

Customer Strategy – v0.7 Draft

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1 About the strategy

Our Customer Strategy sets out how we will provide a consistent customer experience through the proactive provision of information, advice and guidance as well as easy access to services when required.

We will continue to embed and reinforce the good practices that are already in place as well as finding innovative ways to keep improving the delivery of services whether that be out in our communities or directly with the council.

Our strategy aims to improve the customer experience by:

- making services simple to use, accessible and inclusive, saving our customers time and effort
- resolving enquiries quickly and effectively, providing a greater breadth and depth of information, advice and guidance wherever they chose to access this
- making it easier to get the help required when it is needed, streamlining, consolidating and combining our efforts
- reducing the need for multiple contacts to different departments, joining up our systems and data
- providing a consistently good service no matter how our customers reach out to us, avoiding the need for them to repeat themselves
- understanding and anticipating customer needs and offering timely solutions, tailoring support based on their unique history, past interactions and preferences
- keeping customers informed, reducing their need for unnecessary contact with us
- being responsive and effective, providing and using appropriate resources at the right time based on complexity of need
- evolving with changing times and being digitally ready for our customers that wish to engage with us in that way, investing in technology for the future.
- recognising that some people are unable to access digital services due to [connectivity issues, cost or lack of digital skills](#).
- empowering people to be able to help themselves, accessing information, advice and guidance in their communities or signposted to the resources or support they need

This will be a constantly evolving strategy as we adapt to changing customer behaviours and technology developments, although aim to establish a solid foundation to effectively respond to future change.

By keeping our customers, or those that contact us about our customers, at the heart of what we do, we will ensure that we remain connected to our customers as we look to continue to deliver services in the future.

1.1 Context

At Dorset Council, we understand that our residents rely on us for all their council services. While we are the sole provider, we are committed to delivering the highest

quality in customer experience and service. We recognise that our customers view us as a single entity, 'the Dorset Council', without distinguishing between different departments or the complexities of our operations. With this in mind, we have embarked on a journey to place the customer at the heart of everything we do. Our goal is to enhance our services and create a better experience for everyone we serve.

Moreover, we believe in the power of collaboration with our communities. By working closely with local organisations and partners, we can direct residents to a wide range of services available across the county. This approach not only strengthens our community bonds but also ensures that our residents have access to the support and resources they need.

1.2 Why we need a Customer Strategy

We are proud to be a 'customer focused/led' organisation. Our customer promise makes a commitment to our customers to treat them right, get it right, make it easy and involve them in our decisions.

The customer strategy is looking to provide a 'one Council' approach for our customers where we work closer in collaboration with our communities, towns, parishes and partner organisations to meet the needs and expectations of our customers.

We are committed to ensuring that all our customers, whatever their needs, have a good and consistent customer experience whenever they interact with us. The way we deliver customer experience is core to providing public services efficiently and effectively.

Whilst we strive to provide good quality services across the council at all times, there are currently varied levels of customer experience within the range of services delivered by the council. We have developed this strategy to:

- ensure a shared understanding of what a good customer experience looks and feels like
- plan the actions needed to achieve good and consistent customer experience, learning from best practice both internally and externally
- embed a consistently good standard of service with resilience and efficiency, in a fair and inclusive way
- make sure our customers can access what they need in the most effective and efficient way

1.3 Where is the strategy coming from

The strategic intent of the Customer strategy aligns with Dorset Council Plan 2024 to 2029 with a particular focus on the key priority of, 'Communities for all'.

Improving the lives of residents, from the youngest to the oldest. Creating communities where everyone can thrive, where essential services are accessible, where people can enjoy life at any age and where people look out for each other

The strategy will be enabled by other organisational changes that look to provide the approach to:

- Working with our community partners to deliver efficient and accessible services for all
- Working together to design and deliver modern, accessible services to our customers
- Becoming a more responsive, customer focused/led council, actively listening, collaborating and co-producing with our customers and community partners.
- Making improvements with an emphasis on innovation and working with customers using a collaborative approach
- Simplify and join up the way we work, using data to help us make decisions
- Ensuring customers can access information, advice and guidance they need quickly and easily, using the right technology to provide a better online experience.

Initiatives influencing the Customer Strategy include:

- [Our Future Council Transformation Plan](#)
- [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#)
- [Dorset Council Digital Vision](#)
- [Data and Business Intelligence Strategy](#)
- [People Strategy](#)
- [Library Strategy](#)
- [Family Hubs](#)
- [Health & Wellbeing Strategy](#)
- [Voluntary Community Sector Principles for Working Together](#)
- [Our design principles](#)

2 Who are our customers

Our customers include everyone who lives, works, visits or does business in the Dorset Council area, as well as community partners and agencies. Customers include those who access information, advice and guidance or need to interact with the council or those who the council need to engage with.

