

UNDERSTANDING YOUR NEEDS DELIVERING YOUR SERVICES



CITY OF YORK COUNCIL CUSTOMER STRATEGY 2012 - 2015

Contents

- 1 Foreword from Councillor Julie Gunnell
- 2 Introduction and context
- 6 The strategy
- 7 Understanding our customers
- 9 Always open
- 11 Working with and in our communities

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce City of York Council's Customer Strategy for 2012-15.

With this strategy, we want to push our ambitions further to meet your needs as a customer in the 21st Century. This ranges from providing traditional face-to-face assistance for those in greatest need of support to making use of the newest technology so people can organise services, make enquiries, notify us of issues or pay their bills in a way and at a time to suit them.

The strategy is also designed to make sure, as we stated in our Council Plan, that we continue to protect the most vulnerable people and are completely in touch with our communities.

In the current economic climate, we also have to make sure that our customer strategy delivers what you value in the best and most cost efficient way. It will give us a framework to enable us to respond to changing demands and provide focus on our key priorities so we make the most of every penny we spend.

This strategy is being backed up by a detailed plan that will take us on a journey of assessing and developing our buildings and systems, people and processes. That plan will take us through our journey to our new city centre customer centre in 2013 and beyond, and is fully focussed on ways of working that meet your needs and expectations.



Cllr Julie Gunnell
Cabinet Member &
Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

Introduction and context

Welcome to our Customer Strategy which replaces the former strategy in place from 2009. This strategy responds to the need to provide excellent customer services within the context of a challenging financial climate, changes to our population and in an age where people can expect to access services in a way to suit them 24 hours a day.

For the first time, customers and communities are also being given the power and ability to develop and provide their own local services.

Our Council Plan

This strategy fits with our Council Plan which sets out our priorities for the city for the next four years.

These five priorities give focus to everything we do as a council. Our Customer Strategy will help us ensure that we keep in touch with our customers and our communities so that we can understand and meet their needs.

This strategy supports these aims, sets out how we plan to identify our customers' needs and makes clear what we need to do to meet them.

Who are our customers?

Our customers are anyone who comes into contact with us for any reason: anyone who lives, works, studies or plays in York and anyone who visits our city for business or pleasure – millions of people every year with widely differing needs and backgrounds.

Our five priorities



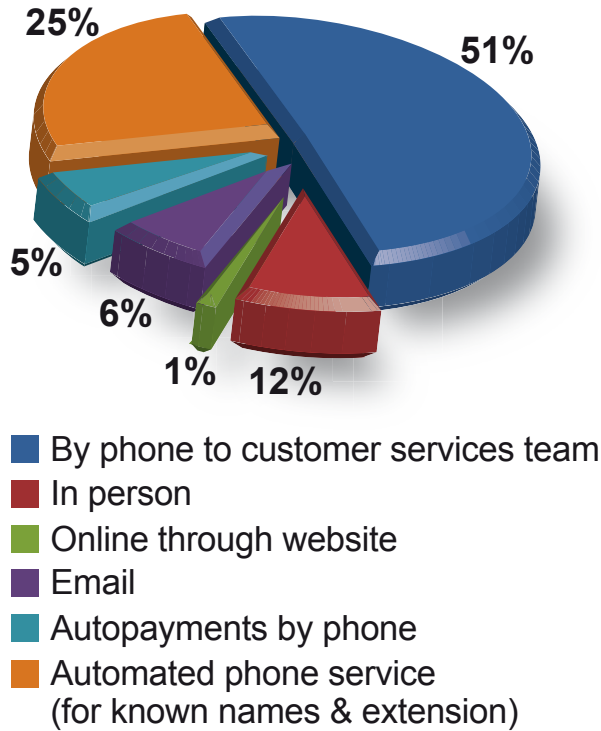
At City of York Council we value every contact we have with our customers – whether it is giving advice on moving to the city, setting up a business, supporting environmental issues such as keeping the streets clean, providing education and leisure facilities for all, to caring for and protecting our most vulnerable customers.

What our community looks like in York

- York's population was 198,000 in 2011, up 9.2% since 2001.
- The number of households in York in 2011 was 83,600 and is expected to increase by a third by 2031.
- 15% of households are privately rented and 15% are social rented housing.
- Using mid-year 2010 projections, there will be a 34% increase in the number of people aged 60 or over (45,900 to 61,600) from 2012 to 2031 and an 83% rise in the number of people aged 85 and over (5,300 to 9,700).
- Around 16% of the population have a long-term, limiting illness and a significant proportion of our customers are disabled.
- As of February 2012, 10,130 people were on key out-of-work benefits (7.3% of the working population). This is significantly lower than the region (13.4%) and nationally (12.5%). Of these, 980 people were claiming for a disability and 5,020 claiming Employment Support Allowance/incapacity benefit.
- There is a rapidly growing black and minority ethnic population in York, due in part to the continuing expansion of university and higher education facilities. A recent study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggested the black and minority ethnic group had grown to 11% in 2009. The study identified 92 different ethnic and national origins in the city and 78 different first languages.
- Estimates suggest that there are in the region of 330 Gypsy and Traveller households in York, mainly comprising English Gypsy (Romany) households.

