

Customer care strategy

2016



“ We will put the needs of our customers at the heart of everything we do ”

January 2016

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Foreword

In our Council Plan, we make the promise that we will put the needs of our customers at the heart of what we do and listen to what they say, treating people fairly and without bias. This Customer Care Strategy is an important step to making this a reality.

Excellent customer service is part of everyone’s role – and not just our Customer Services team. To reflect this we are introducing a set of Customer Care Standards, which sets out how we will approach the way we interact with our customers over the different contact methods. We want to make sure that when our customers contact us, we are helping them get what they need in that first contact or as few as possible, and they are regularly updated along the way.

At the same time, we must support our emerging Digital Strategy to encourage customers to do more general tasks online so that our staff can concentrate on helping customers with more complicated queries.

In addition, we are also placing an emphasis on the importance of gathering customer feedback to help us shape future service delivery – something which we haven’t previously done.



I look forward to seeing this strategy being implemented and welcome the positive outcomes that Tewkesbury Borough’s customers will receive through improved customer service.

Cllr Mike Dean
Lead Member for Customer Focus

Introduction

Our Customer Care Strategy details how we plan to deliver our customer care and outlines the organisational commitments we will make to our customers.

In addition, our action plan (at appendix 1) shows where we want to be, and explains how we will monitor and report our progress in achieving these pledges. As part of our commitment to customer care, we will encourage the adoption of common customer care standards across the council.

Why do we need a strategy?

We want to provide the best possible service to all of our customers, particularly in terms of resolving queries at the first point of contact. We recognise how important first impressions are, and how vital it is to get things right from the start.

Every time a customer contacts us, we must remember that the way they are treated, the standard of customer care they receive and the quality of the outcome all influence their opinion of us.

Given the wider context local government sits in and the changing nature of the way in which people interact with us, we sit within a constantly changing environment. We must be able to respond to the changing needs and circumstances of our customers, while recognising customers who wish to contact us using traditional methods. We must be able to recognise and embrace any new opportunities for our customers and ourselves as they arise.

Who are our customers?

Everyone who lives, works, learns, visits and does business in Tewkesbury Borough is a potential customer of Tewkesbury Borough Council.

We know that:

- According to the Mid 2014 Population Estimates, our population is made up of people aged:
 - 0 to 19 = 19,010
 - 20 to 64 = 48,207
 - 65 to 84 = 16,040
 - Over 85 = 2,527
- Tewkesbury Borough Council now serves a population of 85,784.
- 94 per cent of our population is white British/Scottish/Northern Irish/English (Census 2011).
- 16.5 per cent of population has a disability which limits day-to-day activity (Census 2011).
- The borough’s population has risen in recent years and is predicted to rise significantly in the next 25 years.
- There are more than 3650 companies with a registered address in Tewkesbury Borough.
- Tewkesbury Borough attracts more than 1.5m visitors each year – bringing in £96m spend.

We need to make sure that the council is able to support all our customers so that we can provide an excellent customer experience, whatever their needs.

What are our customers telling us?

We want to provide the best possible service to all our customers. They are the best people to tell us:

- How we are doing.
- What we can do to improve a service.
- What problems they have experienced - this allows us, where appropriate, to apologise, put it right and stop it from happening again.

In developing this strategy we have gained customer feedback from our 2013/14 Residents’ Satisfaction Survey to make sure customers’ views contribute to the direction we will take.

The Residents’ Satisfaction Survey, which we carried out over the summer in 2013, revealed some very positive results including that:

- 80 per cent of people are happy with the way we run things – compared to 52 per cent in 2008.
- 91 per cent of people believe Tewkesbury Borough is a good place to live – compared to 86 per cent in 2008.
- The council is top performing when compared with results nationally, which for satisfaction with the area lived in is 82 per cent and for satisfaction with the local council is 70 per cent.
- 79 per cent of people felt very or fairly well informed by Tewkesbury Borough Council about the services and benefits we provide.
- As well as providing information on general levels of satisfaction, the survey also revealed that satisfaction with specific services has improved overall, including recycling and refuse collection, and keeping public land

clear of litter and refuse. This information was disseminated to services so improvements from our residents’ feedback could be made where possible.

