

Customer Service Policy

2015-2018

Who are our customers?

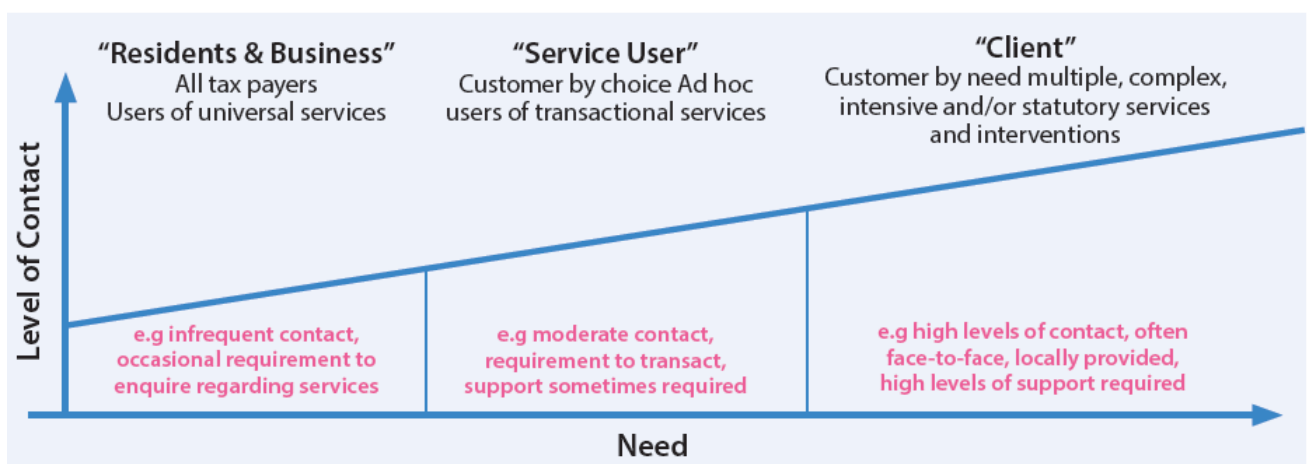
KCC's transformation plan 'Facing the Challenge' places a heavy importance and a focus on the role of the customer as we move towards a commissioning authority delivery model: -

"By 2020, all KCC services will have a greater customer focus with services organised around the needs of service users and residents, not the priorities of the service provider or service professionals." Facing the Challenge also sets out the direction of travel for our changing relationship with customers as we become a commissioning authority. Our focus will now be on how we evidence active engagement with customers in the design and delivery of their services, rather than on our historic understanding of their needs.

KCC provides a wide range of essential public services to a diverse range of people and is committed to ensuring that we meet our duties as described in the Equality Act 2010.

Individuals will often have relationships with different services. There are varying levels of need, complexity, intervention, risk, and value placed on personalisation, alongside varying levels of contact with KCC and its service providers.

Various terms and language are used to describe our customers. One size does not fit all – however it is possible to describe this relationship under the three broad groupings below.



The term 'customer' is used as a generic description for all. The customer relationship may change depending on the service they need to access. People may also move between these groups at different points in their lives.

The customer service policy describes KCC's commitment to customers, and is described in three core principles which should be applied when delivering services to customers. Commissioners must ensure that this policy and its principles are adopted throughout the supply chain. The Customer Service Policy works with and supports the Commissioning Framework, allowing KCC to hold all service providers to account for ensuring our customers have a good customer experience.

KCC's Customer Service Principles

Principle 1: Delivering Quality

As KCC moves to become a strategic commissioner of services, the number of service providers will increase. Each provider will be required to meet specified levels of service customer service, and will be able to evidence consistent quality and standards of delivery.

A set of corporate minimum service standards will provide a baseline framework enabling each Commissioner to develop specific standards and outcome targets for each service/service provider, demonstrating a response to customer needs.

Customer experience and how this will be monitored and reported must be part of all commissioning activity.

Commissioners will be required to prove that they have incorporated the standards and have appropriate evaluation activity to demonstrate that a provider meets the standards outlined in the customer service policy.

Principle 2: Customer Focused Services

KCC will ensure that direct or commissioned services can be accessed in the most flexible and convenient way by our customers, and demonstrate how value for money is achieved for Kent's taxpayers.

Service provision will be inclusive and responsive to customer need – ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable continue to be met.

Commissioners and providers will be expected to demonstrate how they have considered and incorporated customer needs into service design; and by using evidence and careful monitoring to show how digital and other channels will be used proportionately to support customers, especially for those who cannot transact digitally.

Principle 3: Intelligent Commissioning

KCC will require all services to collect and report on a range of customer feedback, data and intelligence to inform future commissioning and ensure that all services and providers are aligned to customer needs.

We will develop a deeper understanding of customers, their needs, changing trends and how and why they access our services in the way that they do.

Commissioners and service providers will be required to collect a range of qualitative and quantitative information about our customer activity and use this intelligently to improve services.

Customers must be involved in service design process. We will require all commissioners and providers to demonstrate how this is being achieved and evidence improvements as a result of customer engagement.

KCC's Commitment to Customers

1. We will treat all customers equally, fairly and respectfully, and do all we can to ensure that customers are able to access services when and how they need to

This will be achieved by listening to customer feedback and ensuring we actively engage with customers to understand the changing nature of contact preferences and needs when accessing our services now and in the future.

2. We will deal openly and honestly with customers; always taking the time to explain why KCC is taking a particular course of action; what the timescales are likely to be, and how the intended outcome will benefit the customer.

This will be achieved by ensuring we have systems in place to monitor response times and take steps to improve where we are not meeting agreed timescales.

