

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

One Council, One Customer Service Strategy

The purpose of the strategy is to increase customer satisfaction creating an enduring positive experience of the County Council and its services. Wherever possible we want our customers to feel that we have added value to their experience of us and to have exceeded their expectations. We want our customers to have a lasting impression that Kent County Council makes a real difference to their lives, that we help them to help themselves and to help each other.

The word ‘customer’ signifies a different relationship with citizens; one which focuses on their individual needs and preferences. It includes anyone who lives or works in Kent, or visits us here, and it also includes people who buy goods from us; our suppliers and contractors; commissioned agencies and our strategic partners.

Creating a Lasting Customer Impression

“A customer whose illness had made him unable to speak and who had no family to help him came into the Gateway. He had had to give up work because his condition had got worse. He gave us a list of things he needed help with. Our Gateway staff were able to check his housing benefit claim and advise him that we would meet his rent in full. They also advised him his council tax claim had been assessed and he would get a refund. The customer service advisor helped him to complete a blue badge application and referred him to Adult Social Services who arranged for an assessment so they could adapt his house and arrange for help at home with meals. They arranged for a benefit advisor from DWP to visit him to see if he was entitled to higher disability benefits.

He was very emotional but happy that he had walked into the right place. He held up a note just saying ‘Thank you’.”

Our aim is to change the way we serve our customers. We believe it is possible to achieve high quality customer service and save money – a win-win strategy. We will achieve our purpose by designing services in a way that makes sense to our customers. This is about a different way of working aimed at increasing our customers’ ability to help themselves and to help each other. It gives us a real chance to have one corporate approach to customer service creating “one feeling” or experience for our customers.

What are the big differences we want to make?

We want a ‘**One Council**’ approach to raising customer satisfaction by:

- Using knowledge about our customers to shape future policies and priorities
- Creating one “digital council” that allows easy access to information and services
- Working closely with the private sector to develop new models of delivery
- Aspiring to create a contact centre that is world class becoming a regional contact centre with both public and private sector partners
- Raising the standard across our face-to-face network so it matches the best of the private and public sectors
- Reducing unnecessary customer contact across the whole County Council

- Increasing self-service opportunities
- Engaging **all** our staff

Achieving customer excellence
needs....everyone, every day

This will increase public recognition of and confidence in the KCC brand. Our brand is much more than just our logo. It represents everything we stand for, our core values, and the way the public view us. Customers will define our brand based on their most recent experience of us. Strong branding allows customers to associate our services with a consistent set of values which they know and trust. This helps to deliver immediate satisfaction whilst building solid long term relationships. With a strong brand, customers will see added value in new services because of what they associate with our brand.

Vision

Our vision of *customer satisfaction* is a consistently high-quality customer experience, recognised by '**one front desk**':

- **One** KCC digital environment
- **One** KCC 'phone number
- **One** KCC face-to-face network
- **One** KCC customer account and card

This will become standard practice across our organisation; there will be **one** way of doing things.

Principles

The principles behind this strategy were developed by the KCC Challenger Group in June 2011 and have been fundamental in its design; they were brought together under three headings:

We will treat all our customers:

- with dignity and respect, keeping our promises, exceeding expectations wherever possible
- in a way that empowers them to take control and make informed choices
- fairly, offering transparent and easy to understand processes
- equally, providing a consistent customer experience regardless of how they choose to contact us

We will continuously improve our services by:

- understanding who uses our services
- using customer insight, consultation and customer experience surveys
- understanding the customer journey
- providing easy access to a wide range of services
- working with partners to join up services in a way that makes sense to our customers
- providing greater efficiency by sharing accommodation with our partners

We will behave as one council by:

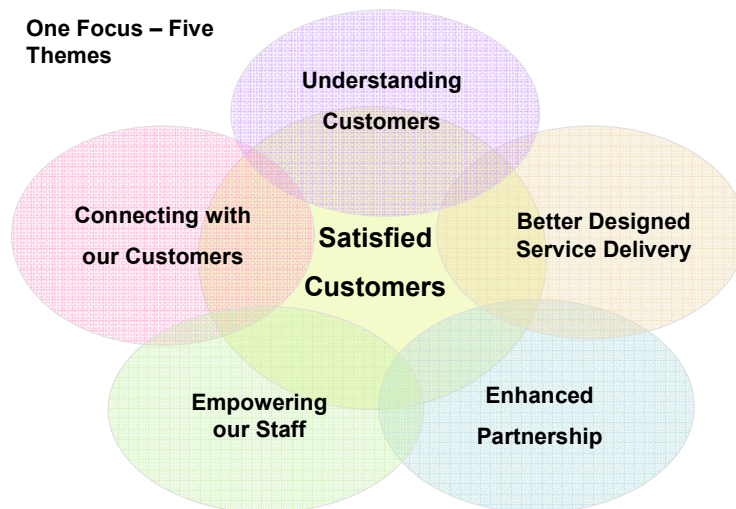
- managing information and knowledge to remove duplication
- matching customer need with the appropriate response
- delivering value to the customer
- training our staff to a consistently high standard of customer service
- resolving customer queries at the first point of contact
- promoting channel migration to the most effective channel

Whilst not all our customers are willing customers, they are entitled to expect the same degree of dignity and respect as we would expect ourselves. Our aim is to build relationships which will help us to solve problems together.

Themes

We have broken down our strategy into **five themes**;

1. Understanding our customers
2. Connecting with our customers – effectively and efficiently
3. Empowering our staff to meet customer expectations
4. Providing excellent quality and value to customers through better designed service delivery
5. Improving customer experience working with our public service partners.



