

**Central Bedfordshire Council Customer Services Strategy 2009/2011**

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## Executive Summary

Central Bedfordshire Council as a new Unitary Authority is ambitious in its vision for delivery of Customer Service Excellence for all those it serves in its communities. Its ethos and culture is summarised in its vision statement

"Our Vision is to improve the quality of life of all in Central Bedfordshire, and enhance the unique character of our communities and our environment".

To support our vision, the Customer Services Strategy represents the Council's ambitions to meet our customers' needs. To do this the Council has to gain a better understanding of those needs, develop appropriate solutions and ensure they are delivered. We recognise that the authority working alone only provides part of the solution in some instances.

Customers should no longer have to go from one location to another to obtain service from the public sector and therefore this strategy identifies the need to provide single points of access to public sector services. This will involve working closely with our partners in the public sector, to deliver fully joined up, cohesive and efficient services. The Council will focus on what it does best and work with others to provide comprehensive solutions.

This ambition to provide better choice, accessibility, and resolution of public sector services at first point of contact, in a way and at times that are most convenient to our diverse population, will deliver value for money service through:

- understanding the customer requirement and designing the appropriate solution;
- partnership working and;
- operational efficiency.

By gaining an understanding how our customers want to access services we will be able to develop the appropriate access channels encouraging the use of the more cost effective electronic access but ensuring there is appropriate face to face and telephone services.

Fundamentally this approach will enable Central Bedfordshire Council to deliver on the promises and aspirations that the authority has clearly articulated about enhancing customer services.

This strategy provides an overview of customer contact development for Central Bedfordshire Council and its ambition to deliver services jointly to our customers with other public sector partners. The Customer Service Strategy plays a key role in how the Council responds to local challenges and the national transformation agenda.

This strategy fully supports the other corporate initiatives such as our Community Engagement Strategy, our Local Strategic Partnership and our role in national projects such as "Total Place" and "Tell Us Once", and our overall Business Transformation Strategy.

## Chapter One – Ambition and Vision

### 1.0 Ambition

Our ambition is to make Central Bedfordshire Council a more accessible organisation for Central Bedfordshire residents and businesses, with improved and more interactive services.

We will ensure consistent quality service delivery and information provision across existing customer access channels, whilst developing opportunities available to the Council through strong partnership working. Our understanding of customer needs, and the physical and emotional journey that they currently experience with public sector organisations will shape these partnerships, ensuring delivery of real benefits to the customer.

Listening to and understanding our customers' needs and expectations will allow us to redesign our services, to provide a cohesive response to these needs.

All staff will be supported to offer a consistently high level of customer service and have access to high quality sources of accurate information. We will develop a customer first culture across the Council, ensuring that we respond to the diverse needs of our communities. We will work positively with our contractors and partners, so all organisations representing Central Bedfordshire Council in our communities reflect our customer first culture and standards.

### 1.1 The Customer Service vision

*Our vision is to consistently meet and exceed our customers' expectations<sup>1</sup> through service excellence.*

By identifying who our customers are, understanding their needs, preferences and expectations, we will build a picture of how to shape our future service delivery.

By reviewing and continually refining our interactions and processes, walking through each one from the customer perspective, we will gain valuable insight as to how we use the resources at our disposal to work more efficiently and effectively.

By understanding and then acting on customer experiences, we become a more responsive and inclusive body, working in parallel with our public sector

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<sup>1</sup> How do you exceed customers expectations when you go for a meal in a restaurant for example? You expect to be greeted pleasantly, sat at a table of your choice, be given a menu and wine list, have clean cutlery and a nice napkin; and of course have good food. This alone will not impress you. To exceed your expectations you perhaps when greeted, the person remembers your name from the last time you visited, asks if you would like the same table and as a returning customer offers you a free drink. On realising it is a birthday celebration provides a birthday cake. All of these service actions exceed your normal expectation.

partners and our communities, to provide genuinely joined up service solutions, supporting and improving the quality of life for all.

To achieve this shift in customer experience from simple service delivery to exceeding expectations and delight, all staff, contractors and partners, need to understand the customer service vision, their role and responsibilities in achieving this, and have confidence in knowing that their individual actions do make a difference.

## **1.2 What is Customer Service Excellence**

**Customer service excellence in Central Bedfordshire should include:**

- High quality, reliable, flexible and responsive services
- Resolution of multi agency queries at the first point and preferably single point of contact
- Greater choice and convenience – providing a range of customer access channels tailored to meet specific needs
- Improved Accessibility – in locations, at times and in ways which ensure equality and customer preference, minimising where possible, the need for travel
- Consistent – using information effectively to ensure the same level of service and information is available to all
- Joined up – with partners, accessing wider services through a common front door, seamlessly
- Value for money – greater cost effectiveness, reliability and efficiency

This translates to a confidence and trust in the brand identity of Central Bedfordshire Council, that delivers on its promises and meets its obligations in a proactive way.

## **1.3 Current position**

Central Bedfordshire Council starts from a strong background and belief in providing multiple services regardless of how customers choose to contact us. Significant investment has been made in developing a corporate Customer Services model, through telephone contact centres, provision of services face to face in local one stop shops, and multi skilling of its customer service advisors.

