

Review of Customer Experience Final Report

Introduction

1. People contact the council for a wide variety of reasons. It may be to report a problem such as dog fouling or abandoned vehicles; to obtain information about a service such as opening hours of the local swimming pool; to pay for a service such as garden waste or to seek advice such as on planning matters. Contacts are made using different mediums and may include telephone, letters, internet/ emails as well as speaking to someone face to face.
2. In the current climate of austerity and ever decreasing council budgets, there is a need to look at how council services are delivered and consider whether these can be provided in a different way which is not only more convenient and easy for the customer but can also save money for the council. Understanding how and why people contact the council and looking at their experiences can help us to design and deliver more efficient services.
3. The Resources and Governance Board agreed to undertake a review of customer experience as part of their annual work programme at their August 2014 meeting. This proposal was put forward by members who had received complaints from their constituents about their poor experiences of contacting the Council, especially when using the phone.
4. The review was led by a small working group of the Resources and Governance Board and started with a brief tour of the Customer Services Centre based on the ground floor of the Council House. The tour looked at the various services provided by the contact centre and ended with a short briefing from the Head of Service and Service Manager about their services.
5. Further evidence for the review was provided by the Director of Customer Management, Head of Customer Services, Head of Communications, Direct Services Manager (ICT), Equality Adviser and Customer Service Advisors including the Team Leader. The working group also received a presentation on the E- Services programme by the Strategic Director of Resources and was ably supported by the Resources Programme Manager and the E-services Project Manager.
6. Members held face to face interviews with 49 customers who had visited the council. The survey involved customers completing a short questionnaire about their contact with the Council. The interviews were held in the main reception area on two separate days and provided a snapshot of customer experience.
7. The Resources and Governance Board thanks all of the people who gave evidence during this review. It would not have been possible to conduct a thorough review without their contribution.

Customer Services

8. The customer management journey began with the publication of Customers Services Strategy in August 2004. This outlined a vision for customer services which sought to put customers first and at the heart of everything the council

does. It aimed to have services that were integrated, responsive, customer focused and cost effective, and which concentrated on the needs of the community rather than those of the council.

9. The current customer contact model has been gradually developed starting with the transfer of Revenues and Benefits and Pest Control in 2005 to the contact centre. A telephone contact centre was introduced in 2009 and the Team moved into Albion Street during the Council House refurbishment in 2010 before returning to the Council House in 2012.

Derby Direct

10. The Council's contact centre, commonly known as Derby Direct has two teams:
 - the Councils' contact centre and
 - the Service Transition Team
11. Derby Direct works with Council departments, external organisations and third sector services to manage customer contacts across an increasing range of Council services across a range of contact channels. The contact centre is managed by the Derby Direct Manager with 5.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) Team Leaders managing an establishment of 23 FTE permanent Customer Service Advisors and 19 FTE fixed term Customer Service Advisors.
12. This FTE is made up of a mixture of part time and full time staff to match the peaks and troughs within services and to ensure staff is available over the lunch period. There are currently 51 members of staff in 42 FTE posts with the working ratio between managers and Customer Service Advisors at 1:10.
13. Additional fixed term funding was provided to increase the number of Customer Service Advisors in the Derby Direct contact centre as well as creating additional fixed term posts in the Service Transition team. However the fixed term nature of this funding means that 25 of the 51 Customer Service Advisors (49%) have a contract end date of 31 March 2015.

Channels of contact

14. The Customer Service Advisors in Derby Direct manage customer contacts across a range of channels including:
 - Face to face - the Meet & Greet role on the ground floor of the Council House. Duties include sign posting customers to the correct service point, resolving issues, helping customers use self-service facilities and providing reception services for visitors
 - Face to face - at customer booths dealing with a variety of services including issuing parking permits, tip permits and applications for concessionary bus passes. NB There are other face to face services – Derby Homes, Housing Benefits, Council Tax, Housing Options case workers who are directly employed by the service departments but operate using Derby Direct processes and procedures

