CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE IN CROYDON

Putting the customer at the heart of everything we do
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I am very pleased to be able to bring you Croydon Council’s five year customer service strategy which sets out how we are going to deliver and improve our services for customers across the borough. This strategy builds on the positive foundations created over the last few years including the creation of Access Croydon, in Taberner House and continuing improvements to the council’s website which mean customers can apply for, pay for and do more via the internet. However, more needs to be done. Within this strategy we set out how we will build on our in-depth understanding of our diverse customer base. This, in turn, will mean we can develop more effective ways of connecting with our customers and in particular, how we can improve access to services so that there genuinely is access for all. More than anything, as a local authority, we have a responsibility to act as the champion for all our customers – representing their views and concerns at the appropriate level, be it locally or nationally. This is of key importance during the current economic crisis.

Ultimately, Croydon Council’s aim is to be known as an outstanding local authority when it comes to customer service. Our staff will be respectful, knowledgeable and respond to all customers’ needs quickly and efficiently, thereby making customers feel assured and secure. Our services will be delivered in a fair, considerate and caring way that will ultimately make our customers feel respected and valued. We want our customers to trust us and to see that we will always go the extra mile, resulting in the belief that we provide excellent value for money.

These are challenging aspirations but Croydon Council is already well into its journey to achieve excellence in customer service.

Sara Bashford
Cabinet member for resources and customer services
We take customer service seriously in Croydon Council and this strategy is one of the most important ones in the organisation. This strategy is designed to enable us to meet and exceed the expectations more of the time.

We know there is more work to do in improving customer satisfaction with the services we deliver. Over the coming year, all front-line services will undertake a self-assessment in relation to customer service quality, with a view to gaining external accreditation after that.

We work hard at delivering excellent value for money. That is why we will be looking at how customers currently access services and identifying whether we could make these services available in a better, smarter way. This is about giving customers more control over when and where they access our services.

This is about making any interaction between the customer and the council easier, better and faster. Our ethos is “no wrong door” in that none of our customers should ever feel like they are being passed from department to department, with no answer. We will be working with the services that matter to our customers in order to develop staff, systems and processes so that always put our customers first.

Jon Rouse
Chief executive
Foreword by Tom Jeffery:
Executive director, community services

Improving the customer experience is at the heart of this strategy. In whatever way a customer contacts us, they should come away from that interaction feeling valued and respected. Only then will our customers trust us.

One of the first projects to come out of this strategy will be the development of our customer promise, ‘Proud to Serve’. We will be developing this by asking customers and staff alike to vote on the key promises they think the council should adhere to.

Once we have developed the customer promise, we will then look at embedding the behaviours needed across all services – be they services delivered directly by the council or on behalf of the council, by our partners.

This promise will also give us a foundation from which to deal with things when they go wrong. Ultimately, our aim is to reduce the number of complaints we get. However, when we do receive a complaint we will give it the respect it deserves, act on it quickly and use it as a learning opportunity.

The successful implementation of this strategy will mean that in every interaction, in every decision we will always put the customer at the heart of everything we do.

Tom Jeffrey
Executive director, community services
Customer excellence in Croydon: Putting the customer at the heart of everything we do

Proud to Serve
Our Customer Service Framework

Understanding our customers
Customer insight
Feedback

Connecting with our customers
Access
Performance
Staff

Customer ‘mirror’

How we work together

Emotion

Customer service excellence

Serving our customers
Delivery
Customer experience

Being the champion for our customers
Executive Summary

At the heart of this strategy is the desire to create better and easier interactions between the council and its customers to the extent that customers do not worry about contacting us. Ultimately, we want to ensure that all of our customers feel valued, even in the most difficult of interactions, and for them to become our biggest advocates.

This strategy has four themes within it and these are: (1) understanding our customers (2) connecting with our customers (3) serving our customers and (4) being a champion for our customers. Within each of these themes hopefully the reader will get a sense of the council not only ensuring the basics are right but also wanting to innovate around customer service delivery. The four themes act as a continuous cycle of improvement as depicted on the next page.

The first theme focuses on knowing our customers by having a deeper understanding of their wants and needs. This is about making better use of customer insight and segmentation and taking this understanding to a deeper level. At the moment, the council uses insight at the post-code level. The aim will be to take this to house-hold level, as well as bring in some elements of social marketing. In addition, this theme sets out the need for more joined-up engagement activities across the organisation and with our partners. This is important if we are to reduce duplication and more importantly, get the best out of every customer engagement activity every time. Recognising the importance of the customer experience and in particular, the emotional needs of the customer are the final piece to this jigsaw.

Once we understand our customers’ needs we then need to be clear about how we can best meet those needs. This is the aim of theme two, which has the development of the access strategy and subsequent channel management plan at its core. This also sets out performance management activity and targets in relation to customer service and increasing customer satisfaction. Improving staff skills and creating a customer-centric culture both within the council and any commercial partners it may work with are integral to the success of this theme. As such, approaches are set out both in relation to selection into customer-focused roles as well as development for all staff around improving the customer experience.

