

Thurrock Council

Customer Services Strategy 2016-20

Convenient - Consistent - Cost Effective - Customer Care



Contents

Page 3	Executive summary with principles and key focus areas
Page 7	Strategy on a page
Page 8	Additional focus areas within this strategy
Page 10	Background
Page 12	Where are we now?
Page 15	My Account – progress to date
Page 18	Digital by default
Page 17	Customer and Demand Management
Page 18	Transaction delivery framework
Page 20	Our response and actions for customer principles
Page 27	Outcomes and conclusion of this strategy

Executive Summary

Customer expectations are rising, the local population is growing and changing, and in response we are increasingly required to strengthen our customer focus and build integrated service delivery models within the resources we have available to us. Our approach must be based on meeting customer needs more efficiently and effectively. This means keeping their needs at the heart of every decision from strategy formulation and design through to execution but also to complete process reengineering, resulting in value for money processes that reduce waste and duplication and produce an effective customer journey enabling the customer to self-serve wherever possible.

The Customer Service Strategy sets out where the council is now; where it wants to be; and how it will get there. It is intended that this document will provide a strategic overview that will lead the direction of travel through service plans and other council documents and procedures.

The strategy is part of a wider programme of projects. The strategy brings these together to create a comprehensive plan of how we will improve service to our customers across all access channels.

The strategy acknowledges that in order to deliver the standard of customer services that will meet the expectations of an increasingly demanding public, we need to address issues of people, process, technology and organisation, managing our resources to optimum effect. To succeed it will be necessary to create a culture, supported by the right operational procedures and infrastructure that will deliver high quality customer service; listening to the voice of the customer and employees, measuring customer satisfaction, embracing change and striving to continuously improve.

Throughout the strategy there is a strong emphasis on digital and self-service for the customers that are able to utilise this method but recognition that high standard of service and accessibility must still be available for the customers that cannot.

A Customer Services Strategy cannot be delivered in isolation. The council's relationship with partners and the community is changing and we want to empower groups and individuals through community leadership. This can be achieved by working together with the voluntary and community sectors to build pride and respect but also by building resilience in local communities. We want to support independent, active residents who can benefit from local assets and neighbourhood networks including through the community hubs. This will create a place that better supports community well-being and healthy lifestyles. This approach is at the heart of the strategy.

This document will support a set of standards within a customer services charter to embed and support our drive to provide:

Convenient - Consistent - Cost Effective - Customer Care

This strategy aims to address the following challenges:

- Inconsistent customer service standards across all services
- Clarity and communicate what our customers can expect including self-service options
- Customers mainly using more expensive channels such as face to face even for simple transactions available online
- Self-service not available for some high volume transactions
- Reluctance to change including understanding and use of digital methods
- Need to reduce avoidable contacts and promote proactive contact with residents
- Refresh of contact centre telephony platform and other technology enhancements i.e. web chat
- No single view of the customer for all contact channels i.e. web, email, face to face, telephone
- Opportunities for cross-council working, further service calls through the contacts centre to deliver efficiencies and explore as a potential growth area and for income generation

Our Customer Services Mission

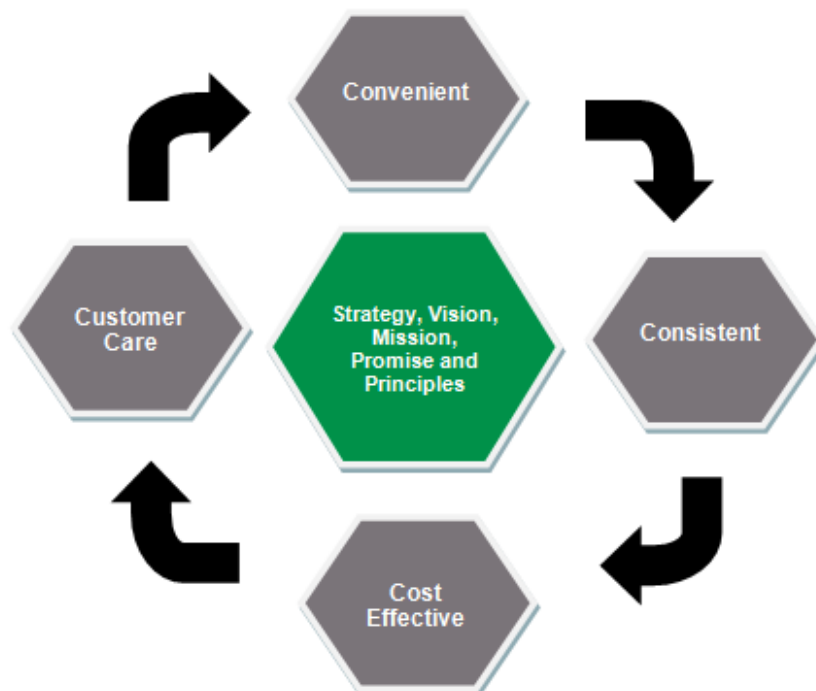
To enable our customers to self-serve wherever possible, maximising the efficiency, quality and accessibility of our services, yet still ensuring we provide high quality specialist and targeted support for our customers and transactions where self-service is not possible.

Our Customer Services Promise

To provide you with services that are accessible, meet your needs and leave you satisfied. We promise to keep you aware of the actions being taken and deliver what we say we will, when we say we will aim to meet your needs first time whichever way we serve you.

We will achieve this by committing to the Customer Services Principles below:

1. Customer needs - To deliver consistent customer services with integrity – reducing the need for our customers to repeatedly contact us about the same issue by getting it right first time
2. To go above and beyond for our customers by encouraging and empowering our employees to take ownership and deliver positive outcomes
3. To provide up to date information and efficient processes, continually striving for improvement and innovative solutions
4. To proactively engage our customers in developing services that respond to their needs and seek feedback on the delivery of those services
5. To provide quality, cost effective choices that do not exclude members of the community and offer easy access to our services
6. To enable our customers to transact with the council when it suits them without having to phone and visit to enable the fastest possible service at the lowest possible cost
7. To offer support to help people be online and work with our partners and the community to improve access to services



Key recommendations:

1. Channel Migration - Accessibility – April 2017: Approve recommended services as **digital only** closing channels for contacts that add no value to the customers, maximising the use of resources for customers that really need our support or where there is no online solution. Housing benefit and homeless applications are now 100% online and this was implemented without a problem. This will allow excellent support for vulnerable residents and assisted self-service via telephone or face to face where needed. See appendix 2 – Top query types and suggested channel. In addition continue to design further cost effective, efficient and user friendly digital means of contacting the council. We should also utilise Experian mosaic to promote online, targeting specific customer types utilising behavioural insight techniques

2. Channel Migration - Face to face channel – April 2018: Remove specific face to face service desks to allow for an increase in self-service facilities, appointment service only for vulnerable service users. Provide a self- service scanning solution for requested documentation, a meet and greet floorwalker and business visitor self- service check-in solution instead of a reception desk and all customer services advisors multi- skilled to cover all Customer Service functions. This will enable flexibility of resource and appointments for vulnerable customers. A good time to complete these changes would be in line with the refurbishment of the ground floor to allow a period of adjustment for customers however these recommendations are not dependant on this.

