London Borough of
Barking & Dagenham

Customer Access Strategy:

Delivering Excellent Customer Services

Table of Contents

1   Executive Summary

Our vision is that all our customers will receive an excellent experience when contacting the council for a service. We want our customers to have access 24/7 to as many of our services as possible and give them the right information first time, quickly and easily. For those customers with more intensive needs, we will provide a high quality assessment and referral service.

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is looking to meet the needs of its customers against a backdrop of budget challenges, increasing demand, and raised expectations. To address these challenges, we have reviewed the current level of service provided and identified potential changes as part of the Council's wider transformation. The key aims for the future include enhanced levels of customer service for all individuals and households by:

- Easier availability, access and delivery of services provided
- Utilisation of innovative technology for more efficient and cost-effective service delivery
- Improvements in how we engage with customers and obtain feedback to drive satisfaction
- Effective measurement of customer service levels and performance
- A targeted approach to ensure all customers get the right level of support

The Council will achieve these aims through the provision of services across a range of different touchpoints, primarily through digital and voice channels. As part of a targeted approach, we will ensure that appropriate face-to-face support is also available for individuals and households to meet their specific needs.

The longer-term vision is for fast, easy access to council services, efficient and cost-effective service delivery, and high levels of customer satisfaction. This strategy outlines how the Council will support customers and achieve our vision for excellent Customer Access.

Challenges and opportunities

London and east London, in particular, faces an unprecedented series of challenges and opportunities.   The borough is experiencing rapid changes in demography coupled with regeneration growth in a time of increasing budget constraints. Demand for our services is increasing, as a result of:

- **High levels of population growth**, especially children requiring school places
- **High levels of new arrivals into the borough** leading to increasing demand for services
- **Significant reduction in central government grant** is driving cost reductions
- **Residents with increasingly complex needs**, many of which require the involvement of multiple agencies and services
- **Increasing expectations** amongst the general population regarding ease of access to services

Despite a **potential funding gap of £63 million by 2020**, the Council continues to provide a full range of public services. However, *the status quo is no longer possible*, so in response the council is embarking on a programme that proposes to balance growth and cost cutting with an innovative and original approach to service delivery.

Improvements in customer services are at the heart of the programme. New technology, service standards and organisational transformation all need to be developed and implemented whilst we *simultaneously deliver services*. This journey will take several years and it is absolutely essential that customers are supported throughout. We will ensure that no one is left behind during this period of transition. *Indeed, we also intend to achieve* **Customer Service Excellence.**

This strategy outlines how we intend to achieve this transformation.
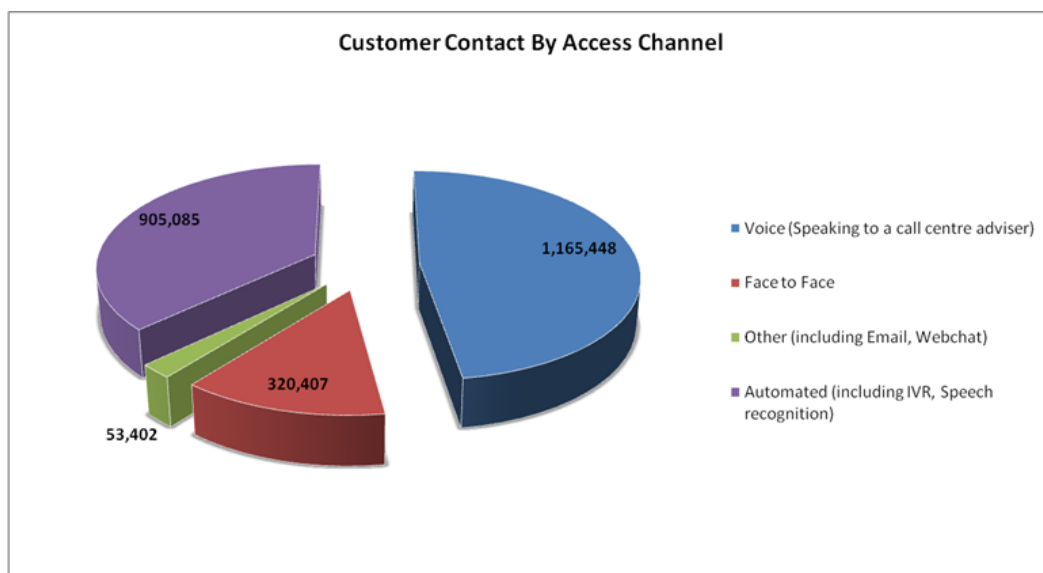
2   Our customers

Our **Customers** are defined as those who access and consume council services and include (for example):

- **Residents**: council tax payers, people with disabilities, single parents, carers
- **Businesses**: private landlords, property developers, builders, NHS organisations
- **Voluntary / third sector organisations**: charities, religious groups
- **Partners**: Delivery Partners, voluntary sector, volunteers for teams
- **Visitors**: Tourists, those who work in the borough

Why do we need a strategy?

Current Performance

There are a number of ways in which our customers contact us. The table below gives a snapshot of customer contact by contact channel.