To date we have:

- Ensured all households have received regular updated information on the services we offer and how to reach them
- Launched and promoted our Customer Services Charter to both customers and all Central Bedfordshire Council staff
- Installed a new telephony system across all of our Customer Service Centres and main contact centre
- Improved the access to services from our Customer Service Centres
- Delivered an operational website
- Ordered work force management and call recording systems to improve resource allocation and training for customer service advisors

- Introduced automated telephone payments for many council services
- Introduced a single general enquiries telephone number for customer contact
- Introduced a single general enquiries e mail address for customer contact
- Established fair and responsive feedback procedures to respond to compliments, comments and complaints
- Rolled out additional service options like additional direct debit payment dates and the ability to pay your housing rent or council tax via a cash payment card through local shops.
- Completed consultation on customer services opening hours

#### **1.4 Strategy Drivers**

We need to respond to key national, regional and local drivers for change in the context of the geographic area, rather than just the Council or public sector partners in isolation. The key drivers influencing this strategy are:

- The current UK economic climate and the anticipated squeeze on public sector finances
- The need to drive value for money in the eye's of our customers
- The personalisation agenda for adult social care
- Emerging community leadership and community engagement agenda
- CAA – Comprehensive Area Assessment – the Audit Commissions current measurement of our performance and the subsequent audit arrangements.
- The Local Area Agreement –LAA – the Local Strategic Partnership measurement of its performance
- The Transformational Government agenda
- Equality and diversity
- Avoidable (non value) Contact – National Indicator measure14 ensuring we resolve service requests at the first point of contact
- “Tell Us Once” – Department of Work and Pensions joint working project
- Total Place Pilot– From Dependence to Self Reliance
- Climate Change

This Strategy provides a flexible and dynamic foundation for the Council to address these drivers. With our partners in the public sector we will facilitate innovative ways of meeting our customer needs, exceed their expectations and provide excellent value for money.

#### **1.5 Strategy Benefits**

The Customer Services Strategy ensures that we put the customer at the heart of everything we do.

- It enables the Council to clearly state its customer service vision to its customers and public sector partners.
- It identifies the key drivers that are influencing customer service provision.
- It enables the Council to review progress against its customer service vision.

- It states the strategy and key programmes underpinning our customer service delivery.
- It ensures customer service delivery is aligned with other key strategies of the Council such as the Business Transformation Strategy and Sustainable Communities Strategy.
- It provides Customer Service business requirements for the ICT Strategy

## **1.6 Strategic goals**

Our vision to consistently meet and exceed our customers' expectations through service excellence is based on two strategic goals

- Achieving upper quartile customer satisfaction within the Unitary and County Council comparison group
- Delivering an efficient, quality value for money service in partnership with others

To deliver against these goals, a set of principal activities around four themes have been developed. All activities take the approach of gaining customer understanding, defining solutions and implementation and delivery of those solutions. These work themes are to:

### **Work Themes**

- Understand our customers needs and expectations
- Ensuring, with our partners, equal and appropriate access to public services
- Listen, learn and improve
- Promote a high quality, efficient, value for money customer first culture across the whole council

## **1.7 Customer Service Work Theme Activity Programme**

The principal activities relating to each work theme are detailed below, with new ideas, technologies and evidence of best practice will be continually considered, to ensure the most effective achievement of the strategic goals and the Customer Service Vision

### **1.8 Work Theme 1 - Understanding our customer needs and expectations**

#### **1.8.1 Customer Insight Programme**

The ways in which customers are able to contact us has a huge bearing on the overall quality of the service we provide. We will implement a Customer Insight programme as follows

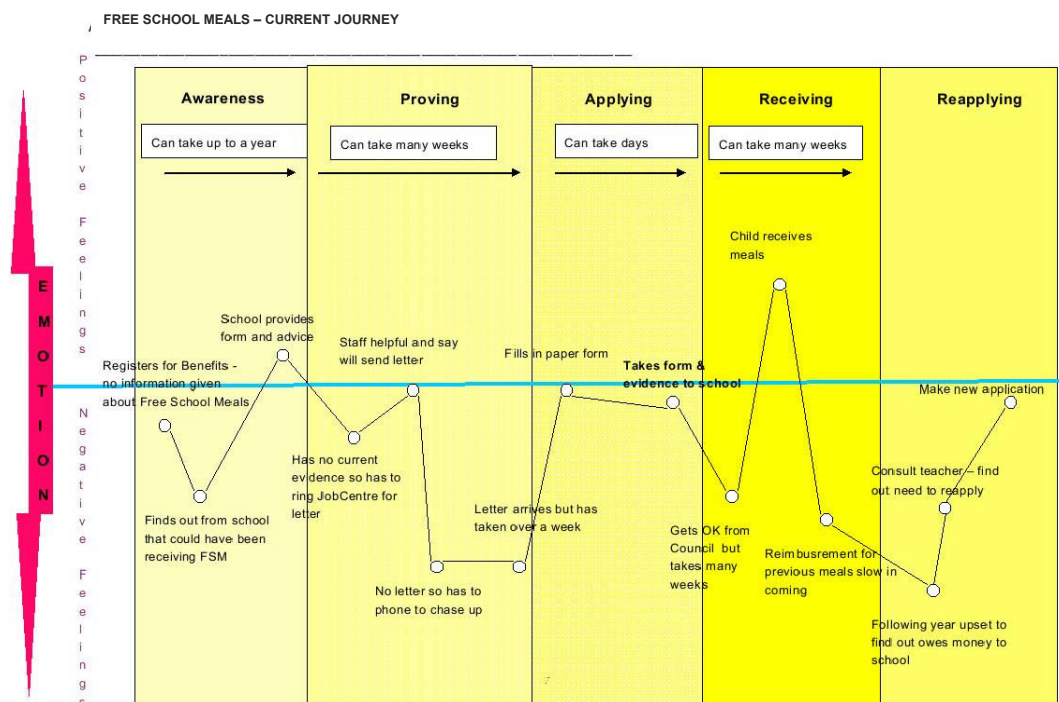
- Use Customer Segmentation data to identify our customer groups. This information will start to inform the types of Council and partner services accessed by each group and their preferred methods of accessing these services.