The customer experience is central to the third theme. ‘Proud to Serve’ will see us engaging with our customers and our staff in order to develop a meaningful customer promise. Improvements to the complaint process are also set out against this theme and in particular, improving how we respond to complainants. How we communicate with residents is included in this theme, ensuring our customers feel informed is a key element of their overall satisfaction. The final element of this theme relates to customer service excellence, both as an ethos and as an accreditation standard. The ethos is something that all parts of the council will develop. The accreditation is something that all priority services, at the very least, will attain.

Supporting, lobbying on behalf of and developing more innovative practices around participatory action are the aspects within the fourth and final theme. This looks at collaborative and partnership working as a way of creating a more seamless experience for the customer. An assessment will be carried out to determine where we are on this journey, both inside and cross-departmentally and outside with other organisations. Creating champions via our staff, particularly the 70% who are also residents, is something that will create a fast and informal feedback loop between us and the people we serve.

To ensure the council achieves customer service excellence we need to focus on the emotional side of customer service as well as the process and systems. By ensuring that all service improvements, service design and service delivery is focused around process, systems and emotional needs the council will undoubtedly see an increase in customer satisfaction. Customer excellence is not unattainable for Croydon and by 2015 we will be held up as one of the best local authorities in the UK around customer service as judged by our own customers.
Introduction

Croydon is already an exciting place in which to live, work and play. Innovative urban regeneration will see it become a vibrant metropolis, one that could rival any of the cities and large towns on the continent. Our plans, such as those for Building Schools for the Future, will see Croydon become a centre of excellence around education which will, in turn, attract more employers into the borough. Croydon already has a thriving business heart which looks set to grow, even in the midst of the current economic climate.

To cement this, Croydon now has a vision statement which sets out the borough’s shared priorities for the future. The vision statement sets out the quality and scope of change that we need over the next thirty years. The vision states that by 2040 Croydon will be known as one of the most enterprising cities; where everyone has the opportunity to succeed because they have the right support; there will be a very real sense of place, with the different and vibrant communities that make up Croydon co-existing and working together to ensure Croydon is a place to be proud of.

In 2009, a number of core strategies were developed to work towards achieving the vision. These include equalities and cohesion; older people; communication; culture; ICT; and information management strategies. This five year customer service strategy is another vital piece of that jigsaw. It comes at an appropriate time with the imminent launch of Step Change Croydon and the borough’s vision. It also comes at a time which has seen Croydon lead the way as one of the pilots for Total Place, a programme aimed at partners coming together to create integrated services designed around the needs of the customer.

It is important to ensure that the customer service strategy acts as one of the foundation stones to the aspirations and programmes set out above. This will be done through the aims set out in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>To deliver the priorities of the community we need to...</strong></th>
<th>Develop and understand service priorities. Define appropriate short, medium and longer term standards and organisational-wide service design, ensuring continuous future focus and direction for the Council’s priorities.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To increase satisfaction with quality of local public services we need to...</strong></td>
<td>Ensure the measurement of standards against the chosen priorities, managing and directing shortfalls thereby driving up customer satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To increase public perception of value for money with public services we need to...</strong></td>
<td>Understand what drives and improves customer value for money perceptions of ‘what matters’ leading to better informed customers and increased satisfaction levels. Our service delivery will be, in turn, informed and influenced by our customers’ perceptions of these matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To meet challenges and demands placed upon us by central government we need to...</strong></td>
<td>Meet all statutory and national priorities in fulfilling the provision of services to all segments of the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To enable Croydon Council to be recognised as one of the top ten local authorities in the UK we need to...</strong></td>
<td>Achieve upper quartile customer satisfaction and performance and be recognised as a customer focused market leader organisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To ensure the success of each part of the organisation we need to...</strong></td>
<td>Enable the creation of a single customer mindset throughout the organisation to ensure consistently high standards of customer satisfaction throughout all service relationships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The actions contained within this strategy are relevant to and in line with Croydon’s vision of becoming:

- An enterprising city
- A learning city
- A creative city
- A connected city
- A sustainable city
- A caring city

Embedded within the strategy is a continuous cycle of improvement with aim of understanding, connecting with, serving, and being the champion for our customers. We will use this continuous cycle for all services we deliver, whenever we deliver them, in order to ensure success for all of the aspirations set out in this introduction. As shown on page six, there are strong links with other key strategies from across the organisation. In particular, there are strong links with the equalities and cohesion strategy and the equality framework is embedded within each of the themes throughout this strategy. The links between the framework and the strategy themes are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer service strategy theme</th>
<th>Equality framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding our customers</td>
<td>Know our community and understand its needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecting with our customers</td>
<td>Engage with the community and improve satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving our customers</td>
<td>Responsive services and customer care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exemplary employer of a modern and diverse workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being the champion for our customers</td>
<td>Provide strong leadership, partnership and organisational commitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, in order to succeed in all of these aspirations we must get our basic offering to our many different customers right. This means providing services in the best way possible, whether that is face-to-face, online, over the phone or via other means. This means ensuring our processes are the best they can possibly be. Processes that work for the customer as well as processes that work for us. This means ensuring that we make sure we make optimum use of the systems we have already invested in and that when we buy new systems that we make sure they are future-proof, in that they will continue to meet the needs of customers a few years down the line. Finally, this is about thinking about the customer experience. It is all very well making sure our processes and systems are great but this means little if our staff are not always looking to ensure the service meets the customer individual needs and to go one step further and delight the customer. There have been shining examples of staff who have delivered amazing customer service and indeed, some of the very best were show-cased at the recent council awards. This strategy aims to build on those examples of outstanding customer service.
Customer excellence in Croydon: Putting the customer at the heart of everything we do

