



Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 18th January 2023

To: The Chair & Members of the Cabinet

Report Title: Customer Experience Strategy 2023-2026

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision?
Councillor Jane Nightingale	All	Yes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report proposes the attached Customer Experience Strategy developed as agreed in the Council's 22/23 Corporate Plan. It is proposed that the Strategy covers the years 2023-2026 given the ambitious action plan and includes the following content:
 - a. The Council's current main customer contact model across the range of access channels;
 - b. The channels our residents are now choosing to interact with us and to what extent;
 - c. The shift to digital;
 - d. How we make our services more accessible to all;
 - e. What our residents are telling us about our quality of interaction;
 - f. The issues we know about from speaking to our residents and looking across the different models in place across the organisation; and
 - g. A proposed action plan to improve.
2. Due to the pandemic and in line with the national situation, the Council has seen Doncaster people increase their use of digital channels for access to the Council's main contact routes into the Council with 55% of access now via this route in comparison to 30% by phone and 15% visiting the Civic Offices one-stop-shop. This digital change seems here to stay and will only increase in time, therefore it is timely that we review our arrangements. That said, it is also clear that residents

still want and need to interact in person relating to more personal and more complex services.

3. Therefore, the Strategy takes care to recognise that we still need to maintain our less used channels for those that need them. In addition, it also ensures tools for inclusivity are available to assist those who need them such as those of our residents who speak a different language, are hard of hearing or deaf, are visually impaired or have a disability.
4. The Strategy also acknowledges that the Council has been significantly stretched resource wise over the last couple of years with regard to customer interaction caused by increased demand, additional tasks such as business support grants, self-isolation payment schemes, household support funds, energy rebates, school holiday food provision etc. The list is extensive. This has affected the ability of the council to deliver quality customer service to the extent it aspires to, therefore this strategy seeks to find ways to help improve that situation.
5. In addition, the current financial environment brings further challenges with regard to the Council's future level of resources available and therefore capacity to deliver, meaning any acceptable forms of using technology or automation in the background could be explored to assist in providing alternative capacity to deliver.
6. The vision for this strategy to convey the aspiration of the Council and knowing we have areas for improvement is simply, 'To always provide the best possible customer experience to all the people we serve no matter how and where we are contacted'. A Delivery Plan will be developed and monitored.

EXEMPT REPORT

7. N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. This report seeks agreement of the attached Customer Experience Strategy 2023–2026.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

9. This strategy seeks to further improve and modernise the experience of Doncaster residents when contacting us by delivering the actions outlined in the strategy action plan which include:
 - Regular review of our service delivery performance targets and making them clearer to our residents;
 - A reduction in the number of telephone numbers and email addresses advertised;
 - A review of the council's physical face-to-face customer access points without reducing support across the borough;
 - Further improve our on-line offer, making more services available on-line.
 - Improve how we communicate;
 - Seek to reduce residents having to contact many different services when

- life events occur;
- Review our remaining use of paper forms and letters and seek to rationalise further; and
- Further enhance and improve our technology used behind the scenes to assist in providing the extra capacity we require, including the use of Artificial Intelligence and Robotic Processing Automation.

BACKGROUND

10. The last Customer Service Strategy 'Customers are our business and define our success' was agreed in 2016. It included the following aims, which the Council has strived to achieve where possible:

- A high percentage of Doncaster's residents will know about and access appropriate Council services and information 24/7 on-line via one fully transactional Council website and apps where appropriate.
- Fewer residents will use traditional channels such as visiting a reception or phoning us. However, when they do, they will receive a high quality, value for money, personalised and proactive service, with the same technology so there is a single customer approach and single consistent data and records held, no matter what method is used to contact us.
- Our customers will only need to tell us something once and we will know more about what our customers need using the intelligence they have already provided to us.
- We will only send or request letters or paper documents where necessary and phase out other channels that are not as effective and value for money.
- All Council staff will operate digitally using modern technology with efficient automated and streamlined business processes and information at their fingertips.
- All Councillors will have technology to enable them to deliver excellent customer service when approached with the ability to request services, check progress and be aware of what has been reported and resolved in their ward.
- Doncaster Council will present itself as one joined up Council when offering services wherever possible and always aim to deliver what and when we promise.

