

# North West Leicestershire District Council

## Performance Directorate

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## Customer Service Strategy 2005 - 2008

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### Document History

Revision date	Previous revision date	Summary of Changes
24/11/05		Draft v1
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# North West Leicestershire District Council Customer Service Strategy

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# 1 Introduction

This document outlines North West Leicestershire District Council's vision for Customer Service over the next three years. The strategy is designed to be a high-level document setting out the over-arching framework for customer service in North West Leicestershire.

This strategy aims to put the customer first – at the heart of everything the Council does and recognises the importance of the diversity of customers' needs. The structure and organisation of the Council are not important to customers trying to access Council services rather the ease of accessibility, quality and speed of response received. In essence, this strategy and the projects and initiatives arising from it aim to improve significantly the quality of customer experience in North West Leicestershire.

This strategy has been developed within the context of the Council's Delivery Plan and links to the vision, strategic aims and priorities.

## 2 The Strategy

### 2.1 Strategic Vision

The Council's Vision for Customer Service in North West Leicestershire is outlined below.

#### **OUR VISION**

Imagine it is 2007; a resident can access Council services by a telephone, Mincom, videophone, Language Line, or internet up to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The service provided is consistent, co-ordinated and proactive. Customer Service employees will be able to identify if the customer needs extra help or advice, will help sort out problems and take personal responsibility for them.

This is what the Vision will mean for the residents of North West Leicestershire...

Mrs Smith has just moved into the district. She wants advice on how to get a wheelie bin, where to get a childminder and how to access a renovation grant. She has also noticed that the streetlight outside her home isn't working. The customer service centre is able to deal with all these enquiries. They order her a wheelie bin and inform the relevant service of the malfunctioning light – all electronically. They are able to give her basic advice on renovation grants and childminders.

It's August 2006, Mr Hart has received a letter informing him that he needs to provide more information in support of his application for Housing Benefit. He telephones the

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customer service centre to contact the relevant officer to find out what he needs to provide. He also reports a broken paving slab and damaged bus shelter. All of Mr Smith's queries are dealt with in the new customer services centre by a customer service representative.

It's January 2007, Mrs Jones has a rat infestation in her garden and calls the Council to report the problem. The Customer Service Representative takes all of the details and confirms the date and time that the Pest Control officer will visit. The details are sent electronically to the Pest Control Officer who is out in the district.

### 2.2 Objectives

- To create an organisation with the skills processes and culture to deliver better access to improved public services.
- To make sure that all the people of North West Leicestershire have equal access to the services that they need.
- To provide more responsive, more reliable, more satisfying public services that meet the expectations of the people of North West Leicestershire for better access to better quality public services.

#### 2.2.1 To create an organisation with the skills, processes and culture to deliver better access to better public services.

Training and development will be key to the successful implementation of this Strategy. Customer services training should not be confined to frontline employees but should be rolled-out across the organisation. All new employees should receive customer service training as part of their induction to the Council.

Customer service employees require more than just customer service skills. They will need to understand the diversity of all our customers' needs, the business as well as the ICT systems they are using. This will mean training – lots of it.

Changing current work processes will be the single biggest and far-reaching project of this Strategy. Business Process Re-engineering – BPR – will provide the means by which processes are transformed in line with requirements in order to deliver services in new ways that meet customers' needs.

Impact and needs assessments are extremely important in making sure our services remove barriers and do not create any new ones, particularly for minority ethnic customers, disabled people and women.

Implementation of this Strategy is dependent on bringing new beliefs, attitudes and ways of working into the Council. Customer expectations have been raised in recent years; therefore the quality of customer experience delivered by the Council must rise to meet this enhanced service expectation.

**2.2.2 To make sure that all the people of North West Leicestershire have equal access to the services that they need.**

All customers, should have equal access to the services provided by the Council. This means that we recognise that people have different needs and requirements and we will do all we can to meet these. The Council will use this Strategy to harness the power of e-Government positively to tackle exclusion from services and communities.

The Council will continue to work towards complying with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act – DDA – and the Race Relations Amendment Act to make sure that the Council's reception facilities are fully accessible for disabled customers and for customers who use other languages.