Links with other core strategies

The above diagram shows how this strategy links to and supports some of the other strategies across the organisation.
“Seek to understand before you can expect to be understood”

Stephen Covey

Our commitments against this theme:

- To have a clear definition and understanding of our customers and their physical and emotional needs
- To understand and respect the needs of vulnerable customers
- To understand and respect the differences among our customers
- To ensure we engage our customers in design of services
- To ensure we review services from a customer viewpoint
- To make use of customer feedback to drive service improvements
- To focus on our customers’ priorities
Theme one: Understanding our customers

Who are our customers?
We deal with a wide range of people across the borough. The council is a highly complex organisation which facilitates the well-being of those that live, work or play in the borough – be it physical, mental or economic well-being. As such, our customers include:

- Council tax payers
- People with disabilities
- Builders and property developers
- Victims of domestic violence
- Private landlords
- Religious groups
- Unemployed residents
- Schools
- Homeless people
- Road users
- Older people
- Single parents
- Looked after children
- Business owners
- Charities and voluntary organisations
- Asylum seekers
- Various ethnic groups
- Council departments (internal customers)

Whilst the lists above are not exhaustive they simply serve to demonstrate the sheer range of services the council offers to its customers. In order to ensure we are delivering the right services in the right way, we need to ensure we understand as much as is possible about our varied customer groups. We need to understand more about the people who do not use our services, as well as recognising and working with the interdependencies that may exist between customer groups, for example older people and younger people in relation to housing needs. Finally, we need to think ahead in order to plan for future customer needs and changing expectations.

Customer insight and segmentation
Currently customer insight is based on what is known as ‘post-code level’ data whereby key customer groups and their habits are identified via their post-code groupings. It is possible to look at house-hold level data and more recently, a new level has been added which enables organisations to gain insight at a person level. Croydon Council will move to house-hold level as a way of getting further depth of understanding in the habits and behaviours of customer groups across the borough. This understanding will be developed across the organisation as part of development for managers and performance analysts. In addition, Croydon aims to be the first place in the UK where customer insight is shared and used across the local strategic partnership (LSP).

However, in order to take customer insight and segmentation even further, the council needs to develop and make use of the concept of social marketing. Social marketing is a process that can help in shifting the power balance by developing better informed, planned, executed and evaluated interventions and also by ensuring that all service provision is designed around the needs of customers. The main aim is to ensure all interventions are based around and directly respond to the needs and wants of the customer, rather than the customer having to fit around the needs of the service or the intervention. Social marketing is driven by action-oriented insights about what will and will not help people change. To develop this level of insight requires Croydon Council to move beyond traditional information and intelligence (for example demographic data) and to look much more closely at why people behave the way they do. A strong emphasis needs to be placed on understanding what is to be offered to the customer, based on what the customer values.

Alongside segmentation we will use and develop traditional targeting through geo-demographic data to further understand key customer groups. High impact segmentation will also develop our understanding of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. This means that services can then be developed to address specific needs, be they physical or emotional. Ultimately, this is about knowing our customers and understanding their needs.
Emotional and physical needs

Every customer has the right to expect their basic needs to be met by us. However, it is an exceptional organisation that understands the emotional needs of its customers. This is Croydon’s aim. The hierarchy of needs that Croydon’s customers can expect to be met are shown on the next page.

To ensure physical needs are met we will streamline information and processes. By doing this, staff should find it easier to deal with customer needs – whether it’s a need for information, for a meeting or to follow up on a previous interaction. In turn, customers should experience a quicker response time, have trust in the information they are receiving and believe that the council will look after any information relating to that particular customer.

Customer engagement and feedback

An excellent organisation will recognise and respond to the diversity of the community it serves, creating tailored responses to suit wide-ranging needs. Croydon Council exists to serve the needs of its communities and these communities increasingly expect to be able to influence service design and delivery. Improving services means engaging with customers at all levels to find out what they want, ensuring effective delivery and being accountable for that delivery.

Customer engagement and feedback helps deliver a culture where resources are given to where they are most needed. The council currently uses tools such as Govmetric along with the customer insight data. We will commit to develop further tools to develop the richness of this data and improve its use into the organisation.

Building better customer engagement starts with an honest assessment of the council’s current levels of engagement with residents and community groups. This must then be bought together into a cohesive, joined-up plan which reduces potential duplication of activity between services. This, in turn, will lead to the creation of one central system which all staff will be able to access in order to plan their own engagement activities and which all customers will be able to access in order to plan which engagement event they can attend. An essential component will be the monitoring and evaluation of progress against all customer engagement activities. This latter point is particularly important in relation to ensuring engagement activities are quality controlled and effective. By 2015, Croydon Council will be running high impact and joined-up customer engagement activities. In addition it will have ensured that its own customer engagement activities are integrated with its partners’ engagement activities. This includes making more use of social networking sites as a way of engaging and understanding our customers.