Customer Contact By Access Channel

- Voice (Speaking to a call centre adviser) — 1,165,448
- Face to Face — 320,407
- Other (including Email, Webchat) — 53,402
- Automated (including IVR, Speech recognition) — 905,085

* The data shows contact activity over a 24-month period (April 2014-March 2016)

Voice contacts via Call Centre(s) represent 48% of the total – or 11,200 per week. The average call length varies by transaction type and can be as much as 11. 5 minutes, with an average waiting time of 8 minutes. Revenues and benefits calls are more complex and take longer. The impact of Universal Credit, the *completely online Benefits claims system*, remains to be seen, but may significantly drive down call volumes. It is also *likely that call volumes will drop overall as self-service technologies are implemented.*

Current Customer Experience

Our current customer model ensures that simple transactions and service requests are routed through Customer Services, whilst more complex and involved cases are generally managed directly by a variety of council departments. These arrangements have generally worked reasonably well but having multiple entry points across the Council does not always result in a joined-up customer experience. As a result, customers sometimes have difficulty accessing services smoothly, easily and in a timely way.

Although the different ways that our customers can access our services has increased since 2010, the standard of service they receive can vary depending on the service they require. Some of the key challenges include:

1. **Inconsistent customer service quality** due to the absence of a coordinated approach to overall service design and delivery

2. **No approach to demand management and forecasting**, particularly in back office services. Therefore, managers are **unable to effectively forecast** and manage peaks and troughs in demand.

3. Limited availability and usage of customer insight data to support service delivery (partly due to a lack of internal skills and resources).

4. The speed of transformation, especially of digital services, has been slow and erratic.

Current Customer Service Cost Base

Voice and face to-face channels are the most expensive way to serve customers and digitisation is the only realistic way of achieving the savings needed to safeguard future service delivery. This is necessary because online transactions cost about 5% of other routes, potentially, a considerable saving that could be used to protect other council services.

Reducing the number of telephone and face-to-face contacts will be crucial to achieving our Customer Service transformation. Our customer service operations require significant improvement. The transformation programme is aimed at *improving customer service quality and reduce costs* at the same time.

3 Our Vision

Our vision is to provide excellent customer services that are easily accessible and tailored to customers' needs

Our Approach for Customer Access

Our customer interactions typically fall into three key areas or tiers, each with specific requirements. Our Customer Access Approach aims to support customers in each of these categories:

1   One and Done

We will ensure that our most simple transactions, pay, report, book, will be easy to use, fully automated and optimised to work on all devices, from a mobile phone to a smart TV. These services will be delivered either online or via automated telephony and will be fully resolved at first point of contact.

2   Service Order

The customer may use an online or automated telephony route to contact the Council but a handoff to a back-office service will be required to complete the request or order; an example would be a request for a new bin or a dropped kerb. The customer will be updated on the progress of their issue until it is resolved.

3   Targeted Services

Customers who present with complex needs may use an online or automated telephony route to contact the Council but will then be assessed and then may receive services face-to-face. We will coordinate services around the customer so that the customer does not have to do this for themselves. This includes services provided by other bodies including charities and the NHS.

Our Approach to Customer Complaints

The process of making a complaint should be streamlined to make it easy for customers to report issues and concerns. Complaints will be prioritised and acknowledged quickly, providing the customer with clear information on the complaints process and service standards. Where appropriate, an apology will be issued quickly and assurance given that action is being taken to prevent the issue recurring.

4 Drivers for change

Our customers are becoming more demanding, expecting simple and routine transactional services to be possible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This reflects increasing take-up of digital services within the community, with an increasing acceptance and expectation that digital services are available "on demand". This demand is also influenced by the increasingly complicated domestic and working arrangements of many people's everyday life.

This means that the technological and social drivers for change in 2010 are even stronger in 2017:

- **Societal and technological change** leading to expectations that access to information is available 24 hours a day 365 days a year
- Expectations that **transactional** ('self-serve') **activities can be carried out at any time**
- Expectations of ever increasing **immediacy of response and routine information updates** as service requests are processed
- **Pressure to control and reduce unit costs for each contact**
- **Increasing customer competence** at carrying out increasingly complex processes online based on wider trends of internet usage
- The rapid adoption of new technology and the increasing power of social media are also driving customer expectations. However, the same opportunities for customer engagement also represent a potential risk. For example, social media allows rapid comment on both good and poor customer service and customers of all ages are increasingly tech-savvy.

Solutions

Improvements in satisfaction and reductions in many types of contact are possible, as we address some or all of these drivers, through:

- **The provision of accurate and timely information** at *all stages and interactions*
- **Improvements in signposting** and *directing customers to all service providers that can help them*
- **Anticipating progress checking** by *providing automatic updates*
- **Publishing service levels** to *reduce unnecessary contacts and manage customer expectations*
- **Integrating systems** to *eliminate requests for information we already possess*
- **Communicating service standards** at the *initial point of contact*
- **Synchronising systems** so that information from all sources is *accurate and up to date*

Rapid prototyping and roll out will address these issues but will also require new workforce skills and consistent management.