2.1 Understanding Dorset

We are dedicated to understanding our customers' needs, learning from their experiences, so that we can better prioritise how to support them.

Our council is made up of a diverse range of customers. We have a wide range of residents in terms of ages and economic status. There is a combination of affluent

areas and areas of significant deprivation where customers rely on us to provide them with the support they need. Because of this diversity, our approach to our customers must be dynamic and adaptive.

Key facts (2021 census) include:

- Total number of households in the Dorset Council area – 169,261
- Latest population of Dorset Council area – 379,578
- Population of 0- to 15-year-olds – 57,696 (15.2%)
- Population of 16- to 64-year-olds – 209,527 (55.2%)
- Population of 65+ year olds – 112,355 (29.6%)

- Projected growth in total population over next 25 years – 31,885 (8.4%)
- Projected total population in 25 years' time – 411,463
- Total businesses in the Dorset Council area – 20,600
- Total visitors to Dorset – 30 million [as at 2019].

3 Customer voice

We receive feedback from customers in a variety of ways, such as comments on surveys, compliments and complaints.

We also want to develop models of insight to enable predictive modelling and insight. To continually improve the experience for our customers, it is essential that we are proactive in understanding and acting accordingly by collaborating and co-producing with customers of all ages and community partners.

3.1 Our Resident Survey (March 2022)

- 75% of respondents were satisfied with the way Dorset Council runs things.
- just over three-fifths of respondents think Dorset Council keeps residents well informed, with 10% thinking they keep residents very well informed and 51% thinking they keep residents fairly well informed. 35% of respondents think Dorset Council does not keep residents well informed.
- 27% of respondents would speak positively about Dorset Council, with 3% who would speak positively without being asked and 24% who would speak positively if asked. 20% would speak negatively about Dorset Council.
- two-fifths of respondents think Dorset Council acts on the concerns of local residents 'a great deal' or a 'fair amount'. 35% think that Dorset Council acts on the concerns of local residents 'not very much' and 7% of respondents think Dorset Council acts on the concerns of local residents 'not at all'. 18% of respondents answered 'don't know'.
- 52% of respondents trust Dorset Council 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount'. 28% trust Dorset Council 'not very much' and 8% 'not at all'. 12% answered 'don't know'.

3.2 Common feedback themes

Several common feedback themes have been identified and considered as part of this strategy:

- Residents recognise that the Council and its employees care about providing them with the service they need
- Residents are satisfied with the extended range of services they receive within libraries, which have customer reception points although Dorset's rurality makes access to services difficult
- Since the County Council and District Council merger in 2019 to form 'Dorset Council', residents can begin to see more joined-up working within departments
- Residents value the services they can access via the website, but they would like a broader range of services available for self-service
- When residents see the Council, they have to engage with lots of different services and departments rather than just one organisation,
- Residents often need to repeat what they have already told the Council as details do not appear to be shared across departments
- Although the Council offers many telephone lines, residents find it difficult to actually get through to speak to someone
- To resolve their enquiry, often residents need to make contact on more than one occasion. They want their needs met first time.

3.3 Big Conversation

Engagement sessions have taken place with residents looking at key priorities to be delivered over the next five years. Customer experience feedback will be considered as part of the council's commitment to listen and continuously improvement.

4 Our Customer Promise

The council currently has a Customer Promise which was co-produced by our customers. It focuses on:

- treating customers correctly by understanding their needs, being helpful, polite, considerate, and respectful, ensuring honesty and fairness, and keeping personal data secure and confidential.
- getting things right by resolving requests promptly, working together for the best outcomes, keeping promises, providing updates, and correcting mistakes.
- striving to make interactions easy by communicating clearly, being accessible, increasing online services, and providing clear ways on how to contact the council.
- Listening to feedback, co-producing and collaborating to improve services.

5 Our key challenges and opportunities

5.1 Meeting rising customer expectations and increased need

In our digital landscape, people want faster access with customers preferring to access relevant services and find information, advice and guidance 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Customers express a desire for more flexibility for choice in accessing services in a way that best meets their needs.

5.2 Fair access

Our communities are diverse. We need to continue to find ways to remove any barriers to accessing services and support. Knowing this about our customers would allow us to anticipate their needs and respond respectfully, appropriately and efficiently.

5.3 Digital exclusion

Some people don't have access to the internet or have specific accessibility needs, and that may mean that they can't find our information, advice or guidance and services online. We need to help these customers by providing alternative access for those who need it.