**2.2.3 To provide more responsive, more reliable, more satisfying public services that meet the expectations of the people of North West Leicestershire for better access to better quality public services.**

Once customers access the service, they will be greeted by courteous and knowledgeable employees, who want to help and take pride in their work. Questions should only need to be asked once as all previous information will have been captured centrally, including information about accessible formats customers may need, such as Braille, large print, or where a particular language is needed. Information will be used in the interest of the customer wherever legislation allows and the customer will be allowed to opt in or out where legislation is unclear whether or not information about them should be shared.

There will be a published Customer Service Charter, owned by senior management and members, known, understood and believed by all front-line employees.

The first employee contacted will be able to resolve multiple service requests. When an enquiry needs to be referred to a specialist in the back office or another agency then the initial contact will become the customer's advocate or champion and own the enquiry until it is resolved.

### **3 The Way Forward – Delivering the Strategy**

The Customer Service Strategy details the programme of work that is required to deliver a Customer Focussed organisation. It sets out the three-year programme for the development of customer service delivery within North West Leicestershire, by placing the customer at the heart of everything the Council does.

The key outcomes of the overall Customer Service Programme include:

- The development of an organisation with the skills, processes and culture to put the customer first
- Implementation of service designs that lead to increased customer satisfaction

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- Development of a front office service that resolves 80% of customer transactions at the first point of contact
- The provision of services that are driven by customer needs and not service requirements
- A significant cultural change to a customer focussed organisation.

The programme is linked closely to the corporate plan and directly supports a number of the Councils strategic priorities. Through focussing on customer service the Council will:

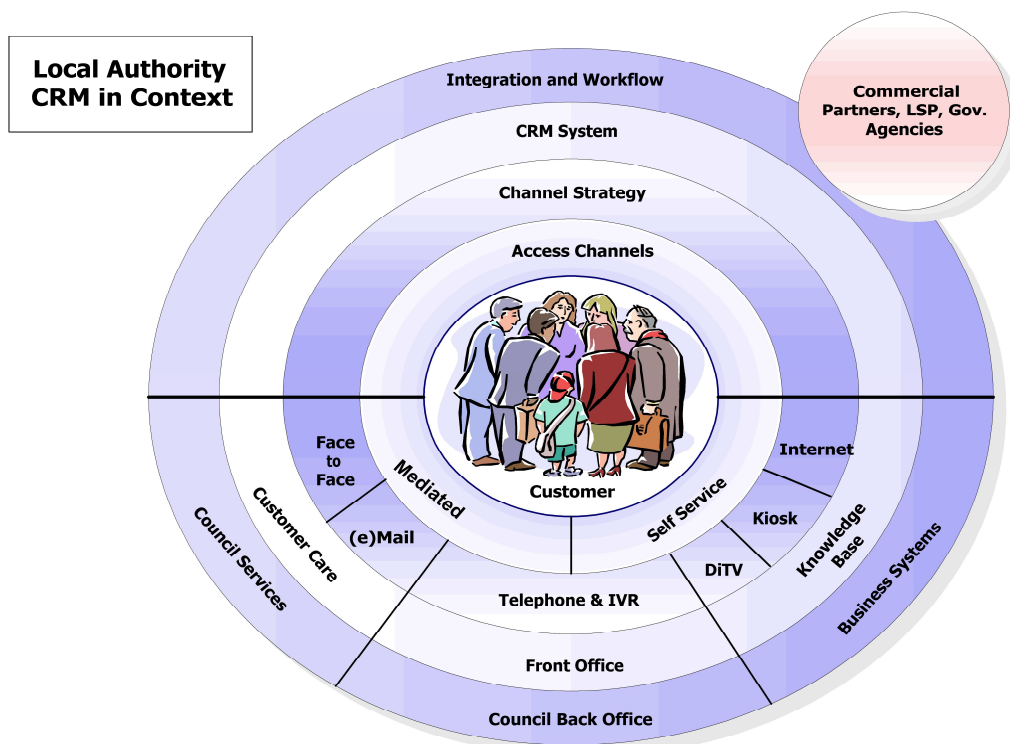
- Shape the development of future services from the customer perspective, rather than concentrating on service delivery issues
- Consider the views of a wider range of stakeholders when defining services
- Consider the benefits of partnership options in the delivery of service