To take engagement to the next level we need to explore forms of participatory action research (PAR). This addresses underlying causes of inequality using a solution-focused approach. It is a continual process – beginning with community dialogue, the next phase is data generation, leading to action and then back to dialogue. Ultimately, this allows participants, in this instance our customers, to learn from their action. The ultimate notion is that community members are equal partners in the research process. The goal of PAR is to develop the capacity of participants to understand and develop solutions to their own problems rather than relying on outside experts to do this on their behalf.
### Key actions for theme one:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Develop use of customer insight data at the household level</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Development programme for managers and performance analysts on the use of customer insight and segmentation data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop and roll-out the concepts of effective engagement, including social marketing, for use as part of service design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Roll out the customer experience hierarchy of needs pyramid and incorporate into service planning and PDCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop centralised engagement plan and supporting centralised system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop quality and performance monitoring to underpin customer engagement activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop and roll-out Participatory Action Research and co-design methodologies for use by services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop future contracts, delivered by partners, to include customer satisfaction metrics as part of delivery and payment models</td>
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</table>
Understanding our customers in 2015

Customer action
Miss Khan needs to report anti social behaviour in her block of flats

Physical experience
Miss Khan quickly finds the number she needs to call by looking on the council website. When she calls the number it is answered promptly by Lesley in the Contact Centre.

Lesley quickly and efficiently takes Miss Khan’s details and sees that she is a council tenant. Lesley looks up the availability of the Anti Social Behaviour team in DASH and asks Miss Khan for a time and date that suits her. Miss Khan opts for an appointment in two days time.

Ron, from the ASB team visits Miss Khan at the specified time and finds out more information from her. He lets her know what will happen and when and gives her his contact details if she needs to get hold of him.

Emotional experience
Miss Khan feels nervous about making the call and is worried about any repercussions. Whilst she doesn’t say this, Lesley picks this up both in the tone of Miss Khan’s voice and the nature of the call. Lesley adapts her style so that it is warm, as well as efficient. Miss Khan comes away from the call feeling that Lesley was respectful of her worries.

Miss Khan is anxious about the meeting with the ASB officer as she is a single Muslim woman and she knows the officer is a man. Ron arrives and picks up on Miss Khan’s anxiety – he asks if she would like him to take his shoes off before entering the flat. This makes Miss Khan feel respected and slightly less worried. Ron listens more than he talks and then repeats what he has heard Miss Khan say, clarifying where he needs to. This leads Miss Khan to believe she is being taken seriously and by the end of the meeting she is certain that the council will help her with the situation she is in.
The Croydon customer experience hierarchy of needs

- **Primarily physical needs**
  - Value for money
  - Trust
  - Safe
  - Accessible
  - Reliable

- **Primarily emotional needs**
  - Satisfied
  - Responsible
  - Comfortable
  - Efficient
  - Responsive
  - Resolute
  - Knowledgeable
  - Caring
  - Respectful
  - Assured
  - Friendly
  - Valued
  - Happy
  - Respected
  - Contented
Customer excellence in Croydon: Putting the customer at the heart of everything we do
“Customer service is about treating others as you would want to be treated”

Anon

Our commitments against this theme:

- To ensure our services and access is tailored to our customers’ needs
- To ensure access is aligned to the most appropriate, effective and efficient channel
- To put in place clearly defined performance standards
- To maximise the amount of interactions completed at the first point of contact
- To develop services linked to life events and personal circumstances which maximise the support provided and reduce the requirement for multiple contact.
- To develop our staff, at all levels, so that we have a customer-centric culture
- To make as many transactions automated as possible, enabling the customer to access standard services 24/7
- To create an ethos of “no wrong door”
Theme two:
Connecting with our customers

**Customer access and channel management**

A supplementary strategy which supports this one will be the council’s access strategy. Based on in-depth engagement with a variety of customers, this strategy will enable the council to determine which services it continues to deliver face-to-face, which services can be transacted online and which services can be dealt with by the contact centre. With the current financial climate creating more pressure, the aim is to deliver as many of the ‘universal’ services in the most cost-effective way possible. Universal means those services which everyone in the borough uses, such as waste collection. The result of this work will be to reduce ‘avoidable contact’ also known as NI14 (National Indicator). One example of avoidable contact would include calls from Croydon residents chasing the progress of a street light being fixed. Reducing avoidable contact will lead to improvements for our customers and efficiency savings for the organisation (NI179).

The council’s new ICT strategy has excellence in customer services at its heart and it sets out a number of projects which aim to increase automation of processes for customers. In five years time this will be at the next level whereby customers can access a virtual contact centre which has a virtual customer services advisor, interactive maps, video footage of council services and links to all council services.

Croydon will be one of the first authorities to implement ‘Tell Us Once’, an initiative which will allow us to successfully join up a range of services which allow customers to inform us of a birth or death once, rather than many times. A birth or death can impact on a vast number of benefits or services delivered across the borough and beyond. ‘Tell Us Once’ will not only help to increase customer satisfaction but also reduce the costs incurred by duplication of effort. By 2015, this principle will have spilled over into other services and an aspiration is for there to be one website for all public services in Croydon where customers can access the council, the job centre, the NHS and the police to name but a few. Thus, this becomes more than just about “no wrong door” at Croydon Council but rather “no wrong door” across the borough, which is an aspiration for the local strategic partnership (LSP) as evidenced through the Total Place pilot.
Performance management

