Renfrewshire Council

Customer Strategy

2017 – 2022

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1.0   Executive Summary

Renfrewshire Council is committed to improving the service it provides to local people, by looking at innovative technology and developing services that are based upon the needs of our customers.

This strategy outlines the Council's approach to achieving this commitment, involving our customers and making a difference to the service we provide for the benefit of our customers.

In addition to understanding and developing the relationship we have with our customers, there are four key areas that will be tackled through this Customer Strategy: Service Fulfilment, Access to Services, Communication and Developing Digital Skills.

For each of these themes, the focus will be on ensuring that end-to-end processes and service delivery teams across the Council are involved with our customers to make improvements in what we do and, importantly, how we do it. This is not a strategy for Customer Service Teams alone; this is a Customer Strategy for the whole Council.

The Council recognises that we are living in a world of digital disruption, with an ever growing population of customers looking to communicate, interact and access services through digital channels so we will focus on developing the way we deliver services to meet this need. We will accelerate this, and will look to involve customers who live their lives digitally.

Through the work being done through the Digital Strategy, we recognise that not all our customers are able to access services digitally, and nor are they comfortable using online services. For these customers and those with more complex needs we will continue to develop linked services through our existing telephone and face to face channels.

2.0   The Renfrewshire Customer

Renfrewshire is the tenth largest authority in Scotland with around 175,000 population which is made up of approximately 20% younger than 18, 20% older than 65 and 60% between these ages.

The population is not expected to increase to any degree in the next 5 years; however, the age composition will change. It is expected that the number of people aged 0-64 will decrease, and those aged 65 and above will increase.

Across the Council, we receive 3 million contacts per year and the main Council services used by customers are environmental services, council tax, benefits and housing services with the telephone and face-to-face being the preferred method of contact for most customers.

Over 20% of our population are in the most deprived areas, according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation which contributes to an increase in demand on health and social care services, and increases the challenges for those customers in their ability to access Council services.

3.0 Strategy Development

In developing this strategy, we looked at how our customers contact us and the service they experience while we deal with their request; helped by a partner organisation, this insight was gathered through customer focus groups and more in-depth interviews. From this work, we were told that our staff are professional, friendly, courteous and knowledgeable however, our processes are complex, difficult for customers to navigate and sometimes overly bureaucratic.

From this insight we are developing a more customer centric service design framework that will allow services to be designed in partnership with customers and communities, leading to a positive customer experience.

In addition to this work, we also conducted further consultation with over 130 people at various forums and events with the use of a number of engagement models such as online survey and staff focus groups.

The aim of the consultation was to understand our customers and the challenges they face when accessing our services in order to deliver the simplest, most effective services that meet their needs by embracing the digital world we live in. By undertaking consultation with staff we identified the challenges they face, what works well and what could be improved for our customers.

Some of the key results from the consultation used in developing this strategy are:

- 'Being able to access services online' was the most important feature when contacting the Council, followed by 'how quickly I get a reply'.

- 53% of respondents from the online survey stated that Website / email and telephone were the most convenient way to contact the Council

- Visit to a Council office is the best way to contact if you have a disability, learning difficulties or require language support

- People said they don't have the skills or confidence to use online services and / or don't have access to the internet due to life circumstances or experiencing poverty

- Online services would be more usable with a single registration and sign on for all services, web chat assistance and increasing the services available online

- Simplify processes and systems which cause duplication and ensure up to date information is available to make the customer journey more straightforward

- Increase the use of social media as a channel for customers to contact the Council

- Council wide training and team sessions are key to providing efficient services and increasing customer satisfaction

4.0　Vision and Priorities

The overall vision for the Customer Strategy is:

"We will use insight to understand our customers and the challenges they face. Our services will be developed using innovative technologies and delivered in a way that meets our customer needs and enhances their experience of dealing with us."

