

Customer Service Strategy 2013-2018

Version 5

FINAL

4th October 2013

CONTENTS

Key Messages/ Executive Summary.....	3
1 Introduction	4
2 Vision.....	5
3 What is good customer service to us?.....	5
4 Corporate Context	5
5 Where do we want to be?	6
6 Monitoring and Evaluation	8
7 Risks	8
Customer Service Strategy Action Plan 2013-18	9

Executive Summary

Huntingdonshire District Council will place customers at the heart of every service activity especially in respect of:

- The role the Council plays in the community and
- Performing as efficiently and effectively as possible.

This will ensure that the Council adopts a more proactive financial stance whilst continuing to provide essential services to the residents of Huntingdonshire. In other words this will make better use of the taxpayer's pound.

The lynchpin of the Strategy is to adopt a more constructive and realistic approach in the provision of good customer service. It aims to challenge traditional ideas and will make the case that this ideology can be delivered without significant additional cost, and will deliver efficiency savings.

Some of the key themes/ deliverables of this strategy are (further information is within Annexe 3):

- **Commitment to understand our customers better** (customer insight) so that the council is better placed to provide the right services to customers at the right time. (See Annexe 1).
- **The Customer Service Delivery Model** which shows how Huntingdonshire District Council plans to deliver services to the public. It effectively depicts that for a majority of customer enquiries will be routed through self service channels (mainly the website). As the transactions become increasingly complex, they will be suited to the telephone, then face to face at one of the customer service centres and finally at the resident's home.
- **Reaffirming that our staff are key** to delivering the level of service we aspire to achieve. Enabling them and empowering them to resolve customers' enquiries will improve first time resolution rates and will also improve morale.
- **Working together** as an authority to re-design processes with the customer in mind and bringing services together in order to think long term about single points of contact for public services.

For the Strategy to succeed, the Council's management, officers and members must commit to deliver the changes outlined in this document. We will all need to work in unison if the essential services are to be maintained and improved upon.

One of the most important elements of the strategy is Channel Migration (Annexe 4). This can be defined as the migrating of customers to more effective/less costly mechanisms for contacting the Council. The rising use of technology in the UK means that customers are now expecting to contact and interact with organisations through self-service channels (e.g. the website). This shift to self-service reflects the change in customer demand as more of them conduct their business on line. This service will be available 24/7 and can be conducted in the customer's own time. It is a fact that once established, self-service channels cost the council less money per contact and therefore efficiencies can be gained through migrating volumes of customers to these channels for appropriate transactions. A comprehensive breakdown of each of our customer channels can be found in Annexe 2.

1 Introduction

Huntingdonshire District Council is committed to delivering good quality customer service and value for money for the taxpayer. This document outlines our strategic approach, progress to date and how we plan to continue delivery of the action plan for the period 2013 – 2018.

This strategy aims to ensure that delivering high value customer service is at the heart of everything the Council does. Outlined within this document is the vision of how we aim to make it clear that the delivery of local government services in Huntingdonshire is built around the needs of customers. It is a council-wide strategy that will outline steps that will guarantee that the Council continues to provide services which are consistent, professional and co-ordinated to ensure the customer is satisfied at the first point of contact.

The channels through which public services are delivered and by which the public has contact with the authority, (be that via telephone, online, in person or other means), are a critical part of public service provision, and there is ongoing impetus for them to be managed effectively and efficiently for everyone.

The **customer insight** element of the strategy sets out how Huntingdonshire District Council will base its decisions, actions, services and future developments around the needs of customers. It describes how the Council will better understand our customers, their requirements and priorities.

This strategy also paves the way for the channel migration plan. This is driven by customer service goals to improve service and reduce the cost of service management and is essentially about migrating appropriate customer contact online to encouraging customers to self-serve. It will detail the Council's plans for influencing how customers access Council Services, and how services can be made more accessible to Huntingdonshire residents, whilst also delivering maximum value for the tax payer.

The 2008 strategy brought together the "front-office" services – Customer Service Centre, Call Centre and Community Information Centres under the management of the Customer Services Manager.

The Call Centre provides access to many services such as Streetscene, Payments, Council Tax enquiries, Elections, Switchboard and many other services. As more services transfer to the call centre, direct dial volumes have decreased and these calls have become more focused on the complex, specialist calls, best dealt with by service experts.

The new purpose built Customer Service Centre in Huntingdon opened in February 2010 and is the first point of contact for all visitors to Pathfinder House. The Centre responds to enquiries about Payments, Planning, Building Control, Housing, Benefits, Council Tax and Electoral Services and many other services. There are also Customer Service Centres at St Neots, Ramsey and Yaxley which also provide a similar service. The range of services and information between these centres has been brought in line during the last few years.