5   What might the future hold?

The world is changing and fast.   We cannot predict future technological changes but we can determine our direction and approach to new innovations in customer service delivery. The focus will be on ensuring we continue to improve customer satisfaction levels, maximise efficiency, and avoid decisions that could lead to wasted investment.

The "Internet of Things" where many more devices are connected to the internet *will mean we should be able to start to anticipate where issues may occur in the home*. Devices in household products could be alerting us that a part or whole device (e.g., a boiler) may soon need replacement. By understanding when a part may soon fail, we should be able to plan cyclical maintenance more efficiently and negotiate better purchasing discounts. From a customer perspective, this would enable us to be more proactive in our customer service approach and reduce the volume of inbound maintenance-related customer calls.

The contact centre itself is changing. Already one local authority (Enfield) is planning to use Artificial Intelligent (AI) for faster online resolution; looking ahead to 2020, we would expect technology like this to be more widely used by other councils to help automate and reduce the cost of certain transactions. Initially, this may be focused on internal contact centres aimed at supporting staff, i.e., to help reduce operational costs. For example, services including HR, IT and Finance. But it is anticipated that AI contact centre agents will also become more commonly used to automate other simpler external customer service transactions.

This could lead to improvements in the level of support provided to residents. For example, by freeing up more time to assist customers, provide services, and support through the AI agents for our 3rd sector partners etc. Potentially, where many local authorities are turning off telephone services due to the high costs involved, many of these services could be made available through an AI agent.

Increasingly, councils are moving towards the "single view of the customer" for targeted services. The aim is to understand all of the interactions with a customer, and the ability to predict customers' needs. This "single view of the customer" is part of our longer-term plans, facilitated through enhanced business intelligence and predictive modelling capabilities.

Our customers are demanding more automated online services. Many customers would rather pay a bill or apply for a service at a convenient time in line with their lifestyle and circumstances. This is particularly true of our younger residents, many of whom are new to the borough.

6   One and Done

The majority of customer contact is for information or to or pay for a service:

- To '**Report** It': noise complaints, graffiti, missed bins
- To '**Pay** for It': council tax, planning applications
- To '**Apply** for It': parking permits, housing register
- To '**Book** It': registering births, deaths, bulky collections
- To '**Appeal** It': parking fines

In most cases, the council is a monopoly supplier (e.g., paying council tax). *Consequently, our customers have no choice but to engage with us.* In other parts of their lives, (e.g. online retail and banking) customers expect to carry out transactions smoothly and efficiently.   They also expect clear information service standards (e.g. delivery dates) and routine progress updates and reminders.

Engaging with the council is completely unlike other parts of their lives where many choices exist, e.g. flight bookings. Customers are obliged to use our services *regardless of the quality of customer contact*. This loss of control means that customers can become *rapidly frustrated* when our processes to do not operate smoothly, efficiently and transparently. A lack of proper feedback to our customers can also lead to increases in the volume of calls to the contact centre and a reduction in customer satisfaction levels.

To address these issues, customers will be given a timely acknowledgement of their query, issue, complaint or service request with a clear indication of the follow-up action taken (what, when, how), and an invitation to provide customer service feedback, whatever channel they choose to use. *Solutions will also be designed to meet customers' expectations of a modern, easily accessible and smoothly operating customer service*.

Services will also be designed to align with the key life events of our customers to match up services where relevant. For example, where there is a birth, bereavement or marriage that requires a licence application, other related service requests will be integrated, automated, and actioned. Using this type of proactive approach will help to save time, reduce costs, and improve the customer experience. Further analysis will be needed to define how the process of identifying and triggering the delivery of "matching services" would be managed, i.e., from a technology and operational perspective.

Customers will be prompted about their transactional service needs and more efficient payment methods through outbound communications as part of the new approach. The most cost-effective methods for communications with customers will be used where feasible, i.e., email and via mobile. Reminders and prompts will also be included across all touchpoints, and within paper billing runs whilst still available. For example, promotion of the benefits of payment via Direct Debit for Council Tax, waste management, parking, business rates or other transactional services.

Similarly, where customers are required to provide specific documents or details (e.g., National Insurance Number) to complete a transaction, we should provide a prompt as a reminder on the web page or within the IVR system before they begin the process. Having completed their transaction, the customer will be given a "nudge" to remind them about related transactional services. For example, if they have received a parking ticket then we may want to remind them to renew their parking permit where relevant.

Digital by Design

To deliver our 24/7 vision, our customer access will be web enabled *for any 'connected' device*. This will meet our customers' expectations of fully accessible, easily accessed information and services.

Key Principles for Web Enabled Design

Simple and Fast: Quick and easy will be one of the key reasons customers will choose to shift online from more expensive channels, such as the telephone. Making the web services simple and fast will be the biggest benefit of going online for our customers.

This means we will eliminate unnecessary steps and improve the customer experience. This includes registering for My Account or not asking for information we already have.