Bold Steps for Kent

The Customer Service Strategy will contribute to achieving the three ambitions in **Bold Steps** for Kent:

- It will put customers in control by empowering them to help themselves and each other
- It will help tackle disadvantage by making it easier for them to talk to us and making sure that they receive the same high quality of service regardless of their circumstances or how they contact us
- It will help the Kent economy to grow; whether by putting services together in such a way as to make it easier for customers to get the skills they need to find a job; or by making better use of our buildings by sharing them with public sector partners, voluntary and community groups

The key priorities in **Bold Steps** for this Customer Service strategy are to:

- Improve access to public services and move towards a single initial assessment process
- Expand the 'Gateway' programme to cover multi-channel access to services through the internet and telephone - a single Gateway website and single Gateway telephone number, so residents can access the services they wish

- Embed the Gateway approach across the range of KCC front facing facilities so whichever door the customer walks through it is always a gateway to KCC being able to help them meet their needs

The Strategy contributes to achieving the **Leader's vision** of an enabling authority with an emphasis on:

- **Personalisation** - through introducing a customer account and creating a Kent Card
- **Incentivisation** - by helping people to help themselves through the creation of opportunities to access services online, enabling them to choose their own services and complete self assessments
- **Demand Management** – by making information more readily available on our website; by encouraging people to use more cost effective channels, and by reducing duplication.
- **Localism** – by working with people to design and potentially run their local services.

How long will it take to implement the Customer Service Strategy?

The strategy is a three year plan, based on the experience of other authorities' customer strategies, but this does not mean we will stop after three years. Excellent customer service is about keeping up with customer expectations and our customer service will evolve and change to reflect this.

By 2015 we will be recognised as delivering a 'leading edge' service. We are not starting from scratch; we have already started this journey with Contact Kent, kent.gov and face-to-face at libraries, children centres and Gateway.

Who will make this happen?

Everyone:

- Our customers, because they will have the opportunity to be involved in shaping and delivering services.
- Our Members, because they are the elected representatives of our customers and have valuable insight into customers views and needs
- Our staff, because every one of us makes a contribution to customer service.
- Our partners, because if we redesign services together we will improve the customer experience

"If you're not serving the customer, your job is to be serving someone who is."

Jan Carlzon – Former CEO of Scandinavian Airlines

What will be the overall outcomes?

Customers will;

- experience satisfaction and delight with KCC
- receive consistently good service no matter where or how they contact us
- find it easy to contact us and get answers to their enquiries
- make informed decisions and grow in self-reliance
- trust the Kent County Council brand

Staff will:

- have the skills and the knowledge to deliver excellent customer service

- be able to resolve customers enquires and be empowered to change processes for the benefit of customers
- understand the connections between services and how they affect customers
- be satisfied in their jobs and feel valued in their teams
- be proud to work for Kent County Council and act confidently as its ambassadors

KCC will:

- be recognised as a first rate authority
- save money through service delivery that is intuitive to the customer
- involve customers in the design and delivery of services
- deliver more integrated services by developing better partnerships
- be better prepared for future demands by making use of our insight into recent, current and upcoming demand for services

What will our approach be?

Our approach to increasing customer satisfaction is:

- Building a better understanding of our customers
- Creating 'one front desk' that brings together the data from all customer channels in one place to help us understand where improvements can be made
- Using that "one front desk" or customer contact centre to drive new changes for customer service
- Creating a Customer Assurance and Design (CANDO) team to help business units identify opportunities for improvement
- Giving the same consistent quality, whatever channel a customer chooses to reach us
- Making our processes as quick and easy as possible for the customer
- Making first-time resolution the norm
- Using feedback from our customers to change our processes

Our approach to reducing costs is:

- Reducing unnecessary contact
- Re-engineering and improving our processes and removing duplication
- Having one public access point for each channel
- Encouraging and driving channel shift
- Creating a single initial assessment process
- Reducing and integrating computer databases and systems

Customer Contact Centre – 'The Bridge'

In the same way that a captain controls the ship from 'The Bridge', by having an overview of everything that is going on in and around the ship, the customer contact centre will have an overview of all customer contact, enabling it to drive improvements in customer experience across KCC.

How will we fund the Customer Service Strategy?

There is an assumption sufficient resources will be made available to implement the Customer Service Strategy allowing adjustments for priorities, funding and service quality. The funding model for the Contact Centre will be remodelled. Savings achieved through channel shift and streamlining

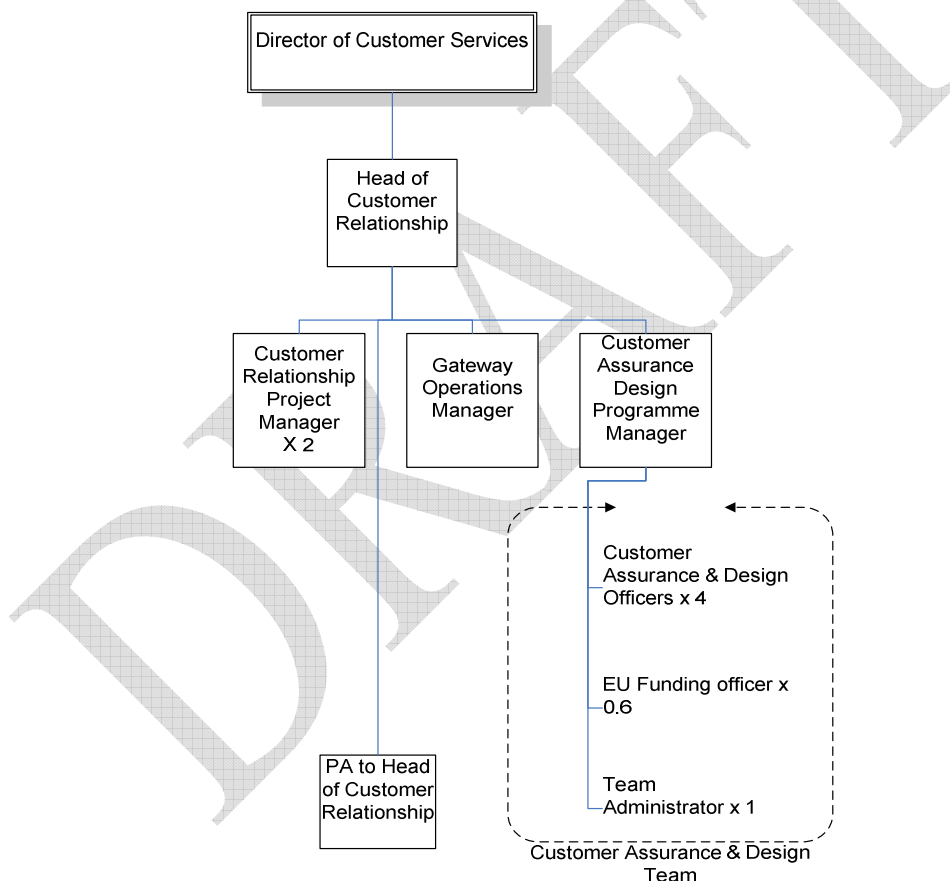
processes should go back to the team concerned to count as savings or be used to invest in service improvement.

