

Customer Services
Service Statement

April 2019



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Head of Service: Mary Readman
Lead Member: Cllr Nick Oliver

Customer Services

Purpose

Our team provides the Council's first point of contact service for customers accessing services. We support service delivery across all Council functions except Adults and Children's Social Care. We operate from the contact centre at Cramlington (telephony/web/social/ media) and from 9 Information Centres across the County for our face to face provision

We want to resolve as many enquiries as possible at first contact and provide effective access to services. We work closely with services to ensure that we provide the most up to date information and can inform customers what they can expect from us.

Our aims are to:

- **Resolve** as many enquiries at first point of contact as possible
- **Engage** with customers for successful outcomes
- **Achieve** the best level of service we can
- **Connect** people with what they need
- **Help** customers to help themselves

Primary functions

We provide the first point of contact service for residents, visitors and businesses wishing to transact with the Council. The main contact channels are: online (website and social media); telephony via the contact centre in Cramlington and in person at one of our 9 Information Centres across the County.

The service also supports payments for services via the contact centre and at a handitill at some of the Information Centres.

Some key facts and figures

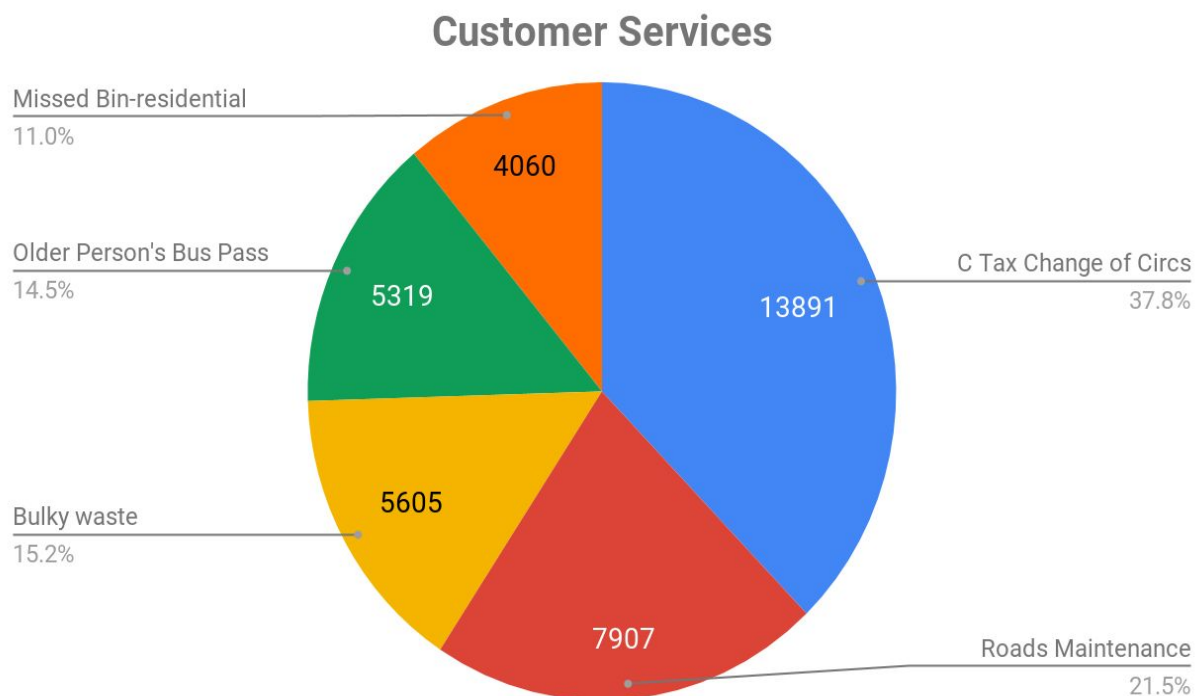
1. The contact centre handles in excess of 300,000 telephone calls a year
2. The 9 Information Centres are based at:
 - Alnwick
 - Ashington
 - Bedlington
 - Berwick
 - Blyth
 - Cramlington
 - Hexham
 - Morpeth
 - Seaton Delaval