11. We have not fully succeeded in delivering all of those aspirations to the extent we hoped for, however the following have been achieved:

- We have continued to develop our digital channels and promote them;
- The use of our digital channels now exceeds the more traditional channels such as reception, post and phone;
- We have maintained traditional access channels for those that do not wish or are not able to use digital channels but also when they are more appropriate;
- We have used the information customers have provided to deliver support to our residents during the pandemic and the present cost of living crisis;
- We have reduced paper forms and letters where appropriate and when we know customers can and wish to interact digitally; and

- We have once again significantly modernised the way our staff work to improve efficiency and service delivery.

12. However, it is now time to review the situation again, in particular, as behaviours and expectations have changed due to the pandemic as well as increased demand and reducing resources.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

13. Only two options are proposed:

1. Agree the Customer Experience Strategy 2023-26; or
2. Do not agree the Strategy.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION



14. The recommendation is option 1, to agree the issue and delivery of this strategy.






The benefits are many and include:


- A clearer view to our residents of how to contact the Council for the range of services with less contact points to understand;
- Less passing around between different services having to repeat information when life events occur;
- Increased digital services in line with customer expectations;
- Increased speed and efficiency in some areas depending on the channel used;
- A more informed expectation regarding service delivery as a result of customer contact;
- Increased value for money; and
- Modern technology that can take the quality of service to the next level.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

15.

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider – Negative overall	Neutral or No implications
 Tackling Climate Change	✓			
The increase in digital channels contributes to a further reduced need for residents to travel to Council offices.				
 Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work				✓

	Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs				✓
	Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all				✓
	Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs	✓			
<p>This strategy contributes to improving how services related to creating safer, stronger, greener and and cleaner communities can be requested and issues reported with improved communication. It also improves the expectation we create relating to delivery timescales.</p>					
	Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough	✓			
<p>This strategy contributes to improving how services related to nurturing a child and family-friendly borough can be accessed. The main points of initial contact into the Council's main services including Children's and Adults Social Care sits within Customer Services.</p>					
	Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future				✓

 Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities				✓
Fair & Inclusive	✓			
<p>A Due Regard Statement is included at Appendix 2. The Strategy also includes a section regarding how we ensure customer contact is currently inclusive across all channels. It is absolutely essential that this Strategy ensures the experience of the Council's customers is fair and inclusive.</p>				

Legal Implications [Officer Initials: SRF | Date: 16.08.22]

16. S111 of the Local Government Act 1972 sets out that “a local authority shall have power to do anything (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions. When developing new service offers the Council should be cognisant of its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty and should consult accordingly on any proposed changes to front facing services. Advice should be sought from HR in relation to any impact on staffing arrangements and any new technology purchases should be carried out in accordance with Contract Procedure Rules.

Financial Implications [Officer Initials: PH | Date: 19.08.22]

17. There are some projects such as Artificial Intelligence, Robot Process Automation and the Customer Relationship Management System Replacement which are identified either separately in the capital programme or with funding being allocated from Council Wide Systems. For any additional work required outside the normal Customer Service budgets, funding would need to be identified at the appropriate time.

Human Resources Implications [Officer Initials: KG | Date: 19.08.22]

18. There are no specific HR implications arising from this report and strategy however there may be HR implications within specific projects arising from the strategy and these will be included in the appropriate individual reports as required.

Technology Implications [Officer Initials: PW | Date: 19.08.22]

19. Technology will continue to be a key enabler to support the delivery of the new Customer Experience Strategy and Digital & ICT must always be involved via the

technology governance model where technology-based procurements, developments or enhancements are required. The CRM Review and Artificial Intelligence Phase 2 projects are already underway and will further enhance and improve our technology, directly contributing to the delivery of the strategy and the associated action plan.

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

20. The risks currently identified are:

- Staff cultural issues when changing ways of working;
- The ability of services to meet agreed service level agreements;
- The complexity of developing technology to meet business needs; and
- The resources required to deliver the strategy.

All have a possible likelihood and a major impact and will need to be mitigated against to ensure quality services are maintained.

CONSULTATION

21. Feedback from our residents has been used to inform this strategy via the following means:

- The Council's customer complaints and compliments processes;
- A Doncaster digital inclusion survey recently completed on behalf of the Integrated Care System; and
- Feedback from Customer Services who speak to Doncaster residents on a daily basis, by phone and in the One-Stop-Shop.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

22. Appendix 1: Customer Experience Strategy 2023–2026
Appendix 2: Customer Experience Strategy Due Regard Statement

REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

Dulcie Aulton, Head of Customer Service
Email address: Dulcie.aulton@doncaster.gov.uk

Julie Grant, Assistant Director of Customers, Digital & ICT
Email address: Julie.grant@doncaster.gov.uk