The survey, which is anticipated to be carried out again in spring 2016, was conducted via postal questionnaires using a sample of 3000 addresses. Nearly 700 questionnaires were returned, which provided the council with statistical assurance that the responses were representative of those that would be given by the resident population of Tewkesbury Borough.

For a full breakdown of the survey’s results, please visit www.tewkesbury.gov.uk/satisfactionsurvey

What do we need to do?

Our Council Plan highlights our value that we will always put our customers first. We make the promise that we will put the needs of our customers at the heart of what we do and listen to what they say, treating people fairly and without bias. Supporting our values we also have an ethos that whatever we do will be ‘better for customers, better for business’.

To ensure we achieve this, our Customer Care Strategy aims to:

- Introduce a set of customer service standards for staff to follow.
- Make it easier, simpler and more convenient for customers to interact with us when requiring a service.
- Use feedback from our residents’ survey to help shape future service delivery.

- Make sure our staff are equipped with the skills to deliver high quality customer service.
- Promote approaches to delivering services that are more convenient for customers and less expensive to deliver for the council.
- In line with our emerging digital strategy, utilise technology to manage and serve our customers’ changing access needs better.
- Work with our partners in the Public Services Centre to ensure our customers’ experience a seamless and worthwhile experience when visiting the offices.

Customer experience

It should be a priority for all staff to ensure that we make our customers’ experience a good one.

We have developed customer standards that support the council’s values to create satisfied customers, both internally and externally. These standards cover all our contact approaches including the internet, email, telephone, letter, and reception desk. Our standards will be made public, so that our customers are aware of the commitments we are making.

A separate digital strategy details our online approach to make accessing services more convenient for customers and less expensive for us. Over time we expect this to significantly improve customer experience.

Customer Services team

We also have a dedicated Customer Services team, which operates primarily as our front of house – directing our customers to the correct point of contact. The team also provides customer service at our Advice and Information Centres across the borough, as well as being the main customer contact for Ubico.

The Customer Services team has undergone significant changes in recent months, following a service review carried out in 2015/16.

Prior to the review, the service was recognised as a welcoming service, valued by customers with a friendly ‘can-do’ attitude from officers. The team however was isolated from the rest of the council, lacked clarity on its vision for the service and over its demand/performance data.

Now the review is complete, the structure of the team has been aligned to meet the current demand placed upon it. The team is now set up to meet the concept of a ‘front of house, meet and greet’ including the main point of contact for all Ubico-related enquiries. The team provides information and advice for each different council service and provides access for thousands of different contacts via telephone, online and face-to-face points.

Customer care standards

The customer services standards, which are being introduced as part of this strategy, detail what our customers can expect from their experience with the council.

What customers can expect from us

- We will provide accurate and clear information in response to your enquiries.
- We will be polite, friendly and helpful at all times.
- We will use plain English and will arrange for a translator if required.
- We will be open and honest about what we can or cannot deliver.
- If you need special help we will try to make arrangements that meet your needs.
- We aim to get it right first time, and where this isn’t possible we will ensure that we will keep you updated as we look into your enquiry.

When you phone us

- Our aim is to answer your phone call as quickly as possible during our opening office hours Monday to Friday.
- If we need to transfer your call, we will pass on your details so you don’t have to repeat yourself.
- We will keep our voicemail messages informative and up-to-date so you know when you will get a response, and we will offer an alternative number if your call is very urgent.
- If the employee is on leave, the voicemail message will inform you when he/she will return and will provide an alternative number for you to call.

When you email us

- We will deal with your email as soon as possible.
- We will send a full reply within ten working days or an explanation of any delays with a new date for a full reply
- If the employee you email is away you will receive an automatic reply giving their return date, and the name and number of an alternative contact.

When you send a letter

- We will respond to enquiries made by letter within 10 working days. In most cases this will be a full response but if the issue will take longer to consider or resolve we will tell you.
- The reply will give the name, title, department, telephone number and work address of the person dealing with your query.