The strategy itself will call upon existing customer resources and new resources in the short term. The Customer Assurance and Design (CANDO) team will work with units to support them to serve their customers in more efficient ways, leading to improved customer experience and a reduction in service costs for KCC.

The CANDO team will bring an evidence based approach to business process and service design improvement. This team will balance skills for customer delight, empathy for customer reality and designing against demand. This will bring a fresh set of skills and insights to existing business processes.

Based on successful models elsewhere, the team will be expected to cover its costs within two years by identifying and delivering significant savings.

Suggested Kent Customer Assurance and Design Team staffing structure:



Governance

The Customer Services Strategy will be owned corporately by Kent County Council, managed by the Director of Customer Services, implemented by the Customer Relationship Team together with the Directorates and driven by the Customer Access and Assessment Team.

Comments on this strategy should be sent to pascale.blackburn-clarke@kent.gov.uk & mike.ballard@kent.gov.uk

THEME ONE: UNDERSTANDING OUR CUSTOMERS

By 2015, customers have greater confidence in their relationship with KCC because they feel their needs are known and their preferences understood.

Understanding our customers better helps us to design and target services much more effectively. We can do this by using information we already have about our customers, encouraging them to give us feedback about how we are performing and by using insight tools to help us predict what they might need in the future.

We have a wealth of data and need to use it better. In the private sector customer data is the most important asset they have. We are missing the gold here. We have a treasure of information about our customers but it is not held in one place and so it is difficult to learn from. We also get regular feedback through comments and complaints, community engagement, social media blogs/posts, forums and insight from our own staff and Members which we should use to improve our services.

If we put this information together with insight tools, we will be in a stronger position to predict future demand for services and understand the way in which people want to access them.

Insight tools – These are knowledge based tools which collect information about people and the way in which they choose to live and interact. A well known example is Tesco Clubcard which allows Tesco to understand what we buy and when, so that they can tailor vouchers and advertising to the right people

Example of using Customer Insight - Ashford Library stock

Before Ashford Library opened in July 2011, customer insight was used to decide which books should be on the shelves. Insight highlighted the demand for children's books and confirmed reading trends in the area. In August 2009, the average daily footfall was 717 and 18,000 books were issued, 7,000 of which were children's books. In August 2011, the average daily footfall was 912, and 26,000 books were issued, of which 13,000 were children's books

One Resident, One Account

We propose customers will have access to their own individual customer account to let them keep track of things they have reported, requested or paid for and to find out about other services which they may interest them. This will provide us with a view of the customer which can be used to influence and shape future services. This will be done by ensuring all transactions and contacts are routed through one central system capturing key information.

“The world is moving in this direction where things are going to be designed more around people and that's going to be a really powerful direction... In a few years' time people will share more information and expect to see services, advertising and websites that were targeted at them.”

Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook

Complaints

“Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning.”

Bill Gates

Customer feedback and comments, including complaints and compliments, are a really valuable opportunity to learn about what matters to customers and how to improve service design and delivery. Acting on lessons we learn from complaints is an essential part of continuous improvement.

We will introduce one contact telephone number, postal address and email address for all complaints. The information about how to complain will be held in one place and the complaints themselves handled by one KCC Complaints Team based in Customer Services.

Customer benefits

- Customers will know how to give KCC their views about their needs and preferences and suggestions about services
- Customers will feel they are understood
- Customers will receive information and advice enabling them to help themselves and each other
- Customers will be able to view their contacts with KCC
- Customers will be kept up to date with their enquiry's progress

We propose to:

- Actively and routinely consult customers and learn from their comments
- Bring our customer information together in one place
- Use insight to get a better understanding of the services people want and how they would prefer to access them
- Develop 'One Resident: One Account'

THEME TWO: CONNECTING WITH OUR CUSTOMERS – EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY

By 2015, customers contact KCC in ways and at times to suit them, receiving the same high quality, timely and reliable response whichever channel they choose.

Customer behaviour is fluid and people's expectations are high. We all want information and to be able to complete transactions faster than ever and in ways that are convenient to us at that particular moment.

Our customers expect to be able to complete their transactions easily and quickly regardless of which department or even which tier of government is responsible for delivering a service. They see us as one entity and so should we.

We will have one 'front desk' for all of our contact channels. We will ensure that our staff will have access to the information they need in order to resolve the majority of customers' enquires first time.

There will be one version of the truth across all channels; we will be 'digital by default'. Staff will use our website as their primary resource. The information people find on our website will be as reliable as speaking to a member of staff – enabling customers to trust and have confidence in all our channels.

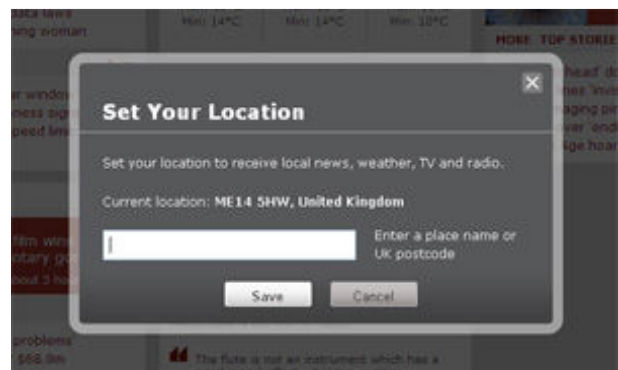
Offering customers choice about which channel they want to use is important, however we need to reduce dependence on costly transactions where there are reliable alternatives that are cheaper and easier for the customer. The drive to using more cost effective channels is known as "channel shift".

Web and mobile

Our website will be our **online Gateway**, where people can quickly and easily find and use a wide range of rich, open information and services that relate to who they are, where they live or what they want to do, in a way that is convenient for them.