Integrated online first: where possible, we will use self-service online services to help complete the customers chosen transaction. Where feasible, our online services will be, integrated into the back office systems to allow faster responses and more immediate resolution of customer issues. Mobile web services will offer location-based services (e.g. reporting of pothole or fly tipping) to enable operatives to identify exactly where the fault lies for a quick resolution.

Principles for realising the benefits of online services:

- *Automation wherever possible:* Online services will be automated for things like address details and name suggestions to make the customer interaction faster and easier than other channels.

- *Customer insight using analysis tools:* to understand customer behaviour. For example, identifying how many customers are completing their online journey, where they struggle or stop and where they spend the most time (which could highlight issues or options for supporting the customer).

- *Location-based services are embedded in some electronic forms* (e.g. for reporting potholes)

Relentless testing to improve the customer journey: *The rapid testing of options directly with customers is now routine elsewhere.* The ease of collecting data, producing working solutions and modern 'Agile' management methods make this possible. In practice, this means that we are able to trial small changes, compare different solutions and identify the best ones (via **A/B testing**). Moreover, the current users of My Account provided a firm basis on which to proceed with testing.

This continual refinement, testing and fact (data) based evaluation will reduce development costs and provide the best outcome(s). Traditional methods are time-consuming, expensive and formal, whereas this "Test and Learn" approach is faster and directly involves the customer in the design. This method is also very cost effective.

Trust, Privacy, Data Disclosure and Data Protection: *Customers must have trust and confidence* in what we are doing.

- We will be clear with our customers on how we will use their data and how long we will keep it

- **Online payment** and services will always be **safe to use and secure**

- **Information** will be **secure and protected** (through data encryption)

- **We will follow national standards** (Data Protection Act, Public Sector Network) for data transfer and processing.

- **Public Services are better** if we can use data to manage demand

- **To ensure that customers are being routed to the right place**, we will not provide contact details or the identity of individual officers (below the top 3 tiers), to protect their personal data and ensure more efficient customer resolution.

Online search: *We all search the internet or organisations home pages to find services.* We will review our search options and website structure to ensure customers can get straight to the service they are looking for from Google or *any other page.*

Web content: *Less is more!* We should only ask customers to read additional information when necessary. Most transactions are straightforward and should be intuitively designed to work without additional information being required from the customer.

MyAccount: *Carrying out transactions easily is a key priority.* Insisting on a MyAccount registration can act as a deterrent to reporting simple issues (e.g., racist graffiti) and force users onto other more expensive channels. *Registering for MyAccount will only be requested where we can add value* (e.g. providing progress updates) or where person verification is required. Customers will not be forced to register for all requests, e.g. simple transactions such as reporting issues, making complaints or making a booking.

Other forms of digital engagement – *One Borough Live*:
We will explore the use of delivering council content in video format, via YouTube and of delivering services via Skype, especially to home-based residents with complex needs. Customer insight would be needed to define the potential appetite and uptake in advance of any future development work.

7 Voice-Based Contact

Telephone contact via the contact centre will become our secondary channel. We will develop a clear telephone number strategy which will create a very limited set of c*ore numbers* to support ease of access to services for the public. This will also facilitate the *automation* of some services in the future.

Our contact centre approach will be to:

- **Reduce the number of calls** by using digital channels.

- Use **Interactive Voice Recognition** (IVR) to provide fully automated service resolution.

- Have **standardised metrics to facilitate *effective* performance management**. For example, *overall call volumes, service specific volumes, number of abandoned calls and % of repeat calls.*

- **Route calls to services not individuals**, eliminating single points of failure. However, some areas will still need direct lines (e.g., social works and disaster recovery). To ensure that customers are being routed to the right place, we will not provide contact details or the identity of individual officers (below the top 3 tiers).

- **Automate feedback**, enabling real-time management and monitoring of customer satisfaction.

8 Face-to-Face Contact

This is our tertiary contact channel. It is the most expensive though we also acknowledge that it will always be best for some customers to access services this way. Where it is not required, our strategy is to reduce face-to-face contact and improve the quality of service provided.

Currently, face-to-face is provided by the Dagenham One Stop Shop, John Smith House, Roycraft House, a number of community checkpoints and volunteer centres delivering services to residents or signposting to the relevant services.

Assisted self-service

There are a number of our residents who have no or low-level digital skills, a recognised disability or poor internet connectivity. This limits online accessibility and requires third party support. Some people simply do not want to transact digitally. Our approach, Assisted Digital (AD), aims to support these people and groups.