- Telephone – for a range of services including Streetpride, Fostering and Adoptions, Adults Social Care, Council switchboard and Housing Options
 - Voice mail – mainly for the Streetpride service responding to service requests left as a message,
 - Email – across all the services Derby Direct helps to deliver
 - Self-service - an increasing volume of self-service forms submitted by customers that go direct to the relevant Council service, as well as an increasing volume of self-service payments that requires no intervention from a Customer Service Advisor
15. Allocating staff to each of the above takes into account vacancies, annual leave, sick leave and training from the daily available resource.
 16. Priority is given to the Meet & Greet part of the service because of the high profile, reputational work this team carry out. On average 7.5 FTE per day are allocated from the daily available resource of approximately 30 FTE.
 17. There are approximately 40,000 contacts per month through face to face, telephone and email. The Board was informed that members of the public often consider the council to be the first point of contact for most issues, even when it may not be the right body. However when someone makes a query that is not the responsibility of the Council, the Customer Services Team refers them to the appropriate organisation.
 18. The service is organised to ensure 70% of staff manage customer contacts whilst individual staff performance for dealing with customers is measured. This helps the organisation to learn from the experience and make services more efficient and effective. Call times for each service area are monitored for learning purposes.
 19. Generic customer service staff is trained in a range of services. This enables better management of the service as they may be allocated duties to areas of high demand when required. Having a wide skill mix provides greater flexibility for allocation of duties.
 20. Annual customer surveys are conducted at around October for each channel which helps to assess the quality of the service. Everyone who receives a service is requested to complete the survey. People contacting through telephone are also asked to complete the survey.
 21. It was explained that there are more contacts than staff available to deal with them and therefore we need more people to use self-service. Transactional based services are channelled through self-service.
 22. Team leaders spend time with service managers to understand the service. Service adviser responses are scripted and all conversations are recorded. Training for advisers is mostly carried out in-house with some sessions delivered externally. A trainer and a service manager are always present during the training.

Customer Services Advisors

23. The Board also received evidence from Customer Services Advisors to get a better understanding of their experiences of dealing with public and to hear their views on how the service could be improved. The team members giving evidence to the Board included the team leader and between them had a range of experiences of working on the phones, emails as well as on reception.
24. It was stated that a weekly rota is issued to front line staff to ensure all services are covered, including meet and greet and back office roles. The rota is managed by the team leader using a computer generated matrix. Advisors are trained to manage contacts from a range of services across a number of contact channels. The system has a filtering and routing process which enables advisors to identify the service of each query. Staff working on the phones only cover service areas they are trained to advise on. There is a process for managing peaks and troughs in the service demand including cover for sickness absence.
25. Telephones are monitored and statistics are routinely compiled which record length of time people are waiting to be connected, numbers on line at any time and the length of their call. The system allows management to monitor who is dealing with it as well as which service has been waiting the longest. Average waiting times for Streetpride for example is between 5-10 minutes whilst CYP is between 20-30 minutes due to the specialist nature of the work.
26. There is a policy on the length of time staff work on the phones. There is a lot of flexibility with some advisors constantly moving between different tasks whilst others are constantly on the phone. The length of time they spend on the phone depends on what they are trained to do.
27. On occasions when someone has had a poor experience with council, staff will try to find out the nature of the problem to distinguish where the error occurred and will try to explain how best to deal with it.
28. The team gave details of their role in dealing with missed bins. They explained that there are set procedures for dealing with these depending on the time of the day the calls are received. A missed bin is normally dealt within 2 working days and unless a whole street is missed in which case these would be collected within 24 hours. However all queries are passed immediately to the waste management service. Customers get upset and angry when they are told their bin was not presented or that it was contaminated. Also when they are told the bin will be collected within two days and have to ring back when this doesn't happen.
29. The Advisors stated that they had noticed an increase in the number of contacts received for Streetpride and people enquiring about benefits. A board member also stated that from her work with constituents she also noticed an increase in the number of housing benefit queries and received concerns about waiting times.
30. Customer Services Advisors stated that they always try to help the customers. If they are unable to deal with a query themselves, they ask colleagues for advice

to try to get a steer. They will also take down the number to get back to them within reasonable timescales if it can't be dealt immediately. They were not sure whether this is a standard practice for all Customer Services Advisor's. Customer Services Advisor's will also pass information to the relevant department to ring back.