3. Channel Migration - Assisted digital support – assisted digital support is for people that cannot use online services at first on their own. The support can be guiding a customer through the digital service, entering a user's information onto the digital service on their behalf initially and setting up their account so that they can continue to utilise this channel going forward. This can be provided via face to face, telephone or web chat. We should continue to provide this support via the contact centre, within the community hubs and within our face to face area at civic offices, always encouraging and supporting our customers to be able to utilise the easiest contact channels for the services where online is available

4. Technology - 2017/18: Implement a new contact centre telephony solution, along with a new customer satisfaction, call recording and scheduling solution. Ensure new solution will link effectively for potential technology enhancements i.e. Advanced IVR capability and potential Omni-channel (single view of the customer) technology solutions which should both be explored. The existing telephony system is due for replacement and there is an opportunity for us to potentially share a telephony platform with another council to reduce costs. Exploratory discussions are already underway regarding this. Single view of the customer solutions should definitely be explored but full business case and impacting to truly understand the benefits against the cost of implementation. – Link to Digital board and Digital strategy

5. Organisational design – From 2016-19: Review the best fit for customer interaction across all departments, completing a review of customer demand and call volumes directed to specific service areas. Determine the best fit within the organisation as part of all service reviews by 2019. This would be an opportunity for us to review existing call volumes across all services and identify transactions not currently digital that would be better placed within the contact centre initially. This may reduce the resource cost for dealing with these transactions which may result in additional savings.

6. First time resolution and avoidable contact - 2017/18: We must reduce the need for our customers to contact us by reducing bureaucracy, learning from our mistakes and complaints, continuing to automate processes, process reengineering and working with partners to provide joined up services and manage demand e.g. failure demand, avoidable demand, value demand. – Link to Customer and Demand Management Board and service reviews.

7. Growth - 2018/19: There is definitely opportunity for us to join forces with other local authorities for customer services delivery. This should be pursued as a potential growth area with a view to our customer services department providing services on behalf of other local authorities.

8. People and Culture - 2017/18: Embed the mission and principles for our customer service delivery and a set of service standards throughout the organisation. We need a holistic approach to Customer Services across the organisation with customer care training available to **all** employees via classroom or e learning. This should include the Customer Service, mission, promise and principles with clear standards of performance that are visible and transparent to our customers via a customer charter We need to create a culture that supports the delivery of High quality customer services cross the organisation and partner organisations. We need to recruit the right people with the right attitude and behaviours and develop their skills to deliver continually improved services. In order to do this we need to provide clear leadership and governance arrangements to drive the strategy from the top and provide a shared vision that everyone can work towards. Our culture must-have a high focus on digital and defined approach to digital innovation to empower our employees via digital tools and technology. We need a clear development and change management programme to support this along with a refresh of our current behaviour frameworks to reinforce the changes - Customer services should be part of everyone's objectives and included in all Job descriptions and service plans .- links to people and digital strategies .

9. Social media - 2017/18: Utilise information received via existing social media to its full potential to proactively reduce contact. I.e. if we are made aware of a general issue or trend via social media we can be proactive to reduce the need for other customers to contact us

10. Process Re-engineering - 2017/18: Process redesign and changing the way that we work across the council is key to the delivery of this strategy – links to service reviews.

11. Digital Principles - 2017/18: We must embed the digital principles within all services and within our digital strategy and this will be a high focus of all service reviews. We should be digital by default - link to people and digital strategies

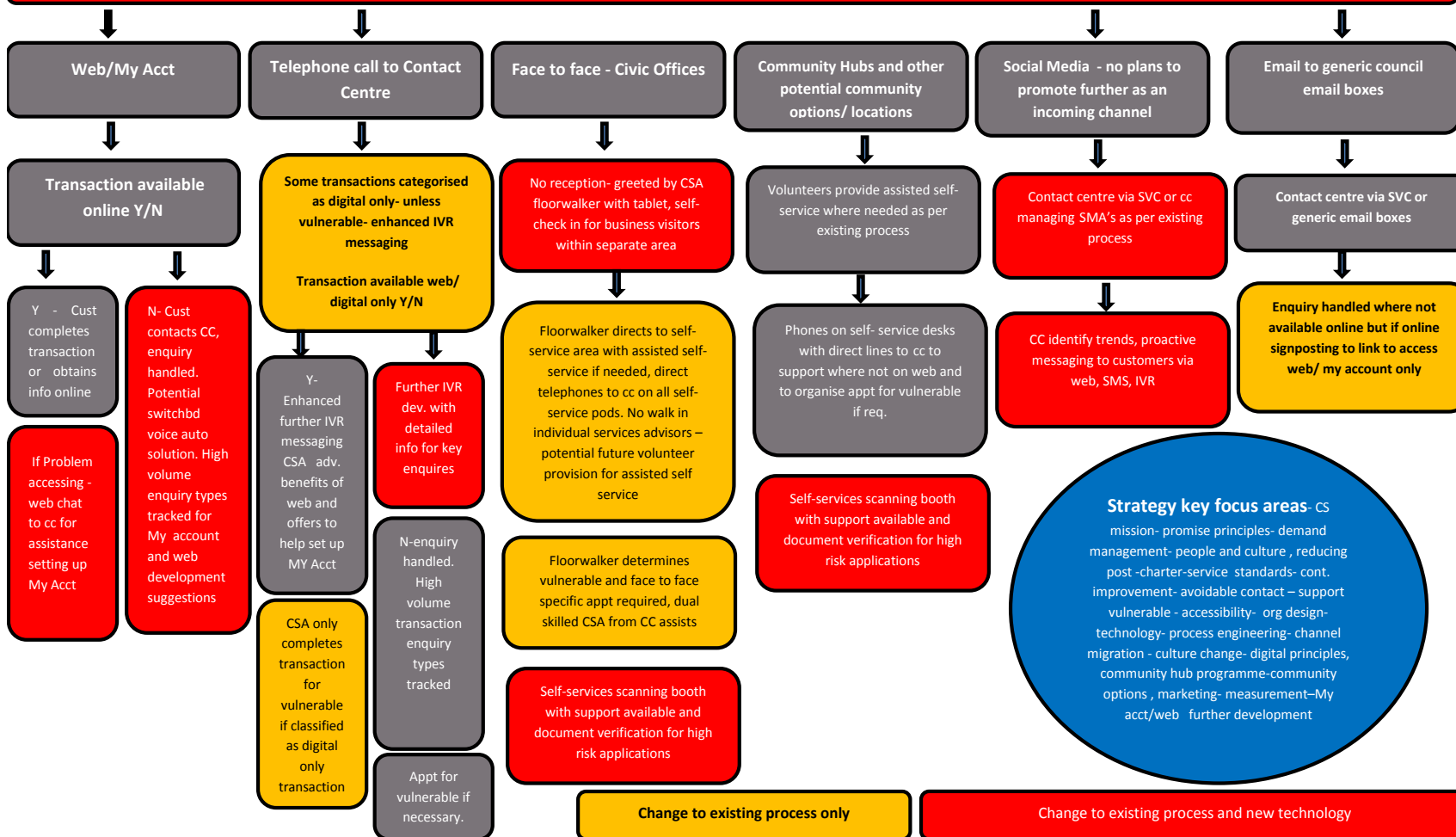
12. Community Options – Ongoing: Support the development of community hubs and consider additional community access routes alongside service reviews so that community solutions can be explored collectively in ventures that manage demand and reshape our services – links to Customer and Demand Management board. Property Board and service reviews.

