

ORGANISATION
ENABLING STRATEGIES
**01: CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE STRATEGY**

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Introduction

As a council we recognise that the long-term success of the borough as an attractive place to live, visit and invest is inextricably linked to creating a stable financial framework within which the council can develop its service improvement and investment plans. Securing financial stability is our number one priority as this will enable us to have the ability to drive forward the service improvements most needed by our communities.

To achieve this we will need to ensure that our business model provides maximum value for money to ensure our primary focus is on delivering meaningful impact for the benefit of all those who live and work in the Borough. This will be achieved by:

- Effectively managing our finances to afford the required investment in the future.
- Supporting and equipping our workforce to be agile and customer-focussed.
- Maximising the use of IT and technology to create efficiencies that enable greater investment in those with the greatest needs.
- Consolidating our assets to reduce our overheads and improve service integration through co-location.
- Putting the customer first in all our service planning.
- Enabling people and communities to be as independent and resilient as they can be.
- Learning from our customers' lived experience

This strategy is one of a suite of 5 strategies that shape our new operating model and deliver on our improvement plan.

Strategic Context

Wirral Council is committed to providing exceptional customer service. This strategy sets out how that will be achieved over the next four years. Our ambitious programme of transformation will see the latest technology utilised to help us provide the exceptional service we constantly strive to achieve.

As a council, we understand that there isn't one simple definition of what a customer is. We deliver a complex and diverse range of services, some statutory and others that are commercially focused. We have safeguarding responsibilities for both young and old and a duty of care to act when required. We understand that whilst many who experience services will consider themselves as customers, not all will. This policy is not what we do but the how we do it and therefore the customer experience.

Customer experience can be about our customer 'touch points' and how good that experience was, including the resultant service delivery process. Was it convenient to make contact? Were they attended to promptly? Was the staff member courteous? Was the request correctly recorded and actioned? These are all aspects that will inform the customer experience.

Customer experience is also about our relationship with the many thousands of residents who live, work and visit the borough. Whilst these people may not be requesting a service directly, they are experiencing council services every day- for example enjoying a safe, welcoming and well-maintained environment.

Customer experience encompasses all these areas and to optimise only one of them is to misunderstand how the customer views the relationship.

For some years now, the council has witnessed a shift in the way customers wish to engage with us and the Covid-19 pandemic has cemented this trend. Our online offer is critical to capturing this shift and ensuring we are available when customers need us.

This strategy commits to the further development of our website and to leverage the powerful digital technologies available to us to ensure we provide the best possible customer experience to our citizens. As part of our Digital Strategy, we will develop a plan to ensure digital services are accessible to all. We will support those residents and customers who are digitally excluded or who may need some help to fully access digital services.

Every customer interaction matters, and it requires a whole organisation approach to achieve exceptional customer service- including for those in need of a face-to-face interaction. Our strategy is bold, ambitious, and sets out to transform our citizens experience when interacting with Wirral Council.

This strategy enables the authority to move away from a view that customer service is the responsibility of a single team or department, but instead recognises that it is a cross cutting theme that spans the whole organisation and links intrinsically with our wider plans. It enables customer experience to become part of our core vision and values of 'being customer focussed' that each and every council officer subscribes too.

The Wirral Plan defines the priorities for the local authority over the coming years, outlining those tasks that the council will focus on to achieve its objectives and deliver outstanding services for residents. It identifies the council's ambition of making the borough a place Wirral residents can be proud of, with modern public services there to support them.

The customer experience strategy raises the profile of the customer and ensures our plans, decisions, and business actions are customer centric and reflected in the council's new operating model. We are aware that both the technology landscape and our customers' preferences are changing at an ever-accelerating pace. This is at a time when the resources available to the council are decreasing. We need to further harness digital technology to find new, innovative, and efficient ways of enabling our customers to interact with the council, whilst at the same time releasing our capacity to support those customers that really need us. The strategy outlines how we will deliver this change and reinforces our commitment to providing fair and open access to our services.

Following the external assurance review in September 2021, the council has further developed our change programme to provide a systematic approach to modernising the organisation to a defined set of design principles. The customer experience strategy will form an integral component of our new operating model and act as a catalyst for an ambitious transformation in the authority's approach to customers.

The way people do business and communicate is changing rapidly. We use cash less and pay by card and smart phones more, we go to the shops less and order things online more, we write letters less and use email more. Many of us contact organisations through social media, rather than telephoning, using email or visiting in person. Increasingly we are doing all these things from just one device, be it a smartphone, laptop, or tablet.