2 Vision

Our vision is **to be an organisation with a reputation for good customer service amongst our peer group and customers with excellent financial productivity.**

To do this, we will provide:

- Accessible services that provide customers with choice as to where, when and how they access services.
- Good quality services which exceed customer's expectations and resolve enquiries, where possible, during the customer's first contact.
- Reliable and continually improving services which are cost effective, efficient and delivered through a highly trained workforce.

3 What is good customer service to us?

Good customer service is striving to understand our customers by actively listening and consistently responding to and meeting (or exceeding) their expectations within a specified timescale.

Where possible, staff should check that they are getting it right by being open to feedback from our customers, keeping an open mind and remaining willing to change and challenge in order to continually meet the (changing) needs of our customer base.

In the most basic terms, good customer service is striving to get it right first time, always treating the customer with dignity and respect while acting professionally and politely.

This is all totally free, no cost at all.

4 Corporate Context

This Customer Service Strategy enables delivery of a number of corporate aims. To achieve the 'golden thread' through our performance management framework, we have adopted these aims in this Customer Service Strategy and they will be used to inform Service Plans and individual staff Key Performance Areas (KPA's).

5 Where do we want to be?

In five years time, HDC will be or aiming to be **an organisation with a reputation for good customer service amongst our peer group and customers with excellent financial productivity** by ensuring that our whole organisation is more customer focussed.

Becoming more customer focussed is not about delivering an unaffordable Rolls Royce service. It is about making sure we are providing the right services at the right time to the right people in the right way. It is making sure that we are achieving value for money and that we are utilising resources as effectively as possible. It is about reducing waste and increasing productivity. It is about making difficult decisions regarding the way we provide services in the hope that they can continue. It is about finding new ways of working to enable us to do more with less.

5.1 How do we get there

Overarching objectives	Sub-Objectives Over the next five years, we will
To ensure that the customer is at the heart of everything we do as a council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise customer service as an authority and put the customer first. This needs to be measured and monitored through service plans and KPIs. • Consistently serve all of our customers to a high standard no matter how they choose to contact the council and which department they contact. • Make it as easy as possible for customers to access our services and get appropriate information • Support delivery of consistent customer service training for all frontline staff • Do more to find out who are customers are, what their needs are and how we can best meet them (customer insight). • Create a programme of work to improve customer service and performance monitoring of service departments. • Measure our performance against publicised standards and openly report on this in a clear, consistent and customer-friendly way.
To get it right first time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure and improve the rate of customer enquiries answered first time • Significantly reduce levels of avoidable contact (repeated customer contact that could have been avoided by being proactive). • Empower front line staff to resolve more problems at the customer's first point of contact. • Recognise the role of complaints to facilitate continuous improvement.
To be clear about what we can and can't do and what we aspire to achieve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly publish and make available our plans and services standards and information about our performance. • Fulfil reasonable customer requests within the stated timescales.
To meet the rising demand of our services and the needs of our customers without	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for the increase in Huntingdonshire's population and ensure that we understand how this will impact customer service.

<p>costing the tax payer more money.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Propose ways of making the best use of customer facing staff resources. E.g. bringing the call centre into Pathfinder House and having one team on one site. • Engage in more channel migration – migrating services on-line to better utilise staff resources. • Create business cases to propose initiatives that address how we can be more proactive in providing information to reduce customer contact, identifying quick wins and long term opportunities. • Work with departments to become more open with information online and that it is presented in a customer-friendly format.
<p>To motivate our staff to deliver excellent services and empower them to try new things in order to provide a high standard of service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed strong values as an authority that prioritises positive behaviours that lead to empowerment of staff and excellent customer service. • Achieve the Customer Service Excellence accreditation as an authority. • Create Customer Service awareness campaigns around ‘thinking like a customer’ and work with LGSS to provide training for managers and staff. • Map customer journeys and processes to ensure that they are efficient for the customer and the council and that we are utilising our resources effectively.
<p>To work innovatively together as an authority in order to recognise where we can improve and streamline services to reduce cost and improve efficiency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with managers in order to generate ideas and improvement schemes and encourage staff to come forward with ideas of how to improve processes. • Work cross-organisationally to identify customer processes that could be re-designed and streamlined by working more closely together. • Make the most of improvement projects and ensure the customer’s needs are always paramount.
<p>To engage and work with external partners to find ways of improving the way we handle customers and reduce costs by sharing resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further explore partnerships and shared services with other public sector organisations. This would improve efficiency in staffing levels and also provide joined up working, which means customers may not need to contact numerous agencies, and contribute to the idea of a ‘one stop shop’ for local public services. • Work with partners delivering services on behalf of HDC to ensure customer service levels are not affected. Over the life of this strategy, it is likely that some services will be provided by shared services or external organisations, so it is important to foster a positive working relationship with these organisations to ensure customer service levels are maintained.
<p>To utilise our resources (staff, contact channels, software etc.) in the most efficient way. To shift appropriate transactions to self-service channels to free up resources for the more complex cases and residents that require more assistance than others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift appropriate transactions to self-service channels to free up resources for the more complex cases and residents that require more assistance than others. • Increase the availability of self-service customer channels and be mindful of consistency in service standards • Spend time and effort to promote on-line services and support customers using them.