We will focus on:

- Getting the basics right
 - We will make it quick and simple to get advice, tell us about a problem, request a service, book an appointment, pay for things, or track the progress of things reported or applied for
 - we will never launch a new digital service without first testing it with people who will use it
 - we will learn from people who use our website to continually improve it
- Encouraging people to use our website
 - We will make our web content and services available for re-use on other websites, such as local community websites
 - We will use social media to encourage more people to visit our website
 - Our staff will encourage people to use our website when they call or visit us



BBC Website

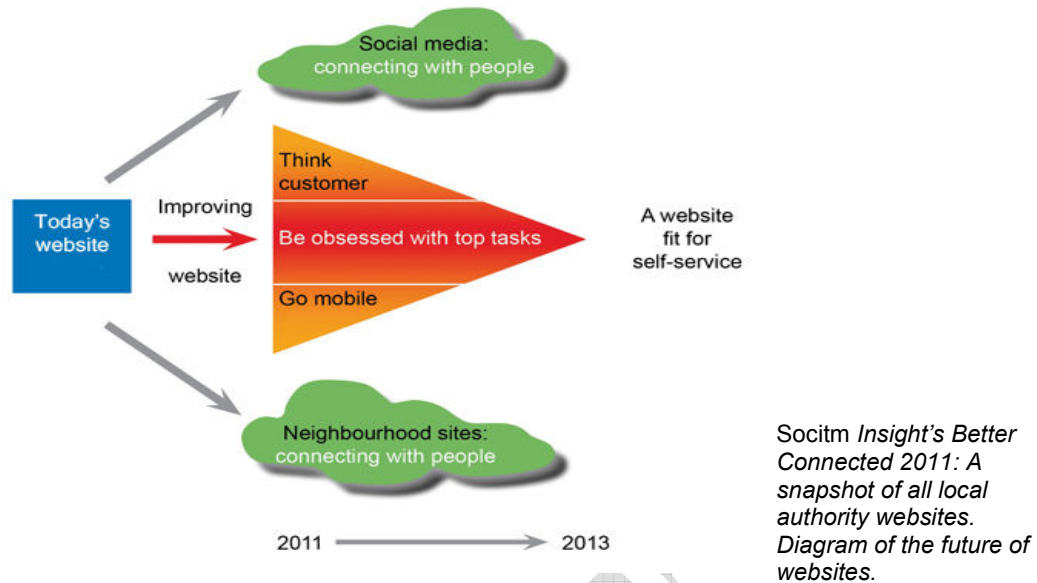
- Offering a personal experience
 - We will provide a single customer account so people can track the progress of things they have reported to us or applied for.
 - We will enable people to type in their postcode to find out what services are nearby such as schools, doctors' surgeries and information such as when rubbish is collected or planned developments.
 - We will enable people to sign up to receive timely and relevant information.
- Being usable and accessible
 - We will make sure that the website is accessible and usable on 'smart' devices such as Blackberrys, iPhones and, in future, internet TV
 - We will continue to make sure our digital services are accessible
- Providing new and compelling ways for people to interact with us
 - We will use mobile applications (apps) to make our content and services available 'on the move'
 - We will use social media to listen and talk to customers, answer their questions or direct them to the appropriate place
 - We will add value to people visiting our website by providing other useful content from other websites, such as NHS Choices

Example of Digital Technology - Explore Kent Mobile App

In May 2011, Explore Kent launched KCC's first mobile application or app as they are known. It offers a simple and new way to explore the Kent countryside and coast and it's free. You can download walking and cycling routes direct to your phone and track and share routes with friends.

So far customers say they love the app and it has received the highest rating of 5 stars. In its first month over 1,800 walks were downloaded.

Customer Comment: 'Just got back from a splendid walk around Cranbrook guided entirely by this app and I LOVE IT!!! Such a lot of effort has gone into this...'



We will use social networks and connect with people through local community websites to:

- increase the reach of our services
- inform people, particularly about information that is time critical and localised such as services available in bad weather
- understand what is important to our customers, answer their questions or signpost them to the relevant place
- encourage them to report problems and be involved in decision-making
- raise awareness about local issues

Smart Cards

We will have one KCC smart card to give residents access a range of services from libraries to concessionary travel. Customers will be able to add services onto their smart card as they become eligible for them without needing to give us the same information again.

The single smart card will replace all the separate cards currently in use. In future, we will work with private and public sector partners to create a single card for Kent to offer additional services, such as access to leisure facilities; and offer incentives such as discounts or the opportunity to try something new.

Telephone

The Contact Centre will be the hub for all telephone contact (and emails) about KCC services.

It will:

- have one public contact number for all services,
- pilot live web-chat which will enable customers to complete transactions online with help from contact centre staff,
- use technology such as text messaging to keep customers informed,

- gather information and feedback to achieve excellent customer service across all our channels,
- use the same tools as our customers to help improve and to build their confidence in those systems,
- make the most of the opportunities technology offers, for example home-shoring which could let contact centre staff work from home, making it easier to manage peaks and troughs in customer demand and improve staff retention

Face to face

There will always be a need to offer services through our face-to-face network as not all customers are able to transact with us by phone or web.

We will complete the current Gateway programme (subject to service review) and extend the Gateway approach across our face-to-face network including libraries and children centres. The Gateway approach means more than just locating services together under one roof. Partners in each Gateway understand each other's services so that they can cross refer customers to meet their needs in a more complete way.

We have a lot of buildings that customers visit, such as libraries and children's centres, which can also offer similar 'Gateway' solutions. In this way services available through our current network of Gateways will be expanded and our staff equipped with the skills, knowledge and tools needed to resolve the majority of enquiries at the first point of contact – "whichever door the customer walks through, it is always a gateway to KCC where we can help them to meet their needs." We will extend this approach by reaching out to our rural communities and 'hard to reach' groups by using our mobile outreach.

We will continue to work in partnership with other public and voluntary sector organisations, fully exploring opportunities for collaboration and joined up service delivery where this benefits customers and delivers efficiency.