The following strategy on a page diagram demonstrates the incoming channels and the new proposed delivery model for serving our customers.

Customer Services Strategy on a page – Proposed Future Operating Model

Customer Contact Channel for REPORT-PAY-APPLY-HAVE MY SAY-ADVICE-BOOK-INFO

1. New/shared telephony solution and 2.potential Omni channel Contact Centre Platform (SVC) – single queue for all channels - routing from web, telephone and email to Contact Centre



Additional Focus Areas:

As well as the key recommended actions within the executive summary our strategy and action planning will include all access channels, some key new actions and continuation of other existing linked strategy action plans. There will also be some key focus on the following additional areas and specific actions relating to these are all detailed in the action plan:

Contact channel

- Telephone - To minimise the volume of contact numbers published, to provide fast access to an informed advisor for those unable to self-serve
- Mobile - As the adoption of mobile technologies grows we must continue to support our mobile/smart phone customers in new ways and utilise technology in a tactical manner.
- Web - To maintain and improve - providing a single, comprehensive, easy to access and up to date website that allows anyone to transact and interact with the council effectively 24/7.
- Post/paper - To reduce the amount of post and paper communication by enhanced use of electronic channels wherever possible and internal governance.
- Email – To reduce the amount of email communication by better use of electronic forms and other digital channels and internal governance

Quality and continuous improvement

- **Quality assurance** - maintain our existing quality standards and monitoring programme within the Customer Services and maintain our existing CCA global standard accreditation for Customer services, always aiming to identify any issues and areas for improvement.
- **Complaints** – we must continue to value the complaints received from customers as important feedback on our performance and utilise information provided by the complaints team to guide us to identify the best areas that we can make improvements for our customers, along with improvements to policies and working practices.
- **Continuous improvement through customer feedback** – Customer feedback is a powerful tool, not only for understanding customers experience and satisfaction with our service but also for developing strategies to improve our services.
- **Consultation** - should also be a key focus to ensure that money is not wasted in making online channels for those services where particular groups just will not use. We must ensure that we have good engagement with our customers to understand who our customers are, what services they need and want and how and when they want to access these services



Marketing and promotion

- **Marketing digital services** – Increased specific targeted activities for different customer profiles. Marketing can be expensive so we should ensure that we are advertising on assets that are available to us i.e. bills etc. We must find ways of encouraging customers to use our digital channels wherever possible.
- **Digital Psychology** – many customers may suspect that a digital strategy is purely a cost saving measure and whilst this is important it is also a massive opportunity to give our customers what they actually want – access to services that suit them and control over their customer experience.
- **Behavioural Insights** – central government are utilising behavioural insight as they believe that evidence from psychology and behavioural economics offers a toolbox for innovation and service improvement at low cost . Utilising 'EAST' principles – **E**asy, **A**tttractive, **S**ocial and **T**imely to change the way services are delivered.

Planning and measuring success

- **Critical Success factors** – critical for the success of any projects, including ensuring the key decision makers are on board to enable management of these throughout the programme to increase the likelihood for success.
- **Outcomes/benefits** – we must always identify the outcomes by which the success of any of our programmes will be judged to ensure we can enable any benefits to be accurately determined. We must ensure we have the ability to obtain and analyse internal and external metrics and use them to measure and improve our success.
- **Assumptions** – our strategies should not assume that all services should be made available digitally or that a service that is available on one digital channel should be available across all digital channels. Every choice we make should be backed with evidence utilising customer experience research, website usage data, internal MI customer surveys and results of similar projects.
- **Management Information** – there must be consistent, timely, accurate and scoped management information to measure performance and costs between different services and channels otherwise we will miss opportunities to target areas of waste, identify improvement opportunities and measure the benefits of change.

We must start our journey with a clear definition of Customer Services. We should all understand who our customers are, what we mean by high quality customer services, along with a clear vision of where we need to be and a true understanding of where we are now. This will allow us to implement the required recommended actions.

Background

Customer service in local government has principally been provided reactively. Customers of local government don't always have the choice of dealing with the council and this often increases the expectations they may have. We recognise that in order to create a great borough and a great council we need to work with our customers and our community

We want our customers to have the best possible experience when they use our services at a time when demand is increasing. In very simple terms we cannot continue to deliver services in the way we have so must evolve and improve delivery methods that meet the demands of our residents within the resources we have available.

In achieving this there cannot be a compromise in our commitment to understanding our customers and their needs. We aim to increase our customers control over their experience with us whilst utilising our digital channels as a way of delivering services in the most efficient way. We will ask those customers that are able to self-serve through their on line account or our website to do so but at the same time build our capacity through community options to provide support and help to those people that are less confident in doing so or do not have access to technology, utilising our most expensive channels for the most vulnerable

We will listen to our customers about their experiences with us and use their feedback to make real differences to our services so that our services are valued by the people that use them.

Our challenge is to maintain relentless focus on customer excellence across the entire organisation not just in the Customer services department, to ensure that our systems and processes work consistently and that we are flexible in our approach as technology, legislation and other pressures continue to change over the coming years

The modern way of delivering customer services is changing across all sectors and we too here at Thurrock have become much more innovative in our service delivery with the implementation of My account, as customers seek online and accessible 24/7 services. This document will enable us to better understand our customers' needs and expectations and enable us to further meet the challenges of delivering services in this digital age

Useful data

At present each time the Customer services Department serve a customer, the resource cost alone is approximately;



At present approximately 38,000 customers per month contact our contact centre and an overall contact within Customer Services is 50,000 contacts per month.

Given that feedback and analysis from previous consultation with Thurrock's population indicated that 86% of residents would be happy to utilise on line services, there is clearly the potential to make significant savings and improve customer satisfaction even further by improving options for contact that support their lifestyle needs

The Go ON digital exclusion heat map which shows the likelihood of exclusion from digital at a Local Authority level is not high for Thurrock confirms that self-service wherever possible should be an appropriate direction of travel for our services The exercise summarises that:

- Only 4.6% of adults in Thurrock have never been on line
- 76% of adults in Thurrock have all five basic digital skills
- 91.10 % of households receive broadband speed of at least 2 megabits per second

What does this data tell us?

This data supports the fact that our customers in the main have the skills to utilise our self-service options and that we should be doing everything possible to encourage and support our customers to actively use the internet for straightforward transactions wherever possible.