6 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are critical to ensuring that we achieve the objectives.

To ensure we are making progress we will:

- monitor our performance against local (and national, if any) measures
- report performance on customer service
- collect and publish evidence of good practice throughout the Council.

This strategy and action plan will be reviewed annually. A highlight report will be submitted every year so that we can monitor progress, review and set specific targets for the future. A comprehensive review of the strategy will be undertaken every three years.

7 Risks

The council's corporate risk register identifies a large number of risks that may have negative effects on the council.

An effective customer service strategy is imperative to ensure the risks and the possibilities of them becoming a reality are kept to a minimum or prevented altogether.

The following key risks have been identified:

- This strategy requires a commitment to change. We may experience a lack of buy-in from HDC managers which would make this strategy undeliverable.
- The organisation is going through a major period of change with some departments and services being considered for shared services/ outsourcing so this will impact how we deliver services to the public. IMD is also being considered and the web team is a part of this team.
- Delivering the strategy may require resources already committed to other activities and projects.
- The website is under-resourced, the web team is under pressure and may not have time to work on channel migration projects.
- Customer insight may focus effort onto the majority of customers at the expense of hard to reach groups.
- Shared service requires commitment from outside the Council; it may be this is not forthcoming.
- Channel migration means that our reliance on technology becomes even more prevalent. This has support implications in terms of the Help Desk/ web team and means that there is more to potentially go wrong.
- The infrastructure needed for successful channel migration is expensive and hard financial climate means there is less money available for improvement projects.
- Staff perception of channel migration – staff may feel their jobs are at risk
- The web team and the call centre and face to face customer service teams not being one team could be a barrier to channel migration.
- Proactive customer service – customers may not want to give us their email addresses and mobile phone numbers.
- Member buy in/ approval of spending. In order to deliver the channel migration solutions, infrastructure and marketing, this will need capital in the short term.

Customer Service Strategy Action Plan 2013-18

Corporate Theme	Corporate Aim	Objective	Action	By whom	By when	Result
Improve the quality of life in Huntingdonshire	Make our services accessible to all	Ensure our services accessible to those who cannot travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobile and flexibly delivered services away from the Council to be developed where there is a clear business case to do so, particularly in rural locations. Investigate alternative more customer focused premises for our Customer Service Centre in St Neots and Yaxley. 	Customer Services Divison Customer Services Manager	Ongoing September 2014	
		Open up more channels for customers to contact the council	Pilot with a view to introducing interacting with customers through new channels. E.g. web chat and social media.	Customer Service Manager / IMD	September 2014	
		To manage resources effectively to ensure service is available to the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise emerging council technology and solutions that could enable home and remote working for call centre advisors which could then enable face to face staff to answer calls remotely when call demand exceeds face to face. Create a business case that will propose relocating the call centre to Pathfinder House to create one customer service team responsible for face to face and telephony. 	Customer Service Manager / IMD Customer Service Manager	September 2015 January 2014	
		Evaluate customers needs by utilising available data to gain customer insight	Periodically analyse the population of Huntingdonshire to identify areas of increased need to ensure that we are meeting the needs of residents. See customer insight section in Annexe 3.	Customer Services	Ongoing	

Corporate Theme	Corporate Aim	Objective	Action	By whom	By when	Result
		To be clear about what we want our Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) to be and what we want from it. Maximise the opportunities and benefits that the council's CRM system gives us	Investigate how the new CRM system (deployed in 2013) can provide further benefits. This provides us with many opportunities. These need to be investigated and projects set up to utilise this system further to maximise the benefits we get from it. E.g. Central logging of all customer enquiries so we have a full view of historical information for each customer for all channels.	Call Centre Manager/ IMD	Ongoing following completion of CRM rollout project	
		Ensure our services are accessible to all people of all ethnicities, people who have disabilities and are sensitive to the needs of all customers no matter what their personal circumstances.	Continue to ensure that all customer facing staff receive regular Equality and Diversity training.	Customer Service Management team	Ongoing	
		Make the most of all of our contact channels	Deliver objectives for each channel in Annexe 2	Customer Service Management team	January 2018	
Improve the quality of life in Huntingdonshire	Develop the Council's role in reducing benefit dependency	Aid the smooth implementation of welfare reform	Work with the Benefits and Housing departments to ensure that we deliver the front line services to customers in the most effective, knowledgeable and caring way with highly trained and proactive staff.	Customer Service Management team	Universal credit timescale	

