A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a black headset with a microphone. The background shows an office environment with a desk, a telephone, and a whiteboard. A green exit sign is visible in the upper left background.

Customer Services Strategy 2017-20

Convenient – Consistent
Cost Effective – Customer Care

1. Introduction

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.

Our approach must be based on meeting customer needs more efficiently and effectively. This means keeping their needs at the heart of what we do to provide the right customer journey enabling the customer to self-serve wherever possible.

The Customer Services Strategy sets out where the council wants to be and how it will get there. It is intended to 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 and links closely to the digital and people strategies. It creates a comprehensive plan of how we will improve service to our customers across all access channels.

To succeed it will be necessary to create a culture, supported by the right operational procedures and infrastructure that will enable us to get it right first time.

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 must still be available for the customers that cannot.

The council's relationship with the community and partners is changing and we want to empower groups and individuals. 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.

The 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

Who are our Customers ?



Customer service is about doing the right thing. It's about treating a customer as they would expect, and as you yourself would want to be treated. Every customer wants to feel like they are important.

Where are we now?

Every month the council receives on average:



38,000 calls to the contact centre



8,000 visits to civic offices



Over 1 million hits to the website including:
100% benefit claims and housing applications online
70% bulky waste collections online
25% of households manage their council tax online



Over 1,000 emails to the general enquiries inbox

And we have:



50,000 registered customers on My Account



10,000 followers on Twitter

The costs (benchmark average) per contact are:



15p per transaction



2.83 per transaction



£8.62 per transaction

The Residents Survey 2016 told us that:

Over 90% of residents in Thurrock have access to the Internet at home or on a mobile device

81% would prefer to contact the council by phone, 27% via online methods and 10% in person at present

61% would be willing to contact us online in the future

72% think council employees are friendly and polite

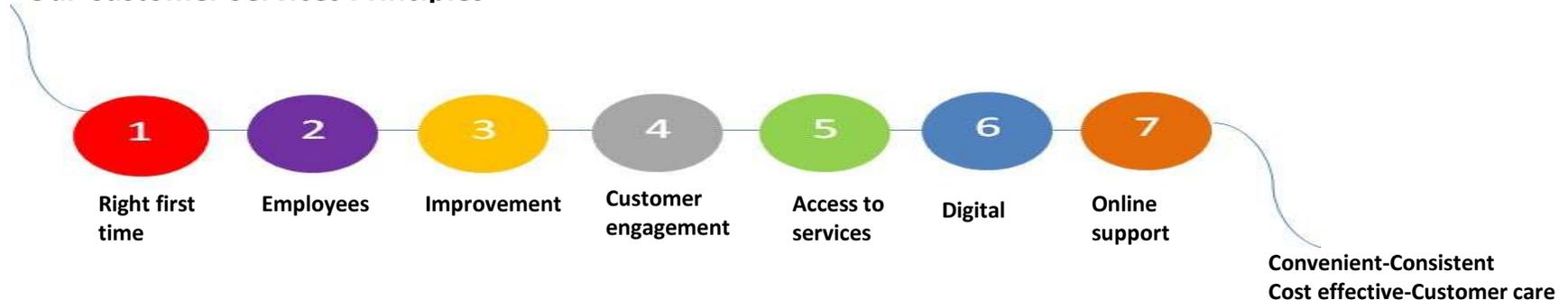
48% think we respond quickly and efficiently to queries

Our Vision for Customer Services

The council will:

- ∇ Meet your needs first time whichever way we serve you
- ∇ Deliver what we say we will and keep you informed of actions being taken
- ∇ Enable you to self-serve, ensuring we provide high quality specialist and targeted support where self-service is not possible or appropriate

Our Customer Services Principles



What do these mean?

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

Key recommendations / actions to deliver our customer services principle 1



Principle 1 - Right first time

To deliver consistent customer services with integrity – reducing the need for our customers to repeatedly contact us about the same issue

1

Key recommendations / actions

- ∇ **Review of customer contact within services** including methods and quality of communication – work with all areas to identify customer service issues, potential process re-engineering, training requirements and review quality of communication i.e. letters and ensure learning plans and actions are in place for complaint areas with follow up on progress and actions – from **April 2017** and ongoing - linked to service reviews.
- ∇ Develop a **customer service charter** by reviewing existing service standards and targets, ensuring that customers are aware of the process and timeframes they can expect as well as the council's commitment to get it right first time and if not, to say sorry and resolve the issue quickly - **July 2017**
- ∇ **Customer care training programme** to be widened to all service areas. Principles included in employee and members induction. Develop customer care eLearning course by **December 2017**. Encourage more customer service apprenticeships.
- ∇ **First time resolution and avoidable contact** - reduce the need for customers to contact the council by reducing bureaucracy, learning from 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 from 2017 to 2019.