- Review current access channels with service areas and partners
- Use data on customer use of existing channels to explore how to motivate change to more cost effective channels, including self service
- Undertake customer journey mapping to proactively deliver additional appropriate services at a single point of contact

## Customer Journey map example



### CASE STUDY: TAMESIDE FREE SCHOOL MEALS



- Ensure that equality and diversity issues relating to service delivery and take up are specifically addressed in the analysis
- Develop a public sector village concept, allowing customers to consult multiple organisations in a single place
- Co ordinate multi organisation requests received by telephone or electronically
- Develop services into key themes, life events or seasonal targeting, personalising service provision, co-ordinated by the most appropriate partner
- Coordinate activity across the Council to use customer insight and intelligence in all services, not just at the first point of contact



Seeing our services in a joined up way through the eyes of the customer at the point of need, as well as understanding the trigger for a contact, creates a truly informed appropriate responsive experience for each customer. This will be supported through themed literature, web site information and design, and multi skilling of Customer Service Advisors.

### **1.9 Work Theme 2 - Ensuring, with our partners, equal and appropriate access to public services**

The Council is committed to working jointly with its partners for the benefit of the residents of Central Bedfordshire. Certain Council services are operated on a shared basis with Bedford Borough Council, for example; Central Bedfordshire Council hosts the Registration and Coroners Service on behalf of Bedford Borough (and Luton Borough Council for Coroners Services). Part of the development of this Strategy is to consider the impact of shared service provision against our vision of the customer experience.

We are establishing close links with our partners within emergency, health, Registered Social Landlords and other public services and will work with them to share and implement Customer Insight work. This will inform where a face to face service is the most effective method of service delivery, and therefore allow appropriate investment in key locations within a community from which to deliver multiple services. Use of community fire stations, which stand empty much of the time, and the creation of new Community Health centres by the PCT, which act as a hub for the community, are examples of the investigations that will be conducted.

We will work closely with Town and Parish Councils to ensure the local delivery of services can be delivered where appropriate by those Councils that want to deliver them.

This public sector village concept will result in the Council not always taking a lead role in delivery of services, allowing us to focus on what only the Council can do or what the Council does best, and providing an open approach to our services provision where it is more appropriate for a partner to take the lead. By working with colleagues in the Police Service, who operate on a 24/7 basis, for example, it may be possible for Central Bedfordshire Council customers to continue to reach non emergency information and advice outside of normal business hours.

Robust governance and accountability arrangements will be essential in all elements of partnership working to ensure clear roles and responsibilities for all elements of the partnership arrangements.

Relationships with the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector are important to this Council and have already been demonstrated with co location of the Citizens Advice Bureau at the Customer Service Centres in Ampthill and Leighton Buzzard ( where the VCS (Voluntary Community Services is located). These will be further developed as these relationships mature, with opportunities for inclusion of these services directly in a multi organisation service delivery approach.

### **1.9.1 Total Place**

Central Bedfordshire is one of the Government's 13 "Total Place" pilot projects, in conjunction with Luton Borough Council. This is an ambitious and challenging programme to bring together elements of central government and local agencies to create service transformations that will improve the experience of local residents and deliver better value through efficiencies and to evidence how more effective cross agency working delivers these improvements. The theme for this project is "from dependence to self reliance" and 4 sub themes are being developed for consideration to ensure that effort is concentrated in the area where the aims of the programme will achieve the most benefit for our customers, and achieve the efficiencies required. This Strategy will support the activities of this programme through its significant contribution to Customer Insight work and development of the Customer Access Network as a vehicle for delivery of flexible, relevant and effective single point of contact delivery opportunities.

In addition to this cross organisational work, we will continue to develop and improve other methods of contacting the Council, ensuring these support the direction and commitment to partnership working.

### **1.9.2 Access channel strategy**

In order to use the results of our customer insight programme to respond to customer preferences, we must consider our access channels (ways our customers wish to communicate with us) and ensure that each is fit for purpose, operationally efficient and equipped to respond to the changing priorities and direction of the business

### **1.9.3 Customer Access Network (Where we meet our customers)**

Currently Central Bedfordshire Council provides face to face access through our Customer Services Centres:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Woburn Street, Ampthill</li><li>• Saffron Road, Biggleswade</li><li>• West Street, Leighton Buzzard</li><li>• Council Offices, Dunstable</li><li>• Priory House, Shefford</li><li>• Bedford Square, Houghton Regis</li></ul>	Insert map of locations of CSCs
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In addition to our existing Customer Service Centres we will :

- review the use of all our public access buildings, including libraries and Adult Social Care Centres, as part of an overall asset management review, identifying how, by including them in the Customer Access Network, a wider range of relevant Council and partner services can be provided

- evaluate the potential migration of mobile library vehicles into the Customer Access Network, thereby reaching those communities identified as requiring face to face service, but with limited transport or close access to a Customer Access Network location.
- evaluate the current opening hours in conjunction with our wider ambitions and results of our customer insight programme

#### **1.9.4 Telephony Access Channel**

We will develop our use of non geographic 0300 telephone numbers, minimising the range of numbers published to make contact easier for our customers. A non geographic number provides greater flexibility to maintain business continuity, and the new range of 0300 numbers offers better value for money for those customers choosing to contact the Council by telephone.