Customer Experience can be defined as an interaction between an organisation and a customer over the duration of their relationship. For some customers that relationship is very short as they make initial contact and then their request is fulfilled; however, for others the relationship can be life-long.
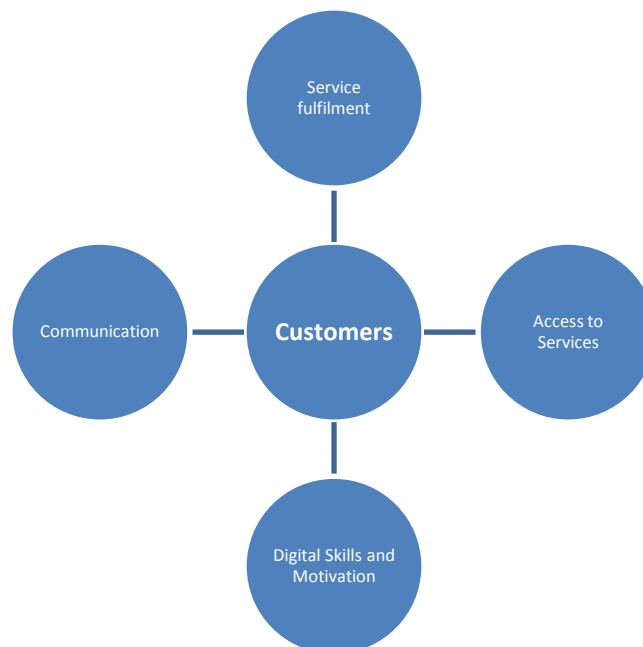
This strategy recognises that every customer is different, and has a different relationship with the Council. It also recognises that no matter what that relationship is, the experience for the customer should always be a positive one.

It is not just about how a customer contacts the Council; it's also about how Council services more widely respond. This strategy will therefore take a Whole-Council approach to ensure that the needs of our customers are met through the delivery of efficient and simple end to end service.

We will understand customer demand, recognise customer needs and then design services that provide a joined up experience that delivers on realistic expectations.

Placing the Customer at the heart of everything we do will result in a Council that is seen as being there for its customers. We have made a start on this as we developed this Strategy and this early engagement and consultation has given us early insight into what is important to the people of Renfrewshire.

 Our consultation with customers has identified four key themes. These themes are outlined below.

Each of these key themes will be explored in more detail in the remainder of this strategy, we will outline the key principles of the theme; what we want to achieve and how we will achieve it. It is also important for any strategy that we are able to tell when the objectives have been met and ensure we can measure this success.

The final sections of the document will then outline the overall governance, reporting and monitoring arrangements that will be in place to track progress towards achieving the overall vision of the strategy.

4.1   Customers

The relationship we have with our customers is critical in delivering simple, effective service. This section will look at how we will develop ways of really understanding our customers, recognising the challenges they face and providing services that meets their needs.
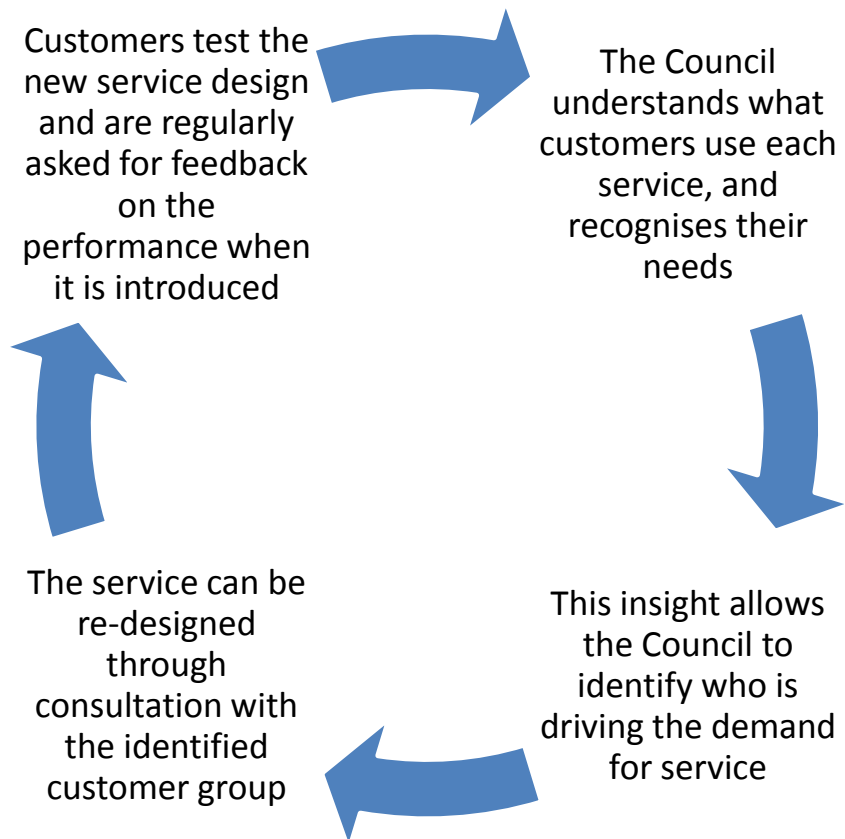
Key Principles:

We understand who our customers are, the challenges they face and the service they require. We involve them in the delivery and design of service.

