



From mountain to sea

Customer Service Strategy

December 2023

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Introduction

Customer service is of utmost importance as it holds great value for our organisation, communities, and customers. It cuts across all services and influences how customers experience Council services at all levels.

Customer service is the responsibility of all employees within an organisation. Regardless of their specific roles or departments, every employee plays a crucial role in delivering a positive customer experience. Whether they are directly interacting with customers or not, every action and decision can impact the overall perception of the organisation and its service delivery.

By recognising that customer service is a shared responsibility, employees become more invested in the organisation's success and in meeting customer needs. When all team members prioritise excellent customer service, it promotes a customer-centric culture that resonates throughout the organisation.

The Council is committed to delivering top quality customer service, across all services, to all residents and businesses ensuring customers can contact us in a way, and at a time, convenient to them. Our aim is to provide efficient and effective services meeting the needs and expectations of our customers. By prioritising customer satisfaction, we aim to build trust, foster positive relationships and enhance the overall experience of engaging with Aberdeenshire Council.

Aberdeenshire Council's Customer Service Strategy details how we plan to deliver customer service across the organisation, in line with our Customer Service Charter.

The Strategy is underpinned by a set of principles to support us in achieving the Customer Service Vision. We want to ensure we continue to improve service delivery, build resilience, and increase capacity for customer enquiries and to support our more vulnerable citizens. This document is written in alignment with our Council Plan and Digital Strategy to ensure a cohesive approach to service delivery.

This Strategy recognises the ongoing transformational change via the Future Aberdeenshire programme, which will influence operations and service delivery, presenting both opportunities and challenges that will shape customer service as it progresses.

Customer Services regularly collects feedback from customers, which confirms their preference for flexible contact options. On contacting us, customer priorities are: -

- Resolve issues on first contact
- Keep them informed of progress
- Provide clear timescales for requests
- Complete requests within timescales provided
- Treat them fairly and listen to their concerns

Customer Service Vision

Customer service you can trust.

Our Principles

Our Customer Service Strategy will put customers at the heart of everything we do, delivering services that meet customers' needs. Our principles underpin our approach and form the basis upon which our customer service delivery decisions should be made.

1 Customer-focused

Service delivery designed around the needs of the customer. Ensuring we do what we say we will do, when we said we would do it and explaining when we can't.

Giving customers choice in the way they contact us and resolving queries at the first point of contact, wherever possible, recognising and considering the diversity of our customer base.

2 Digitally Enabled

Using technology effectively to improve efficiency, accessibility, and customer experiences.

3 Open and transparent

Being clear about what we can deliver, timescales for delivery and keeping customers informed of progress.

4 Predictable/Reliable

Ensuring we do what we say we will do, within specified timescales.

5 Accountable

Taking responsibility for our actions and quickly resolving issues that arise.

6 Responsive

Reacting quickly, acknowledging customer requests and dealing with them effectively.

7 Building Trust

Upholding commitments, keeping our promises and acting with integrity.

Transforming Services

Incorporating a transformative approach to service delivery is essential to our Customer Service Strategy. There is a need to understand why we deliver services the way we do, what works well and what can be improved.

In partnership with customers and other services, we will review existing customer processes as part of the organisational Transformation Programme, aiming to improve service delivery to meet customer needs. This will be a rolling programme of improvement which is evidence-driven, based on customer feedback. Efficient processes will resolve queries on the first contact, reducing the need for customers to contact us again. Keeping customers informed of progress plays a vital role in achieving this goal.

Digital improvement continues to be a critical element in developing service delivery models to support how, and when, our customers want to interact with us. Through innovative solutions and a customer-centric approach, we'll gain customer trust, and reduce repeat contacts for the same queries. We want to continue to improve, seek

Appendix 1

customer feedback, and build a stronger, resilient customer service framework to increase capacity to meet rising customer demand.

Reviewing current systems used and ensuring a holistic view of the customer journey is paramount for delivering exceptional customer service. Centralising customer data, where possible, and assigning tasks efficiently can minimise query duplication and ensure timely responses. Adhering to response deadlines is crucial to reduce repeat customer contacts, emphasising the importance of managing queries effectively.

Additionally, the strategy will prioritise redesigning our services to strengthen community resilience and offer customer support through our various contact channels.

We will continue to engage with our customers to ensure service delivery meets their needs. This Strategy should be fluid and adaptable, aligned with the Council Plan, Transformation Programme and Digital Strategy.