Developing better performance management across the whole council, in relation to customer services, is essential to the improvement of the council’s ability to deliver services in ways that are effective, meet the needs of the customer and continually improve. Performance management in relation to customer services needs to be developed so that it:

- Focuses on improving genuine customer priorities
- Has sufficient internal and external challenge
- Has a limited number of key indicators to signpost performance
- Produces self-sustaining continuous improvement
- Celebrates achievement as well as identifying poor performance
- Triggers action in response to missing targets, indicators and standards

In short, this is about ensuring that every single person in every single service takes responsibility for their customer service priorities and ultimately our residents’ satisfaction with our services. A balanced scorecard for this strategy is given on page 15. This sets out the targets the council aims to achieve by 2015. It is the responsibility of every single person in the organisation to make it happen. Targets include increasing customer satisfaction and reducing the number of complaints. As such, these targets need to be factored in to service plans and PDCS objectives.

Quality control and monitoring is another key component of performance management. Call Quality Monitoring (CQM) is currently used as part of the performance management of staff within the contact centre. The aim is for CQM to be rolled out across the organisation. This is not about listening in on every call but rather it is simply a way of ensuring that the customer can be sure they will be treated in considerate and helpful manner. The same will apply to written and electronic communication. This is not only about spelling and grammar, which are the basic foundations of any written correspondence, but also taking into account the intended audience. Plain language will be used in all written correspondence with customers – be it via email or letter.

Staff and culture

Training in customer service skills, across the organisation, has not had as much focus in some areas as it perhaps should have done over the last couple of years. The training that staff in both the contact centre and Access Croydon receive enables them to handle the complexity of systems, processes and customer behaviour. This training needs to be rolled out across the organisation for all levels of staff (including contractors), particularly new starters and especially those working on the front line. In addition, as part of every new starter’s induction they should spend at least one day in the contact centre or Access Croydon. The benefits of this are many fold – the individual would get an instant overview of the many services the council offers; they would have more appreciation for some of the frustrations experienced by customers; and they could take the learning back to their team which could then feed in to service improvements.

Prior to training is the importance of selection. It is increasingly important that the council recruits people with the right knowledge, skills and attitude. HR & OD have already led the way with regard to executive level recruitment and selection. The same ethos should be applied to staff going into customer facing roles. An interview and a psychometric test are not enough to determine a person’s suitability for working in a customer-oriented role. Instead, a set of behavioural focused assessment exercises should be used to determine, for example, a person’s ability to handle vulnerable persons with sensitivity or their ability to handle an angry or abusive customer. Psychological research continually shows the benefits of using comprehensive assessment techniques – not only can it have a massive impact on customer satisfaction but it can also impact on finances as well, through increased productivity and reduced turnover. We also expect our contractors and commercial partners to use thorough selection methods for all levels of their staff.
Key actions for theme two:

- Develop and roll out the council’s access strategy (includes the development of a channel switching plan)
- Roll out ‘Tell Us Once’
- Develop and roll-out ‘One Croydon’ website, encompassing all public services in one place
- Embed customer service and satisfaction performance targets in every departmental service plan, divisional service plans and individual performance objectives
- Establish Call Quality Monitoring (CQM) across the whole organisation, including contractor call centres
- Establish Quality Monitoring for written correspondence, including contractors
- Ensure customer skills are assessed when recruiting for any customer-facing roles, including contractors
- Develop a customer skills training programme as standard for all staff, including contractors
- Incorporate time in the contact centre or Access Croydon as part of induction for all new starters
Connecting with our customers in 2015
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer action</th>
<th>Physical experience</th>
<th>Emotional experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Houlihan has to apply for planning permission</td>
<td>Mr Houlihan has inherited some money and has decided to try his hand at property development. He has purchased some land with accompanying buildings. He logs on to the council's online planning portal and as he has never put in for planning permission before, let alone done it online, he takes the time to click on the video tutorial.</td>
<td>After recently retiring, Mr Houlihan is excited at the prospect of becoming a property developer, although slightly anxious because of the economic climate. He is also worried that some of the people who live near the land and buildings he has purchased may oppose his plans. He doesn’t like confrontation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After the tutorial, Mr Houlihan clicks on the option of having a virtual planning advisor (an avatar) who can guide him as he fills out the application. He is taken through each step of the process and it is made clear what documents he needs to be able to provide. He completes the online application and clicks for it to be submitted. He receives online confirmation with a reference number and details relating to his application. He also receives information about the next set of planning committee meetings at the town hall, which he is able to check against his diary.</td>
<td>He is worried that the filling out the planning application will be difficult and that he will either get bits wrong or miss out bits. However, he is relieved to see that the council have put in place video tutorials to help people like him. He’s also surprised to find he can opt to have a virtual planning adviser to help him. Mr Houlihan finds both these forms of assistance really helpful and he fills out the planning application much quicker than he anticipated.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Houlihan is glad to see that all the details relating to his application are in one email, rather than sent to him piecemeal. He is also impressed that within the same email he is informed of the next nearest planning committee meeting. He hadn’t even thought of that and he found it really useful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Customer service strategy
Balanced scorecard

Customer perspective
By 2015:
• Customer satisfaction at 55%
• Complaints reduced by 25%
• Value for money perception improved
• Call handling quality improved by 50%