This does not mean that improving the digital access options will mean that Thurrock stops providing services through traditional methods such as telephone or face to face but that these channels will be freed up for those people that need to use them –often residents with complex and sensitive needs.

We must aim to minimise the need for our customers to contact us but if they do, provide them with an excellent self-service experience that is quick and convenient and ensure we widely advertise our choice of other contact channels to hard to reach groups.

Consideration must also be given to the fact that increasing online is not beneficial unless the volumes for other contact channels reduces as otherwise this just becomes an increased cost to our organisation



To enable an effective strategy for channel migration key factors must be:

- Detail – process reengineering deliberate design for each service bearing in mind the level of human interaction required and the needs of the targeted customer base.
- Fluidity – constant reviewing of the effectiveness for each type of contact bearing in mind changing technologies and changing customer habits.
- Simplicity – the optimum channel for any organisation should be the easiest to use for the customer which will then naturally drive a shift in customer behaviour.
- Inclusion - no group should be denied access to a service because of disability, language or the cost of the access channel. Other options should be available to those that need it.
- Cost effectiveness – finding ways to deliver our service effectively but at a lower cost.

We know that experiences of contacting the Council can differ and that the customer experience can be mixed. Some of the best customer service within the Council is down to individual excellence rather than clearly embedded standards of High Quality Customer Service across all directorates.

Where are we now?

The current Customer Services Department within HROD directorate consists of:



Customer Contact Centre- dealing with incoming telephony calls across a variety of council services such as benefits, council tax, waste , environmental, highways, facilities, housing payments , housing , rents, homelessness, general enquiries etc. The contact centre promotes digital services and also set up My accounts for customers when they are experiencing difficulties or when they agree on the telephone

Careline Service - 24/7 monitoring and response for vulnerable residents within their homes through the use of lifelines and assistive technology to allow independent living. The team also complete emergency and routine visits to vulnerable residents and provide the council's emergency out of hour's service

Face to Face Service - dealing with all customer enquiries in person for face to face visitors at the civic offices. Supporting residents with self-service, particularly benefits and housing applications as customer can only apply for housing and housing benefit online.

Cashiers – Cash Management- of cash for services where this is still required i.e. Car parks. Management of the Council's suspense account and allocation of payments to the correct budgets.

There are various telephone access routes across all directorates such as contact centre, community solutions, MASH, Careline which results in a lack of consistency of service provision and customer care training throughout the organisation. There has not been any recent initiative to identify the best fit for call handling where digital is not available or appropriate and it is recommended this is reviewed as part of the service reviews and via the customer and Demand Management Board.

The council has no clear overall service standards or targets published on the web along with service targets set by individual departments not shared for publication on the web. This means that customers are not always aware of timeframes which can cause unnecessary contact. It is recommended that customers service standards and targets are reviewed, agreed and published for the council as a whole with departmental exceptions only permitted by further agreement from Directors Board

There is no common customer centric vision across the council and customer service is not included in all directorate service planning, objectives or reporting.

The contact centre Nortel telephony solution is due for replacement and the contact centre is currently operating with a temporary call recording solution and without a specialist scheduling tool due to the transfer from Serco to the council. This is planned for later this year and current solutions are being investigated including sharing a telephony platform with another local authority which would also support disaster recovery

The available web chat solution is not yet implemented which would be beneficial where customers are experiencing difficulties setting up their my accounts and this should be progressed ASAP

There is no single view of the customer and a customer services advisor cannot view all contacts for all services from the customer for all channels i.e. phone, email, social media, web etc.

Technology is outdated and there are various solutions available on the market which should at least be explored including self-check for business visitors, automated voice recognition for switchboard type enquiries, advanced voice IVR, utilisation of available web chat to support My account registration/set up and single view of the customer platform. Full business case impacting should be completed as the cost may outweigh the potential benefits but these should at least be explored to establish any potential benefits

Current Customer Services Targets

- **Contact Centre telephony response time target** - 50% of calls answered within 20 seconds (this was reduced from 80% within 20 seconds to achieve a saving efficiency of 3.4FTE without a negative response or increased complaints) YTD achievement 63.7% - **Target exceeded ✓**
- **Contact Centre telephony call abandoned rate target** - < 12% abandoned calls (this was increased from 4% in line with service level reduction above) YTD achievement 4.54% - **Target exceeded ✓**
- **Contact Centre call quality target**- 85% combined quality score – assessed by combination of scoring calls against call monitoring criteria and automated Viewscout customer satisfaction survey YTD achievement 96.40% **Target exceeded ✓**
- **Contact Centre email response target** – target 100% to be responded within 2 working days YTD achievement 100% - **Target achieved ✓**
- **Face to Face Service average wait time target** - average wait < 10 minutes YTD achievement 8 minutes – **Target exceeded ✓**
- **Face to Face Service customer satisfaction target** - > 85% satisfaction from customers scoring the service provided YTD achievement 99.81% **Target exceeded ✓**

Previous contractual KPI targets from the strategic partnership with Serco and the council have been maintained as operational service targets to ensure high standards of service delivery are maintained.

All customer telephone calls are recorded for quality monitoring, training purposes and complaints investigation.

The customer services department complaint volumes are exceptionally low and for 2015-16 only 10 upheld complaints were received from a total contact volume of 651231 YTD across the overall customer services department (Face to Face, Contact Centre and Careline) which is 0.0015 % complaint ratio.

There is a high focus on quality monitoring which is scored via a combination of Viewscout scores. This is our automated customer satisfaction survey which gives customers the opportunity to rate the service provided and also leave a comment regarding the service if they wish. This is combined with the Customer Services Advisor call monitoring where the advisors calls are scored by their Team Manager and assessed against our customer Services Call Handling Criteria

There is a strong emphasis on promoting self-service within the call handling criteria and if an advisor does not promote this when it is appropriate for the transaction or customer this affects their score for their call quality scoring, which feeds into their PDR

Recognition

Excellent performance is recognised and wall displays within the contact centre demonstrate positive feedback from actual customer comments left on the satisfaction survey as below:

All advisors achieving 100% for quality in the month are recognised and certificates and displays for our 'Call of Fame' award created regarding their achievements.

Accreditation

The customers Services dept. was assessed by BSI in June 2016 for the CCA version 6 – Customer Contact Association Global standard for customer contact and achieved this with no non-conformances and an impressive audit report. This meets ISO9001 quality standards and is a new industry standard. There will be another assessment in 2017 to maintain this high standard of accreditation.



Implemented actions to support channel migration

Some additional activities have also been implemented to assist channel migration including:

- Self Service area established on the ground floor within the Face to Face area with floorwalker support for assisted self-service if needed and promotion of online services at every opportunity.
- Enhanced call monitoring and side by side call listening to identify suggestions for online activities and to understand the customer experience.
- Contact Centre has taken responsibility for the My Account enquiries line to support customers that are having difficulty logging in and accessing their accounts from home.
- Amended the automatic responses on generic public email accounts to promote the online functions.
- Reviewed and redesigned letters across service including Council Tax bills and Housing Benefit award letters, where online functionality is available to remove contact details and promote My Account.
- Included in Council Tax Annual Billing documentation detailed promotion of My Account for all Thurrock residents.
- Communications team produced a Housing Benefit postcard which was distributed across the borough to residents.
- Involvement with 3rd party providers to ensure that they understand the online functions to promote to their users i.e. Private landlords.