Those who are not able to transact digitally, for whatever reason, need to be supported. This is often called 'Assisted Digital' and is provided in several ways:

- **Software support** (e.g. video relay services) for those with *sensory impairment, disabilities or where English is a second language*

- **Voice** via the *contact centre or professional staff via direct numbers*

- **Face-to-face** *in community touchpoints, partner locations or one-stop shop*

- **Third party services** such as a *Housing Association, advice agency or charity*

- **Key partners** *focussing on our priority target groups*

Our face-to-face strategy is to work with the "Community Solutions" Programme and volunteer organisations to ensure:

- **Reduced face-to-face contact** *can be achieved through less costly channels*

- **Face-to-face operatives to signpost** *residents online when appropriate*

- **Standardised data capture across locations** *enabling better demand management*

- **Customer service training for staff** *to improve the quality of customers' experience*

- **Consistent communication across all face-to-face sites** *about changes to council services so that customers are aware of all the options available to them*

- **Appointments whenever possible** *to reduce customer waiting times and facilitate effective demand management and improve customer satisfaction levels*

- **Build in Customer Feedback** *connected to management and commissioner reporting systems to support continuous improvement*

9   Targeted Services

Targeted services will operate at an individual and household level: Our focus will be to provide direct targeted support for three types of customer, those:

- At **risk**

- **With multiple** needs

- **With specialist** needs

Online solutions will reduce demand through initial screening and signposting to other providers. Customers will be directed to community resources best placed to offer support. "Community Solutions" will also have an assisted digital function for those customers unable to access online services. Further details of the vision for "Community Solutions" service can be found within the case study in Appendix 1.

Account managers / specialists, outreach workers and specialist services also will be able to access the same back office systems to provide support to 'at risk' customers and those with needs.

By Specific Need

Well defined and well known groups have specific or complex requirements. *This represents a minority of customers but takes a significant level of resources to manage and support the level of service required.* Customer access and fulfilment systems will be configured to provide *preventative and early intervention support for those who are:*

- Unemployed / low paid

- Low skilled

- In debt or who have financial problems

- At risk of homelessness

- On benefits

- Engaged with low level alcohol and substance abuse

- Domestic Violence

- Anti-social behaviour

- Suffering from low level mental health needs

A single view of the individual customer and household is essential to make this work. Multiple agencies, including the NHS and police are also involved and partnership arrangements need to be put in place. These will conform to data protection requirements while supporting our requirement for early intervention.

The combination of rising demands and financial pressures mean that we have to re-think our approach. In future, we propose a single service for those who believe that they need help - whether

that concerns housing, welfare, employment, social care, or other issues, with early resolution and problem-solving to help residents to become more self-sufficient and resilient.

We intend to move from separate departments to coordinated and integrated services, with the current council services included:

- Housing allocations and determination of housing need
- Parts of adult social care providing advice and information
- Children's early intervention; family support; Early Years and Childcare
- Employment and skills and jobs brokerage
- Financial support, revenue and benefits advice
- Parts of community safety services including dealing with anti-social behaviour
- Housing advice and preventing homelessness
- Libraries

Our approach aims to ensure that accurate signposting to information resources and third party service providers is timely and targeted. We will also support early intervention by ensuring that appropriate self-assessment tools are available and reliable data and information is collected as early as possible.

10 Supporting digital take up

The key aim will be to make digital accessibility to council services easier and faster so customers receive immediate *tangible* benefits. To fully realise the financial benefits, customers will need support and self-help facilities. The council and its partners will work closely together to ensure that digital services and self-help provision is actively promoted. This is simple: *we just need to let our customers know how much quicker and easier services are online.*

The principle objective will be to encourage take up of digital services to support our "channel shift" ambitions. The proposed engagement and take up activities will be a key process in the continuous improvement and development of our digital offering.

A series of activities to promote to maximise "channel shift" opportunities exist:

- Making digital services **simple and quick** for the customer

- **Communicating the benefits** of using the digital service option during other channel interactions

- **Supporting our customers** to try digital services for the first time

- **Effective management** of staff and partner engagement

- **Overcoming barriers:** legislative, policy, operational and cultural

- **Identify and minimise security concerns**

- **Identify users' triggers for using non-digital channels** and satisfy these needs through the digital services available

- **Setting channel shift targets**

- **Track and measure channel shift**

11 Performance monitoring

Some of our current performance metrics

Service Access Performance Indicators	Target	Current
Generic Contact Centre		
% of calls answered	80%	84%
% of Customer Enquiries resolved at first point of contact in Contact Centre	90%	97%
Call quality assurance	85%	81%
Customer satisfaction	80%	90%
Webchats delivered each month	1000	987
Missed bins by IVR (automated telephone)	65%	82%
Housing Repairs		
% of calls answered	95%	86%
% calls answered in 20 seconds	85%	25%
% Call quality assurance	85%	85%
Customer satisfaction	80%	100%
One Stop Shop		
% Average waiting time of customers in (<30 mins)	80%	97%

How we will improve performance metrics

We will focus on specific performance measures to improve customer service and efficiency, and deliver cost effective services. Additional metrics will be added to provide better insight into service request response times, and to measure the success of transactional requests across the range of services. For example, % of service requests acknowledged and actioned within a given timescale, and the e-Forms service request completion rate via online. Other measures may include:

- The **call abandonment % rates** within the Contact Centre and through the Interactive Voice Recognition service. (To ensure that customers get through on their first point of contact, and their service needs are met quickly and easily.)
- Performance against the **Key Performance Indicators** defined within the service improvements plans for each key service area across the council
- **% of queries and transactional requests completed via digital touchpoints**
- **Assisted Digital** (for "Community Solutions") metrics, e.g., % of face-to-face contact and appointments offered vs attended
- **Volumes of complaints recorded vs actioned and resolved**

How we will measure our success

Customer service satisfaction levels will be measured through qualitative techniques including gathering customer service feedback via online surveys, and polls. In the longer-term, we may also consider setting up an Online Customer Panel to provide customer feedback on service levels and customer experience. (This is a method used by successfully by other local authorities). The Online Panel could also be used to test out new Digital services, processes or features. (Either within My Account or other areas of our website.)