#### **1.9.5 Automated telephone payments**

This has been implemented, allowing secure payments to be made 24/7 for council tax, housing benefit overpayments, housing rents and sundry invoices. Automating these transactions provides increased accessibility as it is available 24 by 7 and increased customer service advisor capacity to resolve more complex enquiries where there is a need to interpret and advise, thus improving the customer experience.

#### **1.9.6 Email Access Channel**

The [customer.services@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:customer.services@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk) email address allows customers to make an enquiry online or request information. It includes an automatic acknowledgement response, detailing the timescales in which a full response can be expected.

#### **1.9.7 Text (SMS) Access Channel**

This method of accessing Council services is not yet in place and an evaluation of its viability will be undertaken. This will incorporate the Customer Insight Programme findings to inform which services would most benefit from its introduction. From implementation in other Councils, the use of SMS can extend to report incidents from missed bins to potholes and streetlights, and for the Council to remind customers that payments are due, when appointments have been made for officers to visit them, and to promote new events, including children's activities.

#### **1.9.8 Internet Access Channel- [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)**

The development of the website into an easily accessible, highly transactional environment is a key element of the delivery of the Customer Services vision. We will work to deliver all services via the single website address with intuitive links to individual activities, to present a consistent contact location for our customers.

Building on Customer Insight and Customer Journey mapping concepts, the Council can maximise self service for those communities where electronic contact is their preference. Based on experiences at other Councils and enabled by appropriate technologies, customers can report and track their requests through a personal secure log in. This can extend to video interactions, web chat and recent developments such as Facebook and

Twitter. Development of the web strategy is a high priority for the Council and as part of our partnership commitment, we will ensure that a joined up approach is taken in its development.

#### **1.9.9 Public Internet Access Channel - I-stop kiosks**

Even in communities where the prevailing access preference is not electronic, we are able to promote access to our website, and those of our partners, through a self service I-stop kiosk, located in local retail outlets. This innovative development is already in the pilot phase with 11 kiosks in place and access to [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk) being progressed. The kiosks also provide information from JobCentre Plus, particularly relevant in the current economic climate, together with a product ordering / shopping element, benefiting customers without other access to internet shopping. Goods are delivered to the retailer hosting the kiosk, increasing their footfall and potential for increased revenue. The results of the pilot will be evaluated in the context of the wider opportunities for joint working and recommendations for possible further roll out made at that time.

#### **1.9.10 Digital TV Access Channel**

The increasing take up of cable and satellite television services provides an additional way for customers to access information about Council Services. Digital TV provides a joined up service in a similar way to the public internet concept detailed in section 2.6.1 as it provides links to Job Centre Plus and health information, but from the comfort of the customers home. The two services together enable customers, with or without personal internet or cable / satellite access, to obtain information at a place and time of their choosing. Further development of this service is expected to include access via "Freeview". Central Bedfordshire will evaluate the use of this channel during 2009, in the context of wider partnership opportunities and how Council Services are made available equally to all parts of our communities

#### **1.9.11 Remote Face to Face Access Channel - Community Access Points**

An opportunity exists to provide virtual face to face interaction with our customers in more isolated communities, where no Central Bedfordshire or partner building is available, or volume of enquiries does not warrant a physical presence. This can be provided using a model implemented by East Riding of Yorkshire where:

- communication facilities exist in a secure "building"
- a customer gains entry via an advisor based in the contact centre
- a virtual face to face discussion takes place with the customer
- technology such as scanners can be installed to allow documents to be handled and information provided back to the customer.

This option will be considered as part of the wider public sector village concept, ensuring access to Council and partner services for all our residents and will require significant research and investment to develop and implement.

#### **1.9.12 Translation and Interpretation**

The Council recognises that in order to ensure that services are accessible to all sections of the community, consideration must be given to the need to

provide accessible information and ensure positive outcomes for people who have a disability, speak English as a second language or have low levels of literacy. We will therefore ensure that documents, signage, websites, leaflets etc comply with good practice standards relating to Plain English, clear texts, translation into other languages and accessibility for disabled people.

The Council will not automatically translate or transcribe all public materials but will take into account evidence of need or demand for the translation, and importantly, evidence that people will be disadvantaged without this provision. A decision will be made taking into account overall budget constraints and wider activities that can be taken to improve access to services.

The Council will commission transcription, translation and interpretation services from external contractors as appropriate. Decisions will be based on the extent to which translation is crucial to enabling particular individuals to:

- access essential services including education, social care, benefits, housing, police and safety campaigns e.g. fire and road safety
- participate in local democracy for example enabling people to register to vote or take part in local consultations
- support local community groups or intermediaries working directly with new migrants or non-English speaking communities
- enable people to function effectively as citizens in society and be able to get along with others, by ensuring that they understand local rules and appreciate local customs e.g. waste disposal, parking restrictions and common courtesies

## **1.10 Work Theme 3 - Listen, learn and improve**

### **1.10.1 Consultation**

Whilst developing and implementing improved customer access to services, it is critical that we proactively consult, listen and act upon the feedback that we receive. If this element of customer service is not included in our service improvement model, we will not be in tune with the changing needs and expectations of our various customer groups. The development of the customer insight programme will play a vital role in establishing how customers wish to communicate with us and, therefore, how we target resources to ensure the most effective feedback methods are used. To achieve the ambition of multi agency working, this feedback becomes essential to the direction and inclusion of additional partners and services in the model.

### **1.10.2 Performance and Feedback**

Being responsive to customers is a two way process; as we make available more information allowing customers to make choices and decisions about services, they provide us with feedback on how we can further improve customer service. We will:

- actively seek the views of those residents and businesses who do not consider themselves service users of the Council, e.g. those residents who

may not have the need to seek assistance in the areas of Social Care, Education or Housing; pay their Council Tax by direct debit and whose refuse is correctly collected.