3. The Information Centres deal with approximately 180,000 visits per year.

Last year the service:

4. Provided information on 593 occasions to Customers regarding Universal Credit and assisted 93 Customers to complete a Universal Credit claim by way of an Assisted Digital session.
5. Helped customers on over 5,000 occasions to obtain bus passes
6. Supported over 8,000 customers to make a payment in our handitills
7. Received documents for application processing / proof purposes in excess of 22,000 times
8. Dealt with over 20,000 repair enquiries and appointment bookings over the telephone
9. Took 15,000 payments over the telephone
10. Dealt with over 50,000 enquiries relating to Revenues and Benefits enquiries by telephone

In terms of reasons for contacting us, during the last financial year, the graph below shows the areas of high volumes of transactions or requests for service using the telephony and face to face channels:



Contribution to the Corporate Plan

Customer Services provides the Council's first point of contact service, enabling customers to find out information on council services; report an issue; subscribe and pay for services; access support and assistance; request a service and update the Council with information which enables the Council to carry out its functions. The service therefore supports delivery against all of the Council's objectives. Specifically, the service provides the following contribution:

"We want to be efficient, open and work for everyone" How

We provide a range of channels for customers to access services. Our service aims to provide resolution of the enquiry at first point; therefore our development and improvement plans are aimed at ensuring staff are fully skilled, empowered and able to navigate systems supporting service delivery effectively.

"We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for" Living

It is important that our service is able to ensure that all customers are provided with the information and support they need - signposting to key partners and delivery agencies wherever appropriate. We also aim to capture information which can provide insight to services on what our customers are contacting us about so we can use that to inform and influence service improvement actions

"We want you to love where you live" Enjoying

Data captured by our interactions with customers provides us with insight to inform service improvement and information which is invaluable to the Council when developing its plans. Its therefore key that we work with service areas to share that customer intelligence and use it to influence learning and improvement.

"We want you to have access to the things you need" Connecting

Our aim is to ensure that customers are able to obtain the advice, information and support they need from the Council and partners. We want to train and develop our team to be able to provide this rounded service so will build our knowledge and networks to skill our team to do this.

"We want you to achieve and realise your potential" Learning

As the first point of contact for Northumberland's Adult Learning and Skills service, we are a key conduit to support learning. We also want to support customers who want to transact with us online so are skilling up our team to support customers to build their digital skills

"We want to attract more and better jobs" Thriving

It is important that we support residents, visitors and businesses to be able to access services easily, so we will continue to work with Council services and external partners such

as Advance, to ensure we have the information and knowledge to do this

“We want to make a difference” Success Measures

We will develop our performance framework to ensure that our service is delivering its objectives and that we are also recording data which can be used by services to inform their plans and improvement activity.

Summary of Service Resources at 1 April 2019

	Number of posts FTE	Staffing Expenditure £'000	Non Staffing Expenditure £'000	Income £'000	Net Expenditure £'000	Capital Investment £'000
Contact Centre	48.11	1,428,000	1,318,580	392,740	2,353,840	0
Information Centres	29.12	939,280	85,850	236,830	788,300	0
Total						

Service Standards

The Council's Customer Charter sets out the current key performance measure identifying the levels of service expected by the team in relation to call handling:

answer 95% calls in 120 seconds

During 2018/19, the service achieved 44% and the average wait time was 218 secs

The current indicators do not cover the whole service, therefore new indicators for customers visiting the IC's /complaints dealt with etc are being developed

Customer Feedback

In the last financial year, we received 9 complaints around delivery of our service and 76 compliments. 89% of complaints were resolved within agreed timescales.

Of the customers we assisted to make a claim for Universal Credit 88% provided the service with a maximum score.