Overall service delivery will also be measured by analysing performance against the service delivery metrics including the uptake of services via Digital touchpoints, and the impact of new technology in reducing costs and improving efficiency. The benefits of new technology will be assessed against the relevant metrics to determine performance and establish the return on investment.

New technology and tools will be put in place to enable better tracking and reporting of performance across council services, i.e., to enable improvements to be measured more quickly and accurately. Where appropriate and beneficial, we will collaborate with other Local Authorities via Shared Services arrangements to procure new technology and reduce costs.

12 Customer service standards

Customers will understand when an issue is likely to be resolved. This reduces avoidable contact and empowers the public to speak out or intervene if the issue is critical. If we are not able to service their need at the point of the initial interaction, then we will communicate when the service will be provided and the case resolved (the current Service Level Agreement).

When customers contact us, we will:

- be **polite**, *friendly* and **helpful**
- treat them **fairly** and **respectfully**
- **greet them promptly** and **deal efficiently** with their enquiries
- tell them **how we can help**, **how long it will take** and **how we will keep them informed**
- try to **get things right first time,** and put them right if they go wrong
- **respect privacy**
- **listen** to their ideas, and use feedback to improve our services

Our services will be:

- easy for everyone to use
- well promoted
- relevant and up to date

When people call us:

- We aim to answer calls to our published numbers within **agreed service levels**

Reception facilities:

- **Customers without appointments should wait no longer than 10 minutes** to have an initial conversation with an officer, even if it's just to make an appointment.

- If queues are evident, **reception teams will inform customers of the approximate waiting times** and arrange an appointment with an appropriate officer wherever possible.

- Reception areas will be well sign posted, clean, tidy and comfortable with provision made for children.

- Information, PC equipment for self-serve customers and signposting to services will be visible when practical.

- **Private interview facilities are available on request.** Reception staff will be given specialist training; they will be welcoming and approachable and will deal with our visitors' enquiries as soon as possible.

Visits to customer's home or property:

- **We will make an appointment and keep to it** or contact the customer if we are delayed. *However, there are some cases when this is not practical or appropriate.*

- We will **clearly explain** our **reasons** for visiting.

- On arrival, we will show an **identification card.**

- Whenever possible, we will let the customer know what **follow-up action** to expect.

Accessibility

- **Support will be offered** in community touch points, partners and specialised services will offer support to the public to facilitate access to online services

- We will **actively signpost** and direct customers with accessibility issues to account managers, officers or nominated third parties with a role in assisting the public

- **Website design** will take account of issues including dyslexia and other common learning difficulties that may affect individuals' ability to interact with online services

- **Physical accessibility** will be monitored and provided where service reconfiguration requires a physical move

- **Opening hours** for LA client facing offices, the contact centre and specific LA services will be widely promoted and available online

Email, SMS text, website.

We will:

- **Work to eliminate unstructured forms of communication –** email, text and letters for routine activities. *This will reduce call backs and provide a faster, more efficient service.*

- **Acknowledge that we have received messages sent to our published addresses or numbers within 24 hours** *and aim to reply fully within 10 working days. Compliance will reduce unnecessary demand on our services.*

- **Communicate progress** on a given transaction / application whenever this is practical. *Ideally, this should be automatic and via email or SMS.*

- **Communicate service levels** *so customers know how long to wait before they 'chase' the team responsible.*

- **Communicate *actual* likely processing times.** In periods of **high workloads** or where an enquiry requires research, we will provide an indication of when customers should expect the issue to be resolved.

- **Not generally give out officer specific numbers**. *If an enquiry is urgent, a contact number may be given out but this will be dependent on the context*

- **Communicate in Plain English.** We will use language that is easy to read and understand, avoid the use of jargon and explain any complex or technical terms.

Social media

When contacted on social media like Twitter, Facebook or Google+, responses to replies, comments and direct messages depend on the individual service. Even if we do not reply, **we should be listening and will act on or pass on comments as appropriate.** In most cases, it will be better to use our web-site to provide feedback.

Freedom of information requests

We aim to respond to all formal written requests within 20 working days. Some requests can be complex and will take us this long to provide a response. Straightforward information, or information contained in the Publication Scheme will be provided much more quickly, usually within 10 working days.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Case Study – Transactional Services

Appendix 2 Case Study – Transactional Services

Appendix 3 Case Study – Community Solutions

Appendix 4 Design Principles

Appendix 1 : Case Study : Community Solutions

Lucy, a single mother of a child, Ben, 7 who has behavioural difficulties, separates from her partner after he is made unemployed. Her rented house is in poor condition and she can no longer afford the rent and knows she will be evicted. She has worked occasionally as a chef but not regularly since she moved to the borough 18 months earlier. She knows she is mildly dyslexic. Her family are 2 hours away by train. As a single mum she now can't work easily due to childcare issues.