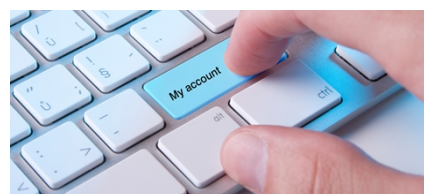
Organisational Design

Although there is a specific customer service department which covers the majority of resident contact for services there is still contact received via telephone from customers within service areas. This should also be reviewed to identify if there are potential savings opportunities by moving these transactions to the customer contact centre or joining up some of the other call handling for these services. If there are higher banded professional employees dealing with customer interactions there may also be a potential to make further savings. The contact center already deals with some complex call types and this is something that should be explored further where services cannot be completed totally on line. E.g. Children's and Adults signposting, general enquiries that do not need specialist advice

My Account

The Thurrock Online project has provided customers with a web based information and transaction website that enables them to create a 'My account' and provides access to a range of information, advice and guidance about council services with 24/7 access via any PC, smartphone or mobile device.

There has been a significant take up of on line service provision and there are approximately 40,000 account registrations to date however there is still much more that can be done to increase this.



My Account Progress to Date

October 2013	Customers can now report Environmental issues online
December 2013	Customer facility to calculate possible benefit entitlement and apply online for Housing Benefits & Council Tax Support.
January 2014	Customer facility to report a change in circumstances online
March 2014	Housing Benefits New Claims - Forced Online -Customer Services withdrew the facility for customers to apply for Housing Benefits using the paper forms. Teams trained to provide an assisted service for vulnerable customers.
May 2014	Environmental reporting/Uniform integration - Additional Environmental services were added to 'Report It' online, including full end to end automation of reporting process.
July 2014	Housing Benefits New Claims Integration - Changes to the back office processing.
September 2014	Council Tax (excluding Move in, Move out function) - Council tax module went live; customers can now manage their council tax account online.
	Housing Benefits View - Customers can now access real time information on their claim i.e. payment dates/amounts check details of claim.
December 2014	Council Tax Move in, Move Out (excluding automation) - Enhancement to council tax module to include 'moves' customers can now register their move online
January 2015	Bulky Waste Launched - Customers can book and pay for their collection online
April 2015	Housing Benefits DHP - Customers can now make an application for Discretionary Housing Payment online
July 2015	Registrar Appointments - Customers can now book appointments to register a birth, death, give notice of marriage/civil partnership etc.
Nov 15	AD contact launched to allow Customer Services to assist customers with setting up accounts, reset passwords etc.
December 2016- Ongoing	Enhancements to existing products to improve the online services for customers i.e. upgrade of the Council tax move in, move out function
August 2016	School Admissions – single sign on for customers

Additional modules as follows:

- Billing Council Tax – 2016
- Licensing (TENS, Premises, Vary DPS)– 2016
- Licensing (Vary premises) – 2017
- Licensing (taxi renewal) - 2017
- My Notifications – 2017
- Single View of Debt – 2017

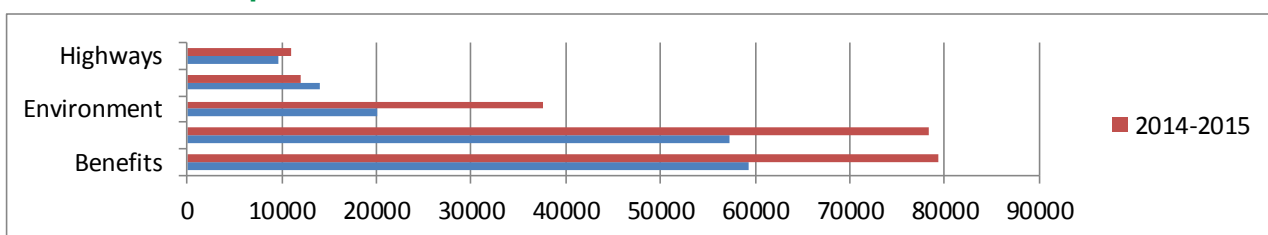
We also use digital to provide:

- a) Information and advice – this is mainly through www.thurrock.gov.uk which in turn is the gateway to other information based services
- b) Engagement – this is through our consultation website and social media
- c) Transactional services – In addition to my Account, through many unaligned systems such as online payments, housing registration and bidding planning applications etc.

There has been a positive overall decrease in contact centre call volumes of approximately 11% from 2014/15 to 2015/16 although there has been an increase in handling times which is likely to be a result of online promotion.

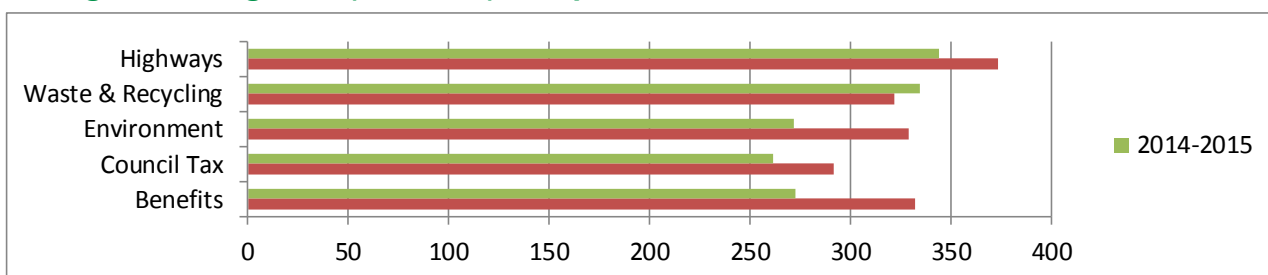
For specific services which are available via My Account there have been some good reductions in most areas in call volumes as the graph below demonstrates and we should continue to identify additional online capability where this is not yet available:

Call volume comparison 2014/15 - 2015-16



Handling times have generally increased for these services as the graph below demonstrates:

Average handling time (seconds) comparison 2014/15 - 2015/16



The council aspires to be a digital council providing digital services that are straightforward and convenient so that all those who can use them will choose to do so whilst those that cannot are not excluded

Community Hubs

In addition there has been some good progress with the community hubs programme. The vision of council voluntary sector and local community groups working together to identify and support the needs of the local community and help residents remain self-sufficient and independent for as long as possible is progressing well.

A community hubs programme board has now been established with clear terms of reference. The board will identify opportunities to investigate how Thurrock council can support communities through hubs linking in with the wider public, private and voluntary sector where possible. The ambition is to achieve social and economic benefit to all sectors whilst meeting the specific needs of our residents and developing a range of locality based opportunities that empower residents to support themselves. The board has strong links into the Customer and Demand management

board. The hubs provide a focal point for residents to access face to face support through trained volunteers such as registering for My Account, pay bills, apply for benefits on line etc.