Wirral Council, like other councils and central government, has made more of its services available over the internet, and this move to online will continue. Most people find it more convenient to get information or to access services in this way. For those who find this difficult, we will provide help to support the online transition. Where this isn't possible, we will continue to provide support to customers to make all of our services inclusive. In line with our legal duty, we will ensure everything we publish on our website is accessible as possible.

The new ways of doing business also provide us with a strong economic case, which is now more important than ever. We have far less to spend than we had a few years ago. Wirral has been very successful in maintaining front-line services while funding has continued to reduce. We need to keep striving to make the most of every pound we get. Every time customers access council services online, they are helping us save the money we need to maintain the public services on which thousands of people rely and enjoy every day.

The strategy builds upon this previous work, to deliver the systemic change required to transform customer experience and realise the benefit of previous investment. It places our customers at the heart of the organisation and seeks to modernise and improve the authority's approach to customer service, through investing in new technology and new ways of working in response to changing customer expectations.

Our journey so far

Our previous customer access strategy reflected a different landscape for the local authority, both socially and economically and was reliant on the technology available at that time. The primary objective was to focus the delivery of services at the frontline, with the emphasis on first time resolution of queries by our customer service staff. A comprehensive network of locations existed across the borough to ensure residents could access services conveniently near to their home.

Over the past four years we have strived to improve the way we work to meet the needs of our customers. We have implemented some key improvements to the way customers interact with us and we communicate with them, including:

- ▶ The introduction of the My Wirral customer portal and a refreshed website
- ▶ The introduction of a new leisure system
- ▶ A new bookings system for Registrar's appointments
- ▶ The introduction of text message reminders for bulky item collection appointments
- ▶ Built large digital audiences on social media and email platforms, which are central to providing proactive communications about the council and our services

CURRENT STATE ANALYSIS



MORE THAN

333,000

TRANSACTIONS HANDLED THROUGH MY WIRRAL PORTAL



IN 2021/2022

99%

OF OUR FACE-TO-FACE CUSTOMERS RATED US AS GOOD OR EXCELLENT



IN 2019/2020

88,177

CUSTOMERS VISITED OUR ONE STOP SHOPS



COMBINED AUDIENCE OF

81,500

ACROSS BIG FOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS



MORE THAN

94,000

RESIDENTS SIGNED UP TO MY WIRRAL PORTAL



IN 2019/2020

272,271

CUSTOMERS CONTACTED OUR CALL CENTRE



IN 2019/2020

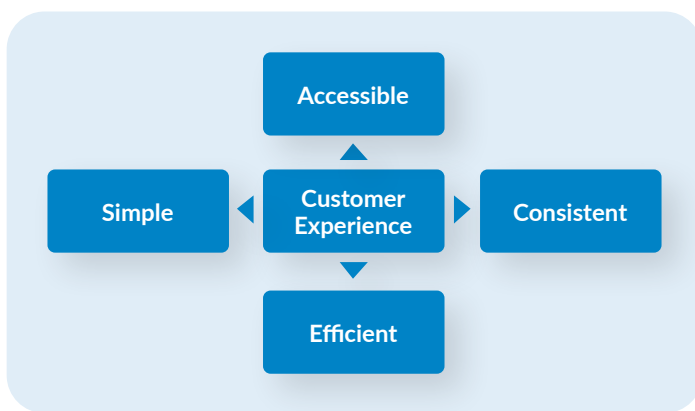
6.97 million

HITS WERE RECORDED ON OUR WEBSITE, AVAILABLE 24/7

Vision and Principles

Customer Experience Vision

We will place our customers at the heart of everything we do, to make every interaction a positive experience: accessible, consistent, efficient, and simple.



Wirral Council's Values and Behaviours

This strategy fully aligns with the council's Values and Behaviours that recognises that to work for Wirral Council is to be a public servant. We are here to serve our residents, to meet their needs, to protect them and to help them raise and achieve their aspirations.

Our Values state that we will...

- Be customer focused
- Be accountable
- Be ambitious
- Be professional

This is the principle our organisation is built upon and the customer experience strategy will support this.

Our Customer Experience Principles

We have developed customer experience design principles to ensure our customers have a positive experience at every touch point they have with the council. This is all-encompassing and goes beyond the traditional customer service teams and includes care services, libraries, leisure centres, cemeteries and theatres, as well as online channels like email, social media and web.

