



Brighton & Hove
City Council

Customer Experience Strategy 2023 - 2028

Getting things right
first time,
every time

Our Vision

Getting things right first time, every time

Contents

Context	2
Our customers	4
Our Services.....	5
Demographics and Equal Opportunities	7
Our Customer Promise, Vision & Current Operating Model.....	9
Our customer promise to you	10
Our Customer Experience Vision.....	12
Current Operating Model.....	13
Learning from Customer Feedback	14
What actions are we taking?	15
How will we know we're improving	18
Contact us.....	19

Draft – 02 March 2023

Context

Why do we need a Customer Experience strategy?

Our customers include everyone who lives, works, visits or does business in Brighton & Hove; we all use council services such as street cleaning and lighting, highway maintenance and waste management. This also includes those who actively interact with the council (for example, residents who live in council housing) as well as those people that the council has to interact with, such as clients where we have a duty of care.

We are committed to ensuring that all our customers, whatever their needs have a good experience when they use or interact with Brighton & Hove City Council services.

The way we deliver customer service is core to providing public services efficiently and effectively. This is relevant to all staff, not just those whose role involves answering phone calls, or seeing customers face to face.

Whilst we strive to provide good quality services across the council at all times, there are currently varied levels of customer satisfaction with the range of services delivered by the council. We have created this strategy as a means to-

- Ensure a shared understanding of what a good customer experience feels like
- Plan the actions needed to achieve good customer experience, learning from best practice both internally and externally
- Embed a consistently good standard of service delivery with resilience and efficiency, in a fair and inclusive way

Customer Experience Steering Group

The Customer Experience Steering Group consists of representatives from all key front line and support services across the council. The group has developed this strategy, taking account of the feedback we receive from customers and staff. The group will be responsible for implementing the strategy and monitoring its effectiveness through continuous engagement with staff and taking on board customer feedback gathered in a range of ways including through customer satisfaction surveys and analysis of complaint and compliment data.

Our key challenges and opportunities include:

Reducing council resources



The need for us to provide good quality customer service does not go away as our funding reduces. We need to continue to develop more cost-effective ways for our customers to contact us and encourage and support our customers to use them. We've based our customer offer on what a customer needs rather than what they want. This is the best use of limited council resources and means everyone can contact and use the services they need.

There are also significant nationwide skill shortages which are affecting the council's ability to recruit staff into some key posts. Our People strategy is addressing this challenge.

Equality of access



Our city's communities are becoming increasingly diverse. We need to continue to find ways to better understand our communities and the barriers they may experience in accessing services and what support needs people may have. Knowing this would enable us to better anticipate all customers' needs and respond respectfully, appropriately and efficiently.

Cost of living



The increasing costs of essential goods and services such as utilities and food are a challenge that the council is not directly able to affect, however the impacts of these increasing costs on customers mean that there is greater demand on council services who support those in an emergency or crisis. It also means increased related demand to services such as Childrens' and Adults Social Care as customer needs become more complex.

Meeting rising customer expectations and increased demand



Customers expect to be able to access relevant services and find information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, using the council's website and social media. They expect flexible and more personalised services where there is a need. Managing this demand in a way that makes the best use of our limited resources is essential to continuing to improve customer experience.

Whilst we aspire to provide good customer service in all that we deliver, our financial position and limited resources mean that the council must focus on delivering essential services.

We need to find ways to be clearer about what we can and can't do so that there is transparency in our decision making and to better manage customer expectations.

Digital exclusion



Some people don't have access to the internet at home, or have specific accessibility needs, and that may mean that they can't find our information and services online. We need to find ways to help these customers by providing equipment and support as required and providing alternative access for those who need it. We need to train our staff in providing appropriate digital support to customers.

Community collaboration



We need to find innovative ways to work in partnership with residents to enable them to play an active role in their communities

Our customers

By customer we mean, any user of council services, voluntary or involuntary. This includes residents, visitors to the city, businesses, students, service users and their representatives.



