



City of
Stoke-on-Trent



Stronger Together

Customer Service Strategy

2021-2024

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STOKE-ON-TRENT CITY COUNCIL STRONGER TOGETHER VISION



The Stronger Together vision sets out the priorities for Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the wider city. The strategic plan has been shaped by the political ambition of the council’s leadership, as well as the values and aims of the organisation. As such, it is as much a corporate plan for the council’s directorates and teams as it is a strategic blueprint for improving Stoke-on-Trent as a city. Our Stronger Together principle is embedded into every strategy including our Customer Service Strategy which is set out within this document.

This strategy is part of a suite of documents, supporting the Stronger Together Vision, which includes the Digital Strategy, the Workforce and Organisational Development Strategy and the Asset Management Strategy, all of which are designed to support Stoke-on-Trent City Council to create a stronger city we can all be proud of.



Support vulnerable people in our communities to live their lives well



Enable our residents to fulfil their potential



Help businesses to thrive and make our city more prosperous



Work with our communities to make them healthier, safer and more sustainable



An innovative and commercial council, providing effective leadership to help transform outcomes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Stronger Together Customer Service Strategy 2021-24 sets out our ambition and commitment to enhancing the services we provide to our residents, businesses, customers and partners. It includes our vision to achieve a step change in the customer experience the council delivers to its customers.

The Customer Service Strategy sets out our approach and standards to customer service across the whole organisation. By aspiring to be as good as the best customer service organisations across the private, voluntary and community sector and public sectors, we will embed, across the council, an effective and efficient customer experience by offering accessible, convenient and responsive customer services putting the customer in control of how and when they access support. Whether making an enquiry, paying a bill, booking an MOT or seeking social care support, the customer experience will be consistent and of the highest standard.

The council has embarked on an exciting process of transformation, exploring new ways to make our services more intelligent and more relevant to the lives of the people who rely on them. We are also improving the way we use data to see where our services are working, and where we need to do things differently to deliver better outcomes for our residents, communities and businesses.

Significant opportunities exist to build and expand on this transformation process. The roll out of the full fibre network, advances in the use of technology and changes to the working environment will enable the council to further develop its digital offer, review the use of assets, automate processes and drive continuous improvement.

This transformation will include investment in a 'digital first' approach across the council in recognition that our customers want a more immediate, personalised service and expect to be

able to contact us 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This will help us to streamline and simplify our services, enabling us to manage demand effectively and releasing capacity for those with more complex needs.

As a service-led organisation, Stoke-on-Trent City Council deals with thousands of customers every day. It is important that we get those interactions right first time, every time, ensuring that our residents and customers are at the heart of everything we do.