Residents Survey

The key findings from the 2018 Residents Survey identified:

- ★ The great majority of residents (90%) have some form of internet access, most often through broadband (85%). More than half access the internet by mobile phone (55%) up from 2015 (41%). The great majority of those with internet access (93%) feel confident about using the internet. Most use the internet to find information or to communicate (96% and 94%).

- ★ Two-thirds (66%) have contacted the Council within the last two years and are most likely to have done so by telephone (43%), although 36% also got in touch electronically via the internet. Overall residents are largely satisfied with their experiences of contacting the Council.

- ★ Reporting a problem of some kind is the main reason that residents have contacted the Council via the webpage or online services (37%). This is followed by making a payment for services (29%) or to find out information about local events (28%). However, when it comes to reporting a problem, residents still prefer to do this by telephone (37%) than via the website (25%).

- ★ When using the Council website, seven in ten residents were able to do everything themselves (69%) although this number is lower for those who are older or have a disability. Just 21% say that they have logged on to the website and they have been unable to do their intended action.

- ★ The Council website is the most used (by 51%) and preferred (by 44%) source to get Council related information. This has changed from 2015 when most residents got their Council information from local media (34% in 2018 and 54% in 2015).

- ★ 70% of those surveyed said they were satisfied in finding it easy to find the right person to deal with

- ★ 62% were happy with their overall contact experience.

Priorities for 2019 – 2021

Resolve as many enquiries at first point of contact as possible

Priority area	Key milestones
Build stronger relationships with services through the “Customer Experience” meetings aimed at improving the way in which the Council handles customer contact and delivers requests for service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review the programme of meetings to extend further into other service areas by September 2019 ● Develop action plans to deliver improvements based on data and information from the Customer Services Team by December 2019
Identify “quick wins” by looking at data on call backs from the CRM and working with those services to address areas where customers have needed to make further contact the Council to progress chase/report service failure/confirm next steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analyse call backs data to identify top 10 service areas where improvements are needed by June 2019 ● Develop a programme of review by July 2019 ● Agree and implement changes to the service model by October 2019
Explore an integrated service offer with the Library Service in terms of face to face provision to identify key synergies and opportunities to join up service provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deliver a workshop with Customer Services and the Library service to identify opportunities for more joined up provision by June 2019 ● Develop a plan to support delivery of service enhancements by July 2019 ● Develop a training plan to enable staff to support customers to self serve by August 2019 ● Deliver “digital skills/self service” sessions in key buildings by October 2019

Engage with customers for successful outcomes

Priority area	Key milestones
Continue to support customers moving onto Universal Credit by working with partners to provide assistance where needed and continue to build processes for signposting customers to support mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue to gather and analyse data in relation to customer assistance/information in relation to Universal Credit to identify any gaps in provision by July 2019 ● Work with key partners - DWP/Citizens Advice to further develop the Universal

	<p>Support offer for Northumberland by August 2019</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Poverty Lead/Welfare Rights Team/Housing providers to monitor the impact of UC rollout and identify further improvement actions by August 2019 • Continue to develop and deliver communications messages for customers; including updating the website (ongoing)
<p>Complete a review of Customer Feedback; including producing a new Corporate Complaints policy and process. Work with services to ensure that complaints are handled in a timely, effective way and that all feedback is used to inform learning and service improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map the current process and meet with services to assess the existing provision against the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman framework of best practice by May 2019 • Develop a new policy for handling corporate complaints by July 2019 • Work with the Director of Corporate Governance to identify improvements around the corporate complaints process and process for dealing with Chief Executive complaints by July 2019 • Identify improvement actions in relation to staff and Elected Member training; guidance and system development by July 2019 • Improve reporting of Customer Feedback to Executive and Elected Members; in particular identifying learning outcomes by September 2019 • Improve management information around customer feedback through the development of Senior Manager dashboards by April 2020