The programme has taken into account the issues faced by customers who contact the Council. The issues to be addressed include:

- Getting through to the correct person to solve the query
- Being 'passed around the system'
- Increasing the knowledge of which services the Council provides
- Improving the telephone services
- Developing further access channels

A Programme Management approach will be taken to deliver the wider Strategy. This will ensure that the transactional experience will be improved and the benefits will be realised by both the customer and the Council.

The Strategy includes the adoption of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in order to improve the customer experience across all channels as illustrated below:



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The programme will fall into four main category areas:

- Process - the way we do things
- Organisation - where we are located and how we are structured
- Technology - the information and communication technology systems we use to support our transactions
- Culture - the attitudes we have and the way we behave.

### 3.1 Guiding Principles

There are five over-arching guiding principles that will drive the Customer Service Programme within the framework of the Council's strategic priorities:

- **Customer Service Excellence**

The Council will be resourced to deliver services to a consistently higher level of Customer Service.

Required Outcome = at least 80% of contacts resolved at the first contact

- **Efficiencies**

The Council will deliver services more efficiently through the elimination of duplication with Back Office functions reducing in size over time.

Required Outcome = balanced budget

- **Accessibility**

The Customer Service Centre will be a contact centre that supports integrated methods of telephone, electronic and face-to-face contact, with 24-hour customer access to services on-line, where Members can access and update information.

Required Outcome = equal access across local geography

- **Accountability**

The Customer Service Centre is the Front Office function, which 'owns' the concept of good Customer Service, using a balance of efficiency and effectiveness Key Performance Indicator measures.

Required Outcome = drive internal service improvements

- **Joined-up working**

The Customer Service Centre will reduce/eliminate internal fragmentation between agencies, sharing community 'intelligence' with County, Parish and Police agencies.

Required Outcome = improve public confidence that action will be taken on reported problems

## Customer Service Strategy

The Guiding Principles outline the Councils vision of what the Customer Service Programme will achieve in the long term, however, the initial phases will be centred on the service provided at the Council Offices and via electronic interactions.

There are specific areas for improvement that have been agreed and prioritised by the Council ...

1. Improve the Street scene 2. Deliver the outcome of the housing Option appraisal to meet tenants' expectations 3. Develop strong inclusive communities 4. Develop into a customer focussed organisation	Priority for resource allocation 2006-2008
5. Improve the safety of the community 6. Support service delivery improvement through best value principles	Priority for resource allocation 2006-2009
7. Revitalise Coalville and Ashby town centres 8. Reduce, recycle and re-use waste 9. Increase the number of people and specific target group's participation in healthy activities	Priority for resource allocation 2006-2010

The Government has also provided guidelines for the improvement of Local Government and the expected benefits.

The overriding aims of the Government programmes are to deliver efficiencies within Local Government through the development of partnership working and the uptake of electronic government. The key Government priorities include:

- Releasing Resources to the Front Line. The Gershon Review of 2004 outlines targets for Local Government to make cash and efficiency savings of 2.5% per annum from 2005/06.
- CPA 2 (Use of Resources)
- Modernising Local Government Agenda
- Implementing Electronic Government (IEG5)
- Freedom of Information Act 2000

The Customer Service Programme must therefore contribute to each of the Government initiatives.



## 4 Where Are We Now?

This section considers the main contact channels available for the Council. Analysis was undertaken at the start of 2004 to determine the volume and types of customer interaction experienced by the Authority across each of the main service areas. This analysis has allowed us to quantify contact volumes and durations to project models for future staffing and service development.

The following are some observational results from the analysis undertaken:

- The majority of transaction types are high volume and low complexity e.g. making a payment, requesting information, collecting a form.
- Service standards vary greatly across the organisation
- Most customers contact the Council by phone, followed by personal visit and written communication.
- There is very little information held about customers who make requests for service.