We also understand how our customers will change in the coming years, and we will involve our future customers (the young people of Renfrewshire) in developing modern services that suit their future needs

To achieve this, we will -

- Ensure the right information is available from services across the Council to help us understand our customers better

- Be more future-focussed on understanding how our customer needs will change over the next 5 years through better use of the data available to us and our partners

- Consult our customers when we are going to make a change, and maintain that relationship to understand how well we are doing

- Continue to develop the support networks that are available for our customers to ensure they get what they want from our services

- Recognise the challenges some of our customers face and ensure that appropriate support is in place for them

- Ensure our customers are involved in service design through the introduction of a Customer Centric Service Design framework developed with the involvement of customers. The framework will encourage Council services to engage customers early in the design process and ensure the needs of the customer are factored into each new service implementation.

Customers test the new service design and are regularly asked for feedback on the performance when it is introduced

The Council understands what customers use each service, and recognises their needs

The service can be re-designed through consultation with the identified customer group

This insight allows the Council to identify who is driving the demand for service

We will know we have achieved this when –

Our customers feel services are designed for them, they are involved in making changes and their needs are considered by all Council services

We will measure our achievements through –

Regular consultation with our customers using customer satisfaction surveys and focus groups

4.2   Service fulfilment

Customer service is not just handling a customer request over the telephone or face-to-face. Customer Service is about how we deliver service from the initial request or enquiry, understanding the customer needs, through to achieving a successful resolution that meets those needs. This requires all areas of the Council to work together and with our customers to develop the service we provide in its entirety.

Key Principles:

Council Services are simple, easily accessed and designed for our customers. We will harness innovative technologies to deliver services and fulfil the request of our customers. Where customers are supported by partners and the wider community we will make sure they are equipped with the right skills to make that support effective.

We will strive to always deliver great service, however when things go wrong we will acknowledge it and work with our customers to make things right again

To achieve this, we will –

- Work towards ensuring our services are simple, accessible for our customers and delivered successfully throughout the customer journey - from request to fulfilment

- Have agreed service delivery standards and customers know what they can expect

- Provide customers with the same level of service, no matter how they access it

- Provide a simple registration process that allows customers to access our services digitally and securely

- Continue to deliver telephone and face-to-face services where digital is not appropriate for our customers or their circumstances

- Ensure our customer facing staff are kept up-to-date with our back office performance and be honest with our customers about fulfilment times for all requests

- Develop services end-to-end, not just focussing on making contact easier, but ensuring that full service delivery is also improved

- Create responsive services that use available information to manage customer demand and forecast periods where this increases

- Our staff are trained to think of our customers first when reviewing or delivering services

- Recognise that sometimes things go wrong, so when they do we will work hard to put things right

We will know we have achieved this when –Our customers feel they are at the heart of everything the Council does, they know what to expect when they request a service and are kept up to date as their request is processed.

We will measure our achievements through –Regular consultation with our customers using customer satisfaction surveys, focus groups and monitoring through our complaints procedures

4.3   Access to Services

Our research has told us that some customers rely on existing support networks to facilitate access to Council services, others come to us direct, and some may still feel uncomfortable approaching the council based on previous experiences they may have had. This section looks at breaking down barriers to access, making sure the Council is an approachable organisation and building support for the existing networks that are in place to enhance the help we give our customers.

<u>**Key Principles:**</u>

Having easy access to Council services is critical for our customers whether they access services directly or through an existing network of support.

Where it is possible our services will be provided online for those who can use it, and where telephone or face-to-face support is required, we will make this as accessible as possible.

To achieve this, we will –

- Ensure that, where our customers are supported to receive Council services, the partners and community groups who provide that support are skilled to provide this effectively

- Make services more accessible by developing the support networks that are already in place for individuals

- Work with our partners to remove any barriers to accessing services that have arisen from past customer experiences, eliminating stigma they feel may be present when visiting the Council

- Make 'accessibility' and 'usability' a key element in the redesign of Council services, and ensure customers have the opportunity to say what this means for them

- Make Wi-Fi available in public buildings and key town centre locations for those who are able to access services through mobile devices

- Design our digital services so they are accessible, no matter what type of device our customer has

- Create customer self service areas where technology and support is provided for those who need a bit more help to access online services

- Ensure other channels remain accessible when digital is not an option for our customers

- Address non-physical barriers to accessing service: language, literacy, disability, culture and make the Council a place that is easy for our customers to go to

- Make our buildings accessible where services are delivered face-to-face

- Give our customers the choice of when they can access services by creating appointment based services that reduces customers waiting time

We will know we have achieved this when –our customers feel comfortable and confident to access the service they require, online or otherwise at a time and place that is convenient for them

We will measure our achievements through –Post contact customer surveys where we ask for honest feedback on the service that has been delivered; learn from that feedback to make improvements.