31. Some phone options direct the caller to the council website. Option 6 allows callers to speak to an advisor. A Member stated that some people have mentioned they have been referred to the website however, a large percentage of older people do not use web.
32. The Customer Services Advisor's told the Board that they consider the main issue to be communication between departments. Sometimes when information is passed to Directorates it is not clear what action if any has been taken. The information is not always kept up to date and it would help them if the notes were completed and put on the system quickly. Directorates should also consider how messages are communicated to the public as these have implications for staff at Derby Direct.
33. There are also issues around bulky waste collection. These are considered to be the worst calls to take as not all wards charge customers for free bulky waste collections. There are free collections for bulky waste in 5 wards whilst a charge is made on the rest of the city. This creates confusion, resentment and frustrates customers. Also metal and junk collection dates are too far apart and have different items. These tend to have different collections points and times for each ward. Customer Services Advisors can take payments where these are charged.
34. Departments receive regular feedback through LAGAN, (computer software system for local authorities) on queries dealt by the customer services team. Every query on Streetpride is recorded on LAGAN which ranges from pest control to abandoned vehicle. Directorates can see all the queries and complaints dealt by the Customer Services Advisor's on the system. Information is entered as quickly as possible unless the issue requires urgent immediate attention such as dealing with a hazardous pot hole that may cause danger. In such cases they will telephone inspectors immediately.
35. When customers are asked whether they have contacted their ward councillor, many say they don't want to bother them. Some people believe Customer Services Advisors are responsible for enforcing the policy and don't want to contact their councillor.
36. Members asked whether Customer Services Advisors found it stressful to talk about the number of different services and whether it led to illnesses. Customer Services Advisors stated that it is more stressful as customers are more aggressive.

Communications and Website

37. The Board looked at the Council's webpage as it is an increasingly important method of engaging with the public. The Board wished to look at how the website is set up and managed as this will be a critical area of development for

the Council in the future and received evidence from the Head of Communications and Direct Services Manager (ICT).

38. The Board learned that the current Council website was established in November 2011 with support from two external companies, Terminal 4 and Erskin Design. They were contracted to help with the design process and to advise on consultation with stakeholders.
39. The web content was rewritten by subject matter experts who were supported through numerous workshops. This content was proof read by the Communications Team before publication.
40. Around 70% of the web content is fixed whilst the remainder 30% is continuously changing depending on the needs of the service. Some services with high turnover of activities such as Leisure, Licensing and Waste Management have been given training and are supported to keep their pages updated on their own. Only a limited number of people in the Service Departments have the authority to update webcontent themselves as this helps to maintains quality control and consistency of tone and language.
41. The Board was informed that it is not possible to monitor and keep everything up to date. However the team periodically looks through web pages and if it notices too many acronyms for example then these will be replaced. There is a real challenge to maintain content up to date due to staff downsizing. The Communications Team has been restructured and no longer has dedicated staff to update web content. Updating has been made a whole team responsibility and everyone is involved, especially on Mondays.
42. The Communications Team has noticed a big increase in people using mobile devices such as Ipads and Iphones to access the website. Its usage has increased from 7,000 users in September 2012 to over 12,000 in November 2013. The main challenge now is to make the website more accessible for transactional services using mobile devices. A Hub and Spoke strategy is being developed which will support this. The intention is to develop a site similar to the gov.uk website which allows easy interaction such as enabling people to renew their car tax. It is important that we maintain the trust people have in Derby City Council without constraining future development. The Communications Team is working with partners to make more services accessible.
43. The Chair informed members that she had spent time looking at various web pages and she is more encouraged than discouraged with the content and does not feel that there are major problems with the content. She liked the home page which had link buttons and allows easy navigation.
44. There are problems with reporting dog fouling as the web link takes the user to reporting litter which leads to confusion for some people. In conclusion some parts of the site work well whilst others are unclear. The Housing webpage was found to have problems such as on the page offering advice on homelessness. There is a problem with the Homefinder website as it has no 'Back' function so when customers access that at the Council House, they must shut down the terminal they are using and re-start it if they wish to use another service.