3. We will try to get things right first time, and put things right as a matter of priority if they do go wrong

We will actively monitor first time resolution to customer contact and require commissioners to set standards for services to resolve issues should they arise; keeping customers informed of the action being taken and when they might expect resolution.

4. We will listen to your ideas, and use your feedback to improve our services

We will achieve this through a range of techniques including listening to your feedback through workshops and other face to face forums as well as monitoring comments and complaints. The customer voice will become clearer through regular analysis of feedback, ensuring that action and improvements follow.

5. We will always strive to communicate clearly with our customers (and will provide alternative formats if required) to ensure clarity and understanding

We will achieve this through involving customers in the design and production of communications material and publications and by refreshing our standards and applying these consistently

What this means for you

Principle 1: Delivering Quality

KCC values and owns the customer relationship regardless of how services are delivered

We will:

Ensure consistent quality and experience regardless of provider or channel

Hold service providers to account for delivery to our customers

Produce and incorporate a minimum set of standards into all commissioning stages, describing customer service expectations and the mechanisms by which these will be monitored and upheld

Provide a direct route to Kent County Council service commissioners for customer service complaints or comments which cannot be resolved by the provider

Retain ownership of all customer data related to our services.

Require customer service insight and feedback analysis to be a prerequisite of all service design and specification development

So that

Customers know what to expect from KCC services irrespective of provider or contact channel

Customers can be confident that KCC is putting them at the heart of everything we do

KCC can take an informed view of how services are aligned to customer needs and requirements

Customers know how and where to direct any comments or complaints about KCC services regardless of who delivers them

All comments, compliments and complaints are captured and used to improve services

Customers can be confident that their information is being used to inform our commissioning and service quality across the Council and that their data is managed safely and securely

Principle 2: Customer Focused Services

KCC will ensure that customers can access services in a range of ways, ensuring that value for money and flexibility are prioritised across all services

We will:

Ensure that services are accessible and flexible according to customer needs and driven by best value

Ensure KCC services are providing customers with the ability to access services through digital self-service as a minimum expectation

Incentivise digital access by improving customer experience in achieving their outcome through this channel; providing a positive change in customer experience through speed, convenience and personalisation

Ensure the full cost of delivering a service is understood and factored into commissioning decisions at all times – from first point of contact through to conclusion.

Review and reduce our service offer as the increase in digital take-up is evidenced. Helping to achieve best value for customers through self-service, whilst ensuring continuity of support for the vulnerable and those customers with complex needs, where digital channels may not be appropriate.

Ensure that services are always designed to be inclusive, with access based on evidence of customer need, ability and circumstance

Listen to our customers and continue to develop new ways in which services can be tailored to suit their needs

So that

Services provided by KCC are flexible and responsive to customers, and can be accessed in a range of ways according to need

The majority of customers can self-serve via responsive and reliable digital platforms at times that suit them

Customers can be assured that KCC is commissioning effective and efficient services on their behalf

Best value is achieved for customers and KCC avoids hidden or unintentional cost pressures or performance issues

Those that require extra help or who have multiple or complex needs will be provided with the help they require

Principle 3: Intelligent Commissioning

KCC will strive to continuously improve services through engaging and learning from our customers

We will

Develop a deep understanding of our customers, their needs and how and why they access our services

Require commissioners and service providers to collect a range of qualitative and quantitative information about our customer activity and use this insight to shape and improve service delivery

Actively promote the sharing of relevant data (as appropriate) to drive improvement in customer service

Require commissioners and service providers to involve customers in service design and evidence customer impact on delivery

Meet customer requirements at first contact wherever possible, minimising the need for repeat contact and ensuring that services are designed and delivered with the customer at the heart

Ensure contact demand is anticipated, managed and that customers can use the most appropriate channel for their needs

So that

Customer information and intelligence is used in designing services from the outset and on an ongoing basis

Customers are involved and engaged in shaping services that best meet their needs

Customers can have confidence that their needs are placed at the heart of everything we do (or others do on our behalf)

Customers do not have to chase or remind us about the things we have said we will do.

Glossary of Terms used in the Customer Service Policy

Contact channels by this we mean the mechanism or device which customers will use to access Council services, examples include telephone, text, email, online, social media, mobile phone, face to face, or post/letter.

Digital means that the organisation will aim to design or redesign services so that they can be delivered to customers online by using smart phones, tablets, PC's or laptops or smart TV.

This means that the digital element will not be a bolt on to existing service delivery. It means that services must use customer research and evidence to design or redesign services in a way that promotes self-service through digital platforms.

This means that well designed digital access will be fundamental to service delivery

This activity must include design of supporting contact channels for those who are not able to access digitally. Importantly this does not mean that we will force digital services upon customers who are unable to access in this way.

Residents & Business by this we mean all taxpayers and users of universal services such as roads and street lighting. This group has infrequent contact with KCC regarding services.

Customer is a generic description for all.

Client by this we mean a customer who receives a statutory service and interventions for example home care or a customer with multiple and complex needs for example a child with a disability. This group has high levels of contact, often face-to-face, locally provided with high levels of support required.

Service User by this we mean Customer by choice, moderate contact for support, for example someone who uses the Library, attends Adult Education classes, goes to Country Parks. This group is often able to 'self-serve' with limited need for support

Customer Intelligence/data by this we mean data, information and analysis about our customers, their needs, wants, views, preferences and ultimately behaviours in relation to KCC and their wider interactions. This includes using information about the customers protected characteristics to improve services.

Strategic Commissioning Authority As a strategic commissioning authority we will find the best, most effective and value for money services for Kent and ensure that these are providing the strategic outcomes we have defined. This is likely to include a range of provision, including in-house service delivery alongside better use of voluntary/community sector and private sector expertise. Importantly this does not mean that every service will be 'outsourced' or provided by a third party.