

# **Darlington Borough Council**

## **Customer Services Strategy**

**2025 - 2030**

## Introduction

Delivering excellent services to our customers lies at the heart of our work. Whether you're applying for a parking permit, registering a birth, visiting our waste recycling centre, accessing social care, or using any other of our wide range of services, we want to provide you with the best possible experience.

We have a clear approach to make every interaction with our customers, whether big or small, a positive and valuable experience. This will provide us with the opportunity to deliver support, build trust, foster collaboration, and drive positive and lasting change.

The development of this strategy reflects our commitment to listen, learn and respond to the needs of our diverse communities. Our ongoing work as part of this strategy will give us a detailed picture of the changing needs and expectations of our customers and how we can work together to make a real difference.

**Councillor Mandy Porter**  
**Cabinet Member for Resources**

## **Our vision**

We want to deliver excellent customer services that are easy to use and provide value for money to all our residents.

We will expect customers who can use digital services to do so, so that we can focus our resources on supporting the people who need our help the most.

We will put the customer at the heart of everything we do.

## **Our aims**

### **We will provide excellent customer services**

- We will provide excellent customer services through face to face, telephone or digital channels.
- We will minimise waiting times and ensure customers are connected to the right member of staff who can resolve their enquiry at the first point of contact.
- Our focus will be on quality, ensuring we get things right first time. By doing this we will reduce the need for customers to contact the Council repeated times to get their enquiry resolved.
- We will deliver all our services to our Customer Standards and publish how we perform against these.
- We will be helpful, compassionate and responsive to customers' needs by putting the customer at the heart of everything we do and ensuring a consistent and positive customer experience.

### **We will make it clear how customers can contact us**

- Information about how customers can contact us will be provided on our website and in our One Darlington magazine. Digital channels, where available, will always be the first choice, but clear information on how customers can speak to staff, will also be provided.
- We will make all our written communications easy to understand and clear about how customers can contact the Council.
- We will provide information in ways to suit our customers and ensure we make use of assistive technologies to improve access for people with disabilities.
- We will provide telephone and face to face services for those who need it and ensure appointments are available.

## **We will make it clear what we can help customers with and what we can't**

- We will ensure all information about Council services is available on our website.
- We will be clear from the start about what services we charge for and those that we provide for free.
- We will explain how long we will take to answer telephones and deal with requests, and we will keep customers updated with progress, where we can.
- We will expect customers who can use digital services to do so.
- We will be clear about what help and support we can provide to those customers who cannot use digital services.
- We will ensure staff are available in our Customer Services Centre, to provide support for our customers to access digital services.

## **We will provide support for those customers who are digitally excluded**

- Whilst we will promote the shift to digital channels to deliver most services and communicate with residents, we will also ensure that no-one is left behind.
- Our aim will be to get more people on-line and connected to the Council's digital services, where we can.
- For those who can use digital services, we will provide the right level of support for these customers.
- For those who cannot use digital services, we will provide full support.
- For those customers who cannot access the Council's digital services for whatever reason, we will always provide contact with a member of staff to assist.
- For those customers who cannot physically access the internet or who do not have the financial means to go on-line, we will provide computer access to Council services and scan stations in our Customer Services Centre, free of charge.

## **We will deliver value for money**

- We will use customer data to improve services for our customers and make them more efficient and accessible.
- Our main focus will be to ensure our staff resources are available to help those people who need the most support.
- We will use new technology to make processes more efficient and ensure a joined-up approach from service request to service delivery, in line with our Digital Darlington Strategy (include link).
- We will reduce the amount of paper we use, which will also help to reduce our carbon footprint.
- We will invest any savings from digital efficiencies into providing extra support for our customers to use our digital services.

## **We will invest in our people**

- We will provide our staff with the right equipment and training to do their jobs efficiently and help our customers.
- We will ensure all front-line staff receive regular customer focussed training.
- We will be clear about our expectations for staff and recognise when they go the extra mile to help our customers.
- We will regularly ask our staff about how we can improve our services.
- We will keep our front-line staff safe and make this our first priority. We will make it clear to customers what behaviours are unacceptable and take action against those who verbally or physically abuse our staff.

## **We will listen to our customers and use this to improve services**

- We will listen to our customers and use their feedback to improve services.
- We will ask our customers about the service they have received and what we could do to improve.
- We will use customer data to better understand what our customers need and whether our services meet those expectations.
- We will use complaints about our services to understand what has gone wrong and what we need to do to put things right.
- We will provide information on what we have done to improve services because of customer feedback.