45. Members did note that officers responded quickly when contacted through urgent numbers listed on the webpage.
46. Members felt there is a need to review the order in which some services are displayed on the website we should consider putting most popular elements on top. Emergency numbers should also be nearer the top of the page. The site should use every day phrases and language which people understand easily such as brown bins instead of garden waste service. It was also suggested the website should be more transactional.
47. The Head of Communications explained that the Local Government Navigation List is used to display the site. However it was accepted that this may no longer be the most appropriate due to competing demands, to provide information to users as well as enabling transactions. The website is being developed which will improve access using the hub and spoke strategy.

Summary of evidence provided by the Equalities and Diversity Lead

48. It was stated that people usually contact Derby Direct first and if they experience problems then they will seek support from the Equalities and Diversity Lead. Most people contact Derby Direct for Streetpride access issues such as dropped kerbs. Telephones used to be a problem but this is no longer a big issue. People with certain conditions such as arthritis also have access issues. People get confused with the different options they are presented with when contacting the council using telephones and often request the Equalities and Diversity Lead to ring the service on their behalf.
49. Many people now use text and there are facilities for text relay. This involves using a middle person to relay the message. Minicom uses a separate line. There have been complaints about the music being played on the phone not being right for some people.
50. Contacting the council by people with learning disabilities can be complicated although there are facilities for them to text Derby Direct.
51. Derby has large numbers of deaf people and there is a sign video system available for deaf people at the reception. There is also a Sign Line for British interpreters to a BSA call centre. There are three areas to deal privately with customers including a booth, private rooms and sign video.
52. Visually impaired people can find it quite daunting coming to the Council and suggest that there should be more signs. It is difficult for visually impaired people to pay council tax as there are no speaking pay machines although it is ok for partially sighted people due to large font. Members were informed that signs have been ordered but have yet to be displayed. The current process relies on people asking for assistance but signage could help with directions.
53. Pillars and lamppost in the reception area also cause problems for visually impaired people. Baby changing and breast feeding facilities could be a useful addition.

54. There are two car parking bays for disabled people which seems sufficient as they are rarely both in use together. The recently published Access Guide provides contact numbers. Customers are referred by Derby Direct to the Equalities and Diversity Lead when they are unable to deal with the query themselves.
55. The Council has a diverse workforce and can respond to many languages. This is supported by a register of interpreters maintained by the Consultation Team in the Chief Executive's Office. The Council also has access to language line which can provide 3 way phone conversations. Constitutional Services are currently preparing a tender for all embracing language support which may also provide a language line.
56. A Welcome to Derby Guide was published a few years ago and provides a range of useful information on Derby. The Stonewall Award is displayed in a cabinet in the reception which will bring confidence to the Gay, Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender community of the Council's commitment to equality issues.

E-Services

57. The Board received a detailed presentation on the E- Services Programme. Members were informed that this is not an IT programme but uses IT to implement change the way Council delivers it services. The programme aims to improve customer experience through provision of easy, convenient and choice of access to self-services.
58. The One Derby One Council Transformation Programme signed off the customer management strategy in 2011 which involves the development of a new website and channel shift to provide focus on self-service. The E- Services Programme is led by the Strategic Director of Resources with a management Board. The E-services board has agreed to build more capacity as there are 2000 transactions per month and 13500 unique emails.
59. There are many ideas and suggestions for e-services alignment. In order to deliver these the council needs to have a web site that is capable of delivering this. It should also enable use of smartphones, Ipads and Iphones, and other internet devices.
60. Support services need to be in place to assist customers and to enable them to make applications on line. The Customers Services Team is working in partnership with other departments such libraries and children centres to make it easier for people to access the internet.

Phase 1 involves setting up new technology to pull information from various services e.g. web portal authentication/ verification. We also need information on individuals such as access to banking services.

Phase 2 involves working with departments to build a business case and do things differently.

61. Based to the Society of Information Management (Socitm) Benchmark Indicators the costs for different channels for Derby are:

Face to face visit – one stop shop	£5.71
Face to face visit - Customer Access Point	£17.00 (registrars for Derby)
Phone – cost per call	£2.95
Web cost per visit	£0.10

Customer Survey

62. Customersurveys were conducted over two days, 17 February and 20 February 2014 by elected members in the Council House main reception area. Customers were assisted to complete a questionnaire which asked a series of questions about contact with the council.