Key recommendations / actions to deliver our customer services principle 2



Principle 2 - Employees

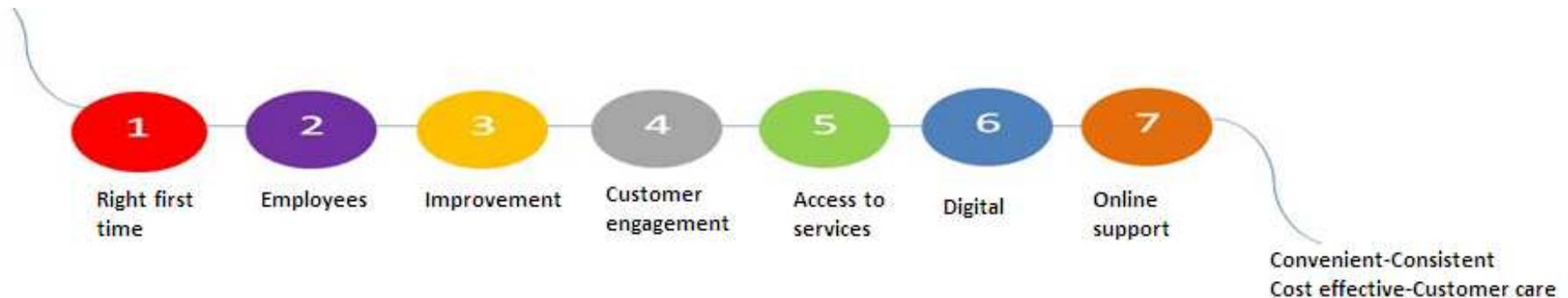
To go above and beyond for our customers by encouraging and empowering our employees to take ownership and deliver positive outcomes

2

Key recommendations / actions

- ∇ **Empower and engage** our employees and customers in the design and provision of services, ensuring effective feedback mechanisms are in place for employees via employee forums, surveys and appropriate representation at Customer and Demand Management Board **May 2017 and ongoing**
- ∇ **All employees who are residents in the borough encouraged to sign up for My Account and promote online services** – organise employee sign up activities and encourage employees to give feedback about the services to inform improvements. **July 2017 and ongoing**
- ∇ **People and Culture** - embed the vision and principles in customer service delivery, and a set of service standards, throughout the organisation from 2017. A holistic approach to customer services with customer care training available to all staff via the classroom or e-learning **by December 2017**. This should include the vision and principles with clear standards of performance that are visible and transparent to customers through the customer charter. The aim is to create a culture that supports the delivery of high quality customer services. Robust leadership and governance arrangements will be in place to drive the strategy from the top and provide a shared vision that everyone can work towards. There will be a focus on digital and innovation to empower our employees using the right tools and technology. The change management programme will support this along with a refresh of our current behaviour frameworks. Customer services should be part of staff objectives and included in all job descriptions and service plans - links to People and Digital Strategies.

Key recommendations / actions to deliver our customer services principle 3



Principle 3 - Improvement

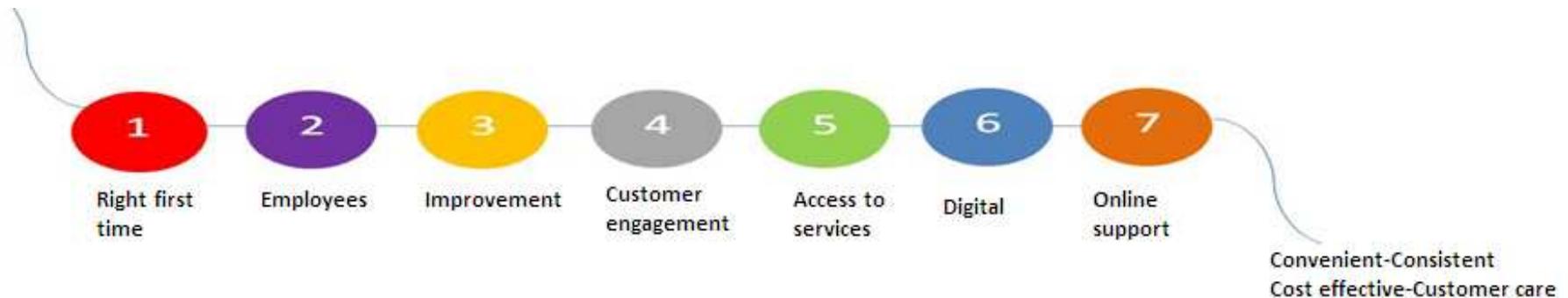
To provide up to date information and efficient processes, continually striving for improvement and innovative solutions