- use this feedback to deliver services in an innovative way
- create a Customer Forum, including Councillors, to act as a key driver for service development and improvement of the customer experience
- work closely with the Customer Relations team to listen and act in cases where customers have cause to make formal complaints, comments and compliments of the service we have provided
- develop a corporate customer satisfaction monitoring programme across all service areas within the Council to provide valuable and consistent feedback of our customers' views and expectations, including face to face, telephone, postal, e mail surveys and mystery shopping commissioning
- support the Community Engagement Strategy to enhance participation and empowerment in our communities
- publish our performance together with action plans for improvements
- work with our Councillors to champion engagement with our communities

The Customer Charter appended to this Strategy sets out the standards that our customers can expect to receive in their dealings with us.

This mechanism will be extended across our partners as the public sector village concept develops, ensuring we act in a cohesive way to deliver improvements and efficiencies to all services

### **1.10.3 Customer Relations**

The customer feedback procedure will be the method by which customers can give feedback and be sure that they will be listened to and taken seriously.

The aims of the procedure are to

- provide an effective means for customers to give feedback about the quality or nature of services
- ensure that those who complain or comment are dealt with promptly, fairly, openly and honestly
- to be open, easy to access and responsive to customers
- ensure complaints are acted on with the focus on the complainants desired outcomes where these are realistic and achievable
- resolve complaints quickly and as close to the point of service delivery as acceptable and appropriate

### **1.10.4 Communication and Marketing**

Research shows that the reputation of local councils is strongly influenced by both the effectiveness of customer contact and the clarity of brand management within customer service contexts.

Communications services will be deployed to ensure that the brand identity of Central Bedfordshire Council is appropriately positioned so that customers are clear about who is accountable for customer services. Marketing will also support our customers in providing clear signposts to our customer services

and shaping information on line and in conventional formats that is designed around the needs and preferences of customers, rather than our organisation.

Developing a multi agency approach to delivery customer solutions will require working together with our partners to correctly position the Central Bedfordshire brand in this approach and a draft partnership brand of the LSP is under development.

The corporate Communication Strategy will reflect customer service objectives and will shape the culture and personality of the Customer Access Network and public sector village. Likewise, the customer insight programme provides a vital feed into the development and implementation of the Communication Strategy, by evidencing effective communication channels for all our residents and ensuring maximum return on investment for our chosen marketing and communication campaigns.

For the Customer Service Strategy to successfully achieve its ambitions, it must become a living document relevant to every officer, Member, contractor and partner to the Council. Each individual, team and service area has the ability to make a real difference to the residents and businesses of Central Bedfordshire. Internal Communications and Organisational Development initiatives will support the process of raising awareness and commitment to the customer first culture within the Council. Where we work in partnership with other authorities or organisations, we will also seek to influence behaviours to make a difference to those outside of our geographical boundaries.

The commitment to ensuring consistent and high levels of customer service will be driven through the Customer Charter and is one of the foundation stones for each service area to measure its performance against.

Activities in this area will be supported by the translation and interpretation services detailed in section 1.9.12 above.

#### **1.11 Work Theme 4 – A customer first culture delivering quality and value for money services**

The way in which we conduct business must be challenged to

- remove waste and duplication
- have meaningful customer interactions
- enable staff with the correct skills and knowledge to exceed customer needs and expectations.

##### **1.11.1 Customer Service Advisors**

To deliver against the service standards laid down in the Customer Charter, it is essential to invest in our Customer Services Team, both in respect of service related training and development, and a clear career progression model.

Linking into the concept of service delivery through key themes or life events, the Customer Service Advisors will be provided with opportunities to progress, by becoming competent in the delivery of front office related services, e.g. ability to gather information required to validate entitlement to Housing and Council Tax benefits, concessionary travel entitlement, education and welfare benefits in one transaction, rather than dealing with more than one Customer Service Advisor or service area. This will extend to the delivery of partnership services to provide a fully integrated customer solution experience.

Customer Services Team Managers will act as Account Managers for each service and partner area to:

- ensure a seamless relationship between front and back office
- meet regularly with a “Customer Champion” within the service to discuss performance
- agree action plans and additional training based on feedback from customers and staff and any changes in process or legislation.
- strengthen relationships between Customer Services and service areas, fostering an environment of trust and desire to continually improve the customer experience.

#### **1.11.2 “Tell Us Once”**

This national initiative is led by the Department of Work and Pensions, enabling a customer to report a change of circumstances, such as a death, to one Government agency or Local Authority and for that information to be disseminated to other organisations that need to be aware of the change. This project is being piloted in Southwark Council, Wolverhampton City Council and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. The results will inform how this project can work for the benefit of the residents of Central Bedfordshire, and provide efficiencies and increased job satisfaction for the Customer Services Team

#### **1.11.3 Council Staff**

The Customer Champion for each service area will be responsible for promoting the ambition and vision of the Customer Service Strategy, through training and coaching of staff to consider all activities from the customer perspective. This will accelerate the culture change that is required to drive Central Bedfordshire Council forward and deliver against our ambition of multi agency collaboration.

#### **1.11.4 Members**

Elected Members play a key role in promoting and delivering against the ambitions set out in the Strategy. They will be helped to communicate and engage more with the communities they represent, acting as a “critical friend and be supported to respond quickly to customer issues that have been brought to their attention. Members are therefore well placed to provide a direct conduit to staff on customer issues. Their input and dialogue is vital to ensuring that we are producing tangible benefits to our communities. Customer Services Account managers will act as a liaison between Members and officers to ensure customer issues are resolved.