Analysis of the 49 survey forms returned:

Age Group of respondents	Total	% of Total
10-20	1	2.33
21-30	10	23.26
31-40	10	23.26
41-50	6	13.95
51-60	6	13.95
61-65	4	9.30
65+	6	13.95
	43	

How did you contact the Council	Total	% of Total
In person	43	72.88
Telephone	9	15.25
Internet	4	6.78
Letter	1	1.69
Other	2	3.39
	59	

How long did you wait to speak with representative	Total	% of Total
Promptly	14	34.15
2-5 min	6	14.63
5 min	6	14.63
10 min	5	12.20
15 min	2	4.88
20 min	3	7.32
30 min	2	4.88
Too long - weeks	3	7.32
	41	

How many times did you make contact to resolve your query	Total	% of Total
1	26	66.67
2	7	17.95
3	3	7.69
4	1	2.56
query still not resolved	2	5.13

Why did you make contact	Total	% of Total
Make payment	13	26.00
enquire about service	24	48.00
receive a service	5	10.00
Other	8	16.00
	50	

Were you satisfied with service	Total	% of Total
Yes	28	66.67
No	14	33.33
	42	

Were you satisfied with person dealing with the query	Total	% of Total
Yes	34	87.18
No	5	12.82
	39	

Summary of Comments from the 'Satisfied'

63. These respondents generally praised the service they received from staff as polite and helpful. Some thought the website was very clear and useful, though not so as regards o the homeless and access to emergency food (one person). They appreciated the new building and the general atmosphere and service; some were very impressed indeed. The few critical comments they made in their responses related to being passed on to other members of staff and having to make an appointment with no option for an answer on the day. Some customers came in just to use Relish at lunchtime.

Summary of Comments from the 'Neither satisfied or dissatisfied'

64. Many of these respondents had had positive and negative experiences on different attempts to contact the Council. Generally they were appreciative of the service they received, and were appreciative of the staff. Waiting times and the desire to be dealt with on the day they visit the Council House (rather than waiting for an appointment) were issues. Some found the telephone system, the payment machines and the appointment ticket system a little confusing. Others didn't wish to be passed on to different staff to have their query answered.

Summary of Comments from the 'Not satisfied'

65. The issue of waiting times was the main issue, whether that was by telephone from the Council House, or waiting to see someone in person. In particular, people did not appreciate having to wait for an appointment, particularly when they have been into the Council House in person already; delays in answering Council Tax and Housing Benefit queries were mentioned. Some mentioned that the website was not easy to use; a number of people expressed frustration

at not being able to talk to someone in person. Generally people did not complain about the staff, although one person said they were patronised and a couple were concerned that the information they were initially given was not correct or sufficiently informative. Suggestions for improvement focused on reducing waiting times for appointments and the ability to wait to see someone on the same day.

Conclusion and Recommendations

66. Customer Services staff are generally very professional, polite and helpful. On the whole, customers appeared to be generally satisfied with the service but there are areas where improvements could be made.

E- Services

67. The Board received a detailed presentation on e-services which articulated the case for e-services to not only provide more customer focused and responsive services but also save money for the council through greater use of self service. There are proposals to build on the e-services programme and bring in further services. However before this can happen, the website needs to improve to enable more transactions to take place.
68. The Board therefore recommends that there is greater integration of the website with the e-services programme and a definitive timetable is established to complete the e-services programme.
69. Although the Board heard of the proposals to expand e-services there is as yet no definitive timetable for achieving this. It is therefore important that a decision is taken to not only improve the website to enable maximum use of e-services but also establish a timetable for completing this.
70. The Board also notes that the responsibility for managing the website lies within the Chief Executive's Office whilst customer services and the e-services programme are within the Resources Directorate. Since the website is considered to be crucial to delivering an effective e-services programme, the Board recommends that the website and e-services are located within the same Directorate.
71. The Board recognises that as a result of fixed term funding, approximately half of the customer services advisor posts will expire by 31 March 2015, which renders the need to expand the e-services programme more pressing. The Board also suggests that service departments are compelled to work with the e-services team and identify services for inclusion in the e-services programme.

