

# Customer Services Strategy

2015—2020

Blackpool Council



# Customer Services Strategy

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## ABOUT BLACKPOOL & OUR CUSTOMERS

Blackpool is a British institution, and a global phenomenon – the world’s first mass market seaside resort, with a proud heritage stretching back over 150 years.

More than two thirds of Britons have visited Blackpool, and with 17 million visits a year from all corners of the country, we’re still amongst the most popular destinations. Despite people having more leisure and holiday options than ever, around 24,000 Blackpool jobs still rely directly on tourism – the most of any seaside destination – and we enjoy the greatest concentration of leisure attractions outside London.

It’s easy to criticise Blackpool. Being unique, our town and attitude aren’t always to everyone’s taste. The very thing that makes us what we are – a town built for pleasure and entertainment - can feel constraining, and sometimes visitors abuse our hospitality. We need to final a way of setting out our expectations of what behaviour we will and won’t tolerate, just as we did in the 50’s and 60’s. Together, we can recreate that feeling that Blackpool is Back as the best seaside resort in the UK

Being the biggest and the brightest isn’t without its challenges. We’ve got major social and health issues to deal with, whilst needing to develop and innovate so our town meets the changing desires of modern day audiences. Equally, we need to take advantage of other opportunities opening up - in fields like energy generation - with the same vigour our predecessors had when building iconic attractions such as the Winter Gardens, the Tower and Tower Buildings, the Pleasure Beach, and of course the true one-off that is the Blackpool Illuminations.

We have more than our fair share of challenges. With high levels of deprivation, not to mention low wage levels, poor life expectancy, poor quality housing stock and population mobility, we can’t make the move to deliver more of our services online as quickly as other places. Figures show that our residents are less likely to have access to the internet at home, with some relying on our libraries to get access. This strategy shifts our approach to customer services towards an online model, whilst remaining careful not to leave anyone behind.

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It is essential that every one of us working for the Council, regardless of our role, remember at all times that we are a **customer service organisation**. The Council's most recent satisfaction survey showed that 52% of people are satisfied with how the Council runs things, whilst 49% rated the service they received when contacting the Council as "good" or better. This isn't untypical of deprived areas, although with service satisfaction figures coming in much higher, we know that this strategy can improve on this significantly in the future.

It is the responsibility of us all to focus our efforts on creating an environment that gives residents and customers the information they need to be able to do what they need to do in the most efficient and effective way. We need to resolve customer/resident issues and problems by making it easier for people to access the help and support they need in the most appropriate way. Customer service is not only about accessing services, digital service delivery and the customer service centre: it is about what all of us do, every day, and must be a priority for us all.

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## CUSTOMER SERVICES VISION

This strategy sets out how we will provide a responsive, flexible, accessible and consistent service to our residents and customers.

We want the residents and visitors of Blackpool to know we care about their requests and how they feel they've been treated. To do this, we will make sure that:

- **Every interaction with residents and customers will be the very best experience we can make it.** We will continuously improve our staff performance, the tools we use and the processes for each area of service delivery so we improve satisfaction and drive out inefficiencies
- **Where possible, every request or issue will be resolved at first point of contact** by systems and staff capable, empowered and supported
- **Residents and customers will be able to access a large number of services and monitor progress 24/7** via excellent internet facilities and by service updates sent to them
- **We encourage the use of internet and telephone services** but we will ensure other contact and service channels for residents and customers are also of a high standard and available to all
- **We measure ourselves better** so we can improve our understanding of how services are performing, keep attuned to and up to date with resident and customer needs to take action promptly
- **We make sure Councillors, as the democratic representatives of residents, have access to information** about service delivery so we can work together to focus on needs

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## VALUES

Our values underpin our Customer Services Vision and make us **accountable** for delivering on the promises we make, making us take responsibility for our actions. It's important to us that we're **compassionate** – caring and understanding, and willing to try and assist people even if their problem can't be solved by one of our services. We take pride in delivering **quality** services that are focused on supporting people to become more self-reliant and able to enjoy independence. We want everyone to act with integrity, being **trustworthy** in all our dealings with people and open about the decisions we make. Finally, our values mean that we're **fair** to people and treat everyone with dignity and respect.

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## PRINCIPLES

We will follow a core set of principles in our approach to customer services.

We will:

- Always try and learn from the experiences of people using our services (residents, customers, visitors and businesses)
- Make their problem our problem, and make our starting position to take action
- Always looking to change and improve
- Be proud of what we do well
- Offer support for those who need to become more able to help themselves

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## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The Council's **relationship with residents and customers** coupled with their experience when dealing with us is very important. If service delivery is right, we will be assured support and loyalty, whilst also delivering value to them as council tax payers.