She has limited contacts in the locality. Lucy also looks for cheaper accommodation on Gumtree, locally, in Newham, through friends and shop windows but finds it difficult to afford somewhere without a partner. *Her priority is to stay local to help Ben stay in school.*

2015-16 – actual outcomes *(based on an actual member of the public)*

Issues – *before* being placed in temporary accommodation

- Unemployment
- Relationship break up
- The original accommodation had cockroaches
- Ben is emotionally and physically draining
- Lucy relies on public transport, which can be unreliable
- Every visit involves at least a one to several hours wait with an unruly child
- The visit to secure temporary accommodation (TA), a studio flat takes a *full day*
- She has no option but to use commercial storage for her belongings

Issues – *after* placement:

- The temporary accommodation (TA) has no working shower facilities (council owned)
- The TA is very hot
- She suffers the emotional impact of living in one room with a challenging child
- Lucy is put on depression medication in December
- Shared areas in TA are dirty and not kept clean by other residents, so there is potential for illness – especially for Ben who is prone to illness
- Lucy has to travel to BLC from Upney to use the free wifi as hers has been cut off
- Ben has to travel to Upney to go to school
- Ben's attendance at school falls to 80%

Lucy makes *8 related visits*

1. July – visits CAB, but no useful information is given
2. August – a 'bloke' (no name) says that she is not eligible for support
3. August – 'Simone' tells her they can help – once they get an eviction notice
4. September – no eviction notice, no help offered
5. October – no eviction notice, no help
6. November – eventually secures temporary accommodation – has to wait a full day
7. November – has to visit Housing Office to sort out TA details

8. December – visits JSH specifically to see 'Simone' to see if anything can be done about the costs of storage which she can no longer afford

2020 – ideal outcomes

In June, just after her relationship breakup, Lucy visits her local GP, which shares a site with a Children's centre.   She notices that there is a poster that says Community Solutions can help with impending homelessness. She chats to the receptionist, who immediately books her a home visit with 'Jake'. There is also an online pre-appointment checklist to complete in advance. Lucy does this and prepares a full set of documentation that includes details of her qualifications, passport and an EdPsych report on Ben.

Jake introduces himself and explains that the appointment is to map a way forward and is entirely confidential. Prior to the meeting he checked her online questionnaire, so knows what he wants to achieve in this meeting and has already created a casefile on the 'ComSol' system and has a tablet PC to update the case file *during* the visit. He can touch type.

Jake, the Community Solutions Account Manager:

- Reviews her finances with Lucy using an on-line calculator
- Reviews her educational achievement, work aspirations and options online
- Discusses how well she is managing (sensitively) and her anxieties
- ComSol flags that Ben is at very high risk of underachievement in school
- ComSol flags that Lucy is at risk of developing mental health issues
- They agree to a second meeting one week later after Lucy reflects on her options

After the initial meeting:

- Jake contacts the landlord to negotiate a reduced rent. She agrees, but only if Lucy and Ben leave by October.
- Jake contacts the school. Ben's school offers some after school support and "summer school"
- Jake sits with Lucy at the Children's Centre so that she can enrol on some food related management and H&S courses at the local college. She can do this because Ben will be in school until 5 or in Summer School in July / August.
- Community Solutions pays the fees from its 'local lottery' funding.
- Lucy completes the courses successfully and starts to apply for jobs.
- Jake also supports Lucy's application for a tenancy at local new build complex built by a pension company on a social rent basis. The LA maintains the site and a named officer to contact over 'snagging' issues. The SLA says most issues will be resolved within 24hrs.
- Lucy moves in at the end of October, but has to sell some belongings to fit
- Ben is happy because it's near school and continues to have good attendance
- Jake notifies environmental health about the poor condition of Lucy's original flat but asks that any action is left until after October.
- Lucy secures a job as manager in a new chain restaurant. Promotion prospects are good and the chain has a good reputation for training and flexible working.
- Jake arranges for a 50% grant for after school childcare for the first year

Lucy makes one more visit to her local Children's Centre. All other communication is electronic with *a response always delivered by Jake or a colleague within 24hrs*. All major issues are resolved by November **and Ben continues to be successful school.**

Appendix 2 : Case Study : A Routine Transaction

Geoff called the 3000 number to report a pot hole near his drive. It appeared very quickly as it wasn't there a few days earlier, although there were some further up the road. Geoff was angry and shaken when his car chassis cracked on the ground as he drove over it. It would be easy to go over it again in the dark as he works in bar and finishes around 12 most evenings. He was furious and contacted the LA as soon as he could.

2016 – actual outcomes *(based on a real story)*

He spoke to the contact centre and specifically asked them how long it would take, but the assistant couldn't tell him. He made him promise to pass on a message that someone would call back to let him know when the pothole would be filled. A couple of days passed and no call was received.