Staff/culture perspective
By 2015:
• 25% reduction in turnover in contact centre
• 30% increase in staff satisfaction
• 20% reduction in staff absence
• 25% increase in staff productivity
• 50% staff with customer service qualification
• All front-line services to achieve external customer service excellence accreditation

Process perspective
By 2015:
• 90% calls answered in 30 seconds
• 80% face to face contacts handled in 5 mins
• 50% reduction in abandoned calls
• 50% reduction in avoidable contact (NI14)

Finance perspective
By 2015:
• 25% efficiency savings through channel switching
• Contacts reduced by 20% per FTE
• Affordable council tax
• 40% reduction in contacts handles to other departments
“We are repeatedly what we do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit”

Aristotle

Our commitments against this theme:

- To build on the ‘Proud to Serve’ value by creating a customer promise
- To consistently deliver an excellent experience for our customers
- To ensure we get things right first time and if we don’t then to apologise and put it right quickly
- To improve our processes so that our staff can deliver better services and to make things simpler for our customers
- To gain customer service excellence accreditation in high priority service areas
Theme three:
Serving our customers

Proud to Serve
Along with the access strategy, the ‘Proud to Serve’ project will be one of the first things to be delivered through this strategy. Proud to Serve is one of the council’s six values. This project will develop a set of promises – by the council for the customer. It is envisaged that no more than ten promises will be developed, with the rank order of importance being decided via a public vote.

Complaints resolution
It is a fact of life that things will go wrong from time to time. Poor complaint handling can seriously affect customer satisfaction and break the trust between the council and a customer. There are three things of importance here. The first is that where we have made a mistake that we are honest about it, apologise and put it right as soon as possible. The second is that customers are clear about the complaint process. The third is that we are consistent in how we handle customer complaints across all departments.

The central complaint service has just been re-structured with the aim of streamlining the process for external and internal customers alike. In addition, much better use will be made of the complaint system, including ensuring that the information entered is correct and handled sensitively. In addition to improving the complaint process and system, training in complaint handling will be rolled out to key staff in all departments and across our commercial partners. This can be incorporated as part of the wider customer skills development programme mentioned in theme two. Ultimately, complaints are a learning opportunity and should be treated as such.

Customer service excellence
As with other public sector organisations, Croydon Council is measured by and judged on the quality of the services it delivers and faces growing customer expectations for better outcomes. An excellent council will run services that are integrated, sensitive to customers’ needs and continuously improving. This is where Croydon aims to be.

Croydon recently piloted its own in-house customer service excellence standard. This looks at aspects of service delivery including complaints, communication and engagement and sign-posting. Scoring ranges from bronze (lowest) to gold (highest). This standard is now being rolled out across priority services, with directors identifying where their various teams are and then working with their service managers to produce service improvement plans against the areas measured in the standard. It is expected that priority services will go for external accreditation.

Quality management is another vital component in the drive to improve services. This will involve the council focusing on how different services are delighting their customers by continuously meeting and improving upon agreed requirements. Quality circles will be set up in each department. A quality circle is a volunteer group composed of staff that are trained to identify, analyse and solve work-related problems and present their solutions to management in order to improve the performance of the service and ultimately, the organisation. The added benefit is the motivation and enrichment of roles for staff. The customer service excellence standard and subsequent improvement plans will be used as the basis for action in the quality circles.
A key aspect of the quality circles will be process improvement. This has already been identified as a need in the ICT strategy and already 12 staff across the service transformation and customer service divisions have been trained in the Lean process improvement methodology. The aim will be to identify staff across the other five departments to train in Lean who can then examine processes, in their home departments, with the intention of improving efficiency and effectiveness, thereby, delivering a better service for their respective customers. This will mean targeting wasteful activities such as:

- Overproduction (too much paperwork, overly lengthy reports)
- Waiting time (queuing, delays, lateness)
- Movement (inefficient ergonomics, transport systems)
- Processing (doing things well that need not be done at all; doing things poorly that are a priority)
- Inventory (carrying too much stock/material that tie up capital and space)
- Communication (overloading data, combining useless with useful information)
- Defects (redoing work because it was not done right the first time)

The impact on the customer that improvements across all these activities across all services will have will be significant. There is absolutely no doubt that the customer service excellence standard and quality circles will play a significant part in increasing customer satisfaction and improving perception of value for money. This should also see a reduction in the number of complaints across all services.

### The customer experience

To truly achieve customer service excellence we need to look in-depth at the interaction between us and the customer as standard. This is in terms of service planning, performance discussions and service improvements. The things we will be thinking about when designing services and when developing our staff are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical experience</th>
<th>Sensory experience</th>
<th>Emotional experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Services delivered</td>
<td>• <strong>Sight</strong> – clear council branding, clean and attractive accommodation, colour scheme, professional appearance</td>
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<td>• Value for money</td>
<td>• <strong>Sound</strong> – authentic message from staff; sound-proof areas for sensitive/confidential discussions;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Quality of surroundings</td>
<td>• <strong>Touch</strong> – aesthetics in buildings, e.g. comfortable chairs, technology/pods that customers can use;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Smell</strong> – clean and pleasant smell in public areas, including toilet areas; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Taste</strong> – coffee machine</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Joy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Anticipation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Surprise (positive or negative)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Disgust</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sadness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Fear</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Anger</td>
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Key actions for theme three:

- Develop and publish the Proud to Serve customer promise
- Improve the complaints resolution function through restructure
- Develop and roll out training in complaint handling
- Roll out the customer service excellence standard to all departments
- Publish service improvement plans for priority services (as part of customer service excellence)
- Establish quality circles in all departments
- Develop a governance structure to support the quality circles
- Roll out Lean training for staff involved in quality circles
- 100% customer priority services to achieve external accreditation in customer service excellence
Serving our customers in 2015

Customer action
Mrs Lawrence has to **pay** a parking fine

Physical experience
Mrs Lawrence has just come back from an emergency trip to the chemist to find she has **received a parking ticket**. The parking attendant is over the other side of the road and Mrs Lawrence goes to speak to him.