Brighton & Hove's population is estimated at 277,200



121,400 households



130,000 Council Taxpayers



The population registered to vote is 204,291



16,400 receiving housing benefit



31,800 children attending school



11,300 Business rate payers



11,550 council owned dwellings



1,020km of footpaths



624km of carriageway



98 parks and open spaces



12km of coastline

Our Services



City Environment

5.5 million refuse collections per year
2 million recycling collections per year
700 miles of pavement cleaned per year



Parking and Transport

360,000 visitor permits issued per year
57,000 resident permits issued per year
6,300 concessionary bus passes issued per year
4,500 Blue Badge issued per year
1,200 business permits issued per year
14,387 permits for roadworks granted per year



Development Management (Planning)

3,700 applications received per year
2,650 applications approved per year



Housing Management

11,592 council tenancies
2,290 leasehold flats in council blocks



Housing Needs

2,800 applications for social housing per year
1,800 units of temporary accommodation
1,700 open cases for prevention, intervention, advice
1,150 emergency placements and transfers per year



Health & Adult Social Care

4,700 care assessments or reviews conducted per year
4,350 people receiving long term adult social care service
1,300 people receive short term intensive support per year
30,200 items of daily living equipment issued



Families, Children & Learning

5,450 children with special education needs receive support in schools
2,150 children attend our children's centres and nurseries
1,950 children supported by social work to be safe (including children in care)
500 receive family support



Registrars

3,400 births registered per year
2,500 deaths registered per year
1,300 marriages registered and officiated per year
580 new British naturalisation certificates issued per year



Libraries

14 libraries across the city
978,000 items issued per year
680,000 visits to libraries per year
19,100 unique users of public computers in libraries per year



Bereavement

2,000 cremations per year
350 burials per year
1,250 deaths reported to the Coroner's Office per year



Benefits

19,100 receiving help with council tax
3,250 new claims assessed per year
2,500 applications assessed for emergency help per year

Demographics and Equal Opportunities

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination on the basis of the following 'protected characteristics': age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex (gender), sexual orientation.

All customers have the right to be protected from discrimination, harassment or victimisation based on their protected characteristics.

Understanding the protected characteristics of people living, working in and visiting the city helps us to be fair, accessible, and appropriate when we make policies, deliver services, and employ people. The council is committed to becoming Fair and Inclusive and is working with the community to shape our Anti-Racism Strategy and Accessible City Strategy.

Supporting and developing good customer experience in relation to all the city's diverse communities is a central aim of the council. Customers may experience numerous barriers to accessing services or need different support to achieve the right outcomes for them. Where these barriers or needs are related to legally protected characteristics, the council has a duty to consider how to remove these barriers, reduce disadvantage and promote equality of opportunity.

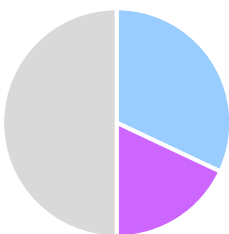
This strategy will support the development of a culture of fair and inclusive services that anticipate diverse customer needs and respond respectfully and appropriately.

The following information is taken from the last census which was conducted in 2021.



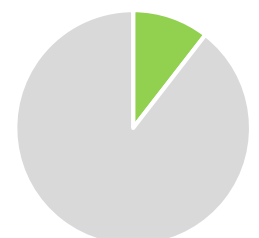
There is broadly an even gender distribution of males (48.9%, 135,600 people) and females (51.1%, 141,600 people). Apart from a disparity caused by a higher number of female students there is a relatively even distribution of males and females across all age groups up until the age of 75. Beyond the age of 75 the proportion of females increases with age.

There are 277,200 residents living in 121,400 households.



We have a high proportion of residents aged 20-39 years old (32%, 88,900 people). 18% of Brighton & Hove's total population (49,000 people) are aged 20 to 29.

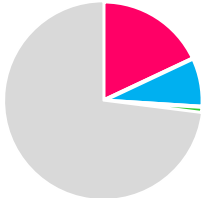
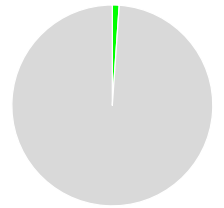
10.5% (22,642) people who responded to this question (214,992 people) identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. This compares to 2.82% of people in England & Wales.