Increased internet use across Blackpool and general expectations of accessing public services online, show that **consumer habits are changing**. They expect to be able to access services and information at a time and place which suits them. It is important that as a Council we keep up to date with consumer trends and offer a choice of channels for residents and customers to use.

**Monitoring the cost of delivering services** is also important. We need to make sure that we are serving our residents and customers in the most cost efficient way.

These changes mean we should always be taking a fresh look to confirm how we serve our residents, customers and communities.

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## WHO ARE OUR RESIDENTS AND CUSTOMERS?

We define 'customers' as residents, service users, businesses, towns and parishes and visitors to Blackpool who use the services we provide; including pupils, parents and carers served by our schools.

Our customers have varying types of contact with us, some of these are:

- **Statutory:** e.g. a requirement to keep our vulnerable adults and children safe
- **Transactions:** e.g. registering a birth, reporting a problem or paying a bill
- **Interactions:** e.g. obtaining advice, public consultations
- **Information provision:** e.g. leaflets, web pages, promotional information
- **Other Council Departments:** e.g. service departments using assets

We will look to create the right service channels which fit the needs of our residents. To do this, we will make use of customer insight tools like surveys and household profiles to ensure that we're communicating with people in the right way and designing our services around their needs.

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## WHERE ARE WE NOW: DELIVERY CHANNELS

- **Face to face services:** we receive around 1,750 visitors to our main office in Corporation Street every month; 65% of these are dealt with at the corporate services centre, but the remainder are redirected to other areas within the Council. The actual figure of unique visitors, is likely to be lower. We expect this number to decline as people increasingly use other channels, but we realise this is still a very important channel.
- **Telephone:** we receive around 16,000 calls to our Customer Service Centre every month and this is a popular way of contacting the Council. We aim to deal with customers as efficiently as possible, but we are not always able to completely deal with everything on the first call, and where this is possible, we would like to. We expect telephone enquiries will continue to be important over the coming years but may decline if internet services are developed, as these are available 24/7 and growing more popular.
- **Internet:** Making our digital services as simple as possible *really* matters. It needs to be so good people actively *prefer* it to offline alternatives, so much so that they recommend it to friends and family who are not yet online. we offer many services over the internet. However we recognise that we could offer more using this route, as it is convenient and useful for a growing number of people. Some visitors to our site want to find out information, and some want to transact. At the moment we do not have the ability for customer to resolve every common matter or request by just one visit to the website and in this way our services could be better.
- **E-mail, social media and text messages:** we receive a small number of customer requests through Twitter, and Facebook and a larger number through e-mail. Those we do receive cannot be processed as easily as forms on the website as we do not always get all of the information we need to respond to the request but we recognise this is a likely route through which some people will contact us. Text messages, e-mail and Facebook are excellent ways of us getting information to residents and customers in some circumstances so they do not need to ask for that information.
- **Mobile Technology:** is increasingly important and we recognise our internet site does not display well on smartphones and other small screens. We will work with our service provider to improve mobile access and develop a Council App to improve accessibility and streamlined service choices.

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## WHERE ARE WE NOW: TRENDS

Use of the internet and use of mobile technology are the fastest growing trends in customer service. According to the Office of National Statistics, the highest internet users are between the ages of 16 and 44, (97-98%) with only a reduced number, (between 80-90%) over the age of 44.

Using smart phones to connect to the internet is an increasing trend. A recent digital survey commissioned by the Cabinet Office showed that 56% of those surveyed owned a smart phone, and 54% of those used it to connect to the internet.

*Recently we gave our customers an option to use the 'bulky matters' service on line and approximately 40% of the demand came in through that route within 16 weeks. We recognise times are changing and we can adapt and improve, by developing popular ways of accessing services better.*

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## OUR APPROACH TO CHANGE

The process of developing and implementing this strategy will be guided by our understanding of customer needs. We will develop detailed understanding of their preferences and their views across all of our services, by promoting a culture where we continually measure and share information.

Our approach to this will focus on 4 important areas:

- **Understanding the profile of customers:** age, preference, ability to access services and other factors
- **Understanding our customer metrics:** What services we are providing including volumes, when are we providing them, how are we providing them and where we are providing them
- **Delivery channels:** The effectiveness of current delivery channels that are available to use, as well as those that may be available in future
- **Internal and external changes :** We will remain flexible to possible changes that may have an impact on service provision and delivery such as changes in legislation, and Government directives

We also recognise that much of our work is linked to that of our partners in areas like health and policing. We and our partners aspire to deliver high quality services for our customers. It is imperative that we work together across our organisations so that customers experience seamless, high quality public services irrespective of who is delivering them.