Mrs Lawrence asks Philip, the parking attendant, **why he has issued a ticket**. Philip **calmly explains** that she had parked in a loading bay which had no parking at any time.

Mrs Lawrence explains her situation and Philip **clearly tells** her that he **cannot rescind the ticket**. However, she can **appeal** and he takes the time to **explain the process** she needs to go through in order to appeal. Mrs Lawrence finds out that she can pay the fine, as well as appeal, **online**. Philip then gives Mrs Lawrence his **full name** so that she is clear on who issued her ticket and so that she has the **information she needs** for her appeal.

Emotional experience
Mrs Lawrence is **worried** as her mother is very ill and she has had to pick up a prescription. When she returns to the car this worry turns to **anger**.

When she sees Philip this **anger becomes more focused** and she crosses the road to appeal to him.

When Philip doesn’t rescind her ticket, Mrs Lawrence becomes **angrier**. However, she is struck by Philip’s **calm and non-confrontational tone**. She is also struck by how **courteous** Philip is and how he **takes the time** to give her the information. He also doesn’t shy away from giving her his full name. Whilst she is still **unhappy** at receiving a ticket, she is struck by the **helpful and respectful behaviour** that Philip displayed. She takes the time to mention this in her appeal letter.
“The thing always happens that you really believe in; and the belief in a thing makes it happen”

Frank Lloyd Wright

Our commitments against this theme:

- To provide a seamless and joined-up set of services between the council and its partners
- To develop a more pro-active service delivery ethos based on prevention rather than cure
- To maximise income and funding opportunities in order to support community priorities
- To lobby on behalf of our residents both at a local and a national level
Theme four:
Being a champion for our customers

Seamless and pro-active services
There are two aspects to this commitment – inside-out (ensuring departments work more effectively together) and outside-in (ensuring we work more effectively with our key partners). Croydon Council does not provide services in isolation but depends on and in turn supports a range of other public sector bodies, voluntary organisations and community groups to raise the quality of life for its citizens.

The council needs to ensure it is working in close collaboration with the right organisations in order to enhance the services being offered to customers. In addition, it needs to ensure that its role in partnerships is clear and that this clarity has a positive impact on the customer in that they have to interact with as few agency professionals as is feasible. This ethos will be brought to life by the building of the Public Service Delivery Hub (PSDH), which will aim to bring together key services both inside and outside the council in order to create a ‘one stop shop’ on a borough-wide scale.

In the current economic climate, we need to think beyond our traditional boundaries and find even more collaborative ways of working to deliver better outcomes for customers. Deciding what partnerships are necessary to achieve strategic aims and to ensure seamless service is a key decision for Croydon to make.

Regardless of whether the joined-up working is within the council or between the council and a partner, collaborative working can only succeed when both parties have a real commitment to and understanding of the greater good and the value of collective goals over individual ones.

In order to improve the effectiveness of partnership working and therefore, improve customer satisfaction within the borough, improvement plans will be created within each division based upon a systematic assessment of existing partnership working (be that within or outside of the organisation). The purpose of this review would be to:

• Identify customer priorities that need partnership ‘buy in’ to be delivered
• Assess the nature of the council’s role in leading or supporting particular partnerships
• Clarify which partnerships should be given higher priority than others
• Identify those from which the council might consider withdrawing and those that might need more support
• Map connections and interdependencies
• Identify gaps and duplication
• Identify examples of good practice and learning for wider dissemination

With an ageing population and increasing pockets of marginalisation, Croydon Council needs to make further in-roads into developing services that are more preventative than curative. If we succeed in this then we will be able to much more easily flex to the changing needs and expectations of our customers. In addition, we will become even more efficient and provide better value for money. This will also be explored as part of the assessment process.
Champions for our customers

There needs to be a balance between acting on behalf of customers who are unable to do so themselves and creating a ‘nanny culture’ within Croydon. This particular commitment is about supporting and lobbying on behalf of customers when they need it and enabling customers to deal with some issues themselves. Bearing in mind approximately 70% of the council’s staff are residents and therefore, customers of the borough, we have a couple of thousand instant customer champions to hand.

We will be engaging staff who live in Croydon about the extent to which they are already involved in their area and the extent to which they would want to be more involved with their local community. We will then create a network of staff that can instantly get views and issues from their neighbours, feed these views and issues back to the council, and then feed back to their neighbours what the council is doing in response to these views. This creates a kind of ‘feedback loop’ which could be incredibly powerful. There will need to be incentives for staff to do this but this should not be enough to deter us as the impact on customer satisfaction and perception will be invaluable.