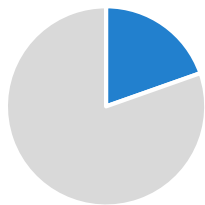
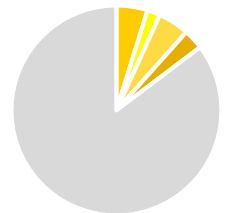
A further 2605 people (1.2%) who responded to this question (214,992 people) identified as pansexual, asexual, queer or 'other sexual orientation'. This compares to 0.34% of people in England & Wales.

2341 of the people who responded to this question (220,742) reported having a gender identify different from their sex registered at birth (1.1%). This compares to 0.5% of people in England & Wales overall.



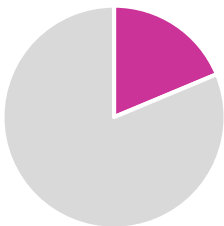
26% (72,272 people) identified as BME (Black, Minority Ethnic), similar to the figure for England overall (27%) and higher than the total for England & Wales (18%).

4.8% of people in Brighton and Hove are Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh
 2% of people in Brighton and Hove are Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African
 4.8% of people in Brighton and Hove are from mixed or multiple ethnic groups
 3.1% of people in Brighton and Hove are from any other ethnic group



Brighton & Hove has a higher proportion of people born outside of the UK (19.6%), than the corresponding figure for England & Wales (16.8%)

For 9.1% of residents in Brighton & Hove, English is not their main language, compared to 8.9% for England & Wales.



At the time of the 2021 census, 19.5% of residents are disabled, this is higher than the figure for all of England & Wales (17.8%).

Our Customer Promise, Vision & Current Operating Model

Our promise to you

Our vision of *Getting things right first time, every time* is the driving force behind our customer promise.

Our promise sets out the standards and principles of how we deliver services to our customers, providing the council with a framework to monitor and measure our performance.

The promise has been recently refreshed considering feedback from customers and based on our own learning of delivering services to customers during Covid-19 pandemic, to ensure that the services we deliver continue to be aligned to the needs of our customers.

We have reviewed feedback from customers provided through online customer satisfaction survey responses, customer complaints and compliments.

The standards and principles within the promise do not only apply to staff who work directly with customers, but all staff who work for the council, including those in support services such as Human Resources, IT & Digital, Finance and Legal. This ensures a consistency of approach and provides staff who deal directly with customers the appropriate infrastructure, tools and support to deliver the best customer experience.

Customer Experience Vision

The council's vision for the future of customer experience is 'Getting things right, first time, every time'. The supporting statements in the Vision document below represent an ideal future state – what we would want customers to experience when interacting with the council. Each service area within the council has its own detailed action plan which sets out how they are working towards making this vision a reality.

Current Operating Model

We know that the council is a large, complex organisation which can be difficult for customers to navigate, to get the services that they need. To make this easier, we aim to bring consistency to the way in which services are delivered. The current operating model below is intended to illustrate the service offer from the council and is subject to continuous review and improvement, based on customer needs.

Our customer promise to you



We will make it clear how you can contact or access our services



- Communicate with you and provide services online (self-service online account and forms/ email/website/social media) where possible and appropriate. This means you can find information or use services at a time convenient to you.
- If you have specific access needs, work with you to find the right support, including help with online services
- Ensure our services are fair, inclusive and suitable for diverse customer needs

You can help us to keep our promise by



- Contacting us and using our services online where you can. This helps us use our limited resources and budget to provide additional support to those who need it
- Letting us know if you have any specific needs and giving us all the information required to help provide the services you need
- Treating us, and other customers, with respect. We will not tolerate abusive behaviour and will take appropriate action as needed.