### **1.11.5 Customer Service Excellence**

The Government introduced Customer Service Excellence as a replacement for Charter Mark in March 2008 to formally recognise public services that are providing efficient, effective, excellent, equitable and empowering service to their residents and businesses. It is an independent validation of achievement of an organisations self improvement and skills development in the areas of customer focus and engagement, thereby building capacity to deliver improved services.

We will use Customer Service Excellence as a reference point in our service design, ensuring we deliver relevant and efficient services, based on customer insight, in a way that is innovative and provides value for money. We will work with our partners to develop this accreditation for all those participating in the multi agency concept.

We will:

- seek to achieve Corporate Customer Service Excellence over a 5 year period, with corporate evidence and Business Transformation Directorate accreditation within 2 years
- identify phasing to include all services
- harness the work of the customer insight programme, “Total Place” project, Business Transformation, Service Improvement and “Tell Us Once” to demonstrate the improvement our customers will see in the responsiveness of our service delivery

### **1.11.6 Business Transformation Programme**

Supporting operational efficiencies and improvements to the customer experience, Business Transformation provides an invaluable impetus to meet the programmes identified above.

By identifying areas within a service which can be efficiently provided by Customer Services at the first point of contact, reducing duplication within the customer journey and embedding a culture of “walking in the customers shoes” through each experience, Business Transformation will produce tangible improvements in the business processes of Central Bedfordshire Council.

This process will identify where partnership arrangements should be developed and strengthened, helping to shape strategic plans for the joined up work we will pursue.

### **1.11.7 National Indicator 14 (non value added contact)**

**NI14** (Non value added contact) is an indicator introduced in 2008/9 to reduce “avoidable contact” between the community and local authorities. The definitions of “avoidable” challenge the way we communicate with our customers and how well we deliver on our service standards. We will:

- create a framework to collect and analyse contacts in all service areas
- identify actions and improvements to feed into both Business Transformation and ongoing service improvement activities

- ensure the reduction in avoidable contacts by implementation of these plans is captured and costed.

NI14 supports the empowerment of staff to get it right first time and provide increased job satisfaction for all staff, building capacity to deliver more services which improve the quality of life of the residents of Central Bedfordshire.

## **Chapter 2 – Implementation and Monitoring**

This strategy provides an overview of customer contact development for Central Bedfordshire Council and its ambition to deliver services jointly to our customers with other public sector partners. The Customer Service Strategy plays a key role in how the Council responds to local challenges and the national transformation agenda.

This strategy should inform and support other strategies being developed by Central Bedfordshire Council to ensure a consistent message and approach for service delivery to our customers, whether this is through partnership arrangements, contracted services or directly provided by this Council.

### **2.1 Ownership**

Ownership of the Customer Service Strategy will be with the Director of Business Transformation, who will:-

- Promote and communicate the Strategy to stakeholders
- Seek approval for the Strategy
- Ensure that this Strategy is incorporated into all Directorate service plans
- Keep the Strategy under ongoing review and development

### **2.2 Implementation and Monitoring**

Accountability for the implementation of the Strategy in each service area will be with the individual Director for that service. The Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee will monitor progress against the strategy action plan.

## **Appendix 1 - Technology Enablers**

In order for the Council to succeed in delivering the vision set out in this Strategy a number of key technological “enablers” will be considered.

### **1 - CRM (Customer Relationship Management)**

To achieve the ability to provide more personalised customer services, it is necessary to develop a single view of each customer and how they are using or not using appropriate services. It is accepted that this is best achieved through a CRM system. This will enhance the Customer Access Network as it will ultimately provide a single portal for Customer Service Advisors to multiple sources of information to provide enquiry resolution, whether over the telephone, at a Customer Service centre or from a mobile location. The development of web services identified above is built on providing secure customer access to the CRM system.

Procurement and implementation of a CRM system is a business requirement that must form part of the ICT Strategy. Detailed requirements analysis will take place to ensure that a CRM is delivered at the earliest point and that it adds value to the customer experience.

This is an ideal vehicle to support multi agency working as all participants can use a single system to link customer enquiries across organisations, ensuring open access to information and resolution from a single interaction with the customer.

### **2 - Speech recognition technology**

Recognising the cultural hurdles that have to be overcome, the strategy proposed to evaluate the use of speech recognition technology for the telephony channel, (allowing customers to select the service or officer they wish to speak to). A business case will be produced for consideration by Members to support its implementation.

The benefits of such technology are:

- avoiding the need for multiple selections and menus associated with a traditional routing system
- ability to automate routine enquiries or reporting without the need for a “real” agent
- releasing capacity within existing resources to more complex enquiries, requiring greater interpretation and empathy
- this technology works 24/7 allowing reporting “out of hours” at a time convenient to the customer, via the telephone.
- the ability to direct enquiries directly to partner organisations without the customer needing to interpret which organisation can meet their need

## Appendix 2 - Action Plan

The following action plan provides an overview summary of the key outcomes and provides details of customer benefits and measurement to show progress against each outcome.