5.4 Community collaboration

Considering that there are many residents living in rural areas of Dorset with poor internet speeds and mobile connectivity, the cost of broadband; mobile data and devices can be prohibitive or they might lack the necessary digital skills to confidently use online services, by utilising localised strengths and opportunities, residents can access relevant information, advice and guidance in their communities or be signposted to the resources and support they need.

5.5 Reducing council resources

The need for us to provide a good customer experience does not go away as more people need services. It is also getting more expensive to provide them, so we need to continue to develop cost-effective ways for our customers to access the information, advice, guidance or services they require.

6 Our future approach to customer experience

The Customer Strategy looks to move the delivery of services closer to our customers so that we make better use of our communities, digital opportunities and emerging technologies.

Service will be delivered in the most efficient and cost-effective way by:

- consistently providing good customer experience across all contact methods with simple to use, accessible and inclusive services, responding to equality needs.
- optimising the use of digital services, wherever possible, so that our services can be accessed online.

6.1 Our ways of offering access to services

We will be responding to changing customer behaviours so that they can access services in ways which they experience in their day to day lives, although traditional contact methods will still be available to ensure that we are not excluding anyone.

We would like our customers to engage with us at the most appropriate point to support their needs by:

- looking to resolve enquiries at point of contact
- receiving a consistent customer experience regardless of how they choose to access services
- ensuring that website content is relevant to allow our customers and community partners to access appropriate information, advice and guidance or signpost to the right resources and support they need
- maximising the use of self-service digital options which are easy to use and accessible so that customers choose these as their preferred method of contact
- using automation technology, where appropriate, to improve customer experience, although there will always be an option to talk to a person, if that is preferred
- providing skilled advisors to support customers who require help in accessing services
- initiating proactive communication and updates to avoid the need for customer to chase to find out what is happening with their enquiry.
- providing dedicated support for those that are either unable to access services online, would prefer not to use digital services or because some enquiries or services requires a discussion with someone
- handling enquiries by the most appropriate resource based on the complexity of needs
- rationalising published telephone numbers and email addresses to make it easier and clearer in contacting the council
- using data and insight that we hold about our customers, joining up different systems and services, to inform the way we improve processes and deliver services.

6.2 Our delivery framework to transform the customer experience

To bring about the changes required to realise the vision set out in this strategy, there will be a Transformation plan to help enable our customer experience aspirations.

A Customer Strategy Delivery Plan will guide our future implementation and monitor progress against the following activities:

- reduce the need to make multiple contacts with us, by removing our existing silo working arrangements

- avoid the need to tell us the same details every time, by using data more intelligently, joining up our systems and sharing between teams
- eliminate confusion as to how to access council service by promoting trusted places, for example our libraries and community hubs, and rationalising published phone numbers and email addresses
- create simpler to use, accessible and inclusive services by delivering consistency in the way that customers transact with us
- deliver a digitally ready approach for those customers that want to access services in that way.

We will be developing and designing services with our customers, using a data and insight led approach to understand what our customers expect when looking for information, advice or guidance and accessing council services. Continually looking to improve the customer experience by listening and acting upon what our customers are telling us.

7 Contact us about the Customer Strategy

Anthony Palumbo
Head of Customer, Dorset Council
Email: customerservices@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

8 Appendix A - Customer Strategy – Delivery Plan – Draft v0.7

The Customer Strategy is all about:

Putting customers at the heart of Dorset Council by simplifying access, enhancing their experience and innovating for the future.

The Customer Strategy Delivery Plan looks to achieve this by:

Providing easy to use, accessible and inclusive services that are convenient for our customers and communities through enhanced information, advice and guidance, processes, people and technology opportunities.

The strategic intent of the Customer strategy aligns with Dorset Council Plan 2024 to 2029 in, '*Working together to create a fairer, more prosperous and more sustainable Dorset for current and future generations*', with a particular focus on the key priority of, 'Communities for all.'

Improving the lives of residents, from the youngest to the oldest. Creating communities where everyone can thrive, where essential services are accessible, where people can enjoy life at any age and where people look out for each other

Aims	Outcomes
Enhanced customer experience	Seamless interactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A more joined-up approach across council services, reducing the need for multiple contacts and repeating details Personalized service: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowing customer history and preferences to provide more tailored support

Aims	Outcomes
Accessibility and inclusivity	<p>Simplified access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information, advice and guidance will be easier to access our in our communities and through multiple channels <p>Inclusive services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to reduce digital exclusion and ensure services are accessible to all, including those with disabilities
Efficient and timely service	<p>First contact resolution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased likelihood of resolving issues on the first contact, saving customers time and effort <p>Proactive communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping customers informed throughout their journey, reducing the need for them to follow up
Greater convenience	<p>24/7 Online services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of online services for applying, paying, booking, and reporting at any time. <p>Digital contact options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced digital contact methods for quicker responses

Aims	Outcomes
Use of technology	<p>Innovative solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of technologies to streamline processes and improve service delivery <p>Self-service options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering customers to resolve issues themselves through user-friendly digital platforms
Continuous improvement	<p>Feedback-driven:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly seeking and acting on customer feedback to make ongoing improvements <p>Adaptability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting services based on changing customer needs and technological advancements

What are we going to do?

