

REPORT TO: Cabinet

MEETING DATE: 14 November 2023

BY: Executive Director for Place

SUBJECT: Customer Strategy 2023 - 2028

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet the Customer Strategy 2023 – 2028 (Appendix 1) for approval.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Customer Strategy 2023 – 2028 noting that this is a live document which will be monitored by the Service Manager – Customer Services and will be reported annually to the Council Management Team.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Since the approval of the Customer Contact Strategy in 2009, the increase in digital technology as a means of communication and service delivery, the global pandemic, cost of living crisis and pressure on Council budgets have changed the way many customers interact with Councils. This has created a need for a new strategy to define how the Council will keep customer service central to all aspects of service delivery, taking account of the challenges, opportunities and changing needs and expectations now and in the future.
- 3.2 In order to develop the Strategy, a Customer Survey was carried out in March and April 2023 to establish how customers wish to contact the Council now and in the future. The responses from this survey were used to shape the principles and commitments in the Strategy.
- 3.3 A consultation on the draft Strategy was carried out during September and October 2023. Feedback from the consultation showed support for the principles and commitments along with a desire to see the Strategy

implemented with clear measures and timescales for a range of ways to contact the Council and concern that digital exclusion was taken into account within the strategy. The feedback has been considered in this final version of the Strategy and in the operational Action Plan that supports its delivery. More detail on the findings has been submitted into the Members' Library (*ref: 110/23*) along with a copy of the Action Plan, which is outlined in more detail in Paragraph 3.5.

- 3.4 In keeping with the Strategy being committed to trauma informed practice the use of the word 'customer' has been expanded at certain points within the Strategy to include 'people we work with'. This recognises that not all of the people we work with choose to do so and therefore would not consider themselves customers.
- 3.5 The Strategy will be delivered through an operational Action Plan. The Action Plan includes action owners, due dates and outcome measures, and will be monitored by the Service Manager – Customer Services, with progress being reported annually to the Council Management Team. A number of the commitments in the Strategy will be delivered through other strategies, projects and action plans, for example the Digital Strategy and the Asset Review.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 In approving this Strategy, Cabinet will be ensuring that the principles and commitments detailed in the Strategy are embedded across the Council.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and no negative impacts have been identified. The Integrated Impact Assessment will be published on the Council website in due course.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – There are no direct financial implications associated with the Strategy. There is one commitment that may incur an unbudgeted cost – the introduction of an appointment system for face-to-face meetings – however it is expected that this can be delivered through an existing IT system.
- 6.2 Personnel - None.
- 6.3 Other - Effective implementation of this strategy will require the support of Council Services to deliver the principles and commitments within the Strategy and implement the action plan.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Customer Strategy 2023 – 2028: Consultation Findings and Action Plan
(Members' Library Ref: 110/23)

Appendix 1: Customer Strategy 2023 – 2028

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DATE	24 October 2023

DRAFT CUSTOMER STRATEGY 2023-28

Delivering services to residents, tenants, businesses,
visitors, partners, community groups, council staff and services.



Introduction

Welcome to East Lothian Council's Customer Strategy.

I am delighted to introduce our new Customer Strategy, which sets out a commitment to deliver the best services we can to all our customers. It highlights the importance of continuing to ensure customers and the people we work with are at the heart of everything we do as a council. This means ensuring services remain fit for purpose and accessible to all who need them, while being designed in such a way as to tackle inequalities, adversity and trauma in all of their forms.

In developing the strategy, we carried out a survey to help understand how customers want to contact us – now and in the future. The strategy responds to the requirements of our customers and the people we work with, recognising the importance of being able to access services easily in a way and at a time that suits.

In recent years there have been changes in the way we interact with each other and the services we access, partly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There has been a shift towards online communication and the Council has embraced this change. Our Digital Strategy 2022-27 highlights the role technology plays in improving how we engage with our customers and deliver services, at a time when demand for services is increasing and councils face severe financial pressures. That's why the new Customer Strategy reinforces our commitment to use digital innovation to best effect so that we can deploy resources as efficiently as possible and in support of the priorities set out in our Council Plan.