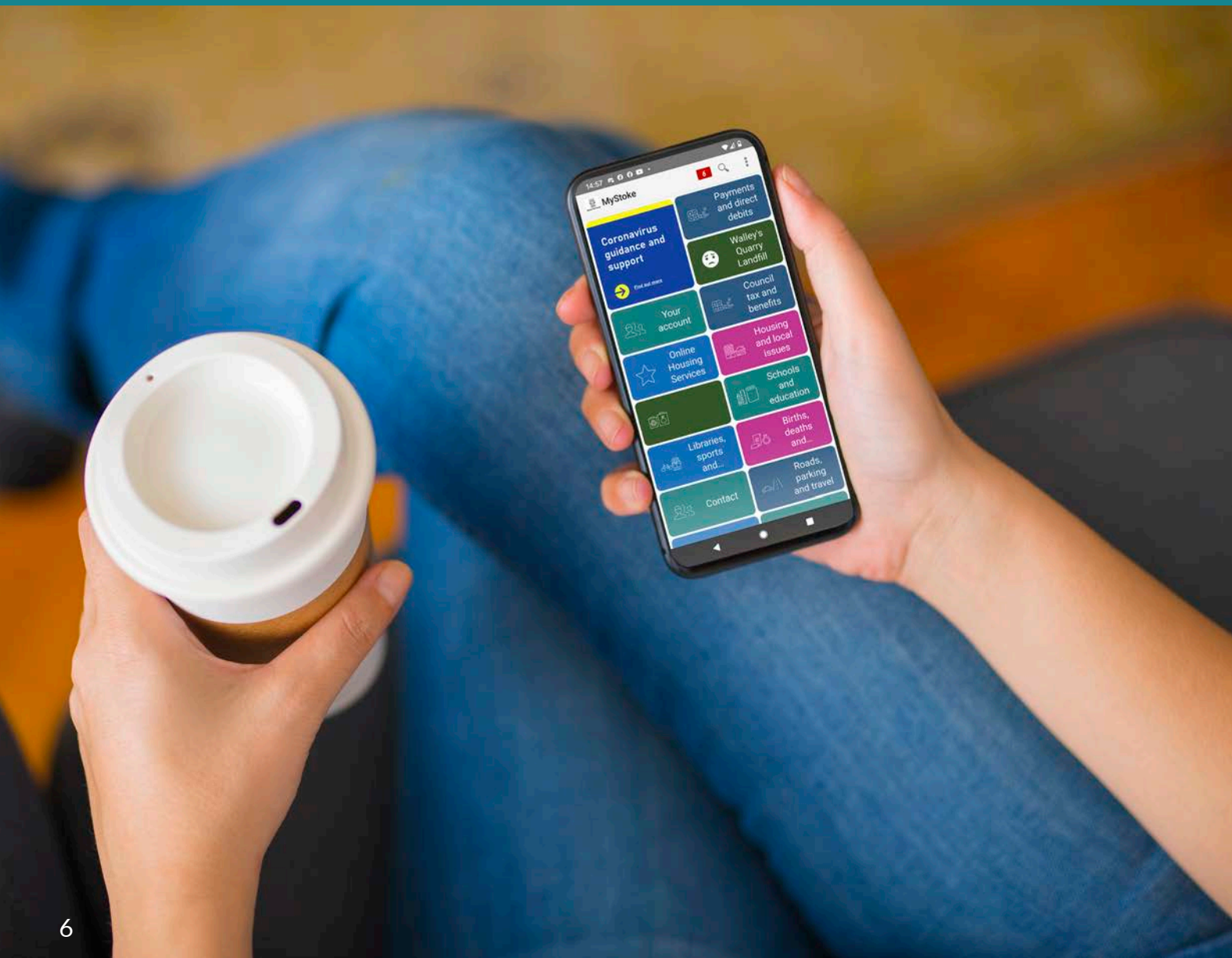
This Customer Service Strategy underlines our focus on the needs of our customers and in making every contact count, we will raise the profile of the "customer" throughout the

organisation and ensure that our plans, decisions, actions and overall culture put the customer at the heart of all we do. Working together we will ensure we have a clear vision for how we will deliver exceptional customer service in a rapidly changing environment and ensuring we truly are 'Stronger Together' in creating a city we can all be proud of.



OUR VISION

We will focus on the needs of our customers, ensure that we make every contact count and that we are there when our customers need us to be, ensuring we truly are 'Stronger Together' in creating a city we can all be proud of.

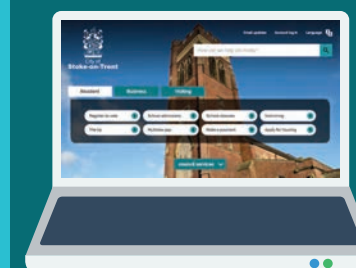


Aims

- To make it easier for our customers to access information, advice and services when they need to and enable them to help themselves
- To reduce demand and cost through innovative and effective digital redesign of our services
- To prioritise capacity to support those with complex problems or vulnerability
- To embed our customer promise across the whole council in a consistent joined up way

Key Objectives

- Provide exceptional customer service to our residents and customers so they can access the information, advice, services and help they need at the first point of contact.
- Provide choice in how customers access information and services ensuring we are accessible when residents and customers need us, promoting digital as the preferred option to free up other channels for those who need them most.
- Develop digital customer services through website, apps, social media and new technology, enabling us to be more responsive and efficient.
- Embed restorative practice into our organisation's culture – this means having a real, honest conversation with customers and doing everything we can to address concerns at the first point of contact.
- Ensure our customer contact is joined up seamlessly with the services we deliver through effective systems and processes.
- Ensure continuous learning and improvement from all customer contacts, data and satisfaction surveys to help shape the customer experience and service improvements.



BACKGROUND

This strategy sets out a step change in the way we interact with our customers which is driven by a number of factors. The local population is growing in size and diversity, particularly with a predicted huge increase in the age profile of our residents.

Demand for our services is increasing and a rapidly aging population with increasing dependency means many people need our services and extra help to live independently. Ensuring there is enough capacity to tailor our services to the different needs of our most vulnerable people and communities means we need to free up customer facing staff by dealing with transactional services differently.

At the same time, the internet and digital technologies have transformed lives on a global scale and continue to do so. This gives us a great opportunity to revolutionise our services to the benefit of our customers, residents and workforce.

Managing demand for services through automation and self-serve means customers will be able to access us through a variety of channels at the time they need us while freeing up direct personal contact for those who need it most.