## How will we know if we have got it right?

- Our customers will be able to tell us about their experiences.
- We will meet our Customer Standards.
- Customer satisfaction will improve.
- Our customers will find it quick and easy to access Council services.
- Our data will show more customers are accessing services in the ways they wanted to.
- Our data will show that more customers are using our digital services.
- Our data will show that more customers will be using the computers and scan stations in our Customer Services Centre to access Council services.
- Our data will show that we are delivering excellent customer services at good value.
- Our Digital Darlington Strategy will demonstrate how we are using new technology to make our services more efficient.
- Our staff will tell us about how we can help them deliver excellent customer services.
- Our customers will say that our staff are delivering an excellent customer experience and that that they listen to them.
- We will receive fewer complaints about customer experience.
- Our data and reports will show evidence of learning from customer complaints.

# Customer Standards

## Our Commitment

We are committed to delivering excellent customer service to you across all Council services and to ensure you receive a consistent standard of service. We put our customers at the heart of everything we do.

Our Customer Standards set out the timescales and standards you can expect from all Council services when you contact us. These standards apply however you contact us.

### Respect

We will be respectful to our communities, residents, the Council, each other as colleagues as well as service users, stakeholders, and wider partners.

### Innovative

We will be innovative in everything we do and continually look for improvements to ensure we offer quality services.

### Collaborate

We will act collaboratively and ensure our successful journey of partnership working continues to ensure we maximise opportunities to achieve success.

### Deliver

We will aim to deliver quality services to all and strive to always deliver the best we can with the resources available.

### Access to Our Services

We offer a variety of ways for you to contact us. We're available:

- Online
- Via email
- In person at the Town Hall via appointment
- By phone\*

\*an emergency service is available 365 days each year by phone.



## **Our Standards**

### General Standards

We will:

- Treat everyone fairly and respectfully, always showing courtesy and sensitivity.
- Be polite, helpful, open, and honest.
- Listen to you and explain decisions and outcomes clearly to you.
- Respect your rights to privacy and confidentiality and provide private areas for confidential enquiries.
- Ensure our information is easily accessible and in Plain English.
- Aim to solve as many queries as we can at the first point of contact.
- Avoid using jargon or technical terms when we explain things to you.
- Display our photo ID and staff will provide you with their name and contact details, if requested.
- Encourage feedback and use this to improve services.
- Provide interpreters on request.

### Online Standards

We will:

- Make it easy for you to find what you want online.
- Enable you to report issues, apply for, pay, request, submit and book safely and securely.
- Allow you to register for customer accounts, which can offer personalised information.
- Provide access to Council news, information and consultations.
- Ensure appropriate support is available to you to access and use the self-serve elements of our website.

### Telephone Standards

We will:

- Provide all callers with a standard greeting, consisting of a greeting, the section name and the name of the person answering the phone,
- Give your details and the nature of your query, if we pass you onto another person, so you don't have to repeat it.
- Provide you with a reference number, where appropriate, should you need to contact us again.

## Correspondence Standards

We will:

- Treat emails and letters in the same way.
- Ensure all emails and letters provide you with the contact details of the service responding.
- Ensure we use a standard out of office message and auto signature to ensure consistency.

## Face to Face Standards

We will:

- Offer all visitors to the Town Hall a specific timed appointment.
- Aim to attend to you at your appointment time.
- Ensure we have appropriate levels of staffing to assist you as quickly as possible.