Geoff called again and left the same message. He did this *several times* and eventually gave up in disgust. He then made a corporate complaint citing that he had called 6 to 8 times over a couple of weeks and *never got a response* or the *name* of an individual member of staff who was handling it. Upon investigation, the pothole, and several others in the area *had been filled 36 hours after the call.* This met the SLA in place at the time but Geoff is *furious that the council can't even manage to return a call.*

2020 – ideal outcomes

Geoff gets his phone out and pulls up the 'LBBD report it' app. He ticks pothole and the app asks if it can use his current location. He says 'yes'. A text is then received confirming receipt and his location and that a team will be in the area the next day.

The next day he receives texts confirming that the team will be in his street between 12 and 4; then at 3.30 he is texted to confirm that the pot hole has been filled. A couple of days later he noticed that the others had been filled too. The final text, a week later, linked to a questionnaire about the quality of the service provided. It also enters him into a prize draw. *He is delighted.*

Appendix 3 : Case Study : E-forms in Action

Rasnee, David and their three boys move into the borough so Rasnee can be closer to her family.
They need to find school places for their three boys aged 7, 10 and 12.

2016 – Actual Outcomes

Two weeks before moving, she visits the One Stop Shop and is given a very long application form. This asks for previous school(s), contact telephone numbers, addresses etc. Rasnee struggles to fills out the form. She also applies for the closest schools. She drops the form off and receives an acknowledgement letter 9 days later.   No indication is given of timelines. This makes her nervous as she doesn't want to rely on her parents for childcare.

The following week, she receives a call from the local authority. They haven't been able to find details of one school. This is about Rick, who has emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). Rasnee realises she has given the wrong contact details then calls the school directly, asking them to provide information. A week later, she receives a letter about an interview to place Rick. She attends and is asked for documents *at* the meeting. She posts them afterwards.   She receives a formal offer in wiring about a week later.

Eventually, the boys are all allocated places about 3- 4 weeks after applying.   This means Rasnee has to make childcare arrangements. She is also disappointed because no-one got their preferred school. Rasnee is not happy about one school in particular and makes an appeal. It is rejected.

2020 – Ideal outcomes *(already being delivered elsewhere in London)*

Two weeks before moving, Rasnee goes online to register for council tax. This immediately brings up a link to a 'local information pack' – a series of links to e-forms and information on the local community. This includes applications for large bins, school places etc. She follows the link to apply for school places.

When Rasnee enters her name, the eform is populated with her address. She enters the boys' details and is warned that places are limited and that the only criteria currently used to place pupils is distance from home. A distance calculator lets her check the distance from home to each of the schools currently admitting pupils. She only applies schools that are currently admitting pupils. When she enters the previous school details, she chooses from a drop-down list.

When she enters Rick's details and ticks 'EBD' she is taken to a different screen from the other boys. She also scans and attaches some extra documents – recent reports and professional assessments. When complete, she receives an email stating that the applications should be processed in 7 days and that Rick will be required to attend an interview *before* he is admitted.

Later that day, she receives an email asking her to attend a meeting with a headteacher regarding Rick. They attend a meeting a couple of days later and Rick is admitted. He and Rasnee agree to a support plan that was written using the information provided online. An email is received later the same day confirming his place and the support conditions.

Three days after the application the other two boys' places are confirmed by email, along with school contact details. Rasnee is not happy about one place but decides not to appeal when the online link takes her through a self-assessment, and she finds that she does not have sufficient grounds for appeal.

Appendix 4 : Design Principles

A. Key Principles

1. The needs of the customer and their household is always the starting point

2. Transactional processes (e.g. report it, pay for it etc) will be made available online. This is the default option.

3. All services will be easily accessible, intuitive and responsive

4. Service resolution targets will be clearly communicated at first contact

5. Personalised services including progress updates will be built into new processes and provided to customers

6. We will provide assistance to those with accessibility issues

7. We will use our information resources to target well-timed support for individuals and households

8. Signposting and information resources will be proportionate, accurate and relevant

9. Feedback loops will be built into new processes so as to provide timely information on satisfaction levels

B. Online Services

10. Web services should take customers to their transaction page promptly whenever possible

11. Self-support tools including triage, self-assessment and checklists will be available

12. Potential to integrate certain services to improve efficiency

13. Direct email contact for routine activities will be minimised

14. Search will be optimised on the home page and the internet

C. Management Reporting and Performance

15. Benchmarking against the best government and commercial providers will be applied

16. Service levels and performance targets will be reported against

17. Data on the performance of new processes will be easily available to managers after and during the service redesign

18. Staff training requirements will be identified during service development

D. Technology

19. Barriers to customer engagement will be minimised

20. Manual processes will be eliminated whenever possible

21. Off-the-shelf solutions will be used whenever cost effective

22. Seamless integration with other systems and background synchronisation will provide a faster service and more accurate information

23. Cutting edge technology will only be used when there is a low level of overall risk

24. Solutions will not be 'signed off' until user testing is completed