In most areas the service is provided with limited consideration of the individuals needs. Reception areas are located close to the service areas they support with the customer being serviced by someone who is not dedicated to fulltime customer service.

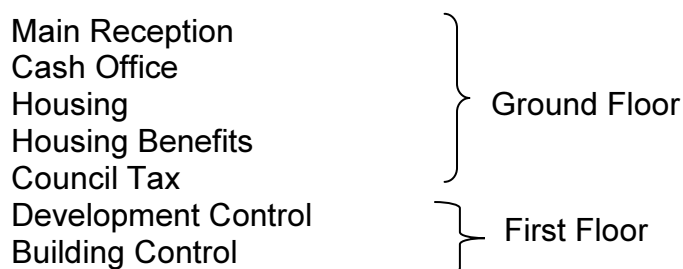
### 4.1 Walk in Contact

NWLDC represents a population of 86,000 people across a largely rural landscape. There is only one fulltime walk in location, at the Council Offices in Coalville. Customers who live outside Coalville have to travel to use the walk in facilities. This can be a problem for customers who have mobility problems.

The Corporate brand is not applied uniformly across all of the various reception points. There are pockets of good practice, but this is by no means universal.

The Customer receptions are poorly designed and are therefore uninviting to use, both for customers and staff.

The walk in facilities provide service from seven different reception points between 8:45am and 4:30pm:



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Each reception differs in feel and style and customers can become confused as to where they need to go for their enquiry. This issue is a particular problem for visitors to Building Control and Development Control, as their receptions are next to each other and the customer often does not know which service they require.

### **4.2 Telephone Enquiries**

The Council offers direct dial for the majority of their services supported by a corporate switchboard function that only signposts call to the service areas.

The larger service areas have single published general enquiry numbers and a number of staff who are capable of answering incoming calls to that number. A few teams have the telephones set up to 'hunt' for the next available number, if the initial direct dial number is engaged or not answered.

Currently there is no way of monitoring the number of incoming calls and their duration for any of the direct dial numbers. The switchboard is also very basic and provides no Management Information (MI).

Environmental and other out of hour's service calls are covered by partner organisations or a messaging service provided in house.

One of the key enablers of the Service Centre Project is to procure and install an IP telephony solution, initially for the Customer Service Centre, but ultimately to be rolled out across the Council. This will give the Service Centre, which will deal with the majority of incoming telephony, all of the MI and reporting capability required by a modern contact environment.

With the development of a more responsive and accessible service the number of contacts, and therefore service requests, is expected to rise. This is due to the latent demand, which was not being met before.

### **4.3 Electronic Interactions**

Each Service has its own e-mail 'bucket' account that can be accessed by designated individuals.

The Service e-mail addresses are published on the Internet for customers who wish to make a service request. The number of requests received electronically differs greatly by service. Those services that interact with professionals e.g. the Planning Services receive a proportionately higher number of electronic service requests than those whose primary contact is with the private customer.

The Council has invested in an Electronic Forms (E-Forms) package that will supersede many of the service specific e-mail addresses. The E-Forms are filled in by the customer on the web site and sent to the relevant area automatically, as they are pre-populated with the correct e-mail addresses.

#### 4.4 Cost of Access

The Government have quantified the cost to the Council of different access channels. These are shown in figure 2.

Cost per transaction by channel (Source: Government Connect)