Principal Activity	We will ...	Customers will ...	Progress to March 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to September 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to March 2011 will be measured against the following targets...
1. Understand our Customers needs and expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>undertake a Customer Insight Programme to better understand the needs and preferences of our customers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>be able to access, request and receive services and information via a channel which suits their needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review existing Customer insight activity</li> <li>Develop a corporate framework to co ordinate the programme</li> <li>Agree resourcing and responsibility for programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of customer solutions based on customer insight programme findings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10% increase in overall customer satisfaction</li> </ul>
2. Ensuring, with our partners, equal and appropriate access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a public sector village concept with our partners</li> <li>review public access buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>be able to access services they require from different agencies at a single point of contact</li> <li>be able to contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of face to face location service delivery points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation of multi service delivery locations started.</li> <li>Resolve 80% of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide access to all customer facing council services through the Customer Access Network</li> <li>Migration of services</li> </ul>

Principal Activity	We will ...	Customers will ...	Progress to March 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to September 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to March 2011 will be measured against the following targets...
	<p>and build a business case for inclusion in the Customer Access Network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review our hours of operation across our face to face and telephony channels to maximise accessibility whilst remaining cost effective</li> <li>• Produce a business case for CRM and speech recognition</li> <li>• promote electronic and self service channels</li> </ul>	<p>the council at times convenient to them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use more convenient self service methods and want to continue to use them</li> </ul>		<p>enquiries at the first point of contact – whether in the service area or the Customer Access Network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed operational service availability strategy with partners</li> <li>• CRM Implementation</li> <li>• Total Place Implementation</li> </ul>	<p>into the Customer Access Network against the Business Transformation programme plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total Place Implementation</li> </ul>

Principal Activity	We will ...	Customers will ...	Progress to March 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to September 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to March 2011 will be measured against the following targets...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review where partnership working will support improved efficiency and value for money through a single point of contact</li> <li>• support the “Total Place” Pilot</li> <li>• Procure translation / transcription and interpretation provision, clarify funding arrangements and embed a consistent approach across all services</li> </ul>				

Principal Activity	We will ...	Customers will ...	Progress to March 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to September 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to March 2011 will be measured against the following targets...
3. Listen, learn and improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• publish a Customer Charter detailing our service standards</li> <li>• create a Customer Forum to seek customer views on service improvement</li> <li>• contribute to the development of the Customer Feedback / Customer Relations process</li> <li>• contribute to the development of the corporate Customer Satisfaction programme</li> <li>• participate in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• know the standards we have set ourselves for service delivery</li> <li>• be able to play an active part in improving services</li> <li>• be able to provide feedback in a meaningful way</li> <li>• see the council taking an active interest in the local community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of benchmark statistics for customer satisfaction with Central Bedfordshire Council and performance against agreed improvement targets</li> <li>• Identification of benchmark statistics for overall satisfaction with the Customer Access Network and performance against agreed improvement targets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10% reduction in corporate complaints</li> </ul>	

Principal Activity	We will ...	Customers will ...	Progress to March 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to September 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to March 2011 will be measured against the following targets...
	<p>Community Engagement activities to promote the Customer Access Network and all access channels across Central Bedfordshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contribute to the creation of the corporate Communication Strategy</li> <li>• Promote our customer feedback policies to ensure our customers views are listened to and acted upon</li> </ul>				
4. A customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be able to access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• undertake</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement of</li> </ul>



Principal Activity	We will ...	Customers will ...	Progress to March 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to September 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to March 2011 will be measured against the following targets...
first culture delivering quality and value for money services	<p>Customer Charter within the council and its partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allocate Account Managers to each service handled by Customer Services</li> <li>• implement a career progression framework for Customer Service Advisors</li> <li>• review the “Tell Us Once” pilot to assess benefits to be realised by Central Bedfordshire Council</li> </ul>	<p>a range of services through highly trained staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be confident that staff are helpful and that the advice and information given is accurate and relevant</li> <li>• feel that their problems are owned by staff and problems are quickly resolved</li> <li>• find it easy to access relevant services regardless of race, language or other perceived barriers to access</li> <li>• see a reduction in the number of</li> </ul>	<p>Customer Service Excellence self assessment for Business Transformation Directorate and create plan for achievement of the standard for this Directorate in 2010/2011</p>	<p>processes required to achieve Customer Service Excellence started.</p>	<p>Customer Service Excellence against the 5 year plan</p>

Principal Activity	We will ...	Customers will ...	Progress to March 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to September 2010 will be measured against the following targets	Progress to March 2011 will be measured against the following targets...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement corporate Customer Service Excellence within 5 years</li> <li>• support the Business Transformation programme in respect of migration of new services into Customer Services</li> <li>• establish a framework for collecting and evaluating NI14</li> </ul>	published telephone numbers for the council			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NI14 performance in upper quartile.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 3 – Customer Charter

### Our vision

"We are committed to providing you with an excellent customer experience when you use our services. We will provide you with a high quality accessible service that meets your needs."

#### What can you expect?

This Charter sets out the standards that we aim to follow in order to provide you with the highest possible standard of customer service, no matter how you choose to contact us.

#### We will:

- Always treat our customers fairly
- Be professional, open and honest
- Expect our employees to be focused on our customers' needs
- Listen and respond to the needs of each customer, treating everyone with courtesy, dignity and respect
- Treat any information you give us on a strictly confidential basis, within the law
- Respond quickly and efficiently to requests for service and information
- Keep you informed so you know what to expect, explaining what we will do next, and by when
- Use clear non technical language
- Work with our partners and contractors to ensure they commit to our standards so that every customer receives the best possible service
- Seek and act on feedback received to continuously improve our service delivery.

#### Services for all

We are committed to delivering services to everyone living in, working in or travelling through Central Bedfordshire without discrimination, prejudice or bias on the grounds of:

- Age or disability
- Religion or belief
- Colour, race or ethnic background
- Gender, marital status or sexual orientation.

#### Accessibility of information

Information on all Council services can be made available in the following additional formats on request

- Audio cassette tape or CD
- Braille
- Larger print
- In another language.