Channel Shift

It costs KCC less to handle customer contact by phone than it does face-to-face, even less if customers serve themselves on the website. We also know many of our customers prefer to use the web, for banking or shopping but in most cases we do not offer them the opportunity to do this on our website.

The aim of channel shift is to encourage more users to self-serve using the web, whilst reserving face-to-face and phone channels for the most complex enquiries or for customers who cannot interact with us online. If achieved, channel shift will reduce costs, improve customer experience and ensure that customers are using the most appropriate channel for what they want to do.

Cost to serve
£7.40 face to face
£2.90 by phone
£0.32 by web
Cost to serve is calculated using Socitm 'Better Served: Customer Access, efficiency and channel shift paper February 2011'

What we know from our customer insight work is that there are key audiences who will use our website, when it meets their expectations. These expectations are currently driven by private sector experiences such as Amazon. This will mean that our services will have to be designed as online services wherever possible. We will also continue to encourage people to use the website

by running promotional campaigns for those services that have a low take-up online and high levels of phone calls. We had 756,000 unique visits to our website in October 2011. We will aim to satisfy the majority of those web visitors by enabling them to complete their transactions on the web. This will reduce unnecessary resolution by phone and face-to face visits, whilst also increasing customer satisfaction and reducing costs.

There are three types of channel shift:

- **Natural** – this is occurring as more and more people gain access to broadband and mobile internet and become accustomed to using online services.
- **Accelerated** – we can do more to encourage people to channel shift such as making sure our website address is advertised on all our literature and actively signposting customers to our web pages when they call us
- **Deliberate** – we can encourage people to use channels that are new to them by creating new online services and using marketing techniques to drive the behaviour change required for successful channel shift

Customer benefits

- Customers can contact relevant services through a channel that suits the individual customer's needs and convenience
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Customers receive the same level and content of service regardless of channel
- Each channel has a unique entry point admitting customers to all services
- Most customer enquiries are resolved on their first contact with KCC

Helping people to help themselves

We are currently helping people to build their computer literacy skills by offering training opportunities through our computer buddy scheme and dedicated UK online centres located in some of our libraries and Gateways. To build on this for the future, we are exploring opportunities with the Post Office to offer people in remote areas the chance to learn how to use the web.

We propose to:

- Provide a choice of channels offering convenient access to customers
- Provide each channel with its unique entry point that admits customers to all services
- Improve self-service functionality on our website and adopt new technologies such as new digital media (eg. smart cards, mobile apps)
- Improve channel design and content and empower staff so that customers receive the same level of service and information regardless of the channel
- Enable customers to move smoothly across channels, functions and selected partners
- Increase year on year the percentage of people opting to use the web as their preferred channel of choice
- Participate in the Government's 'Digital Britain' programme of broadband expansion
- Expand our outreach programmes to increase ease of local access in rural communities and for those considered 'hard to reach'

THEME THREE: EMPOWERING OUR STAFF TO MEET CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

By 2015, customers know they can rely on KCC staff to give them the best possible service.

Example of empowering staff – Highways Find and Fix Campaign

In 2010 & 2011, Kent Highway Services implemented a 'Find and Fix' campaign which empowered contractors working on behalf of KCC to fix any potholes they found.

Customers only needed to report one pothole in their area enabling the teams to come out and fix the others.

In 2010, 31,000 potholes were filled

Our staff have a good understanding of what our customers expect but it is mostly in their heads. We must therefore empower staff to share their knowledge in the redesigning of services, which is reflected in KCC's values - being open, inviting contribution and challenge, and accountability. We will define a set of skills for serving customers, applicable to all staff, complementing KCC's behaviours and competences.

Our customers expect us to be professional and knowledgeable and to resolve their issues and complete their transactions quickly and efficiently. Irrespective of the job we do, or where we work, excellent customer service is an essential part of what we set out to deliver. Every KCC employee has a part to play in ensuring our customers receive high quality services which are reliable, efficient and user-friendly.

The Kent Manager programme will ensure all managers are clear about what is required of them. This will improve transparency and help staff to know what to expect from their manager. The Kent Manager is designed to bring together KCC's behaviours, values and competencies. An essential feature for all managers will be to understand this Customer Service Strategy and deliver it.

"It's our job every day to make every aspect of the customer experience a little bit better."

Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon.com

For the first time, the introduction of Unified Communications across KCC will enable all staff to hold a single personal contact number and voicemail. Using common technology, each member of staff will be required to manage their availability, making it easier to remain in contact or manage phone calls when working flexibly. When staff are absent, personal voicemail will signpost customers to an agreed alternative contact. A key benefit is that customers will have their enquiries dealt with faster and more efficiently.

Ensuring staff are well motivated and equipped with the right skills and knowledge is an integral part of this strategy. It is important that our staff and Members are aware of new technology and the power it has to improve the way we deliver services. Our staff must be empowered to be creative and innovative and must be able to rely on managers to take notice of their feedback about processes that don't work well for customers.

Insight to Innovation (i-to-i)

The i-to-i tool is designed to let staff be innovative about current service provision. Staff imagine the experience of customers by putting themselves in their shoes and looking at the range of services they need. In workshops, staff are asked to:

Explore the needs of customers by mapping their various interactions, to see where we can make improvements to the service.

Identify opportunities for efficiency - saving time and money and improving staff experience.

Produce a list of improvements they will action.

Share information such as ideas and questions that will be recorded, shared between teams and fed into the planning process.

“Customer service isn’t a department, it’s an attitude!”

A customer care training and development programme will be developed for our staff to help them to gain the knowledge and skills they will need to resolve customer queries first time. New employees will receive customer care training as part of their induction.

Our Members, as the elected representatives of the citizens of Kent, have an invaluable insight into the views of our customers. They are uniquely placed to understand what concerns them, to sound out opinions, and gain feedback to shape formal engagement. This also means that they have a key role acting as champions for the strategy and its principles; promoting the design of new ways of delivering services - doing things differently to provide a better customer journey that is also more cost-effective, rather than simply reducing to fit within budget limitations.