Corporate Theme	Corporate Aim	Objective	Action	By whom	By when	Result
		Help to reduce the impact of welfare reform on customers where possible	Work with the Communities teams to join up in planning to help our communities cope with the welfare reform changes. Work with other HDC departments and partner organisations to ease the impact of welfare reform on customers.	Customer Service Management team	Universal credit timescale	
		Help prepare customers for Universal Credit – Digital by Appropriate	Help prepare our customers for using online Universal Credit forms. Benefits e-forms have paved the way for this. Plan to do more to prepare residents by linking up with partner organisations (e.g. CCC – libraries) to help customers fill in online forms and use the digital resources.	Customer Service Management team	Universal credit timescale	
Working with communities	Build constructive relationships with other public sector organisations & parishes	Work closer with partners to improve efficiencies and provide better services to customers	Further explore partnerships and shared services with other public sector Customer Services. This would improve efficiency in staffing levels and also provide joined up working across the public sector, which means customers won't need to call so many separate agencies, and contribute to the idea of a 'one stop shop' for local public services.	Customer Service Manager	September 2018	
		Maintain service levels in a changing working environment	Work with partners delivering services on behalf of HDC to ensure customer service levels are not affected. Over the life of this strategy, it is likely that some services will be provided by shared services or external organisations, so it is important to foster a positive working relationship with these organisations to ensure customer service levels are maintained.	Managing Director	As contracts are written	
		Look for opportunities for consultation	Work with the Corporate Office to take advantage of opportunities to consult with the public as an authority.	Customer Service Management team	Ongoing	

Corporate Theme	Corporate Aim	Objective	Action	By whom	By when	Result
		Openly publish clear performance information	Ensure that customer service performance information is made available and is clear and concise on the website. Encourage all services to be open with performance information.	Customer Service Management/ IMD	March 2015 and ongoing	
The Council	Balancing our budget Skill development – supporting the development of the workforce	Reduce the cost of services	Initiate/ continue phasing out extremely manual processes via mediated channels where possible (e.g. post, cheques). Look into what processes we could make 'digital by default'. For example, parking fines, residents permits etc.	Customer Service Management/ IMD	Ongoing	
		Generate savings by shifting processes online.	Create a business case to integrate key back office systems into the CRM. This is essential if we would like to generate savings through channel migration as integration is key to making transactions non-mediated. Create a business case to include looking at the infrastructure needed to provide end-to-end non-mediated processes on line that may or may not involve payments.	Customer Service Manager/ IMD	March 2014	
		Improve customer service skills throughout organisation	Assist LGSS in the development and release of Customer Service training. Advocate the training packages and encourage all new starters and existing staff to attend training regularly.	Customer Service Management team/ LGSS	March 2014 / ongoing	

Corporate Theme	Corporate Aim	Objective	Action	By whom	By when	Result
		To save money through process improvement	Identify processes that could be streamlined with the customer in mind by working with managers in order to make processes more automated and efficient	All managers	Ongoing	
Customer Service Strategy Objectives		Create a programme of work to improve customer service and performance monitoring of service departments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer service protocols to be signed off and agreed throughout HDC • Service standards to be published clearly so that customers are clear about what they can expect from all council services • Feedback mechanisms to be implemented where possible for customer facing services. • Performance information for services collated and publicised clearly on our website. 	Customer Service Manager	September 2014	
		To get it right first time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure and improve the rate of customer enquiries answered first time (the customer receives an excellent level of service, and the Council does not spend effort dealing with avoidable and repeated customer contact.) • Look for opportunities to empower front line staff to resolve more problems at the customer's first point of contact. 	Customer Service Manager/ All managers	December 2014 December 2015	
		Achieve customer service excellence as an authority	Review the readiness for a Council Wide assessment for the Customer Service Excellence Standard.	All managers	April 2016	
		Ensure sustainability of the councils payments function	The payments function sits within customer services and is chiefly administered by one member of staff. Consider how best to manage this for HDC and implement necessary changes	Head of Customer Service	July 2014	

Corporate Theme	Corporate Aim	Objective	Action	By whom	By when	Result
		Utilise staff resources in the most effective way and provide efficiency savings	Create business case to move call centre to Pathfinder House and re-think how we utilise staff to provide services	Customer Service Management team	March 2014	