All council staff, regardless of their role contribute to the overall customer experience- whether that is serving a customer in a library, inspecting the borough's highways, dealing with an illegal fly tip or supporting residents to remain independent in their home. These principles will guide our staff and help embed a culture of customer service that will bring about a positive relationship with our residents.

The customer experience strategy draws upon the following principles and themes in its design:



Customer First:

Placing customers at the heart of the organisation. Our leaders will adopt a mindset of customer experience and set the tone for the rest of the organisation. Staff will be empowered to provide their very best customer experience.



Customer Access:

A modern, fresh and flexible approach to customer experience. We will deliver services in the most appropriate way, whether physical or digital. Our physical environments will be light, clean and welcoming environments, flexible to our customer's needs.



Digital First:

Positive digital experiences so good they are the channel of choice for many.



Inclusion:

Recognising our customers' unique circumstances and in doing so ensuring that those that need our services are supported and not excluded.



Customer Insight:

Establishing our data sources and consistently measuring our customer experiences. Knowing our customers and their needs. Understanding why things go wrong and learning from this to improve our services.



Value for Money, Efficiency and Return on Investment:

Recognising the financial climate, benefit focused outcomes, business minded decision making.

Priorities

We want to put the customer at the heart of what we do, however we recognise that we do not currently have a single view of the customer. As a result, services can offer an inconsistent approach with varying standards of delivery.

We have therefore identified the following priority areas for improvement. These will form the basis of the first year of the improvement plan, with further priorities identified as we progress the implementation of the strategy.

Putting our customers at the heart of what we do	By putting customer at the heart of what we do we will create a consistent positive customer experience. We will include our customers whenever possible when redesigning our services, looking through the lens of our customer to ensure the design meets their needs.
Service accessibility	<p>As more services are made available online, we must ensure that those customers who have limited digital skills and access to technology are supported and encouraged to develop their skills to take advantage of the numerous benefits associated with being online.</p> <p>We recognise that addressing the digital skills gap is not the responsibility of one organisation, we will look to work with local and national organisations to play our part in improving the lives of our customers.</p>
Harnessing digital technology	Harnessing the power of digital technology will enable the council to increase accessibility and flexibility for our customers, delivering efficient and effective low-cost services whilst freeing up our resources to support those customers with more specific needs. We will continue to invest in technology and new ways of working to help us keep people safe and well, while retaining their independence by enabling them to live in their own homes for longer.
Embedding customer experience across the whole organisation	Customer experience goes far beyond the customer services team-as an organisation we recognise that every employee, contractor, and stakeholder have a part to play in delivering a positive experience. Every phone call, email, social media or face to face interaction provides the ability to shape the perception of the Council and what it is trying to achieve.

How we will deliver the strategy

This strategy outlines our journey as we seek to improve customer experience across the organisation. There remain gaps in our understanding, and we have more to do to refine and develop the strategy to ensure it delivers the expected outcomes by 2026. Therefore, the delivery plan will focus on providing the foundation for the future with all initial actions to be complete by April 2023.

We will work closely with appropriate groups of customers across the Council to garner their views when developing more detailed strategic approaches to how services are delivered to specific groups of people.

Initial work in year 1 of the strategy will be to collaboratively develop capacity to ensure the key actions can be resourced and delivered within the defined timescales.

Key activities have been identified and in year 1 project plans will be developed as below.

Priority one: Putting our customers, the heart of what we do		
Action	By When	Lead
1. Review our customer feedback approach to develop and improve our services, demonstrating a cycle of continuous improvement	31 August 2023	V. Lungley
2. Review the customer complaint process to improve the way the complaints are managed and responded to	30 June 2023	S. Ruddy
3. Aligned with our service review programme, redesign our processes reducing the number of times we transfer customers between teams and focussing on resolving issues at first point of contact	31 March 2024	H. Leake
4. Review the current portfolio of customer contact channels, analyse the volume of interactions, and conduct a gap analysis to ensure we have the right mix of channels and can resource them efficiently.	31 March 2024	V. Lungley/ G Mooney

Priority two: Service accessibility

Action	By When	Lead
1. As part of service reviews, conduct an equality impact assessment to review the accessibility of council services and identify and put in place alternatives as necessary	31 March 2024	Service Owners/ H. Leake
2. Work with partners to create a Digital Inclusion Network, to increase the support, training and digital access available to customers	30 June 2023	K. Leah
3. We will train those employees who engage directly with customers to promote self-serve options and where appropriate to help develop customers' knowledge, skills and confidence in accessing services digitally	30 Sept 2023	Service Leads V. Lungley P. ASpinall D. Walsh
4. Review our current website with a view of improving the accessibility and useability	30 June 2023	J. Dixon