At the same time, there is a recognition that we must continue to deliver services sustainably while reducing our carbon footprint and working towards achieving net zero.

This is particularly important given that East Lothian's working age population is projected to increase by 8.6% by 2028, while our pensionable age population is expected to increase by 10.9% and the number of school aged children is expected to increase by 17.1%.

We also know that many customers are facing pressures. The cost of living is increasing and prices are rising at rates not seen since the 1970s including energy bills, food, fuel and more. Customer needs are changing and expectations are increasing. That's why we have developed this Customer Strategy. It is underpinned by our East Lothian Council values – Enabling, Leading and Caring. In doing so, the strategy sets out our commitment to enabling improvement, leading with innovation and caring for our customers. It also shows how we will involve you – our customers – in the design of our processes and services so that we continue to work together to deliver our priorities.

Monica Patterson

East Lothian Council Chief Executive

Our county, our customers

Our customers and the people we work with includes anyone who needs or chooses to interact with us. This includes our residents, tenants, businesses, visitors, partners, community groups and our own staff and services. This is a snapshot of our services, our customers and how we met some of their needs in 2022/23.



109,580 population



1,073 km of roads maintained



2,567 blue badges issued



202 pitches and play areas



15,092 children in 42 schools



32,289 visits to museums



24,493 online transactions



20,600 care at home hours per week



1,016 planning applications determined



723 employability programme participants



9,107 Council tenancies



1,558 businesses supported



2.7 million kerbside recycling collections



2,053 births and deaths registered



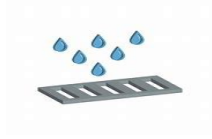
264,698 calls handled by the Contact Centre



2,279 referrals to children's social work



93 Council buildings cleaned and maintained



1,880 road gullies maintained



2,141 licences granted



51 community groups awarded grants



20,541 street lights maintained (95% LED)



1.3 million non-recycling collections



235,064 calls handled from 6,500 community alarms



30 countryside sites managed



345 school pupils engaged in employability programmes



426,674 visits to libraries



340 km of core paths maintained



2,406 potholes filled



52,152 properties registered for Council Tax



41,262 face to face visits for Customer Service enquiries



17,462 housing benefit and council tax reduction claims processed



2,869 cash payments and 270,572 online payments made

Our engagement with you

In March and April 2023 we ran a survey to help us understand how you want to contact us now and in the future. The survey was available online and paper copies were available in our libraries, museums, area offices, community centres and Enjoy Leisure centres. We have used your feedback to shape our strategy.



You told us that you usually go online to contact us (52% use website and email) followed by phone contact at 33%. Less than 15% usually visit us in person. You prefer to have a range of ways to contact us.

Over 80% feel the service you receive is 'OK' or better, and the things that really matter to you are a friendly face or voice, making things easy and responding quickly. These are the things we need to focus on to make sure you have a good experience when you contact us.

71% feel you can access Council services when you need to. The website or email is the most popular choice for simple services like finding information, making payments and reporting things but for anything personal or more complicated phone is the first choice. For updates, complaints and compliments email is the preferred route with phone/web second choice.

Over 82% of you are confident using the website and have used it in the last 12 months, and 62% find it easy to use. The themes of making things easy and responding quickly are just as important for the website as all other ways of contacting us, as is making sure information is kept up to date. Some of you mentioned that you would like a 'live chat' option on the website.

Those who attend offices often do so because you feel you get a better service face to face, although a number of you noted that staff are not always available in offices when you drop in.

Our Vision

We want to make sure the services we provide deliver what you need when you need it, while continuing to target our resources where they are needed most.

Our strategy is customer focussed, community led, digital first and sustainable. It will ensure more services are available online and will make sure it is quick and easy to access them. It will take a targeted approach to face to face service delivery in each area for those who need it, bringing services and partners together to meet customer needs as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Technology has changed the way people interact both socially and when requesting goods and services. We know that more and more of our customers want to interact with us online – in 2022 there were over 9.2 million views of our website, mostly using mobile devices. Over the next five years we will provide more services online, so that you can access them when it suits you to do so, and we will ensure the processes we use to deliver these services are efficient and effective. We will offer you advice and support to get online if you need it, and we will make sure our staff have the confidence and skills to use our systems effectively.