The key aspects of the Strategy that Members will champion are:

Localism – working with local partners to see how they feature in our customers’ journeys

Customer insight - understanding our customers better

One Resident – one account - allowing customers to keep track of things that they have reported, requested or paid for

Kent Card – having one card for residents to access a range of services, replacing the individual cards in existence now

Improving our website – providing the same level of service regardless of which channel people choose

Embracing new technologies - keeping up with our customers’ expectations

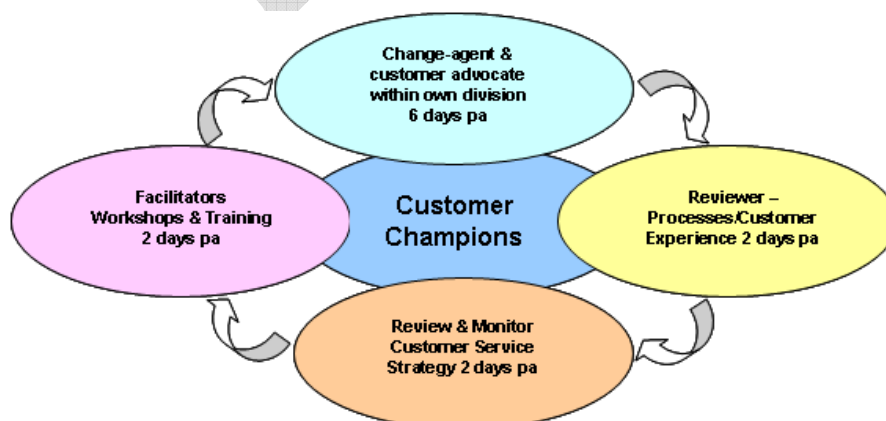
Channel Shift –increasing the number of customers opting to ‘shift’ to more convenient and cost effective channels and increasing their ability to self-serve

A single initial assessment – meaning that customers should only have to tell us things once

Re-engineering our services – improving our customers’ experience and shortening the time from their initial contact to resolution of their enquiry

Customer Excellence Standard – recognition that KCC is delivering a national standard of customer service

We will also have staff Customer Champions in each division, chosen because of their firm commitment to customer service and ability to be an advocate for this strategy. They will help to communicate this strategy across KCC.



Customer benefits

- Customers will be assisted and empowered to make informed choices and better use of services.
- Customers will feel their problems are understood by representatives of KCC (including its contractors) who seek good solutions and keep promises.
- Customers will have a positive feeling as a result of their interactions with our staff

We propose to:

- Embed the principles of this strategy in recruitment and personal development policies
- Build competence and behaviours through training and development activities
- Use customer insight techniques and staff experiences to deliver service improvement
- Introduce customer champions to drive change in their service areas
- Identify resources to lead on customer service improvement and deliver cost savings
- Create a Customer Assurance and Design Team (CAnDO) to help business units identify opportunities for improvement and cost savings
- Meet the national Customer Excellence Standard through robust performance management
- Ensure staff empower customers to self-serve, presenting the information people need to make real, informed choices
- Ensure our customer satisfaction ratings are consistently above 90% by 2015.

Customer Assurance and Design Team (CAnDO)

The CAnDO team will examine data from the contact channels to identify areas which are causing concern to the public and work alongside units to overcome potential problems by re-engineering processes to make them more cost effective and customer friendly.

CAnDO will identify and drive opportunities for partnership and collaboration to improve customer experience. The role of the team will be to make improvement part of our everyday business based on the evidence gathered from customer information and feedback.

Surrey County Council's equivalent team recognised the need for a single online booking system which will help numerous departments including the registration service. They estimate that the system will save them £1.6 million.

THEME FOUR: PROVIDING EXCELLENT QUALITY AND VALUE TO CUSTOMERS THROUGH BETTER DESIGNED SERVICE DELIVERY

By 2015, customers recognise they are served excellently – effectively, courteously, promptly, and efficiently.

Excellent processes produce high-quality outcomes and value for the customer. For example, the online process for renewing car tax is friendly, fast and reassuring for the customer. Behind the scenes there is a complex process involving a number of private and public sector organisations. By working with industry experts and trusted authenticators such as the Post Office, we could achieve similar improvements to our processes.

Excellent customer service can only be delivered by providing our staff with current, accessible and relevant data and information and using this to underpin efficient and effective business processes.

Services in KCC are sometimes designed from our needs rather than from the customer perspective. This means many of our processes are hard to understand and often do not provide a full start-to-finish solution. In order to avoid customers having to chase us for resolution, we must ensure they get what they need first time, or at least understand when and how they will get an answer.

Example - Self-service in Libraries

In 2011, Libraries introduced self-service machines for customers to check out and return books. This speeds up the process for customers whilst freeing up staff to answer more detailed enquiries.

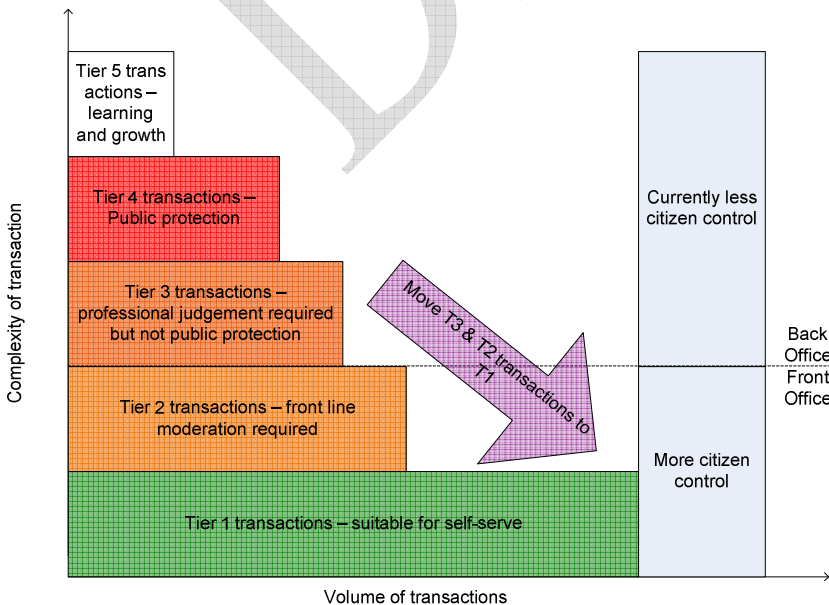
In the first week Ashford Gateway Plus opened, 89% of customers opted to use the self service machines

It is estimated this will save around £1.5 million in the first two years.