We will be clear and treat you with respect



- Be easy to understand in our communication and honest about what we can and can't do and why
- Keep you informed about relevant changes to the services we provide
- If we make an error, apologise and put things right as soon as possible

Please tell us how we are doing



- We welcome all feedback, including when things don't go right. We are committed to using this information to improve our services
- Please tell us how satisfied you are with our service, this [short survey](#) should take you about two minutes
- If you would like to provide a detailed compliment or complaint please contact the [Customer Feedback team](#)

We will understand and get things done



- Aim to answer your query at first point of contact. When we can't do this, we will tell you clearly what will happen next
- Make sure our staff have the right skills, tools and approach to deliver the services you need
- Work together with services across the council and organisations across the city to meet your needs

Checking our performance against this promise



- We check our performance through monitoring:
 - customer satisfaction survey results
 - compliments and complaints
 - information about how our customers contact us
- This information is published through our [Customer Insight Report](#) annually

Different ways to contact us



Website



We will:

- Enable you to self-serve (e.g. paying your council tax, or renewing a parking permit) or report issues (e.g. missed bin collections, broken pavements)
- Provide up to date information about services we deliver and any changes that may affect you
- Ensure our online services are accessible and simple to use
- Use your feedback to review and improve our online services

Written communication (Online forms/emails/letters)



We will:

- Ensure all service email addresses/online forms have an 'automatic reply' which tells you about current response times and clearly explains what will happen next
- Aim to keep average response times within 10 working days. At busier times or for more complex enquiries, we aim to let you know how long you may have to wait

Telephones



We will:

- Aim to keep average waiting times under 10 minutes. At busier times, we aim to let you know how long you may have to wait
- Update voicemails and telephone messages regularly to hold accurate information
- Aim to respond to voicemails within one working day
- Let you know about other ways of contacting us

Face to face



We will:

- Support you to access the council service you need where you are unable to do this online or by phone
- Make sure our customer service buildings are welcoming, safe and accessible
- Aim to assist you on average within 20 minutes. At busier times, we will aim to let you know how long you may have to wait and/or let you know about other ways of contacting us

Social media



We will:

- Be clear how we will respond to any queries received
- Share relevant information and keep this up to date
- Let you know about other ways of contacting us

Our Customer Experience Vision: *Getting things right first time, every time*

Efficiency



Services are available online, where possible and are easy for everyone to find and use



Council information systems are joined up appropriately to make it easier for customers



It is clear to customers what the best way of contacting the council is, based on what they need and any specific access requirements they may have



Staff are skilled and confident in delivering services, including being able to resolve customer dissatisfaction quickly and fairly



The Customer Promise is refreshed regularly to make sure it includes what is important for customers



Services are delivered to the standards set out in the Customer Promise and customers are confident in this



Services make it clear to their customers what they can and can't do, set out in appropriate policies and supported by staff training



Services assess the potential impacts of any changes planned and engage with everyone who may be affected

Consistency

Improvements



Improving the customer experience is an integral part of everyone's day to day role



Customers are asked what they think about the services they receive, their feedback is acted upon and those resulting actions are clearly communicated back to them



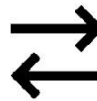
The council uses data and information to plan service improvements and inform decision making



Council resources are used fairly to meet individual customer needs through all contact methods



Services work together to resolve issues, as one organisation for the benefit of the customer



Services support each other positively to fulfill the Customer Promise

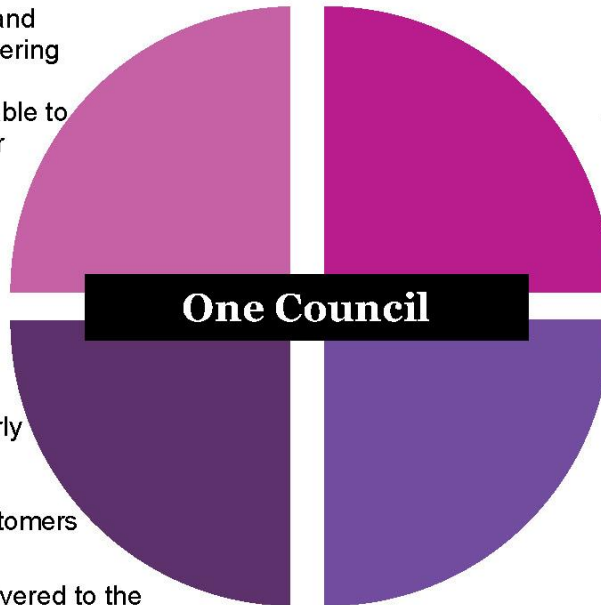


Staff are able to offer basic advice, support or signposting to other council services and external agencies, including supporting those who may be digitally excluded



The council works with other public or private services, charities and community groups to resolve issues and provide services together

Resilience



One Council

Current Operating Model



Online / digital

Basic offer

We are working towards making sure good quality services are available online and are easy to find to enable self-service options.