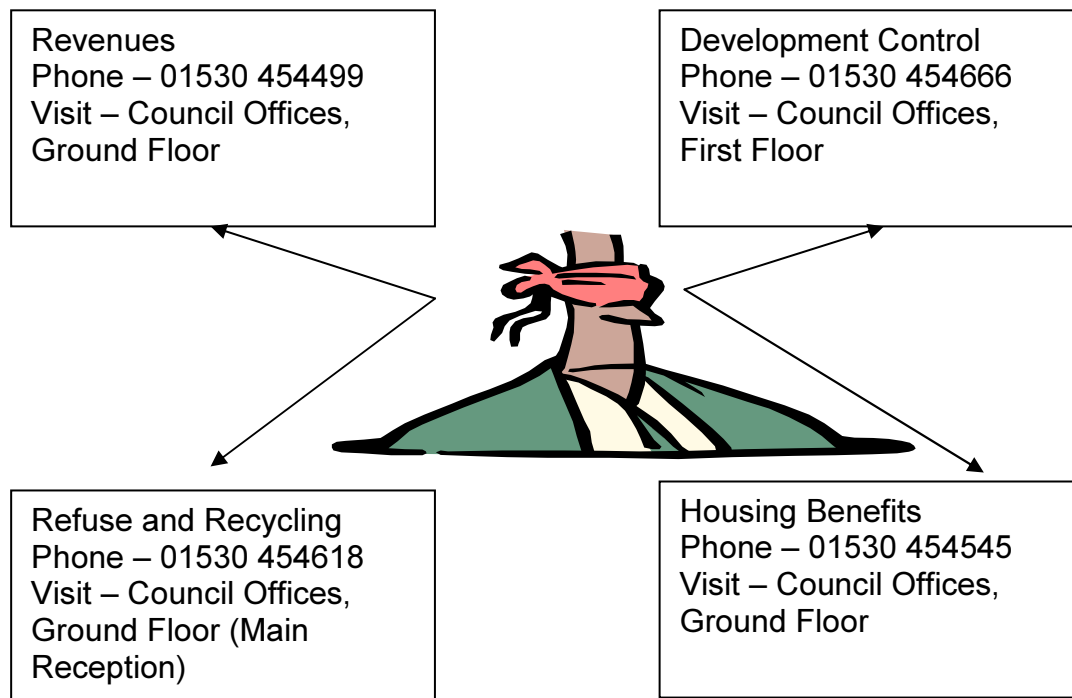
Access Channel	Cost per Transaction
Face – to – face	£9.00
Telephone	£2.00
Electronic	£0.12

It is clear from this cost comparison that large efficiencies can be realised by developing the service offered through electronic means.

The cash office creates a large number of walk-in contacts. Providing internet and telephone payment facilities and encouraging payment via direct debit are addressing these. These measures will all reduce the transaction costs over time.

## 5 The Customer Experience - A Case Study

In this scenario a new resident, who works Monday to Friday 8:30 – 5pm, would like to register their Council Tax, make a planning enquiry, find out about refuse collection, and discuss housing benefits



Potentially, the new customer will be required to phone or visit 4 different departments for access to reasonably basic information. This is both costly and time consuming for the customer and the Council.

There may be other municipal services required by the customer, which will require visits or phone calls to the County Council or other partner organisations.

The Councils current way of working is not customer focussed. Customers do have

- difficulty understanding the services we provide and the benefits available to them
- do not always know where to go to access services
- do not always know what information is required of them to obtain/use services and
- find it difficult to access services because of the limitations in opening times.

## 6 Delivering the Vision

The key elements to delivering the above vision are summarised in the following sections. Each section relates to an individual project strand within the Customer Service Change Programme.

### 6.1 Customer Service Centre (CSC)

The Customer Service Centre will provide a single point of access for a range of services. The services will transfer from the existing provision to the CSC in a phased migration. In the first migration will be Streetscene, Environmental and Planning services. Improving the Street scene is one for the Councils Strategic Priorities for delivery by 2008. Enabling service delivery through the CSC will help to raise the standard of service provided to the customer.

The other services use CAPS Uniform as their main IT system. CAPS Uniform has integration with the Lagan Frontline CRM software purchased by the Council.

The CSC will provide access through a variety of channels including telephone, face-to-face, e-mail, web communications, and traditional post.

### 6.2 Telephony

Upgrading the telephony for the CSC is vital to realising the efficiencies and benefits of introducing a unified front office. The Council will publish one phone number to cover all of its services. Through the use of call routing and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology the Council will be able to control how the calls are received and who deals with them.

The new telephony will deliver all of the management information (MI) required to operate the CSC effectively, and in tandem with the MI from the CRM software, will provide a complete picture of why our customers are making contact. Again, this will help us to create and improve service in line with the requirements of the customer in a way that gives the service a more personal feel.