Digital by Default

The necessity to embed the digital approach throughout the organisation is vital. This needs to become a business as usual activity going forward and not a perennial transformation activity. The previously approved digital principles need to be embedded within the organisation to improve the customers experience and reduce service delivery costs. This really means that all employees need to understand and adopt the principles. Customer contact reduction, excellent service delivery and channel migration must be part of everyday business and every new process decision made within the service should consider these principles.

By following the digital principles not only will this encourage our customers to use on line services but this will improve the end-to-end processes, and in some cases completely transform our delivery models. Online customers, mobile technology and digital service delivery all enhance our ways of working

Where our customers are able to use digital – we will aim to provide a wider range of high-quality digital services

Where our customers are unable to use digital - we will aim to meet their needs off line, often via an assisted digital approach

We should become come digital by default providing services that are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use them will use them, whilst those that cannot will not be excluded

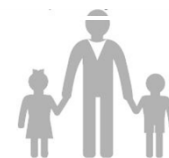
Customer and Demand Management Board

To support the council's budget planning process and transformation programme from 2017-18 onwards, a new framework has been developed with new strategic boards established for; growth, performance, customer and demand management, commercial, ICT/digital, people, procurement, property and service reviews.

The Customer and Demand Management board will be the governance for the delivery of this strategy.

The purpose of the Customer Service and Demand Management Board is to provide the strategic direction and oversight for the development and delivery of customer services across the council. It will ensure that the importance of customer service is promoted to achieve high and consistent standards of delivery and customer satisfaction. The board will oversee initiatives to help manage and reduce demand on services by reducing avoidable contact and through prevention and early intervention.

Our response to our Customer Services principles and specific actions to get there



Principle 1: To deliver consistent customer services with integrity – reducing the need for our customers to repeatedly contact us about the same issue by getting it right first time

We want our Customers to feel valued members of the community and deal with them honestly and with transparency whichever way we serve them .Being open is key to building trusted relationships with our customers

Flexibility, tailored services and fairness are important to customers. This requires a common sense approach to our customers to enable the right outcomes without compromising our policies, priorities vision or mission

We want to create services our customers will tell others about, we want to build relationships with our customers, where our customers talk to us and we work together to reach outcomes if problems arise. We want these relationships to help us to build a great Borough

Direction and actions to deliver;

<p>Action 1 <i>Customer care training programme to be widened to all service areas. Included in employee and members induction with CS mission, vision and principles. Convenient - Consistent- Cost Effective- Customer Care to be embedded. Encourage further NVQ's in customer service and develop customer care eLearning course 2017</i></p>	<p>Action 4 <i>Maintain and review call handling quality checking procedures. Constantly reviewing the criteria to ensure is still up to date within current digital age. Identify process issues from this for re-engineering with an effective feedback mechanism to all depts. 2017 and ongoing</i></p>
<p>Action 2 <i>Review existing Customer Services targets and then develop a customer Services charter so that our customers are aware of the standards and timeframes they can expect to receive when contacting us. 2017</i></p>	<p>Action 5 <i>Maintain C and DM Board to maintain consistency regarding customer service standards across the council – a holistic approach to Customer Services to breakdown silos and align the customer services vision and principles with clear terms of reference Ongoing</i></p>
<p>Action 3 <i>Develop and publish specific service targets on the web pages for key services so customers are aware of timeframes and standards whatever channel is used Ensure employees aware of their responsibility in contributing to delivery of these and that results are published 2017</i></p>	<p>Action 6 <i>Empower and engage our employees and customers in the design and provision of customer services, ensuring effective feedback mechanisms are in place for employees via employee forums, surveys and suggestion schemes and appropriate employee representation at C and DM board 2017 and ongoing</i></p>



Principle 2: To go above and beyond for our customers by encouraging and empowering our employees to take ownership and deliver positive outcomes

Resolution is vital to provide a high quality customer service. Customers want to speak to the right person the first time to get their outcome. We need to ensure we take ownership of their issues, enquiries, applications and work together to reach an outcome. Employees must have the right training, resources and time to provide the best outcomes for our customers however they contact us

Our employees must have the right authority and the right tools to make decisions, Research suggests that employees who are more satisfied in their roles give superior customer service – we aim for employees satisfaction by ensuring they have the right skills and tools to perform their jobs, the right support from management to do their jobs to the highest possible level. We will check in with our employees regularly to ensure they have what they need to provide excellent customers service

Direction and actions to deliver,

<p>Action 1</p>	<p>Action 4</p>
<p><i>Effective training, / cascade to embed the customer services mission, promise and principles within the organisation – culture change is required and the overall goals must be clearly understood throughout the organisation. Implement Development and change programme - 2017 and ongoing.</i></p>	<p><i>Review the organisational design for Customer Services, ensuring initial necessary customer contact is in most cost effective place- calls within department that could be handled within the contact centre by using the transaction delivery matrix. 2017 and ongoing via service reviews</i></p>
<p>Action 2</p> <p><i>Effective leadership message – senior managers must support and embed the Customers Services mission and principles throughout their departments along with the digital principles. The digital principles and strategy should be fully integrated into all service plans, Job descriptions, PDR's. 2017</i></p>	<p>Action 5</p> <p><i>Continued and monitoring an review of incoming channels and action plan for all channels including post/ paper - Review letters across services to ensure these are not creating unnecessary demand 2017</i></p>
<p>Action 3</p> <p><i>Creating a connection for customer services throughout the organisation – a common customer centric vision. Customer service to be an agenda at CWG and part of employee's satisfaction surveys to ensure any issues are identified. Continuation of C and DM board with appropriate representation. 2017</i></p>	<p>Action 6</p> <p><i>All employees who are resident in the borough encouraged to sign up for my account – if they haven't tried it themselves – how can they promote the benefits to our customers – organise employee sign up planned activities and encourage employees to give feedback about the services. 2017</i></p>



Our response to these principles and specific actions to get there

Principle 3: To provide up to date information and efficient processes, continually striving for improvement and innovative solutions

We must be proactive, ensuring our processes are easy to navigate, our information is correct and up to date and we are easy to interact with. We must be dedicated to continually improving our services and making a dedicated effort to ensure we are current, we are convenient and we are accessible 24/7 as an organisation

We will take an innovative approach to customer services. We will continue to use and enhance technology to make our services even more accessible and convenient to our customers but still ensure that there are options for our customers that cannot use the online methods

We want to provide a high standard of customer's services and also ensure that our employees are supported to give their best and we will keep up to date with new customer services initiatives and best practice within not only local government but customer's service organisations and accreditation.