Services communicate with customers online where appropriate including resolving queries.

Enhanced offer for complex transactions and/or higher support needs

All relevant staff are able to provide support to access digital transactions and information about their services for those who need it, including for those who are digitally excluded.

All staff are expected to provide a basic level of digital help and signposting to deliver a One Council approach.

Corporate customer service advisors are available via a central council phone line and at Customer Service Centres to support customers in accessing digital services.



Telephone

Basic offer

Central council phone line is open 9 to 5pm to help customers with basic queries and signposting.

Consistent live telephone offer is being provided by all key services for a minimum of 4 hours each day (9.30 to 1.30pm) aiming to have an average call waiting time of no more than 10 minutes.

We are working towards improving consistency to ensure all key public phone lines have easy to access options and provide information about waiting times.

Where relevant, customers are provided with individual phone contacts for specific officers.

Enhanced offer for complex transactions and/or higher support needs

Services are strongly encouraged to extend their phone opening times adapting to customer needs at any given point in time.



Face to face

Basic offer: Corporate Customer Service Centre

At least one Customer Service Centre is open providing a drop-in self-help area supported by customer service advisors including telephone and computer facilities.

Individual services provide customers with pre-booked appointments based on need. The drop-in offer includes support to book face to face appointments, working with the relevant service.

Customer service advisors and concierge are able to arrange urgent support from the relevant service, when absolutely necessary.

Enhanced offer for complex transactions and/or higher support needs

Additional council contact points across the city are being explored as appropriate.

We will explore formalising partnership working with other public, private and third sector organisations who are able to advise customers about council services.

Service specific buildings/reception points

This currently includes children's centres, social work hubs, libraries etc. Service provision is based on customer need and is regularly reviewed and adapted as appropriate by relevant services.

Visits / inspections / appointments are carried out as required to meet service and customers needs by relevant staff e.g. social workers, regulatory services and are regularly reviewed and adapted as appropriate by relevant services

Learning from Customer Feedback

We receive feedback from customers in a variety of ways, such as comments on surveys, compliments and complaints. To improve the experience of our customers, it is essential that we are proactive in understanding and acting on this feedback.

To make sure that all staff are aware of what is important to customers, and the ways in which we can improve our service delivery, we create a quarterly summary of information relating to customer contact referred to as the Customer Insight dashboard. This dashboard is shared across the organisation. The below are examples of the learning in recent dashboards.

Key learning themes

- Tailor template letters or emails to be sure that all details are correct and that they actually answer any specific questions being asked, rather than just replying with a standard response.

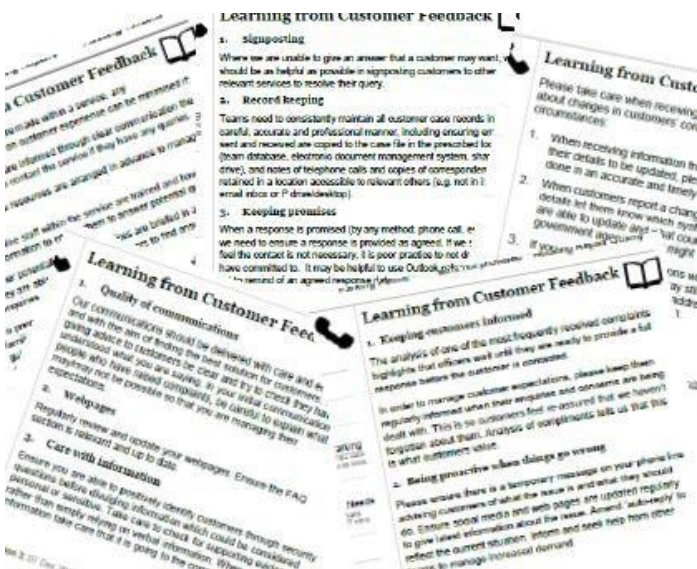
This can save time in dealing with follow up queries, or even complaints if we don't get details right.