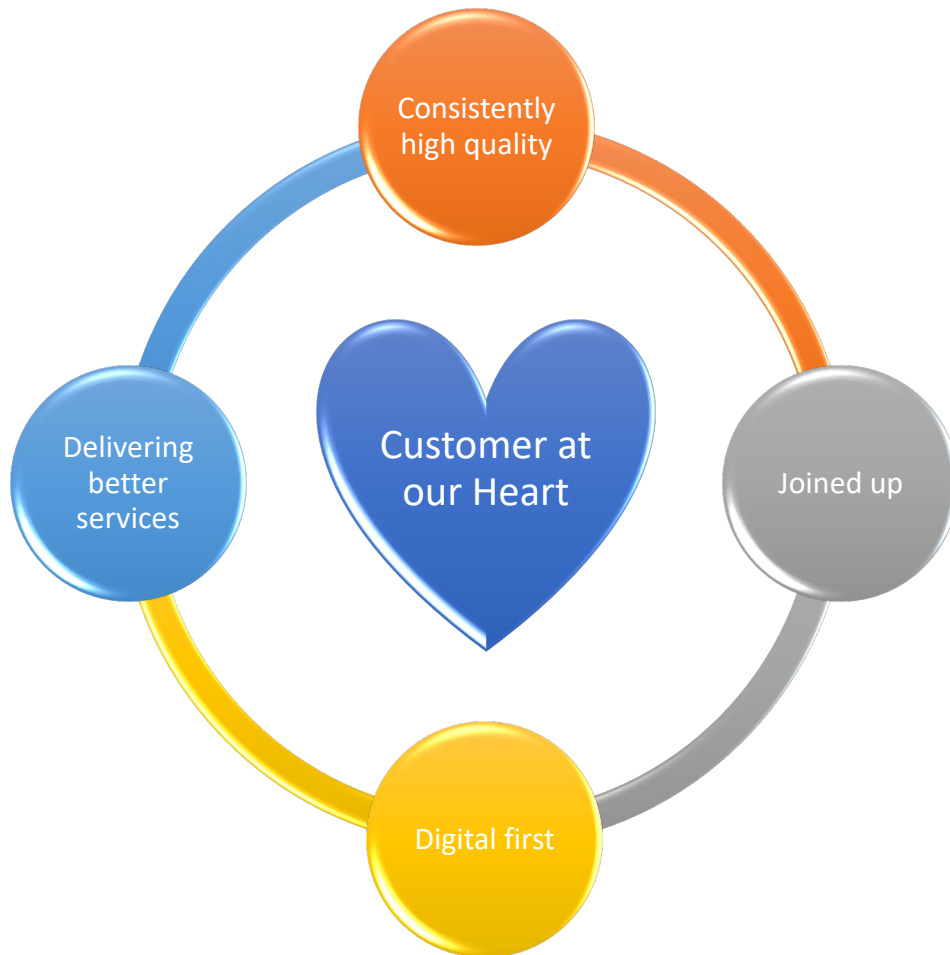
However we know technology is not suitable for everyone or for every situation. By providing high quality, easy to use online services for those who can use them, we will increase capacity and resources to support those customers and people we work with for whom a phone call or a face to face service is more suitable.

We will put customers at the heart of everything we do. We will ensure our services are fit for purpose and accessible to all who need them, regardless of how you choose to contact us, and are designed in such a way as to tackle inequalities, adversity and trauma in all of their forms. We will continue to invest in our staff to enable them to support all of our customers and deliver high quality services. Our approach meets the requirements of the [Equality Act 2010](#). It is person-centred, [trauma informed](#) and is designed to meet the needs of children as set out in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and [The Promise](#).

By working in this way we will improve the customer experience – increasing the services we can deliver in one step, reducing the need for you to chase us for information and therefore ensuring we can deliver services more efficiently and effectively.