OUR CITY TODAY

Stoke-on-Trent is



Provided with more than
700 services
by Stoke-on-Trent City Council



OBJECTIVES AND COMMITMENTS



Exceptional Customer Service

Objective:

To provide exceptional customer service to our residents and customers so they can access the information, advice, services and help they need at the first point of contact.

Commitments:

- We will:
- Offer accessible, convenient and responsive customer services putting the customer in control of how and when they access support.
 - Be open and honest with customers about what we can do and ensure we signpost to external providers where necessary.
 - Update our customers through every step of their interaction, being proactive in providing the information and setting the customer expectation so they feel supported.
 - Develop and train our staff to ensure they have the right skills and attitudes to provide exceptional customer service.



Customer Choice

Objective:

To provide choice in how customers access information and services ensuring we are accessible when residents and customers need us, promoting digital as the preferred option to free up other channels for those who need them most.

Commitments:

- We will:
- Engage with and educate our residents and customers at every opportunity, across all services, to sell the benefits of channel choice to all.
 - Assist to digital – show and tell our residents and customers how they can access services and assist them to choose a digital option.
 - Maintain face to face channels for specific services at Local Centres and Libraries.
 - Develop innovative approaches such as the community lounge pilot, taking a multi-agency approach to supporting people with varying needs in an informal environment.



Digital

Objective:

To develop digital customer services through website, apps, social media and new technology, enabling us to be more responsive and efficient.

Commitments:

- We will:
- Develop new innovative channels such as social media, webchat, chatbot technology, improved online account access and app development.
 - Provide options to access our services when our customers need them, through services such as 24/7 payments lines and online accounts for residents to manage their services themselves.
 - Encourage payments via direct debit and 24/7 payment line, retain cashless payment kiosks on site for those that need them, and cash payments at outlets such as Post Offices.
 - Improve efficiency and responsiveness of our customer contact by maximising the self-serve digital channels for those willing and able to use them and reducing demand for the less efficient channels.



Restorative Practice

Objective:

To embed restorative practice into our organisation's culture – this means having a real, honest conversation with customers and doing everything we can to address concerns at the first point of contact.

Commitments:

We will:

- Roll out the approach of restorative practice across the organisation following its introduction through the children's social care improvement programme.
- Change our thinking and make a determined effort to do everything we can to address the concerns of the complainant at the first point of contact.
- Ensure we engage in honest conversations with customers – real conversations, not simply an exchange of letters or verbal contact that doesn't resolve the issues.



Joined Up Services

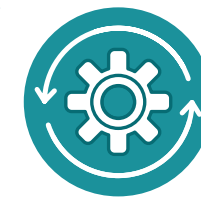
Objective:

To ensure our customer contact is joined up seamlessly with the services we deliver through effective systems and processes.

Commitments:

We will:

- Make things simple for our residents and customers so they only need to make one contact in most cases to gain the information, advice or the service they need.
- Integrate systems and processes to enable the customer to get the services they need seamlessly.
- Share information across systems to ensure there is one single view of the customer.



Continuous Learning and Improvement

Objective:

To ensure continuous learning and improvement from all customer contacts, data and satisfaction surveys to help shape the customer experience and service improvements.

Commitments:

We will:

- Listen to and learn from complaints, compliments and customer satisfaction information.
- Utilise customer insight data to understand our customer needs.
- Ensure that customer insight data is utilised to shape customer experience and make key service improvements.

Our Customer Promise



We will:

- Be polite and respectful.
- Be clear on what you can expect from us.
- Try to resolve enquiries the first time you contact us.
- Do things when we say we will and provide updates on progress.
- Help and support people to use our online services.
- Ensure that we have answered all questions and offered additional help if possible.
- Tell you about applicable council services that may help.
- Give you access to your data and keep the information you give us safe and secure.
- Make it easy for you to feedback and learn from what you tell us.



We expect that you will:

- Be polite and respectful to our staff.
- Be considerate to other customers.
- Keep us informed of any personal changes we need to know about that might affect the services we provide to you.
- Use our online services if you can and try other new ways of contacting us.
- Keep appointments or let us know if you need to change them.
- Provide us with feedback about your experience so we can learn and improve services.

CONCLUSION

This strategy will provide an improved customer experience across all our services and improve how we provide them for the future.

This strategy will be supported by a delivery plan with specific actions linked to the council's wider transformation programme.

The strategy is linked to our Digital, Workforce and Organisational Development and Asset Management strategies which will be achieved by a cross-cutting programme supported by our Annual Delivery Plan, our Operating and Team Plans, and also key deliverables which are reported in the Strategic Measures in line with our Stronger Together Strategic Plan.





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Stoke-on-Trent