- Make sure that you have an up-to-date Business Continuity Plan (BCP) which all staff are aware of. This should include clear provision for continuing to provide services to the public in a range of scenarios, such as network outage, lack of access to council buildings, infrastructure failures etc.

- Communicate any issue or change that will have an impact on customers proactively

and as far in advance as possible – this will reduce the demand on your service in dealing with queries from affected individuals once the change or issue has happened.

- Always make notes of any decision you make, or conversation you have with customers. This can assist with improved customer experience, efficient working and can help us at a later point if there is a lack of clarity about what has been agreed or said.
- Be aware that you are representing the council every time that you send a communication, so don't express personal opinions or views that are not aligned with the council's position.
- Provide full and clear explanations of how decisions are made when replying to customer queries
- Respond to complaints and queries as a single organisation rather than only from your department's perspective.



What actions are we taking?

Delivering good customer service isn't just a one-off initiative, it's a continual process of culture change - reviewing, redesigning, monitoring, training, learning and listening. We will continue to embed and reinforce the good practices that are already in place across the organisation and will find innovative ways to keep improving the way that services are delivered. These are some examples of the key actions planned.

Improved Online Services

It is more important than ever that the council delivers services in relevant and modern ways, to make it easier for customers to access the services they need. We have invested in improving online services which enable customers to self-serve for simple transactions (such as buying a parking permit, applying for school places or amending your council tax information). This means that customers can use services and access information at a time convenient to them, without having to travel or wait in a telephone queue. If customers use self-service options when they can, this also enables the council to use more of its limited resources to support those customers who are unable to self-serve or have more complex enquiries and needs. According to research conducted by the Office of National Statistics (2020), we know that in Brighton & Hove we have a higher percentage of residents who use the internet (97.7%), compared to the South East of England (94.2%) and the UK as a whole (92.1%). Online services, including the design and content of the council website, MyAccount (single online entry point to multiple council services,) Customer Index (database of customer records from across multiple council systems) and Contact Management (structured customer contact channel) are subject to continuous review, improvement and refinement based on customer need, accessibility and advancements in available technology.

Accessibility

We are reviewing our Customer Service Centre provision, to ensure that we are as accessible as possible to those who need additional support in accessing council services, or who do not have access to the internet or a telephone. This includes providing support and signposting for those at risk of digital exclusion. We will be exploring providing council contact points across the city (such as Libraries and Family Hubs) to make accessing services even easier if additional support is needed.

Strengthening our One Council Approach

One of the council's core values is 'Customer Focus', this means we want to put our customers at the heart of everything we do. 'Meeting customer needs' is an integral part of our Behaviour Framework which describes how all staff in the council are expected to perform their roles.

As a public body which delivers a range of different services for its customers, the way that the organisation is structured can be complex to understand and navigate. Knowing which department does what and how or where to contact them shouldn't be something that our customers have to

learn in order to receive the help that they need.

We have committed staff who are passionate about providing high quality services. Our Staff Survey results show that 91% of council staff care about how the organisation is perceived by citizens. However, only 29% feel that the council works as one big team working collaboratively for the good of our customers. To address this issue, we have introduced the concept of a 'One Council' approach to service delivery.

A One Council approach means working together collaboratively for the benefit of our customers; being explicitly aware that the customer is a council customer and not a customer of an individual service; being explicitly aware that we work for the council and not for an individual service.

Proactive Communication

We will continue to improve and refine the ways that we communicate with customers and key stakeholders, enhancing understanding and awareness of how the council is delivering and developing its services and achieving its commitments to customers and the principles which underpin our decision making.

By anticipating queries or issues that may occur when delivering or changing services, and actively communicating with anyone affected this will improve the customer experience and minimise demand on services in dealing with reactive queries when changes or issues occur.

By putting people at the heart of our communications and by actively listening and keeping the customer at the forefront of our minds when we are communicating, we will enable a genuine, two-way relationship based on trust. We will also find ways to strengthen clarity on what we can and can't do and why.