We will deliver the Strategy by focusing on the outcomes to deliver an improved Customer Experience.

What are we going to do?	What does this mean for the Council?	What does this mean for our customers?	How does this fit with the outcomes?	What are the dependencies?	What are the interdependencies?
Increase the breadth and depth of services, information, advice and guidance available at point of contact	Manage customer need more tightly by strengthening skills and capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient and effective delivery of services, information, advice and guidance • Quicker resolution times and handling of multiple enquiries • No need to be passed from department to department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seamless interactions • Simplified access • First contact resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Future Council Transformation Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Strategy • Family Hubs • Health & Wellbeing Strategy
Create capacity and resilience through economies of scale	Consolidate and align customer management functional activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent and cohesive approach • Faster response at point of contact • Clearer delivery of services, information, advice and guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seamless interactions • Simplified access • First contact resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Future Council Transformation Plan 	
Improve information, advice and guidance available on-line	Provide convenient and easy to access information, advice or guidance and self-service options by making on-line resources available 24/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to information, advice or guidance and services whenever needed without the restriction of office hours • Handle many tasks independently • Quick and easy access to information, advice or guidance and service without the need to call or visit the council • Clear, accessible and up-to-date information, advice and guidance that is easy to navigate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified access • First contact resolution • 24/7 online services • Digital contact options • Self-service options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Future Council Transformation Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dorset Council Digital Vision • Family Hubs • Health & Wellbeing Strategy • Commissioning for a Better Life for the People of Dorset

What are we going to do?	What does this mean for the Council?	What does this mean for our customers?	How does this fit with the outcomes?	What are the dependencies?	What are the interdependencies?
Provision of inclusive and equal access to information, advice or guidance and services across all contact methods	Ensures that everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, can access the support they need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible services that are inclusive and equitable • Improved communications, understanding and engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized service • Simplified access • Inclusive services • First contact resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Future Council Transformation Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dorset Council Digital Vision • Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy • Library Strategy • Family Hubs • Health & Wellbeing Strategy • Commissioning for a Better Life for the People of Dorset
Foster a seamless approach across functional activities	Streamline and standardise existing silo operations and joining-up systems, data and functional activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of confusion about who does what • No need to navigate multiple departments • Effortless resolution to enquiries • No need to inform the council multiple time about the same details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seamless interactions • Simplified access • First contact resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Future Council Transformation Plan 	
Manage customer need more effectively with technology	Enhance the delivery of services by using opportunities to improve the different contact channels, workflows, communications and relationships with customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive & timely communications without the need to chase • Personalised experience tailored to individual needs • Easier to reach out through contact channels of choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seamless interactions • Personalized service • First contact resolution • Proactive communication • Digital contact options • Innovative solutions • Self-Service options • Adaptability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Future Council Transformation Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dorset Council Digital Vision
Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of customer experience	Adopt a culture of continuous improvement by using customer data and analytics to inform decision making and future business planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services can be shaped and tailored to better meet customer needs. • Transparency and accountability that can influence actions and plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback-driven • Adaptability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Future Council Transformation Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and Business Intelligence Strategy

What are we going to do?	What does this mean for the Council?	What does this mean for our customers?	How does this fit with the outcomes?	What are the dependencies?	What are the interdependencies?
Proactive provision of information, advice and guidance in our communities or signpost to the right resources and support	Empower people to take control of their own needs by accessing relevant and readily available resources locally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible resources that are easy to find and understand locally. • Utilising local strengths and opportunities for independence and self-sufficiency. • Being in more control and supported within the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified access • Inclusive services • First contact resolution • Self-service options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Future Council Transformation Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dorset Council Digital Vision • Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy • Library Strategy • Family Hubs • Health & Wellbeing Strategy • Commissioning for a Better Life for the People of Dorset • Integrated Care Partnership Strategy

When will this happen?

The Customer strategy has set out the approach that the council should take to deliver an improve customer experience.

Our Future Council Transformation Plan will set out the initiatives required to deliver the opportunities identified in the Customer Strategy Delivery Plan.

The Customer Strategy is a holistic plan that touches all areas of the council. To ensure consistency with existing organisational goals and aspirations, alignment with other interdependent strategies and policies is essential.