Direction and actions to deliver;

Action 1	Action 7
<i>Maintain Customer contact association v6 industry standard accreditation to maintain existing high standards within the Customer Services Dept. and identify any further areas for improvement. Maintain recognition scheme, displays in CS and support PCI compliance assessment. Ongoing</i>	<i>Continue with investigation into a shared telephony platform with another council to reduce costs. Telephony system is due for replacement and this may be an effective solution which would reduce costs and support DR plans. Include web chat investigation 2017</i>
Action 2	Action 8
<i>Complete business process reengineering project for all customer touch points initially within the contact centre and customer service areas to reduce unnecessary contact and explore further digital solutions. Review high call volumes outside of the contact centre. 2017 an ongoing via service reviews</i>	<i>Following new telephony solution implementation, investigate the possibility for growth - Customer Services completing call handling on behalf of other local authorities. ICT to explore 'single view of the customer' technology options and review of existing CRM system 2018</i>
Action 3	Action 9
<i>Continued development of online services and web content with a clear implementation plan so we are building a high quality customer focused digital services - ongoing monitoring of high volume transactions and tracker. 2017 and ongoing</i>	<i>Explore further opportunities with automated messages. E.g. if a customer calls to track progress on an application and the application is still within established timescales there is no benefit to the customer, messages could be played reiterating processing timescales 2017</i>
Action 4	Action 10
<i>Senior leadership sign off and support embedding of digital principles throughout the organisation with an effective governance process of these principles across all directorates and reducing isolated system implementation within directorates. 2017 and ongoing</i>	<i>Explore incentive opportunities or my Acct i.e. a Thurrock Deals programme where local businesses can offer exclusive deals to My Account holders via email alerts. Utilise behavioural Insight techniques in marketing promotions from digital services 2018</i>
Action 5	Action 11
<i>Implement an effective continuous documented Customer Services Benchmarking programme to ensure constant benchmarking of our organisation against the best in the business – look within and beyond the public sector, what, where and how to innovate. 2017 and ongoing</i>	<i>Explore marketing techniques to attract various digital user groups i.e. those who utilise digital for other activities, with different themes i.e. never phone, never queue, and never forget. Consider iPad pal volunteer programme 2017</i>
Action 6	Action 12
<i>Ensure all changes are backed with evidence, utilising customer research, and website usage data, MI. Fully impact all proposals with business cases before implementing solutions ensuring changes make financial sense and are measurable. If we can't measure it we can't improve it. 2017 and ongoing</i>	<i>Review MI to ensure consistency, timeliness, accuracy and scope to measure costs between services and channels. Consistent MI for services. and new measurement and reporting of failure demand 2017.</i>

Our response to these principles and specific actions to get there



Principle 4: To proactively engage our customers in developing services that respond to their needs and seek feedback on the delivery of those services

Feedback must be a vital part of our service. Customers should have an input into our current service and how we build our future services. Customer feedback is an important part of our service provision to both our customers and our employees. Customers must have a voice, an opportunity to give feedback across all service areas and it should be easy for customers to do this

It is important that we review, build and improve services with our customers input. Not only does it create valued relationships with our customers but it helps us to be efficient and deliver value for money, liaison with our customers is the best way we can find out whether the service we are providing is meeting expectations.

Direction and actions to deliver;

<p>Action 1</p> <p><i>Maintain all customer satisfaction surveys and quality measurement across Customer services departments ensuring appropriate actions in place for any identified issues and complaints. Feedback issues to all service areas. Monthly communication of results and complaint reporting. 2017 and ongoing</i></p>	<p>Action 4</p> <p><i>Ensure residents are involved in the service delivery process – involvement of customer segment in process design to understand their point of view. This should be part of any new process design – utilise digital tools and techniques to engage and consult 2017 and ongoing as part of service reviews</i></p>
<p>Action 2</p> <p><i>Establish a Customer Services residents group to identify issues and implement appropriate actions relating to Customer services across all council departments based on customer feedback. 2017</i></p>	<p>Action 5</p> <p><i>Review output from forthcoming Resident's survey and put in place an appropriate action plan for any feedback / issue received in relation to Customer Services with effective monitoring of action / implementation 2017</i></p>



<p>Action 3</p> <p><i>Continue to promote the benefits of our online services to customers at every</i></p>	<p>Action 6</p> <p><i>Utilise social media more effectively for customer engagement to obtain views re , feedback and proactive messaging. Build and implement an media strategy and actions 2017</i></p>
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Our response to these principles and specific actions to get there

Principle 5: To provide quality, cost effective choices that do not exclude members of the community and offer easy access to our services

Our services must be convenient, consistent and accessible to all. The choices of access must all be high quality, add value and make it easier for our customers to interact with us. We have to continue to provide solutions for our customers to make life easy for them and help with their busy lives, allowing them to make the best of their time.

Providing convenient and accessible services is also about ensuring we are inclusive of the whole community. We are proud our community is made up of a diverse range of people from different backgrounds with different life experiences. We want to ensure our community know the methods available to contact us and what to expect when they do. We want to ensure we are spending time with the people in the community who need a bit of extra help and recognise sometime that our processes and solutions don't suit everyone

Direction and actions to deliver;

<p>Action 1</p> <p>Continued development of our website 'Contact us' page explaining available support for our vulnerable service users and including our customer service standards and charter to demonstrate the benefits utilising our digital channels 2017</p>	<p>Action 7</p> <p>Investigate benefits and issues with self-check in system for business visitors at civic offices and complete appropriate business case if feasible and costs are not greater than potential benefits 2017</p>
<p>Action 2</p> <p>Implement, monitor and measure an effective proactive strategy for customer contact via SMS, Gov direct, social media to avoid unnecessary customer contact i.e. missed collection, weather, payment due/ received etc. 2017</p>	<p>Action 8</p> <p>Investigate Voice recognition solution for switchboard type enquiries where caller are ringing to contact an employee direct. Complete appropriate business case if feasible and costs/issues for the solution are not greater than potential resource benefits 2017</p>
<p>Action 3</p> <p>Transform Face to Face Customer services in civic, increasing self-service desks, providing additional assisted support, documentation desks for verification/ scanning and appointment solution for vulnerable residents unable to utilise self-service options – Tie in with refurb 2017/18</p>	<p>Action 9</p> <p>ICT to explore benefits / options of having a single view of the customer system to enable a joined up view across all services. . ICT to also review existing CRM solution 2018</p>
<p>Action 4</p> <p>Amend Customer Services currently provided in community hubs to assisted self-service to support our customers utilising online services and help them enhance their digital skills -this should benefit them in their everyday lives - Link to our Community Hub plan completed 2016</p>	<p>Action 10</p> <p>Explore video kiosk solution at hubs to enable face to face communication with council customer's services advisors for complex enquiries and other potential community options / locations 2017</p>
<p>Action 5</p> <p>Approve recommended services as digital only, maximise the use of resource for customers that really need our support This will allow an appt service for vulnerable residents and assisted self-service, phone or face to face where needed . Effective comms plan required 2017</p>	<p>Action 11</p> <p>Implement a proactive process to contact our customers who have had difficulty registering for my Account to assist them in setting up their account. Sending auto email when abandoned with support details 2017</p>
<p>Action 6</p> <p>Continue to provide assisted self-service for customers that telephone the contact centre , setting up My Accounts for them if they are experiencing difficulties and advising the of the benefits of utilising the online services . Monitor and track the effectiveness 2016 and ongoing</p>	<p>Action 12</p> <p>Revisit cashiers project (phase 2) to identify further cashless options to enable efficiencies and make payment more convenient for customers In progress 2016</p>



