by doing the right thing, being open and confident to challenge and be challenged.
- To aim high, encouraging creativity and embracing change.
- To be proud and celebrate who we are and what we do.
- To work together to achieve our shared vision and goals.

## Current position and rationale for change

Local authorities face growing demand from residents who want to engage with them at a time which suits them on a channel of their choice. The use of online services 24/7, particularly via mobile devices, has increased hugely.

Rapid changes in digital technology are driving a revolution in the way organisations interact and carry out transactions with their customers.

Economic pressures are also forcing councils to re-organise how they operate. The most cost-effective way is to maximise the use of digital channels and mobile working for service teams.

Improvements to the Barrow Borough Council website will make it easier for customers to engage with us directly but the website is just one element of a broader multi-channel approach.

This document defines the guiding principles which will shape the way we develop our customer contact channels over the next four years. Our goal is to put our customers at the heart of everything we do. Whilst technology enables more channels for interacting with our customers, we understand not everyone wants to access our services this way.

We recognise some of our customers will prefer face-to-face services and support during their customer journey. By tailoring our services around our customers we aim to provide excellent customer care.

## Who is this document for?

This document is aimed at managers, staff, and stakeholders who interact directly or indirectly with the public in their role of delivering services and/or handling transactions. It is particularly important for those involved in planning, decision-making and supporting customer access.

The strategy will encourage and enable services to simplify the way they operate and improve the customer experience.

## Guiding principles

### 1. Fully understand what our customers require

- Review our customer relationship management to improve knowledge of customer needs.

- Use knowledge to continuously improve the way we deliver services.
- Redesign services to be more efficient and effective for residents, visitors and businesses.

### 2. Develop use of digital channels

- Encourage customers and staff to use our website for transactions.
- Promote awareness of digital services.
- Enable services for 24/7 web access and digital delivery.
- Align the website team with customer services.

### 3. Empower customers to self-serve

- Create a single view of the customer using a secure login for services and transactions.
- Allow customers to see the progress and completion of their transactions.
- Develop a virtual customer service centre; integrate front and back office systems.
- Data will be processed in line with the Council's Privacy Notice.

### 4. Support access and independence

- Provide access to the public via our front-facing services.
- Support our customers who prefer a face-to-face service, a smile and a friendly face greeting customers at our new central reception area.
- Enable visiting officers to act as advocates for customers by carrying out online transactions related to their needs.
- Provide Wi-Fi access at our key locations.
- Achieve agreed national standards for website accessibility with easy-to-read options.

### 5. Deliver services in a streamlined way

- Streamline services to focus on what exactly customers require.
- Identify opportunities for staff multi-skilling and joint working with partners.
- Increase the number of queries resolved at first point of contact.
- Integrate digital transactions directly into back office services.
- Ensure consistent information for customers, irrespective of channel.

## Research and analysis

We need to establish a clear understanding of our residents' lifestyles and what exactly they require from services, communications and how they want to make transactions.

We need to know what proportion of our customers use the phone, website, tablet, and other channels. We also need to learn from what is happening in the most advanced local councils.

Information required includes:

- Detailed profile of our area and a demographic breakdown
- Behavioural patterns for different channels eg website, mobile, phone, face-to-face, email and social media
- What happens at Barrow Borough Council now? For example: how many phone calls, emails, website figures, use of online forms (parking, planning etc) and accessing social media
- Figures from our own customer consultation exercises/surveys etc.
- Best practice and current customer experience trends. Understanding vulnerable customers' needs and tailoring services to meet these.
- Evaluation and learnings from partners/local authorities who have reshaped customer services.
- Evaluation of customer complaints in line with our updated Customer Complaints Policy.

Using this information we have to agree the sort of relationship we want to have with our customers and ensure recommendations support our broader Council Plan.

## Objectives

- To improve customer satisfaction.
- To make service delivery more effective and efficient.
- To enhance access to services for customers 24/7.
- To support our vulnerable customers who need face-to-face service.
- To make it easier for customers to pay us for services.
- To encourage residents use of the most cost-effective digital channels.
- To establish a 'single view' of each customer by streamlining our IT systems.
- To increase customer (community) engagement.
- To increase customer engagement via our social media.

## Conclusions

Major technological and culture change is required to ensure Barrow Borough Council continues to fulfil its core remit of providing prompt and cost-effective services for its residents.

We must understand clearly the needs of our residents and deliver what they require effectively, using the channel of their choice.

While encouraging the use of digital communications we must recognise, for some years yet, many of our customers will continue to use traditional methods such as the telephone and there will always be a requirement for face-to-face personal contact offering support and assistance via our new central reception point.

We need to plan our corporate reception area and how this will operate. Establishing a 'single view' of customers will improve efficiency and free up resources which can be re-invested to provide better services.

Having a 'single customer account' will empower residents to self-serve and to have real-time access to essential information. It will also enable staff to target communication and resources in a much smarter way.

Making better use of the land and property gazetteer (LLPG) and GIS systems will allow property information to be more closely linked.

Expanding the use of mobile working will enable our staff to become more flexible and agile. We will increase our visual presence in the community and build stronger relationships with residents and ward councillors.

Achieving this cultural and technological change will ensure excellent customer service is at the forefront of everything we deliver and it will put our Council at the heart of its local community. This is in line with our 'Vision and Values' within our Council Plan.

Making more information available online and giving customers the ability to receive bills and notifications electronically will generate significant savings in stationery, printing and postage costs.

Establish ownership of Customer requests to enable the owner to influence the service provider

The creation of a performance management dashboard looking across all service areas will identify hotspots and enable better deployment of resources.

Attached to the Strategy will be an Action Plan developed with managers across the Council. The Action Plan will be reviewed over the four years of the Strategy to continually develop our Customer Service.