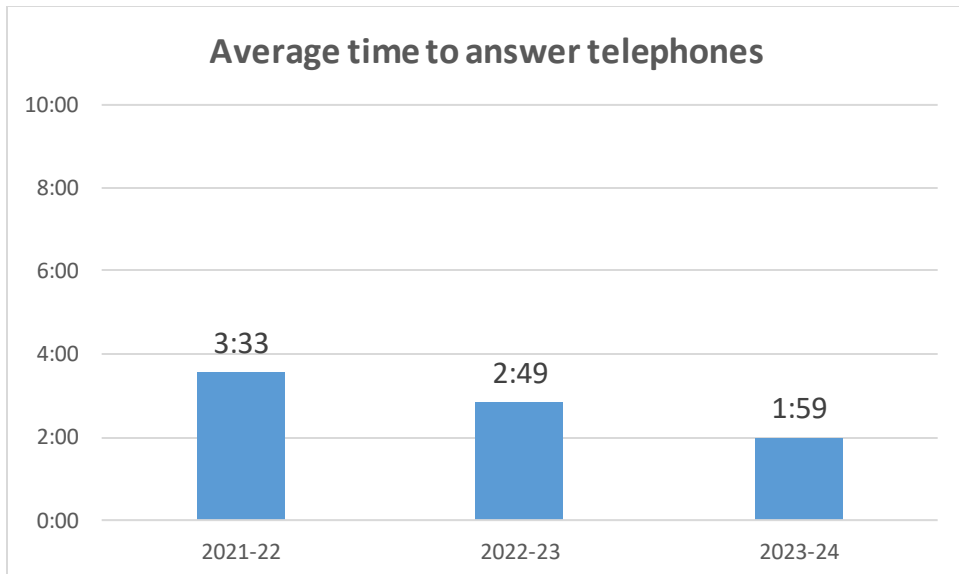
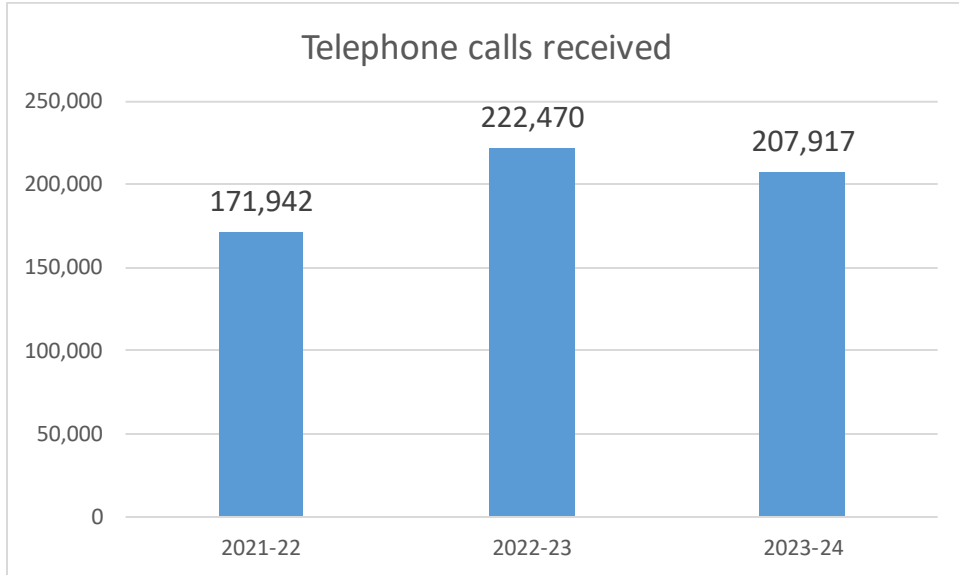
## Performance Standards

We will:

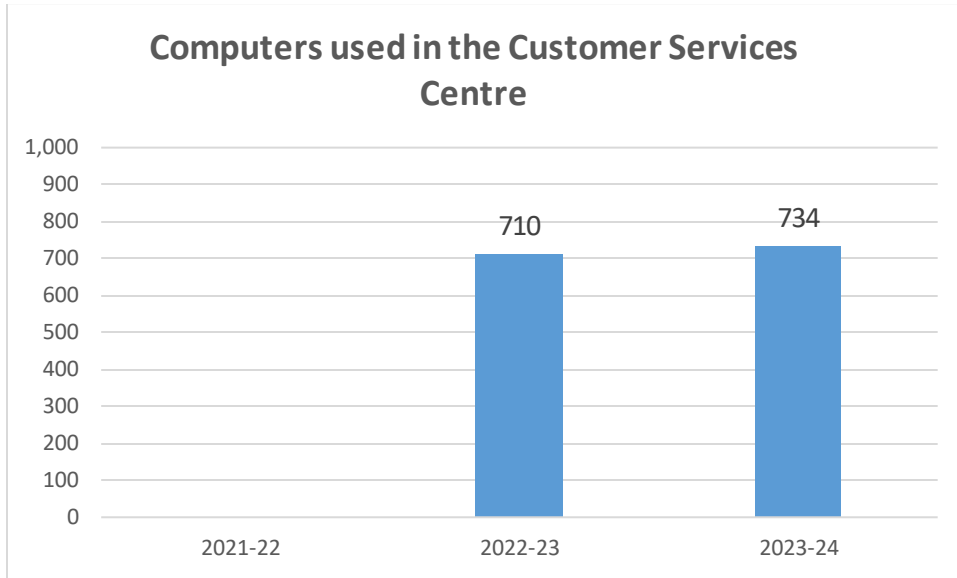
- Measure our performance through customer feedback, complaints and comments.
- Provide this information annually, so you can see how we are doing and what we are doing to ensure we achieve our targets.
- Encourage customers to give us feedback on our performance either online, in person, by telephone or in writing and use this to improve our services.
- Provide annual reports on complaints, compliments and comments received.
- Aim to answer all internal and external calls through our telephone system within an average of 5 minutes.
- Respond to all letters and emails within 7 working days of receiving them. If we cannot provide a full response to you in that timescale, we will contact you to agree a response time.

# How we are performing

## Telephones



## Digital Access



No data held for 2021-22