Our Strategy will:-

- Make it easier for customers to access the services they need in a way and at a time that suits them;
- Use technology where appropriate to make our service delivery better for customers;
- Make it easier for customers to access information online;
- Support us to train our staff to better help our customers at the first point of contact;
- Help us to work with customers to build the services they want and need.

Customer Contact Service Delivery

Customer service delivery includes various contact channels to accommodate different communication preferences and provide seamless support. By offering a variety of contact channels, we continue to support customer preferences, improve accessibility and provide a more satisfying customer service experience.

As mounting financial pressures impact the public sector, it becomes crucial to consistently review and innovate our customer service channels. The available options should align with customer demand, while maintaining a strong focus on delivering the best possible customer service experience throughout all customer service journeys. Embracing innovation and adapting to changing needs will enable us to optimise resources effectively and ensure that our customers continue to receive exceptional service and support. Face-to-face and telephone options are expensive to deliver. To reduce costs, we must consider technology-driven self-service alternatives. Although we will continue to offer telephone and face-to-face options, it is likely their utilisation will gradually reduce over time.

Telephony

The organisation currently provides various telephony service delivery options. Each month, approximately 55,000 external calls are made to all Council locations, which include schools, care homes, sheltered housing complexes, community centres and corporate teams, among others. However, only about 16,000 of these calls are managed by Customer Services. This situation makes it challenging to ensure consistency in call handling and accurately evaluate the quality of these interactions.

Appendix 1

Our goal is to provide centralised telephony across all Council services, wherever this is appropriate. We will also determine if it is appropriate to rationalise the number of existing telephone lines, to make things simpler for customers to contact us.

Providing a centralised customer service telephony streamlines communication, providing a single point of contact for residents' enquiries, concerns and support needs. We can efficiently resolve multiple queries and ensure a consistent and effective customer experience. This approach improves resource allocation and greater satisfaction among residents by delivering prompt and reliable assistance.

Working collaboratively with customers and other services, we will identify how best to deliver an effective first point of contact telephony service for better customer service outcomes.

Face-to-Face

Customers can access council services conveniently from multiple locations. Our commitment is to provide responsive assistance to all customer queries, regardless of the location they choose to visit. In collaboration with the Transformation Programme, we will use service design to guarantee the delivery of necessary services in the right locations.

To achieve this, we will review the current face-to-face provision across Aberdeenshire and collaborate with other services to determine the most suitable solutions, and locations, for service delivery within individual communities. The adoption of a community hub approach will offer a more comprehensive range of support and facilities to address the diverse needs and interests of residents in local areas. This will provide additional opportunities for partnership working in specific locations.

Our decisions will be demand-led, considering the specific requirements and needs of each place. By working together, we aim to ensure that customer service remains efficient and accessible across all areas.

Online/Mobile App Access

Aberdeenshire Council offers customers the opportunity to contact us via our website or mobile app. Digital access enables customers to access assistance, information, and solutions in a way and at a time, that suits them.

Offering online access enhances accessibility, provides faster response times, and accommodates the preferences of individuals, contributing to a more satisfying customer experience.

Online processes for customers need to be seamless, encompassing the entire customer journey, from initial engagement to final transaction or service delivery, without assistance or repeat contact. We aim to encourage customers to transact online confidently, ensuring they receive immediate outcomes or a clear status update throughout the transaction. By doing so, we remove the need for them to chase their enquiries through calls or visits to service points.

Working with customers and other services, we will assess processes that contribute to the customer journey, enhance areas where current processes do not align with customer needs, and prioritise the implementation of new online services based on customer demand. Online processes need to ensure the customer is at the heart of what we do and transactions are quick and simple to complete.

First Point of Contact Resolution

First point of contact resolution is a metric used to measure the percentage of customer enquiries or issues that are resolved during the initial interaction with customer service representatives, without the need for the customer to follow up or make subsequent contacts.

A high first point of contact resolution rate indicates efficient and effective customer service, as customers' needs are addressed and resolved in a single interaction, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction and reduced operational costs for the organisation.

To determine what our customers want as first point of contact resolution, we will prioritise collecting feedback from them through surveys, feedback forms, or customer interactions. Listening to their preferences, understanding their needs, and analysing common enquiries or issues will provide valuable insights into the most desired and effective resolution methods.

By actively engaging with our customers and other services, we can align our first point of contact resolution strategies with their expectations and continuously improve our customer service experience.

Measuring Outcomes

The success of our Customer Service Strategy will be measured by its ability to deliver excellent customer experiences, evident through positive customer satisfaction surveys, reduced repeat contacts, and a decrease in customer complaints. By analysing the strategy's impact, we will identify areas for improvement and ensure we consistently meet customer needs.