Every time one of our processes fails it costs us money. If we don't get it right first time the customer will try again and may well choose a more expensive channel.

Tiered Service Offer

We will offer our services on a tiered basis.



Tier One - business processes will be redesigned so they are easier for customers to understand, putting the customer in control and enabling self-service. These services will be delivered online or by front line customer service staff by telephone or face-to-face.

Tier Two - a second level of more complex transactions requiring a degree of specialism to complete will be delivered by our front line customer service staff by telephone or face-to-face.

Tier Three - a third level of more complex transactions requiring professional judgement to evaluate and complete, typically delivered direct to customers or in the back office

Tier Four - Kent County Council has a statutory duty of public protection, for example safeguarding children and adults. These services are not appropriate for customer self service and must be carried out by trained professionals. These processes will still be reviewed, to make sure they are clear and easy for customers to understand.

Tier Five - these are transactions reserved for complaints, investigations, reviews and service improvements.

All tiers will capture information which will improve our understanding of our customers.

Example of tiering - Children and Families Information Service (CFIS)

In April 2011, CFIS transferred to the Contact Centre. The service was reviewed and re-engineered to improve customer service and achieve savings. A two tier business model was adopted. Tier One is simple, short duration enquiries handled by multi-skilled Customer Service Advisors, while Tier Two calls require a greater degree of time or specialist intervention. The Contact Centre trained 16 existing members of staff to handle the calls. This gives the service more flexibility, and sufficient resources to cover breaks, leave and unplanned absences. Before the service moved to the Contact Centre calls were sometimes diverted to an answering machine during opening hours, if all the advisors were busy.

- In February 2010, 66% of callers chose not to leave an answer phone message and had to call back. The Contact Centre answers all calls during service opening hours and customers are able to call when it is convenient to them.
- 62% of calls can now be handled at first contact and on average emails are answered within 4 hours during working hours
- A number of other processes were changed, including using email instead of post, and reducing expensive advertising.

The potential saving for 2011/2012 is estimated at **£483,707**

Over the lifetime of this strategy we will aim to ensure the majority of processes are delivered in Tier 1 and Tier 2; where possible reducing and redesigning Tier 3 transactions. Tier 4 and 5 transactions will be dealt with in an open and honest way to promote organisational learning and growth.

Customer Records

Currently we record customer details on lots of different systems. This means we do not know what other services a customer is using. So we will bring together customer records to ensure customers only need to give us the information once.

Staff working on the front line need to access this information so they can serve customers appropriately. In addition this information must be easily available so we can learn how customers access our services. This will help us to redesign services to make them more effective for the customer and to reduce costs.

The data strategy will take into account the relevant data protection regulations and law, ensuring that our customers' records are stored securely and handled appropriately.

Example of service redesign - Adult Social Services: Bathing Assessment Clinics

A large number of referrals for bathing assessments was having a significant effect on the amount of time customers were waiting. Using Lean processes, Adult Social Services designed a more streamlined approach to delivering assessments and providing equipment. The aim was to improve response time for customers and reduce costs for the service. Part of the new process was to set up a clinic based assessment service using Gateway wherever possible.

- On average clinic assessments are 69% cheaper to run than home assessments.
- 23 % of customers now have their needs met at first contact.
- Using clinics increases productivity by an average 48%.
- Customers are actively engaged in finding solutions to their needs.
- Customers attending the clinics at Gateway also have other services opened up to them.
- Customers are overwhelmingly satisfied with the service and the 'Did Not Attend' rate at the clinic is negligible.

Customer comment: "Excellent service from start to finish."

Customer benefits

- Customers will have realistic expectations about the services KCC provides and have information relevant to their needs
- Customers will experience faster responses to their queries and better solutions to their problems than in 2011
- Customers will experience greater choice, flexibility and self-service in their dealings with KCC (and its partners)

We propose to:

- Keep pace with customers' expectations for knowledge about services and need for information
- Develop an integrated performance management system, including quality standards, that is driven by customer service
- Demonstrate value-for-money in the costs of our service processes and transactions

Kent Contact and Assessment Service (KCAS)

Faced with a high call abandon rate, KCAS was identified as a pilot site for using Lean Six Sigma methods to improve processes. Since December 2010 the service has achieved a 95% - 100% call handling rate.

- Demonstrate that enhanced customer value has been achieved when redesigning service processes
- Increase staff capacity to answer enquiries promptly first time
- Prepare and implement a data strategy to improve our understanding of customer needs, improve service processes and simplify data-handling infrastructure
- Check processes end-to-end; redesign where necessary, and ensure customers reach the solutions they seek in the most effective manner
- Implement a tiered service response
- Ensure procurement of ICT systems improves the customer experience
- Develop an integrated record for each customer.

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THEME FIVE: IMPROVING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH OUR PUBLIC SERVICE PARTNERS

By 2015, customers experience enhanced benefits from KCC working in partnership with other service providers.

Customers' enquiries and problems do not neatly fit within the boundaries of one service or one organisation. We can not always solve issues on our own and need to work with partners to achieve full resolution for our shared customers. This means we must proactively seek out opportunities to work collaboratively with our partners so that customers experience seamless, high quality public services, no matter who is delivering them. We will expect the same high standard of service from any organisation delivering services on our behalf, and this needs to be reflected in our procurement and commissioning processes.

We will work with the Locality Boards to examine how we can improve processes - services and solutions, delivered locally, shaped by local people to meet local needs. The strategy will also give us the opportunity to influence commissioning groups as they develop. If we redesign our services with our partners in a way that makes sense to our customers, we can provide a seamless customer experience which will resolve more of our customer queries than if we worked alone.

Example - Tell Us Once is a national project enabling customers to report a death or a birth to a registrar and opt to allow us to share that information with 27 public authorities. These include Passport Service, DVLA, Pensions, District Councils for Council tax and electoral roll and KCC services such as Blue Badges and Libraries. On average it reduces the number of contacts from seven per customer to one.