Improved Complaint Handling

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) is the public body established to advise on best practice in Local Government and regulates the way that councils respond to complaints. Based on analysis of the annual report that they provide to each local authority, we identify actions which will reduce the number of complaints which are not resolved at an early stage, improving the customer experience and minimising the need for customers to escalate their complaint. These actions currently include improved communication with customers who have made a formal complaint, earlier identification of appropriate remedies, more timely implementation of any remedy to an issue that a customer has experienced and quality assurance of Stage 1 complaints responded to by external providers.

We will continue to carry out more systematic analysis of escalated complaints to improve resolution at an earlier stage, reducing the burden on customers of having to escalate their complaint to get things put right.

Refreshing our Customer Experience Ambassador project

We have appointed Customer Experience Ambassadors from a wide range of services across the organisation. We have worked with these Ambassadors to develop this strategy and to embed the 'One Council' approach. The Ambassadors are responsible for embedding this and other initiatives

to improve customer satisfaction within their teams, working closely with their head of service and their Customer Experience Steering Group representative. An ambassador is someone who:

- Is passionate about improving the customer experience delivered by their service and by the wider council.
- Regardless of their role or the service they work for, believes continuous improvement of the customer experience is an integral part of everyone's role (not simply an add-on.).
- Appreciates that as a council, we are here to deliver public services and recognises that whilst some customers may not necessarily have a choice as to whether or not to access or contact our services, we should behave as if they do have a choice.
- Is willing to go above and beyond in removing barriers to deliver a One Council approach and is prepared to work closely with the Customer Experience Steering group key contact for their service on this.
- Is brave in respectfully reminding colleagues of our organisational agreed approaches in relation to customer experience even if the corporately agreed approach doesn't align with their personal views (e.g. the Customer Offer, the Customer Promise.)
- Recognises opportunity for joint-working across their service and the wider council and is proactive in acting on these opportunities
- Is confident delivering key messages on customer experience to colleagues through various forums including trainings, team meetings etc.

Mystery Shopping

Another way in which we will be quality assuring our service delivery and customer experience is by conducting mystery shopping exercises. The exercises will be designed to test organisational compliance with our customer promise, as well as helping identify any systemic barriers or issues that customers experience in their real-life interactions with the council.

How will we know we're improving

To track our progress against this strategy, we will use multiple sources of data and information, to assess whether our services are improving.

Listening to our customers

The most important way for us to know that the work we are doing is making services better for customers, is to listen to the customers themselves. We analyse the data and make recommendations for service improvements from various sources of customer feedback, including:

- Service specific customer satisfaction surveys
- Service user evaluation forms, some services ask for more detailed feedback e.g. at the end of each intervention or interaction.
- Using compliments and complaints information

Listening to our councillors

The city's elected representatives are often made aware of issues that are important to their ward residents. A new case management system has been introduced to improve the way in which councillors can get assistance for their residents from council officers. The system is providing an enhanced ability to identify themes or trends in these enquiries, both at ward level and city-wide, and enable us to identify areas of improvement for relevant services to take forward as appropriate.

Listening to our staff

Our staff have a keen sense of what is and isn't working for our customers, so their feedback is an important part of measuring our improvements. We regularly collect staff feedback in a range of ways including:

- Feedback from the Customer Experience Ambassador network
- Staff survey

Making good use of our data

In the course of delivering services, we gather a lot of data about our customer transactions and contact. To make best use of this data we regularly measure and analyse metrics which relate to customer contact. These include:

- Volumes of complaints and compliments and analysis of themes and trends
- Phone, email and complaint response times - through the quarterly dashboard
- Contact volumes by channel of communication – through the [annual Customer Insight report](#)

Contact us

We welcome any comments, questions or suggestions for improvement about this strategy, please contact:

Jenny.Garlick@brighton-hove.gov.uk – Customer Experience Manager

Victoria.Paling@brighton-hove.gov.uk – Customer Experience Lead

Rima.Desai@brighton-hove.gov.uk – Assistant Director - Customer, Modernisation & Performance Insight