4.4   Communication

Communication in today's digital world is changing and customers' expectations are also changing. There is less emphasis on formal, written letters. We are even seeing a reduction in e-mail communication as more and more people turn to social media platforms to get in touch with us. The younger generation live their lives on digital communication channels and we need to ensure we recognise the fast-paced change in technologies to ensure we take our customers with us. We must also ensure that more traditional communication channels are maintained to support those who are not as familiar with digital communication.

Key Principles:

We recognise that communicating with our customers cannot be 'one-size-fits-all', so our approach will be tailored to our customers' needs. A variety of communication channels will be available for our customers to choose the method most suited to their needs.

Our social media platforms will be used to provide customer service, support and advice as well as communicate key council information and announcements.

To achieve this, we will –

- Communicate with our customers though their channel of choice

- Provide all customers with the same level of service regardless of the method they choose to contact us

- Offer a range of channels to raise concerns, issues and compliments including e-mail, phone, face-to-face, letter and social media

- Build trust with our customers by encouraging two-way dialogue in an open and honest manner

- Make communications easy to read and accessible for all

- Design our communications for digital channels to make the most of the online customer experience

- Develop a Council-wide communication and marketing strategy which provides a clear outline of key messages, target audiences and communications channels

- Develop an accessible communications framework to ensure all services within the council adopt good practice

- Make it easy for customers to communicate with us and provide clear methods of feedback regardless of their chosen channel

We will know we have achieved this when –our customers become our advocates across communication channels, communication is transparent and honest and there is trust in what we say and do

We will measure our achievements through –our monthly communication performance indicators will allow us to track all elements of our communications approach

4.5   Developing Digital Skills

Digital Skills are essential in modern society; digital is seen as the fourth utility and no longer a 'nice to have' for most people; however, skill levels vary. This strategy will complement the Digital Strategy by supporting the development of digital skills among our customers. We also recognise that our staff need to have strong digital skills to allow them to support our customers.

Key Principles:

Digital skills are critical for everyone in today's world, not just when dealing with the Council. We will encourage and support our customers and staff to develop their digital skills through the services already available across Renfrewshire.

We will involve our young people in helping to develop the digital skills of others

To achieve this, we will –

- Work with our customers and partners to understand the level of digital skills of our customers and provide support to develop these

- Recognise that our staff will be required to support customers to use digital services, and we will ensure their skills are developed to deliver this

- Involve our customers in developing online services and make their interaction with the Council easier

- Help our customers to take advantage of the wider benefits of accessing digital services through the provision of customer self service areas where technology and support is provided

- Utilise the skills of the young people in Renfrewshire to help build digital skills in others and help shape service delivery so it is ready to meet their future needs

We will know we have achieved this when – where appropriate, Council services are delivered online and our customers and staff have the skills to access and use them.

We will measure our achievements through – regular monitoring of online transactions and use of digital access points

5.0   Measuring Success

Performance measurement will be built around the Customer Strategy which will follow the framework outlined below. This is used widely in assessing the implementation of customer and digital strategies. The Framework has six key elements; Involvement, Interaction, Advocacy, Influence, Insight and Impact.

Impact → Involvement → Interaction → Advocacy → Influence → Insight → Impact

For each element, several measures can be used to assess the impact of strategic change. Examples of the measures that can be used for each category are outlined below.

Involvement	Interaction	Advocacy	Influence	Insight	Impact
Total Customer contacts	Contact type (channel)	Customer Satisfaction	Advocacy of the Council	Customer Insight	Business Resources
Social Media Followers	My Account transactions		Social Media referrals		Processes changed
My Account subscribers					

These measures will form a scorecard to assess the impact of each objective in the strategy, and will monitor performance over the duration of the strategy.

6.0   Governance

The Customer Strategy for Renfrewshire will be supported by the Corporate Management Team and approved by the Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board. Half yearly updates will also be provided to that Board.

It is recognised that a number of initiatives will be required to deliver the elements of this strategy and these will continue to operate under existing governance arrangements. As an example:-

Digital Skill – Digital Strategy Implementation Group

Re-design of Services – Better Council Change Programme

The Head of Customer and Business Services / Customer Services Manager will have overall responsibility in the successful implementation of the Customer Strategy. The Strategy will be implemented in line with the existing programmes of work and with the support of staff from across all Council services.

The following diagram outlines at a high level, the governance arrangements for the implementation of the Customer Strategy.

Council Plan / Community Plan

Finance, Resources & Customer Services Policy Board

Corporate Management Team

Better Council Change Programme

Digital Strategy Steering Group

Customer Strategy Implementation