In 2010 all 12 District and Borough Councils in Kent joined the programme. With approximately 12,500 deaths in Kent per year that is a potential reduction in contacts from 87,500 to 12,500. One Local Authority has calculated savings of £600 per case.

The next step will be to increase the number of appointments by making them available in more Gateway and library locations.

There is enormous scope to use this system in the future to include other notifications such as change of address, and to widen the scope to other organisations such as finance, insurance and utility companies.

Gateway is an example of partner engagement delivering an integrated front-line service model. It has produced wide-ranging benefits for customers in a face-to-face setting. We will extend Gateway values to phone and digital channels.

Many external partners have collaborated, gaining advantages from Gateway expertise in serving customers more effectively face-to-face. Many KCC customer-facing services have yet to fully engage with these opportunities, missing out on improved customer experience and operational efficiency.

Example - Working with our Partners

Gateway has been designed to improve customer journeys. Knowledge about local residents has directly informed the service mix of statutory and voluntary agencies. Gateway invites all those best placed to respond to participate with joint assessment and informed sign-posting. In addition to the county and district councils, HM Revenue & Customs, Job Centre Plus and the Ministry of Defence are collaborating through Gateway alongside Health, Citizens Advice Bureau, Volunteer Bureaux, Kent Savers and many other local voluntary and charitable agencies.

Regardless of who is delivering the service, all are expected to follow the Gateway ethos of customer service delivery.

It is essential that we map the journeys of our most vulnerable children, families and adults, recognising that these take place in a highly complex, multi-disciplinary environment, which can increase the risk of delays or failures in the system and lead to the frustrations that result in complaints. Understanding the end-to-end customer journey, including the timely involvement of partners, will reduce these risks very significantly.

Partnership need not only be within the boundaries of Kent. Strategic alliances with other local authorities who are on the same customer service journey, whether that is in the South East of England or elsewhere, will further increase our customer service capacity. In the development of this strategy we have worked with Surrey and Northamptonshire County Councils and are looking to build a more formal relationship so we can learn from each others' strengths and build excellence together.

This includes:

- Sharing experience about increasing capacity in the front office and reducing back office processes to achieve savings. This will include looking at tiering services
- Sharing how to implement improvements in process design
- Sharing approaches to creating useful insight tools as well as exploring the commercial value of customer data
- Investigating how we can use Customer Record Management systems as well as other useful tools such as the customer account to improve the customer experience

Customer benefits:

- Customers will benefit from more joined up services and a seamless 'customer journey' across them, whilst receiving the same high standard of service regardless of who is providing them.

We propose to:

- Develop strategic capacity and momentum through partnership
- Make connections across partner services easy for customers.
- Share data effectively with our partners.
- Reduce 'front desk' duplication and cost by integrating fully with partner services.
- Maximise the business benefits of Unified Communications with public sector partners
- Develop the concept of a 'super' contact centre achieving economies of scale and income potential
- Develop innovative alliances with the best of the private and public sectors to grow the best reputation for customer service across the UK

- Work with public sector partners to find web and digital solutions such as a national online "report it" form and put pressure on suppliers to make sure that reports automatically go into our computer systems.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

Communication and Consultation

Delivering the Customer Service Strategy will only be successful if we build trust and credibility for it among KCC staff, our customers and our partners. Communication is critical to generate support and momentum for the strategy, and to sustain interest in, and commitment to, the changes it will drive. The way we communicate will need to:

- meet the demands of a large and diverse internal audience;
- capture the views for our external customers and partners;
- bring about change in behaviour throughout KCC, not just our "customer facing" staff;
- gain acceptance and support from all of our stakeholders in recognition of the fundamental changes this will mean.

The success of the Customer Service Strategy depends on it being communicated to ensure that staff, customers and partners know about it, feel consulted about it and support it.

Measuring Performance

We will use a balance of quantitative and qualitative measures to assess our performance against this strategy. These include cost to serve, speed of response, process time (eg. call time), transaction volumes, first point resolution, failure demand, repeat contact, avoidable contact and intelligence gathered from complaints, comments and compliments.

Customer perception surveys will use standard questions, repeated regularly so that trends can be observed. The results can be segmented, to increase the depth of insight, and supplemented by call-backs to customers after a period of time to get their perception of the whole end-to-end service. These measures will be combined with methods such as mystery shopping and benchmarking against both public and private sector organisations

Review

The pace of change in recent years proves that we need to review the strategy regularly, particularly as technology evolves and customers' expectations increase. We will carry out a formal review of the strategy after the first year.

Next Steps

The strategy will be supported by a detailed implementation plan. The phases below give an outline of what needs to be achieved to deliver the aims of this strategy successfully. Phases will overlap but will be completed within the 3 year timeframe.

Phase One

- Establish 'One Front Desk' embracing all channels creating the 'One Council, One Feel' customer experience
- Integrate the Complaints Team into Customer Services

- Obtain baseline customer satisfaction data & cost to serve
- Use information acquired from our contact channels to identify priority areas to focus on for improvement
- Create Customer Assurance and Design Team (CAnDO)
- Begin 'quick wins' projects – creating online solutions to encourage channel shift and deliver savings
- Begin service redesign
- Start to use customer insight techniques across all services and wherever services are being redesigned
- Develop Customer Service training programme for all staff
- Develop role of Customer Champions
- Develop Mobile Outreach strategy
- Develop Data Strategy and Performance Management framework for customer experience
- Increase percentage of people transacting via the web
- Monitor cost savings
- Review and confirm year two implementation plan

Phase Two

- Build a single view of customer contact data
- Trial initial single assessment process
- Further increase percentage of people transacting via the web
- Develop innovative partnership approaches with other authorities
- Introduce new online transactions
- Trial new technology to improve customer service – Mobile apps, touch screen devices, web chat.
- Accelerate service redesign
- Monitor cost savings
- Review and confirm year 3 implementation plan

Phase Three

- Introduce Citizen Account
- Introduce Smart Card/Citizen Card
- Introduce new online transactions
- Achieve Customer Excellence Standard
- Further increase percentage of people transacting via the web
- Complete Gateway programme
- Continue service redesign
- Monitor cost savings
- Review and confirm future plans