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## KEY PRINCIPLES WE WILL FOLLOW

### Customer

- Services tailored around customer groups and needs
- Giving customers a choice of contact channels
- Understanding more about our customers - Building customer insight
- Offering joined up services with partners wherever possible
- Giving customers the ability to serve themselves quickly 24/7
- Making sure those without internet access not disadvantaged

### Business Processes

- Maximising first time resolution for our customers
- Simplifying and standardising our internal processes — 'one and done'
- Sharing information more effectively across the organisation and with our partners to improve customer services
- Designing services for web use that are also accessible by other channels

### Technology

- Having great solutions that are easy to use
- Using information to report on areas so that we can make improvements now, and inform strategic planning for the future
- Using reporting to quickly spot and correct poor service

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## Cost effective

- Providing cost effective access to services
- Realistic Service Standards linked to available resources

## Learning and Growth

- Recruiting and developing people who are 'fanatical' about providing excellent customer service
- Little steps
- Building staff capacity, capability & resilience to offer seamless services during disasters or emergencies
- Being led by Customer Insight - our knowledge
- Integrating with other improvement strategies across the Council
- Ensuring continuous and performance improvement
- Exploiting and optimising the technology we have in accordance with the business need

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## THE OUTCOMES WE WILL SEE

- More enquiries resolved on first contact
- Improved access to services
- More services available 24/7 on line
- Customer services exceeds expectations
- Councillors will play a key part in customer service
- We are all better informed about customers and services
- Improved responses to customer comments and feedback
- Better use of council resources by improving and streamlining processes
- Reduction in “chasing” and repeat calls from customers
- Reduction in requests for services which are not provided by the Council

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## HOW WE WILL SHARE THE WORK AND GO ABOUT THE TASK

The work in delivering this strategy involves everyone across the Council, and together as **one team**, we will work hard to make sure that the outcomes are seen as a result.

Whilst everyone has a part to play, there will be a **programme of work**, and **robust governance**, that will oversee and support it. Staff will be pivotal to this and will be heavily involved in the detailed service reviews, aligned with the scheduled programme of work.

There will be **project delivery teams**, with an **overarching programme board**, whose members are senior contributors. Input will also be sought from our Councillors.

There are people, process and technology implications in delivering on this plan. We will align all activities, and work with other project teams, to go about tasks;

An action plan will be managed by the Customer Services Strategy Group. This plan will change from time to time and its delivery will be overseen by the Council's Leadership Team.

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## HOW WILL WE MEASURE

We will use a wide range of ways to measure our achievements:

- Each individual transaction will be measured and analysed
- Customer satisfaction surveys gathered across all services if transactional measurement is inadequate
- Follow up calls with customers after they have transacted / interacted with the Council
- Detailed information gathered through customer contact centre systems
- Website reporting information including online transactions completed
- Creating small work groups of all the staff involved within a transaction set, to analyse the transaction data, set improvement programmes and propose countermeasures to failure modes
- Customer consultations
- Staff consultations
- Monitoring customer complaints and compliments
- Research and benchmarking against other local authorities
- Setting and realigning realistic service standards to reflect the actual capabilities of available resources.

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## WHAT WILL WE MEASURE

There are 5 key areas that we will continually measure to make sure that we are continually *improving the customer experience*:

- **Customer Access** – our services can be accessed easily and are clear, simple and easy to use.
- **Timeliness** – we respond quickly to the initial customer contact and deal with it at first point of contact if possible without passing it on between staff
- **Information** - the information given out to customers is accurate, fit for purpose and they are kept informed about progress
- **Skills and ability** - staff are continually developing and improving their customer service skills
- **Staff attitude** - staff are friendly, polite and empathetic to customers' needs

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## TIMESCALES

Whilst this is a 5 year strategy, there will be significant delivery in the first 2 years. Throughout the programme we will work to change our culture and mind-sets around how we can continually improve our service delivery.

Strategy	Adopted by May 2016
Standards and culture	Defining standards and approach – September 2016 Core Values Training – January 2017 – December 2018
Implementation Plans	September 2016 – February 2018
Channel Shift	February 2015 – ongoing
Measuring effectiveness	December 2016 - ongoing