Achieve the best level of service we can

Priority area	Key milestones
<p>Improved performance; leading to high levels of customer satisfaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed work groups approach in the contact centre • Carry out staff roadshows by October 2019 • Build a “one team” approach (ongoing) • Develop and deliver a temporary additional resource plan which will enable the service to implement improvement actions to build

	<p>capacity and resilience across the team. This includes training Information Centre Team to support the telephony function by May 2019</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learn from the results of the 2018 staff survey and deliver an improvement plan to address key issues raised by May 2019 ● Develop and deliver a training programme which increases digital skills, builds service knowledge and enables staff to deal with customers confidently and within a first point of resolution culture by July 2019 ● Continue to monitor resource levels against demand to perform at optimum levels (ongoing) ● Review the performance management framework to identify meaningful measures to monitor service improvements; this will include a new set of measures around customer satisfaction by December 2019
Better attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communicate as a key challenge to all staff through vlogs/team briefings/focus groups by May 2019 ● Monthly “clinics” in place with HR to discuss current levels and agree actions by May 2019 ● Use results from staff survey to identify key factors potentially impacting attendance levels by May 2019 ● Train and develop managers to apply the Wellbeing Policy to manage attendance effectively by May 2019
Engage with all staff across the service and embed the service’s aims and objectives - “REACH”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use feedback from staff roadshows and staff survey to further develop key communications mechanisms across the service to ensure staff are engaged in key decisions by July 2019 ● Use a range of communications mechanisms to ensure staff understand and are working towards the service’s aims and objectives by June 2019 ● Deliver a programme of key projects aimed at service improvements; building and utilising capacity within the team: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Revs & Bens Service Delivery Model <input type="checkbox"/> Handitills <input type="checkbox"/> Appointments - Information Centres

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Opening Hours Review <input type="checkbox"/> Out of Hours Review <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Information on the website <p>All projects to be developed and completed by December 2020</p>
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Connect people with what they need

Priority area	Key milestones
Review the telephony and CRM platforms so that they are fit for purpose and support the omni channel/self service approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop a specification for the telephony/CRM platforms by June 2019 ● Undertake a procurement exercise to identify suitable suppliers by August 2019 ● Develop an action plan for implementation by August 2019
Work with the Property Service to review the Council's public access buildings - to improve the county's face to face provision; enhance self service and deliver the Council's digital strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Map existing provision across the County by main Township; identifying building/service provision and customer data (footfall etc) by July 2019 ● Engage with service users to determine customer need by October 2019 ● Improve the self service offer and digital signage by October 2019 ● Identify opportunities for improving the " front of house" offer in terms of staffing requirements, integration and up skilling by November 2019 ● Identify opportunities for rationalisation/improving the customer offer by December 2019 ● Develop a strategy to deliver the Council's joined up face to face provision by March 2020 ● Develop a communications plan to support service changes by April 2020

Help customers to help themselves

Priority area	Key milestones
Enable the team to support customers to help themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a survey of staff to assess digital skills and develop a training programme to enhance these with a view to supporting customers to self serve by July 2019 Develop a performance framework to measure success by December 2019
Improve self service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with ICT/Services to develop and deliver the digital programme aimed at increasing self service provision by July 2019 Monitor delivery of the programme through a robust governance framework by July 2019
Raise awareness of the benefits of going online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the Communications Team to develop a communications plan and campaign which encourages people to use self service to access services by October 2019

Performance Framework

Measure	Outturn 2017-18	Outturn 2018-19	Target 2019-20	Target 2020-21
Average time to answer calls (seconds)	173 seconds	218 seconds	120 seconds	120 seconds
Percentage of answered calls to the contact centre within 180 seconds	n/a *	44%**	95%	95%
Percentage of calls answered	76.9%	78.3%	90%	90%
Complaints answered within the specified timescale	60%	89%	100%	100%

* different target during this period, not comparable

** period 10th September 2018 - 31st March 2019