How do our customers contact us now?

We currently provide contact in a range of ways to meet our customers' needs:



The pie chart shows how our customers made contact with us in 2011/12.

Over the last year (to July 2012) we have seen a reduction in the amount of phone calls we receive from customers. There has been an increase in the number of contacts made through electronic or automated channels – such as ‘Do It Online’, email, auto-payments and use of mobile technology.

The council wants to improve the experience for customers in whatever way they connect with us and help people access services in convenient ways for them.

How connected are we in York?

- 63% of York households are more likely to access services over the Internet.
- 48% of households access the Internet every/most days – 5% higher than the national average at 43%.
- York households also purchase more over the internet than average.

However:

- 8,000 households (10% of total) prefer face-to-face rather than other forms of communications.
- Of these, 46% live in the outer wards with potentially limited access to face-to-face contact.

Face-to-face customer service points

By spring 2013 the majority of our reception-based services will be provided from a new, purpose built and welcoming customer centre at West Offices.

At the entrance, customers will be welcomed by customer service representatives who will direct them to the service they need. They may be shown to a self-service area where they can pay bills or raise queries online/by phone with assistance from staff if needed, or they may be directed to the comfortable waiting area or private area to speak with someone face-to-face. We will aim to deal with the query there and then or help the customer get to the appropriate support as soon as possible.

To ensure everyone using the centre has an equally pleasant experience the space will:

- be inclusive and accessible
- promote a feeling of openness and transparency
- provide privacy where appropriate
- pay due attention to customer and staff security.

The new customer centre will also have space for other organisations so that customers can access a

range of services in one convenient city centre location.

Further development is also planned for our other key site at Hazel Court, James Street.

Accessibility for all

It is our aim to ensure that all our customers have fair access to the services provided by the council and organisations we work with. We will consider our customers differing requirements when designing or changing our services, and target our support to those most in need.

For example:

- When developing our website or printed information we will ensure that it is accessible to customers, whatever their background or level of need.
- Our employees will be appropriately trained to understand customers' differing needs.
- Our locations for face-to-face contact with our customers will fully comply with the Equality Act 2010.
- We will ensure that any consultation on the design of our services reaches all groups including black, minority and ethnic groups, older and younger people and socially or financially disadvantaged groups.

The strategy

Our vision is:

‘To deliver the right services, cost-effectively, at the right time, in the right way for you.’

It is based on the following priorities:

- We will improve the ways and choices of ways customers can access our services.
- We will provide a service in a courteous, responsive and timely way.
- We are committed to working jointly with our customers and other providers of services.
- We will continually assess the quality of our services to make sure they remain accessible, efficient and include everyone.
- We will make it easier for our customers and communities to do things for themselves in their own local areas.

By the end of 2014/15 we will ensure we:

- ✓ have a greater understanding of our customers
- ✓ are always open for business
- ✓ are working with and in our communities.

What can our customers expect?

Customers will:

- have a choice about how to get in contact with us quickly and easily
- be able to do it at times that suits their lifestyle
- receive an answer to their enquiries
 - in a timely manner
 - in the way that they prefer
- feel listened to and understood
- have access to up-to-date information about our services.

We will constantly review and refresh our approach set down in this strategy to make sure that we continue to meet our customers’ needs and expectations.

Understanding our customers

To help meet customers' needs we need to understand better who they are, what services they need and how they want to access and use them.

In order to do this, we will work with all services across the council and others we work with to create a central, secure source of data or information (what we call 'the hub') about our customers and communities.

The hub will give us a complete view of customer needs based on the services they want and how they access and use them.

Information will be taken from a variety of sources, including:

- The results of the 2011 census.
- Data about our communities from an information source called Experian.
- Equalities data we hold across all of our services.
- Data on take-up of services.
- Our area-based teams.
- Our partner organisations in the city.
- Our own customer records and feedback.
- Data from customer questionnaires and face-to-face consultation sessions we often hold.
- Our annual service plans.

The hub will translate all of this customer data into accurate management information and maps that we, and the organisations we work with, can use to agree plans and designs for our services that are based on a clear understanding of customers' needs and views.