Priority three: Harnessing digital technology

Action	By When	Lead
1. Increase the number of online services to improve self-service rates, ensuring accessibility for all is maintained	31 January 2024	M. Christian
2. Communicate corporately the need to eliminate paper where possible responding to our responsibilities under the Cool 2 Wirral Climate Emergency Strategy	30 June 2023	G. Mooney
3. Align with the digital programme, review the utilisation of technology such as artificial intelligence, voice recognition, webchat and chatbots to identify and prioritise the optimal implementation of the tools	30 June 2023	S. Ruddy/ V. Chapman
4. Review how social media customer service is delivered, with a view to taking a more holistic view and scaling up resource in line with channel demand	31 March 2024	G Mooney/ V Lungley

Priority four: Embedding customer experience across the whole organisation

Action	By When	Lead
1. Develop and launch a Customer Charter for all staff in the organisation to provide a consistent experience for all customers	31 May 2023	Customer Experience Lead/Comms
2. Develop, launch and embed mandatory customer experience training for all staff utilising the council's training platform (FLO)	31 January 2024	Customer Experience Lead/OD
3. Review all external contracts that involve an element of customer engagement. Ensure all delivery partners have a comprehensive working knowledge of Wirral's values and monitor their effectiveness in disseminating the message to their frontline staff. Engage with Colleagues in Corporate Procurement to include compliance with core values in future contract tenders.	March 2024	Fergus Adams Service Leads /Contract Managers Corporate Procurement

How we will measure the success

To ensure that the Customer Experience strategy leads to better outcomes for Wirral's customers, we will regularly measure our success in delivering on our priorities. To measure our success, we will use a mix of methods - gathering feedback from you and from our staff, and analysing the information we collect. The things we will measure include:

Priority one: Putting our customers at the heart of what we do

Measure	Current Performance	Source
My Wirral customer rating feedback	4.5 out of 5 as of Q4 2021/22	Granicus
Complaints - the number of complaints received annually	714 in the period April 21 to March 2022	Customer feedback team
Complaints addressed within the 15 day timescale as a %	75.2% as of Q4 2021/2	Customer feedback team
% of statutory complaints addressed within the 20 working day timescale in Children Social Care Services.	79% for the year end 2020/21	Dawn Stanley-Smith
% of statutory complaints responded to within 6 months in Adult Care & Health	87% for the year end 2020/21	Jen Milward
Volume of enquiries/messages and responses/resolutions by channel, annually		S. Ruddy/G. Mooney

Priority Two: Service Accessibility

Measure	Current Performance	Source
One stop shop customer exit survey rating. Percentage of 'good' or 'excellent' ratings received during bi-annual surveys.	99% of customers rated One stop shops as good or excellent in the period April 21 to March 2022	One stop shop customer exit survey

Priority Three: Harnessing digital technology

Measure	Current Performance	Source
Total number of live My Wirral Accounts	92,900 as of Q4 2021/22	Granicus system
Number of phone calls into the council call centre	257,064 in the period April 21 to March 2022	Telephony System
The number of One Stop Shop face to face appointments	2127 in the period April 21 to March 2022	Interview logging system
Number of digital transactions, and form completions, received via My Wirral	328,900 as of Q4 2021/22	Granicus Stats Power BI dashboard
Average rating for 'overall experience' of one stop shop video conferencing appointments	95% as of Q4 2021/22	Video Conference Power Bi dashboard
Number of social media messages/enquiries and average response time		Agorapulse

Priority Four: Embedding customer experience across the whole organisation

Measure	Current Performance	Source
Percentage of staff completing customer experience training	New Indicator	FLO system

Reviewing the strategy

This strategy outlines our journey as we seek to improve customer experience across the organisation. We have more to do to refine and develop the strategy to ensure it delivers the expected outcomes by 2026.

To support delivery of excellent outcomes for Wirral's Customers, we also have to ensure we are responsive to national and local changes to technology, legislation, policy and the financial landscape.

We will therefore refresh this strategy annually, to ensure that our objectives and actions remain current, relevant, and valid, and to check we are measuring the right things.

We will also ensure that the strategy is effectively monitored on a quarterly basis.

Strategy Version	Wirral Customer Experience Strategy 2022-23 v0.1
Senior Responsible Owner	Director of Neighbourhoods
Publication Date	March 2023
Review Date	January 2024