3

Key recommendations /actions

- ∨ **Continued monitoring and 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 - commencing May **2017 and ongoing**
- ∨ **Maintain Customer Contact Association v6 industry standard accreditation** to maintain existing high standards within the Customer Services Department and identify any further areas for improvement – annual, **June 2017**
- ∨ **Create a framework for monitoring the charter and improving performance.** With effective feedback mechanism to all services - link to Performance Board , Service Reviews and Customer and Demand Management Board **Sept 2017 and ongoing**
- ∨ **Technology** - implement a new contact centre telephony solution, along with new customer satisfaction, call recording and scheduling. Ensure new solution will link effectively for potential technology enhancements i.e. advanced voice recognition (IVR) capability and potential omni- channel (single view of the customer) technology solutions, to be explored in 2017/18.
- ∨ **Organisational design** – 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 from 2017 through to 2019. This is an opportunity to review existing call volumes across all services and identify transactions not currently digital that would be better placed within the contact centre initially.
- ∨ **Growth** – there is an opportunity to explore joining forces with other local authorities for customer services delivery. This should be pursued in 2018/19 as a potential growth area with a view to Thurrock’s customer services department providing services on behalf of other local authorities and generating income.

Key recommendations / actions to deliver our customer services principle 4



Principle 4 - Customer engagement

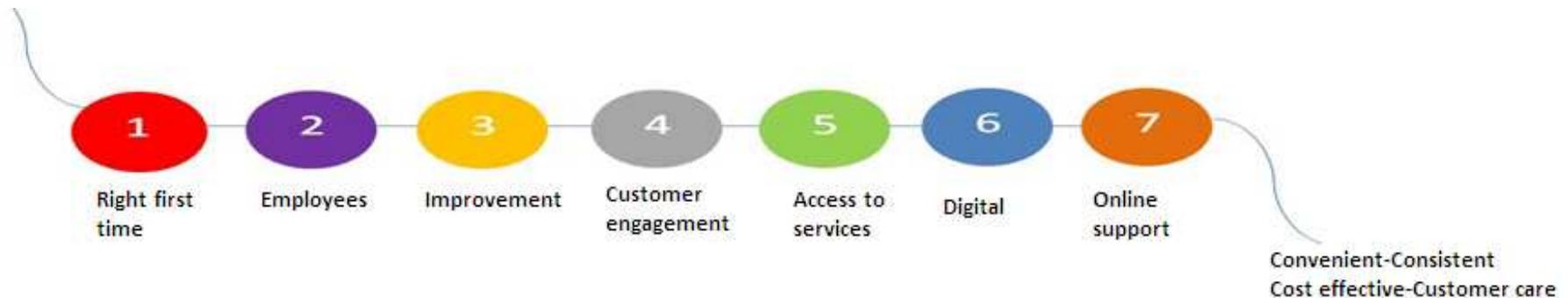
To proactively engage our customers in developing services that respond to their needs and seek feedback on the delivery of those services

4

Key recommendations / actions

- ∨ **Maintain customer satisfaction surveys** and quality measurement and implement a feedback mechanism for digital services. Ensure appropriate actions in place for any identified issues and complaints. Feedback issues to all service areas. Monthly communication of results and complaint reporting. **Ongoing**
- ∨ **Continue to promote the benefits of online services to customers**, targeting future changes to meet the needs of customers .
- ∨ **Review Residents' Survey results** and put in place appropriate action plan for customer services i.e. to improve the speed and efficiency of responses. **May 2017** – follow up survey in September 2017
- ∨ Share and promote **positive customer feedback and compliments** across all services – **June 2017 and ongoing**
- ∨ Utilise information received via existing **social media** to its full potential to proactively reduce contact i.e. if made aware of a general issue or trend via social media, respond to proactively reduce the need for other customers to contact the council – **ongoing**
- ∨ **Ensure residents are involved in the service design process** – involvement of customers in process design or through effective consultation on service changes. Utilise digital tools and techniques to engage and consult **September 2017 and ongoing as part of service reviews**
- ∨ **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. **September 2017 and ongoing**