Website

72. The website is an important part of the Council's communication tool. It not only provides important information to the public but it also provides online transactional services. Members of the Board spent considerable time looking at the Council's website and found on the whole the website was well designed and provided good information. This is backed up by the recent assessment by the SOCITM who awarded Derby City Council website three stars as recognition of good practice. The Board was unable to look at the report

accompanying the award as it was published at the end of the review and not readily available on line. Nevertheless the Board found some errors on the website which include information being out of date and links to pages which provided confusing information such as reports on dog fouling referring to litter.

73. The Board was informed that following staff downsizing in the Communications team, maintaining the council website has become a real challenge. Considering the importance of the website for delivering e-services, the Board recommends the Council Cabinet invests in resources to further develop the website and keep it up to date. The Board suggests that we look at and learn from companies with good websites delivering e-services.
74. Customers don't like having to repeat information and prefer to give information only once if they know it is safe. The Board therefore fully supports the proposal to make the web more accessible for transactional services and for extending this for use of mobile devices. It is therefore suggested that the website development is driven by customer services department.

Reception area

75. With regard to the reception area as a whole, the Board recommends that the aesthetics of corporate minimalism should be relaxed to permit more signs to direct people, especially to the payment machines and appointment/check-in machines. The latter are particularly obscure and confusing. The post box should be signed and situated in a visible place, with the necessary security features added. The appointment screen that is currently obscured by a pillar should be moved and made more prominent. These alterations ought to relieve demands on the 'Meet and Greet' staff. A small 'Play Area' for children in the waiting area could also be considered.

Appointment system

76. The Board recommends that the appointments system be reviewed. Customers should be able to make an appointment by phone or on the website, to save them making at least two visits to the Council House. It should be made clear to customers that appointments will be necessary. A 'drop-in' booth is recommended, where people can choose to sit and wait in turn to be seen in person by someone, rather than make an appointment. It is recognised that this may be difficult for some services, e.g. Council Tax and Housing Benefit, but this option should be considered as for some customers it will be preferable to wait, even if that is for some time, rather than having to return to the Council House on another day for a timed appointment.
77. Consideration should be given to the number of times customers are referred on to other departments and staff to see if that can be reduced.

Telephone queries

78. Telephone queries to council departments from the Council House can entail lengthy waits which frustrates customers. The system can be confusing, especially for customers with learning difficulties. The Board recommends that no telephone answering system should give customers a series of options

which ultimately directs them to using the website; either queries should be answered on the phone, or the first response on the telephone should state that customers must use the website (or visit in person the Council House, where appropriate).

Communication

79. Liaising with services is an issue. Sometimes when information is passed to departments by the customer services officers, it is not always clear what action has been taken by the directorate as the information on system is not always kept up to date. The Board recommends that there is better communication between customer services advisors and departments such as Streetpride and that notes are completed and put on the LAGAN quickly, within 48 hours. Directorates should also consider how messages to the public are communicated and what implications these will have for staff at Derby Direct because they are the first point of contact.

A list of services supported by Customer Contact Centre

- 1** Abandoned vehicles
- 2** Adoption
- 3** Adults Health & Housing
- 4** Allotments
- 5** Anti Social Behaviour
- 6** Ashtree House Locality service (CYP)
- 7** Blue Badges
- 8** Building Control
- 9** Business Rates
- 10** Concessionary Travel Passes
- 11** Council Tax
- 12** Customer Feedback
- 13** Development Control
- 14** Dog wardens
- 15** Education
- 16** Energy switching service
- 17** Fairer charging visits
- 18** Family Information Service
- 19** Football pitch information line
- 20** Fostering
- 21** Free school meals
- 22** Grass cutting
- 23** Grounds Maintenance
- 24** Hedge Cutting
- 25** Highways
- 26** Housing Benefit
- 27** Housing Options
- 28** Licencing

29	Local Assistance Scheme
30	Parking Services
31	Parks
32	Pest Control
33	Planning
34	Public toilets
35	Radar keys
36	Registrar service
37	School Crossing Patrols
38	Street Cleansing
39	Street Lighting
40	Switchboard
41	Trade Waste
42	Traffic Management
43	Trees
44	Waste Management
45	Welfare reform - no longer in use