Information in the hub will also be available to all services and organisations we work closely with in delivering public services so that we all focus our efforts in the right areas.

Did you know?

Targeted leaflet drops in 2011 using the customer profiling data in two discrete areas of Chapelfields and Carr Estate resulted in increased income to benefits claimants in those areas of £33,000 a year.

Across the city, our welfare benefits advisers have worked directly with customers within their communities, resulting in increased benefits take-up of more than £1million in 2011/12.

Our commitment:

- ✓ To work with other organisations in providing a city profile of York including the preferences of customers who work, live and visit here.
- ✓ To base the design of our services on high quality information about our customers.
- ✓ To ensure we review information that tells us about customers' changing preferences and behaviour and that we respond accordingly.
- ✓ To consult with our customers so that they feel that they are involved and are at the heart of what we do.
- ✓ To consider our customers' feedback in driving improvement in services and informing them when we have made those changes.

Always open

We are aiming to develop an 'always open' approach to customer service by increasing the number of ways in which people can contact us and ensuring services are available at the times and in the ways they need.

This is how we will do this:

- We will use new digital technology, including mobile applications (apps) and social media, to bring our services into homes and businesses for the convenience of customers.

Did you know?

In May 2011 we launched 'Do It Online' services on our website where customers can quickly and conveniently order services or report a missed bin, reserve library books, apply for school admissions or for student exemptions. The amount of customers using our online service is increasing – 1,230 service requests were made online in April 2012 compared to 586 in June 2011. Ninety-five per cent of students in York have applied for services online.

- We will improve our website so it will be even simpler to use and more customer-focused.
- Contacting us by telephone will be simpler in the future with one single number to call.
- We will develop a mobile phone service so that subscribers can receive alerts and messages about the weather, floods, road and schools closures, for example.
- We will work with other organisations in the city to ensure everyone is able to make use of our self-service facilities.
- We will also work closely with other organisations to provide greater access to web-based services by improving the city-wide network of cabling.
- We will provide free access to the internet from within all our Explore centres/Libraries and at Energise.
- We will expand the number of free Wi-Fi areas within the city and within council-owned buildings.
- We will provide free training and support for residents to get online – part of our Race Online 2012 commitment to make York a digitally inclusive city.
- We will work with other organisations to ensure that everyone is digitally included.

Our commitment:

- ✓ To increase the availability of web-based services.
- ✓ To ensure we have access to the most up-to-date tools and technology, which matches modern lifestyles, for example, mobile apps and social media developments.
- ✓ To continue to develop our website to ensure it is easy to use, accessible and is an open door to other services in our city.
- ✓ To enable our customers to make the most of digital services, for example, by providing free training to help them get online.
- ✓ To look at other ways we can make our services accessible such as through digital television channels.
- ✓ To ensure residents, visitors and businesses benefit from high quality Wi-Fi internet access in council buildings and within the city walls.
- ✓ To move towards making high quality internet access available in all York communities by 2015.
- ✓ To ensure we use our city centre customer spaces in the best way to meet different customer needs in a safe and welcoming environment.

Did you know?

In November 2011 we launched a free city centre Wi-Fi trial to give people wireless access to the internet on their laptops, smart phones or other internet enabled devices from St Helen's Square and Coney Street. Within four months, it had registered over one million hits.

We have since set up more free Wi-Fi spots in Rowntree Park and Museum Gardens and eventually aim to make the whole of the city centre a Wi-Fi area.

Working with and in our communities

Inside and outside of the city centre, we will be working hard to understand the differing needs of our communities and Wards in detail. Community Contracts for each ward will describe the challenges and how the council, other organisations and partners will work together to address them.

We will ensure that all our teams working in the community work together to identify and resolve issues.

We will also be working more closely with partner organisations and the voluntary sector for the benefit of our customers.

For example, in Heworth we have brought together agencies like the Citizen's Advice Bureau, Future Prospects, Credit Union and the Housing Association and our benefits services to provide financial advice and support through our community and children's centres.

The government's Localism Bill has set out an agenda for enabling local communities, organisations and charities to challenge for the right to take over services at a local level.

We will support local people, voluntary and charitable organisations in enabling them to shape and deliver their own services in innovative ways.

No matter who delivers the service in the community, we will ensure that they are able to meet our customers' needs or can provide information or contact with those who can.

As a council, however, we will seek to retain delivery of services wherever they meet the specific and specialist needs of large, diverse or hard to reach groups.

Our commitment:

- ✓ To develop and deliver services in partnership with communities at a local level to address their particular needs.
- ✓ To ensure our teams or people working on our behalf in the community take responsibility for what they see and take action where it is needed.

Customer Strategy 2012 - 2015



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