A translation or interpretation service is available when needed to ensure information about Council services is available to all customers.

#### In all your dealings with us, you have the right to:

- See personal information we hold about you under the Data Protection Act 1998; and
- Ask us for any information we hold that may be available under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

#### Our service standards

Set out below you will find the expectations we have set ourselves for responding to your enquiries.

#### Contacting us by telephone

We will provide you with a friendly, professional, efficient service and we aim to:

- Answer your call within 20 seconds
- Tell you our name when we answer
- Answer your enquiry immediately or, where this is not possible identify who is able to answer your enquiry and provide you with their details
- Connect you to the right extension first time
- Ask if you want to speak to someone else or leave a message if the person you are calling is not available
- Advise you when you can expect a response from us.

#### Visiting our offices

We aim to provide you with as many services as possible in a location convenient to you and we will:

- Greet you within two minutes of your arrival
- See you within five minutes of your appointment time where you have an appointment,
- Ensure you are seen by a member of staff, who can deal with your enquiry, within 10 minutes of your arrival, where you do not have an appointment
- Arrange for a private interview room if necessary
- Provide suitable and comfortable waiting areas
- Accommodate any additional needs you may have.

#### Contacting us by email, letter and fax

We aim to respond to you via your chosen method of communication and we aim to:

- Acknowledge receipt of your enquiry within one working day
- Provide a full response to your enquiry within five working days or
- Tell you if your enquiry relates to statutory timescales, or involves consultation with partners. Such enquiries may take longer to provide a full response and we will advise you when we will be giving a response
- Reply using plain, jargon free language.

#### Visiting our website

We aim to make it easy for you to find the information you want at a time that is convenient to you and we will:

- Ensure that our website information is accurate and up to date
- Let you make payments, fill in forms and get information on all council services
- Ensure that our website is accessible to all our customers, by providing speech software and visually compliant pages.

→ [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)



### Our visits to customers homes and business premises

We appreciate that it is sometimes necessary for us to visit you and we will:

- Provide you, where appropriate, in advance with the name and contact details of the person visiting you
- Agree an appointment time, where appropriate, with you and will keep you informed if a delay occurs
- Show identification cards, with our names and photograph, on arrival and give you the opportunity to check our identity (please do not let anyone into your home unless you know them or have checked their identity).

### Help us to help you

We are committed to delivering a high quality service to all our customers and ask that in return, you:

- Let us know about any changes in your personal circumstances that may affect the service we provide for you
- Let us know if you have any special needs so that we can provide the right help
- Let us know if you cannot keep an appointment
- Treat our staff and other customers with respect. Our staff, partners and contractors will not tolerate abusive or violent behaviour and action will be taken as appropriate to address any such situations.

### Listening to our customers

Our aim is to help you in the best way we can. We want to ensure that our service standards meet your requirements and will listen and act on any complaint, comment or compliment that you wish to make.

- A formal feedback process is available by contacting our Customer Services team by telephone, in person or via email. The process is also available on our website
- Questions relating to schools must be directed to the school. Please contact the relevant member of staff via the school office
- Social Care feedback may be subject to a different procedure. Please do contact us if you would like any further information.

Customer satisfaction surveys and feedback are a valuable method of seeking your comments. These are regularly distributed to people who live in, work in and travel through Central Bedfordshire.

Comments can be made to any member of staff, by telephone, in person or by email or by completing or requesting a customer comment card. We will monitor customer feedback and learn from it.

#### Contact us

This Charter must continue to develop and change to meet the needs of our customers. If you have any comments or ideas, please contact

#### Head of Customer Services

Central Bedfordshire Council  
 Priory House, Monks Walk  
 Chicksands, Shefford  
 Beds, SG17 5TQ

Telephone 0300 300 8000

**Central Bedfordshire in contact**

Central Bedfordshire Council **Central Bedfordshire**

**Central Bedfordshire Customer Charter**

Putting the customer at the heart of everything we do

Per Informacion معلومات کے لیے  
 للمعلومات Informacja  
 ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਲਈ Za Informacje  
 برای اطلاع তথ্যের জন্য  
 Per Informazione

**on the telephone**  
**0300 300 8000**

**@ by email**  
**customer.services@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk**

**on the web**  
**www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk**

BT007\_10 Produced by the communications team at Central Bedfordshire Council, Causton Street, Bedford, MK42 9AP



**Appendix 4 - Risk Analysis**

Achieving the ambitions set out in this strategy will ensure that Central Bedfordshire Council is at the forefront of excellent Customer Service delivery. The following risk analysis indicates areas that will need to be monitored to ensure that the strategy is successful.

	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Probability</b>	<b>Impact</b>
1	Lack of capacity in service areas to provide strategic leadership and project management	Medium	High
2	Lack of ownership and understanding by service managers	Medium	High
3	Lack of essential funding and investment in ICT	Medium	High
3	System / network failure	Medium	High
4	Failure of services to take a corporate approach to joining up services	Medium	High
5	Lack of resources	Medium	High
6	Low public take up of e Services	Medium	High
7	Failure to manage partnership working	Medium	Medium
8	Services not maintaining / updating information resulting in incorrect action, financial loss, impact on reputation	Low	Medium
9	Contractual – over reliance on key suppliers, lack of internal knowledge	Low	High
10	Consultation – missed customer groups	Low	Medium
11	Recruitment of appropriately skilled staff	Low	Medium
12	Lack of engagement from customer services staff with back office services	Low	Medium
13	Inappropriate detailed level of analysis of change by customer services staff delaying progress	Low	Medium
14	Failure to build trusting relationship between customer services and service providers	Low	High