Key recommendations / actions to deliver our customer services principle 5



Principle 5 - Access to services

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

5

Key recommendations / actions

- ∨ **Channel Migration - digital only services** – approve recommended services as digital only from **April 2017**, removing other channels to maximise the use of resources for customers that really need support or where there is no online solution. This will allow appropriate support for vulnerable residents to ensure they are not excluded and assisted self-service via telephone or face-to-face where needed. Residents will be encouraged and supported wherever possible to go online. Ongoing and via service reviews 2017-2019.
- ∨ **Channel Migration - Face to face** – remove specific face-to-face service desks to allow for an increase in self-service facilities and appointment service only for vulnerable service users - phased in from **May 2017** to January 2018. Provide a self-service scanning solution for 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. This will enable flexibility of resource and appointments for vulnerable customers.
- ∨ **Cashiers project (phase 2) to identify further cashless/cheque-less options** to enable efficiencies and make payment more convenient for customers - **June 2017** - in progress
- ∨ **Implement self-check in system for business visitors at civic offices** - enhancement to existing Qmatic system - **July 2017**
- ∨ Explore video /skype solution at community hubs to enable face to face communication with customer services advisors for complex enquiries and other potential community options / locations - **December 2017**
- ∨ **Ensure channel migration actions are implemented** relating to eforms, ensuring digital principles are embedded i.e. replacing PDF and downloadable forms with eforms, replacing leaflets with online information etc. **Ongoing**
- ∨ **Ensure translation service is available across all channels** - **August 17**

Key recommendations / actions to deliver our customer services principle 6



Principle 6 - Digital

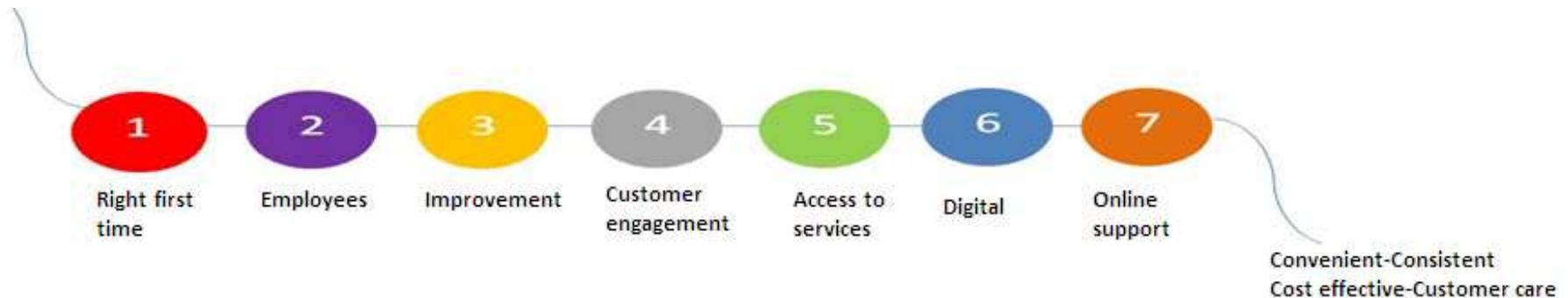
To enable our customers to transact with the council when it suits them without having to phone and visit

6

Key recommendations / actions

- ∇ **Digital principles** - embed the digital strategy principles within all services and a focus in all service reviews. We should be digital by default - link to people and digital strategies **2017/18**
- ∇ **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. **May 2017 and ongoing via service reviews**
- ∇ **Continued development of online services and web content** with a clear implementation plan so we are building high quality customer focused digital services - ongoing monitoring of high volume transactions and tracker. **May 2017 and ongoing**
- ∇ **Explore further opportunities for automated messages and artificial intelligence.** Complete appropriate business case and cost/benefit analysis **2017/18**
- ∇ **Investigate voice recognition solution for switchboard enquiries** where callers are ringing to contact an employee direct. Complete appropriate business case and cost/benefit analysis **June 2017**
- ∇ In addition to web chat, **implement a proactive process to contact 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 - **Sept 2017**
- ∇ **Explore marketing techniques, behavioural insight and incentive opportunities to increase digital engagement** i.e. those who utilise digital for other activities, and engagement with businesses who may be able to provide offers to My Account users. Consider iPad pal volunteer programme. **October 2017**

Key recommendations / actions to deliver our customer services principle 7



Principle 7 - Online support

To offer support to help people be online and work with our partners and the community to improve access to services

7

Key recommendations / actions

- ∨ **Channel Migration - Assisted digital support** – for residents 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 on their behalf initially and setting up their account so that they can continue to use 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 use the easiest contact channels for the services where online is available and implement web chat to assist - **Ongoing**
- ∨ **Community options** - ongoing support for the development of community hubs and consider additional community access points alongside service reviews so that solutions can be explored collectively to manage demand and reshape services – links to Customer and Demand Management Board, Community Hub Board, Property Board and Service reviews.
- ∨ **Change appropriate transactions to digital only** i.e. discounts; this will enable an enhanced service to customers that need our support. Customers will realise the benefits, convenience and accessibility of these services. **May 2017**
- ∨ **Implement a plan to enable proactive contact to residents with dropped searches, registration issues and transactions** via My Account to assist and encourage future self-service - **August 2017**
- ∨ **Implement web chat** to support customers having difficulty setting up their My Account or finding information - **September 2017**

Final thoughts.....



Delivering the vision and adhering to the principles within this strategy will help us transform our customers' experience.

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.