Principle 6: To enable our customers to transact with the council when it suits them without having to phone and visit to enable the fastest possible service at the lowest possible cost

We want our Customers to have the flexibility to contact us when they need to and continue provide simple affordable systems that are available 24/7

Delivering services online at every opportunity and promoting and assisting our customers in utilising this option as their preferred channel will help to allow us to sustain relevant services whilst delivering savings for the organisation,

This allows much greater control for our customers and then enables us to utilise the alternative channels for our customers that really need our support and help

Understanding our customer journey is vital to further progression in this area as getting it right will mean that we may be able to reduce the channels for certain transactions for our customers that are able to access online

Information about what can be completed online and the benefits of doing this will be made as widely available as possible raising our customer's awareness for our customers that just don't have the skills or equipment we can continue to plan and support them to build their skills in this area through a network of local facilities

Direction and actions to deliver;

<p>Action 1 <i>Effective implementation and monitoring of existing communication plan for channel migration ensuring customers are aware of what is available. Utilise a variety of marketing techniques to attract customers to our digital solutions 2016 and ongoing</i></p>	<p>Action 4 <i>Change appropriate transactions to digital only i.e. report it; this will enable an enhanced service to customers that need our support. This will enable customers to realise the benefits, convenience and accessibility and support our financial challenges 2017</i></p>
<p>Action 2 <i>Initial support provided via telephone and face to face to give our customers that need help the confidence to self-serve in the future - this will then make our services more convenient for them in the future 2016 and ongoing</i></p>	<p>Action 5 <i>Process reengineering project to identify further ways to enhance the digital experience and avoid unnecessary contact from our customers 2016 and ongoing as part of service reviews</i></p>
<p>Action 3 <i>Maintain high focus on Customers services dept. setting up accounts for customers utilising AD contact, continuing to track volumes for registration and call reduction. Propose reduction challenges and efficiencies 2016 and ongoing</i></p>	<p>Action 6 <i>Ensuring channel migration action plan actions are implemented relating to eforms, digital principle etc. are embedded i.e. replacing PDF and downloadable forms with eforms, replacing leaflets with online info etc. Links to web pages with info 2016 and ongoing as part of service reviews</i></p>

Our response to these principles and specific actions to get there



Principle 7: We offer support to help people be online and work with our partners and the community to improve access to services

We want to increase the use of online service and help support those that are isolated. Not only will this help develop their skills and increase access to services this would also be our most cost effective choice,

Our staff will be trained to ensure they can fully support our customers that need help in this area

We will continue to work with our communities to increase further the confidence of those that are digitally excluded and support them to increase their ability to utilise online services

We will support people in setting up their online accounts over the phone or face to face with assisted self-service if they are having problems doing this and explain the real benefits of these solutions to them

Direction and actions to deliver;

<p>Action 1</p> <p><i>Implement a plan to enable proactive contact to residents with dropped searches, registration issues and transactions via MY Acct to assist and encourage future self-service. Financial benefits of digital solutions will only be achieved if customers make use of the digital service 2017</i></p>	<p>Action 4</p> <p><i>Ensure all face to face self-service PC's within civic and hubs also have telephone on desks with speed dials to the contact centre for assisted support if customers need assistance to self-serve 2017</i></p>
<p>Action 2</p> <p><i>Roll out training for AD contact to all customer services employees so that any Customer services Assistant can set up My Acct for any customer - .measure the impact on AHT and wait times 2017</i></p>	<p>Action 5</p> <p><i>Contact centre and face to face advisors to continue to promote My account/web after every call, /visit recommending the website and benefits and requesting an email address so that a link can be provided for the web. Monitor the effectiveness. Consider utilising my account for some members enquiries 2016 and ongoing</i></p>
<p>Action 3</p> <p><i>Implement a plan to identify and capture any existing forums and community groups to encourage and support our customer to utilise our website. 2017</i></p>	<p>Action 6</p> <p><i>Expand the communications and transactions that are available through social media sites such as twitter, explore IPTV options and identify further improvement and provision of mediated self-service options 2017</i></p>

Outcomes – How will we know success?

Convenient	Consistent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Our customer find it easy to access our services and information</i> ▪ <i>We will have implemented a new social media strategy and more proactive contact with our customers</i> ▪ <i>We will have implemented new MY Account services</i> ▪ <i>We will have provided additional support to help our customers utilise digital services</i> ▪ <i>Enhanced service for our vulnerable customers</i> ▪ <i>Improved community options available for our customers</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Maintenance of CCA version 6 accreditation</i> ▪ <i>Our senior managers will all lead by example supporting innovation and ideas from employees</i> ▪ <i>Our metrics will benchmark favourably against other local authorities</i> ▪ <i>We will have high 1st contact resolution</i> ▪ <i>Customer services will maintain all service level targets and achievement</i> ▪ <i>We will continue to recognise our employees for providing excellent customer Service</i> ▪ <i>We will have excellent employee engagement scores</i>
Cost Effective	Customer Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Our customers will contact us online unless vulnerable or service not available online</i> ▪ <i>Transactions will be dealt with in the most appropriate place within the organisation</i> ▪ <i>Up to date technology will be in place</i> ▪ <i>Digital principles will be embedded with effective governance</i> ▪ <i>We will have reengineered our processes</i> ▪ <i>We will utilise metrics and information effectively, impacting fully before decisions</i> ▪ <i>We will have, increased My Account registration</i> ▪ <i>We have identified opportunities for growth and realised efficiencies</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>A changing customer focused culture across the entire council</i> ▪ <i>Our charter and promise, standards actions and results will be available to our customers</i> ▪ <i>Customer care training will be embedded within the entire organisation</i> ▪ <i>Our customer will be involved in our process design</i> ▪ <i>Our ground floor will be transformed into a bright modern space</i> ▪ <i>Constant utilisation of customer feedback</i> ▪ <i>Maintained our CSD high customer satisfaction scores</i>

We will be able to demonstrate or have metrics for all of the above

CONCLUSION: Final thoughts on our Customer Services strategy.....

*Delivering the vision, mission, actions and adhering to the principles within this strategy will help us transform our customers experience and at the same time enable us to meet our financial challenges. Our customers will have greater access to our services; will receive regular updates on service areas that are of interest to them and proactive contact to avoid them having to contact us. We will have a workforce with the right skills for the future and with the ability to guide our customers to the right services for them. We will be working closely with our communities to increase access and support to our services and will have strong partnerships in place that allow us to have local ambassadors to support local people. Success is **convenient, consistent, cost effective, customer care** for the residents of Thurrock*