When you visit us in person

- Our offices will be clean, tidy and accessible to all customers.
- We will see you as quickly as possible – within five minutes of you arriving - but if there is a delay we will keep you updated and provide an explanation.
- We will regularly review information in receptions to ensure it is up to date.

When you make an enquiry online

- We will ensure information contained on our website is accurate and up-to-date.
- You will receive a response to your enquiry within 10 working days. In most cases this will be a full response but if the issue will take longer to consider or resolve we will tell you.

When you make a formal complaint

- All complaints are treated with respect and in confidence.
- We will acknowledge your complaint within two working days.
- We will provide a full response within 10 working days.

Delivery of customer care

We want to build upon our achievements in delivering quality customer care, and make sure that we support our staff in providing the best possible experience for our customers.







Our commitment through this strategy is to have a ‘can-do’ attitude and support customers by going the extra mile for them. This will be achieved by providing the customer with an efficient service, delivered by welcoming, knowledgeable and professional staff.

To help us achieve this commitment, this strategy is supported by an annual action plan, which details how we will achieve our commitments to customer care. Progress on the action plan, and any new actions, will be reported each year to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Customer care strategy action plan 2016/17

The following actions will be completed by April 2017





Appendix one

Action	Description	Responsible officer	current status	Comment
To introduce a set of customer care standards across the council.	To work with staff and councillors to adopt a set of customer care standards, so that our customers receive a consistent service from the council. This will include appropriate promotion of the standards, including posters, online and in our Council Plan.	Policy and communications manager		Once this strategy has been adopted, the standards will be promoted internally and externally.
To provide customer service training to all services across the council.	To ensure staff are trained to understand the importance of customer service, and how to deliver quality customer care.	Policy and communications manager		This work has not yet started - anticipated start date of July 2016
To support the development of a Digital Strategy.	Work with the Policy and Communications team to ensure that quality customer care is a priority within the Digital Strategy. To promote digital methods as a first option to support the Digital Strategy.	Policy and communications manager Customer services team leader		Work has started on this, and quality customer care will be an important feature throughout the strategy.
To support the development of an integrated reception area for the Public Services Centre, which focuses on delivering quality customer care.	As the Public Services Centre develops, our front of house is likely to evolve. It is important that this area has a focus on delivering quality customer care.	Policy and communications manager Customer services team leader		
To review the effectiveness of the Advice and Information Centre buildings	To carry out a review the effectiveness of the AICs and decide whether the buildings they are located within are the most suitable.	Policy and communications manager		Work has not started on this yet - anticipated start date of March 2016.
To carry out a residents' satisfaction survey in 2016/17 and use the feedback to improve future service delivery.	Our last satisfaction survey was carried out in 2013/14. The council made a commitment to carry out a survey every two years so that we understand what our customers think of us. This was also picked up as being an important piece of work within the peer review report.	Policy and communications manager Corporate services officer		A report will go to Executive Committee for a decision on whether to continue to carry out a residents' satisfaction survey.




Customer care strategy action plan 2016/17

The following actions will be completed by April 2017

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To review customer feedback systems to ensure there is a consistent and approach and feedback is acted upon.	This is an important action from the Peer Review, and will allow us to ensure we are putting our customers' views and feedback into shaping future service delivery.	Policy and communications manager Corporate services officer		Work has not started on this yet but it is anticipated to start in March 2016.
To support the Customer Services team to complete Level 3 NVOs in customer service.	To encourage all members of the customer services team to undertake an NVO of customer services. This will help us to ensure our team is trained to a high level in this area.	Customer services team leader		Members of the team are currently completing their NVOs.
To introduce a virtual customer forum to gain feedback on various issues, including emerging strategies and policies.	A virtual customer forum would allow us to gather the views of customers when we need it – for example when we are developing a strategy which would have a direct impact on our customers.	Communications and policy manager		An article encouraging members of the public to sign up to the virtual forum will be included in Tewkesbury Borough News spring edition.
To develop a new complaints framework	Review our system and plan how we can run this more effectively – both for the council and for the customer.	Programme officer		The new complaints framework will be introduced in March 2016.

Current status key

-  Work has not started yet
-  Work has started and is progressing
-  Work is on track for completion before April 2016

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