Our Customer Principles

Our Customer Principles explain how we will deliver our Vision.



[Image description for visually impaired customers: The image shows the five principles of our customer strategy. In the centre is a heart shape saying 'Customer at our Heart'. Surrounding the heart are four linked circles that say 'Consistently high quality', 'Joined up', 'Digital first' and 'Delivering better services'.]



- We will put you, our customers and the people we work with, at the heart of everything we do, using feedback to continuously improve services.
- We will ensure all customers are treated fairly and with respect.
- The ways in which you contact us will be fully accessible for you.
- It will become more convenient, easier and quicker for you to interact with us.
- We will design flexible services which adapt to the changing needs and lived experiences of our customers now and in the future.
- We will keep you updated if service requests can't be dealt with 'one-stop' – at the first point of contact - until the service is delivered.
- We will involve you as we design more services, whether online, face to face, or by other means, to ensure our services are designed around your needs.
- Some of our services are delivered jointly with our partners, and we will work together to ensure the best possible experience when you interact with us.



- We will provide a consistently high quality service by applying a defined set of values and behaviours called the '[East Lothian Way](#)' that are person-centred, proactive, caring and inclusive, regardless of how you choose to contact us.
- We will have a consistent approach to communication for example voicemails, email signatures, auto-responses on mailboxes.
- We will set clear expectations of when you will hear from us.
- We will invest in our staff to provide the best possible service and experience to our customers and the people we work with, supporting them to get it right first time.
- We will regularly ask for your views about the quality of our interactions with you.



- Our Contact Centre will be the main route for phone calls to the Council.
- We will make it simpler for you to know how to contact us for different services.
- We will offer appointments for face to face services for those who need them, to help you get to the right service quickly.
- Our staff will be available across a variety of locations, appropriate for each area and we will bring services together to make them easier to access.



- We will continue to promote and support a digital first/self-service approach wherever possible.
- We will increase the number of ways you can contact us online, for example live chat.
- We will introduce more online facilities and self-service opportunities so you can decide when, where and how to get in touch with us.
- All of our services will make use of the technology available, automating where we can.
- Our online services will be user friendly to meet your needs and those of our services and partners.
- Staff will be trained in our systems and we will offer support to you to access our services online.

These commitments are reflected in our [Digital Strategy 2022 - 2027](#).



Delivering better services

- We will continue to deliver best value in the services we provide. Moving more services online will enable us to increase staff availability to support customers and people we work with who can't access digital services or who have more complex service requests.
- We will increase the number of services that are delivered at the first point of contact and keep you updated if it takes longer.
- We will improve our response times by improving and automating processes.
- When things go wrong we will listen to you and keep you informed of our actions and the improvements that can be made.
- We will review our Customer Feedback processes to make it as easy as possible for you to give feedback.
- We will use your feedback and analyse our data to improve how we do things, understand who is and isn't using our services and target service delivery to those who need it most.

Delivering our Customer Strategy

We have created an action plan that will help us deliver this strategy within available resources. The actions are phased across the life of the strategy and cover all of the commitments we have made. This means that, as a customer, you will see continuous improvements in how we deliver the services we provide.

Each action has been allocated an 'owner' – that is the service who will take the lead on ensuring the action is delivered. Each action has also been allocated a date by which we expect it to be completed.

The delivery of the customer strategy will be monitored by the Service Manager – Customer Services and will be reported annually to the Council's Management Team.

This reporting will include outcome measures linked to the action plan which will monitor, track and measure continuous improvement.

Appendix 1: Connections to other policies and strategies

ELC Customer Strategy

Local policies and strategies

Council Plan

Digital Strategy

Communication Strategy

Equality Plan

Recovery & Renewal Plan

Climate Change Strategy

Financial Strategy

Poverty Plan

Local Development Plan 2

Children's Services Plan

Integration Joint Board Strategic Plan

National and international policies and strategies

Scottish Digital Strategy

The Promise

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

National Performance Framework

Equality Act

Place Standard



Versions of this leaflet can be supplied in Braille, large print, audiotape or in your own language. Please phone Customer Services if you require assistance on 01620 827199

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