### **6.3 Web Development – Self Service**

One of the key drivers of the Customer Services Change Programme are the efficiency gains that can be made by enabling service delivery through less traditional channels. Development of the website and the uptake of e-enabled services will be crucial to realising these benefits. The Government has invested large sums of money in the IEG programme and expects Local Government to release the benefits. As the demographic profile of the district changes and more people have access to the Internet, the number of self-service requests will increase, therefore driving down the overall cost of transactions.

### **6.4 Customer Service Standards**

To ensure that everyone in the authority is providing their service in a standard, corporate way, a set of measurable service standards is required. These will reflect the new culture and ethos of the council working as one team to deliver excellent customer service across all channels and all service areas. The standards need to be measurable; they will be published and used by the public to measure our actual performance against our stated expectations.

### **6.5 Corporate Branding and Reception Enhancements**

The corporate branding has been developed and is contained in the Corporate Style Guide (copies available on request from Communications Team). The branding is to be applied in a standardised way throughout the public areas of the Council Offices and any satellite sites (e.g. Leisure Centres, Tourist Information etc.).

The branding will clearly designate the Councils vision and be a statement of intent to customers and staff alike.

### **6.6 Business Review and Process Re-engineering (BPR)**

A culture of self-assessment will be developed to ensure that service areas are constantly assessing what they do and how they do it. This will ensure that services are delivered in an efficient, timely and cost effective manner, making the best use of technology and the skills of the available resource.

### **6.7 Accredited Training and Development**

All staff will be encouraged to undertake Personal and Professional Development Training. The Councils employees will become its biggest asset and they will be given the opportunities they deserve to realise their full potential. The Council will build on its current Performance Review and Development Scheme to ensure that employees are motivated and measured in a fair and consistent way.

### **6.8 Human Resources Strategy**

The HR Service will develop a robust recruitment plan to ensure that suitable qualified and skilled staff are recruited to the Customer Service Roles. A number of new roles will be created by the dedicated Customer Service roles, and these will be filled with a mixture of new recruit and existing staff.

The migration of front line services in the CSC will, inevitably, lead to a reduction in the number of roles available in the traditional back office areas.

As the CSC develops a new culture of extended opening hours and potentially weekend working may be required to meet our customers' demands. This will call for revised terms of employment to ensure sufficient cover is available for service standards to be increased.

The Authority will ensure that it meets its Corporate Social Responsibility obligations by encouraging a healthy Work Life Balance for all its Customer Service employees.

## 7 Measuring our Progress

To ensure that the Council is delivering improved Customer Service, there will be a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) established and monitored. These will test the level of compliance against our published Customer Service Standards and will include:

- Time taken to deal with enquiries
- Time taken to deal with phone calls
- Average length of calls
- Complaints received and the time taken to resolve them
- Percentage of queries resolved at the first point of contact
- Percentage of enquiries dealt with via electronic channels
- Results of customer satisfaction surveys
- Number of hours available to deal with customer interactions

As the services are migrated, more KPIs will be identified and will be monitored to feed into the overall customer service improvement statistics.

## 8 Conclusion

Our ambition must be to provide levels of customer service that are among the highest of any council in the United Kingdom and be comparable with the best providers in the private sector. Delivery of this strategy will enable us to achieve that.

We must make sure that we put the right level of resources in to the services that we develop. We must enhance our back-office systems and simplify our business processes before implementing these solutions, or we will simply end up providing current service over extended hours and in more locations.

It is important to recognise that this Strategy will benefit employees as well as our customers. We will be creating specialist customer service roles. There will be more opportunities for people who enjoy dealing with customers to do so, and they will have the means to provide better service.

## Customer Service Strategy

Much of the routine work currently dealt with by our service experts will be transferred to the front-office, leaving the experts to concentrate on the more complex issues for which they are trained.

We must also acknowledge that things change. Customers' needs alter and their expectations increase. New technology opens up new possibilities for service delivery. We will need to review this strategy regularly to make sure that we keep pace with new developments and the improvements being made by others.