Key actions for theme four:

- Assessment of services in relationship to partnership working
- Develop further opportunities for service redesign around the total place concept.
- Divisional improvement plans in relation to partnership working
- Develop and pilot Croydon Champions initiative
Customer action

Mr Foulides wants to find out where his nearest library is.

Physical experience

Mr Foulides has recently moved in to the borough (Thornton Heath). He is unfamiliar with Thornton Heath and where various amenities are. He has had a look through the ‘Welcome Pack’ that he received and he is keen to find out more about where his nearest library is.

He logs on to the council website and quickly finds his nearest library. However, he also spots other things of interest such as the digital library and he can see that there is virtual lending available. He fills out an online application for library membership, including downloading his photo for his card. At the same time puts a request in for an e-book that he would like to access. He receives email confirmation with a reference number and details of exactly when his membership will become active. Although his membership is not yet active, he has been given access to the e-book.

Mr Foulides has recently joined a new Greek cultural network and has taken up a voluntary role as the group secretary. He needs to find a decent space for them to meet that is easy for all members to get to.

On a second email, he receives details about Thornton Heath library – his nearest library. He reads about the services offered there and finds that he can hire such a space at the Thornton Heath library and that he can do this online. Again, he fills out the request online and receives email notification with a reference number confirming his booking.
Mr Foulides is excited about moving to his new home and is anxious to get lots of things sorted, such as finding a GP etc. One of the more pleasurable activities that he enjoys is reading which is why he wants to quickly find out where his nearest library is. He was pleasantly surprised to receive a welcome pack only 3 days after moving in to his new home and has found it useful.

Mr Foulides experience of his last council’s website was poor. It was hard to find anything so he expects the same when he enters Croydon’s website. However, again, he is pleasantly surprised to find how easy it is to find what he wants. He is also really pleased that he can join the library and order an e-book on line. Neither of which he was expecting. He is impressed that he receives an instant response (must be automatic) which lets him know when his membership will become active. What delights him is that he receives access to the e-book he requested. He never expected that until his membership was authorised.

Mr Foulides’ cultural heritage is really important to him and playing a part in his cultural community is a big part of his identity. Therefore, to receive a second email which let him know the amenities available at the library was incredibly helpful, as he was worried about finding the right kind of space in the local area for his group to meet. By this point he can’t believe how easy it is to sort things out and after logging off he calls the chair of the Greek cultural network about how impressed he is with the council.
## Glossary of terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access strategy</strong></td>
<td>Gives a set of recommendations in relation to understanding our different customers and how these are linked to locations, the services used and their preferences for accessing those services, i.e. face-to-face, telephone etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Balanced scorecard</strong></td>
<td>A strategic performance management tool which helps managers to keep track of the progress of activities, looking at both financial and non-financial measures.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Channel management</strong></td>
<td>The organisation of the ways in which organisations reach or are reached by their customers. Examples of channels include face-to-face, emails and the telephone.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Customer insight</strong></td>
<td>The collection, analysis and use of information which allows an organisation to further understand its customers in order to better meet the needs of those customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer engagement</strong></td>
<td>A form of contact where an organisation engages with its different customers to find out their needs. Methods of customer engagement include surveys, focus groups, user-testing events etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Customer segmentation</strong></td>
<td>A sub-set of customers made up of people sharing one or more characteristics that cause them to demand similar services.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Geo-demographic data</strong></td>
<td>Classifies areas according to the typical traits of the population of that area. Links with customer insight and customer segmentation. The Mosaic database (see below) is one that enables geo-demographic analysis to take place.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Govmetric</strong></td>
<td>A web based tool that enables customers to give instant feedback on the service they have received, whether that is over the phone or face-to-face. This, in turn, enables services to get ‘real time’ information which they can use to improve services.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mosaic</strong></td>
<td>A database owned by Experian that covers the whole of the United Kingdom. It classifies customers into 61 types, split into 11 groups. Takes into account life-styles, culture and behaviour amongst other things.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participatory action research (PAR)</strong></td>
<td>Based on the ethos that if things are to improve then the people affected the most need to be involved in coming up with any solutions and carry out the research needed themselves. All participants decide on the approaches to be used and are given the skills necessary. Aimed more at disadvantaged/marginalised sections of society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance management</strong></td>
<td>Activities that ensure goals and objectives are met in an effective and efficient manner. Performance appraisal for staff is one method of performance management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Service Delivery Hub</strong></td>
<td>The working name for the new central civic building. It is being designed as a modern, dynamic and inviting space for customers and staff. The building will be used by the council and its partners, such as Croydon NHS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality circle</strong></td>
<td>A volunteer group of workers under the leadership of a supervisor who are trained to identify, analyse and solve work-related problems in order to improve the performance of services.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social marketing</strong></td>
<td>Focuses on achieving specific behavioural changes for the ‘social good’. Typical topics covered include health, recycling, sustainability and crime reduction.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Place</strong></td>
<td>A new initiative that looks at how a ‘whole area’ approach to delivering public services can lead to better services at less cost.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vision statement</strong></td>
<td>An outline of what an organisation wants to be, or how it wants the world within which it operates to be. It concentrates on the long-term future, providing inspiration and a clear sense of direction.</td>
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</table>