

CABINET
4 MARCH 2025

CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY 2025-2030

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Mandy Porter,
Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Elizabeth Davison,
Executive Director - Resources and Governance**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve the Customer Services Strategy 2025-2030.

Summary

2. The Customer Services Strategy 2025-2030 sets out our vision for delivering excellent services to our customers and in particular, how we will support customers to access Council services who, for whatever reason, are unable to use our on-line services.
3. Included in the strategy are our Customer Standards, which set out the timescales and standards our customers can expect from all Council services when they contact us.
4. A public consultation exercise has been undertaken on the strategy and feedback is given at paragraph 9. This report was considered by the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 30 January 2025, who received the outcome of the consultation, and agreed the report's onward submission for consideration by Cabinet.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Note the content of this report, and
 - (b) Approve the Customer Services Strategy 2025-2030 at **Appendix 1**.

Reason

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) To ensure residents receive a consistent level of customer service from all Council services, no matter how they contact us.

- (b) To ensure that advice, assistance and support is given to anyone who is digitally excluded, to maximise the productivity and efficiency that can be achieved from technology in accordance with the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director - Resources and Governance

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan's ECONOMY priority to build a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all
Addressing inequalities	The Customer Services Strategy will ensure that residents who are digitally excluded are provided with appropriate support
Tackling Climate Change	The strategy aims to support residents to use online services, therefore helping some people avoid the need to travel
Efficient and effective use of resources	The continued promotion of on-line services with support for those who are digitally excluded will deliver efficiencies for the Council and its customers
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues which this report needs to address
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	All residents
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This is an Executive decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. The Customer Services Strategy 2025-2030 sets out our vision for delivering excellent services to our customers and in particular, how we will support customers to access Council services who, for whatever reason, are unable to use our on-line services.
8. The strategy focusses on seven key aims:
 - (a) **Providing excellent customer services** – delivering all services through face to face, telephone or digital channels to our customer standards. Our Customer Standards set out the timescales and standards our customers can expect from all Council services when they contact us.
 - (b) **Making it clear how customers can contact us** – ensuring that digital channels are the first choice for contacting the Council, but always providing customers with information about how they can speak to a member of staff.
 - (c) **Making it clear what we can help customers with and what we can't** – being clear from the start about what services we charge for and those that we provide for free.
 - (d) **Providing support for those customers who are digitally excluded** – expecting those customers who can use digital self-serve channels to do so, freeing up our staff to help and support those customers who cannot use our on-line services and ensure no-one is left behind.
 - (e) **Delivering value for money** – using technology and customer data to improve services and deliver efficiencies, investing any savings into providing extra support for customers who need it.
 - (f) **Investing in our people** – ensuring our staff have the right skills and IT equipment to deliver services and support our customers.
 - (g) **Listening to our customers and using this to improve our services** – asking customers about the services they have received and using this feedback to make improvements, including complaints about our services.

Consultation

9. A public consultation exercise was undertaken on the strategy during December 2024 to January 2025 alongside the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-2030, as there are several interdependencies between the two.

Outcome of Consultation

10. Overall, limited responses were received from the consultation exercise. Respondents were asked to comment on the strategy, and the following was received:

- (a) Two comments raised concerns about residents who are digitally excluded. One of these related to residents without internet access; “I worry that too many services are becoming online preventing access to those without internet or unable to use”. The Customer Service strategy makes it clear that “we will provide computer access to Council services and scan stations in our Customer Services Centre, free of charge”.
- (b) The second comment was around “vulnerable” residents who would be “unable to utilise these facilities”. Again, the strategy makes it clear that “for those who cannot use digital services, we will provide full support”.
- (c) One comment was around the lack of a “general phone number”. Members may recall that the General Enquiries line was discontinued in 2018 and that our new Netcall system directs customers automatically and efficiently to the correct service. Full details of all contact numbers are published on our website and regularly in the One Darlington magazine.
- (d) The final comment was around the lack of “feedback on status when a report is made”. The Customer Service strategy makes it clear that “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”. It will be up to each service to determine how they update customers about enquiries or set their own individual response times (for example, how quickly we will resolve a housing repair).