



# FOREWORD

## Foreword by Matthew Colledge; Leader, Trafford Council

A Customer Strategy is one of the most important documents that the council produces. The Customer Strategy:

- Sets out the reasons and basis for changing how we work;
- Describes how and why the council works together with customers;
- Proposes how we will manage the current and future needs of all our customers with the money available.

We will make sure that we improve the customer experience. This strategy will explain how we will do this across all the council's services, whether customers contact us using the internet, phone or face-to-face.

Our customers are at the heart of all the services we offer. We want to make sure that when they contact us, we are helping them get what they need in that first contact or as few as possible, and they are regularly updated along the way. We also want to encourage customers to do more general tasks online so that our staff can concentrate on helping customers with more complicated queries.

Excellent customer service is part of everyone's role. We are embedding a culture of valuing customer feedback. We will do this by achieving the Customer Excellence Standard for the council.

This strategy, with investment in improving the technology supporting our customer service will support the delivery of the council's corporate values:

- **Leading the way** – We want our services to be visionary, making sure there is a whole organisation approach to delivering services.
- **Engaging the people of Trafford** – We want to listen and learn from our customers, ensuring our services meet their needs.
- **Acting with integrity** – We want to be open and honest with our customers so they know they can trust us. We will be accountable for our actions. We will follow through with what we say we will do.
- **Using time and money wisely** – We want to make sure our services run in the most effective and efficient way meaning real value for money for our customers.
- **Always improving** – We want to make sure we are continually improving our services, delivering services that are flexible and change with our customers' needs.

We have spoken to many different people and groups when developing the Customer Strategy, ensuring it reflects the views of all our customers and our staff. This means it presents improvements to service standards, quality and delivery through new ways of working. The council wants this approach to continue so customers have more influence on how services are changed and improved.

All our services need to be fit for the future and cost effective, supporting our idea of bringing services closer to where people live and work. The rest of this document tells you more about how we are changing and improving our services now and in the future, making Trafford a great place to live, work and visit.



**MATTHEW COLLEDGE**

Leader,  
Trafford Council

# WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS? WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM?

All residents of Trafford are our customers, they also include everyone who works, visits, learns or does business in Trafford. As a council, we have more information about our customer and their needs than we have ever had. We know that:

1. Our population includes people from different cultures and backgrounds;
2. We have a high number of children under 5;
3. We have a high proportion of older residents;
4. There are over 11,000 businesses in Trafford;
5. There are part of Trafford where people have low income levels and are at risk of ill health
6. We have a large number of tourists visiting our fantastic sporting and cultural attractions.

We need to ensure that the council is able to support all our customers so we can provide an excellent customer experience, whatever their needs.

We talked to customers before we wrote this strategy. Our customers told us what is important to them, what they do and do not want, what they like and do not like. There is more information about this on the following pages.

## WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO OUR CUSTOMERS?

### OUR CUSTOMERS WANT

- A choice on how to interact with the council
- More services online
- Options to join groups / attend meetings
- Clear communication and information to allow informed decisions
- Meaningful consultations with updates on results
- Personalisation of services

### OUR CUSTOMERS WANT

- Close proximity to access information and services, using existing council buildings;
- Involvement in council matters eg forums
- To receive "You said, We did" feedback
- To understand communities and issues facing communities

### OUR CUSTOMERS LIKE

- Plain English whenever we write to them
- Our website for finding information
- The online bulky items collection process
- The standard of face to face service in libraries
- The fast levels of service delivered by friendly staff
- That the council listens to their needs

### OUR CUSTOMERS DISLIKE

- Our complaints and feedback process
- Jargon and technical language
- That it is not always easy to contact services using the website
- That the website isn't easy to use for people with disabilities
- Not always getting through on the phone
- Not being updated on progress about a problem they have reported

# WE ALSO KNOW THAT

85.9% of Trafford's residents have landline access to fast broadband internet and are very active 'online', downloading a significant amount of information each month;

## HOWEVER

Customers in some areas of Trafford are less inclined to use the internet.

Most customers do use the council website first for help or information but then make a telephone call, visit us or email to resolve their query;

Some customers prefer to get help or information from the council face to face.

Customer contact with the council online is in general much lower than for other councils;

The cost of face-to-face and telephone contacts between the council and its customers is much higher than online. Some of our services such as school admissions have been very successful in getting customers to use their online system.

Very few customers know we have a Customer Pledge, but our staff feel it has made them more aware of service standards; however, our staff are not as familiar with our telephone policy;

Some customers are interested in using Skype, texting and videos as a means of contacting or communicating with us.



# WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

Trafford is a high performing and value for money council. Our ambition is to maintain this and we want to make sure our services continue to:

- Be of excellent quality;
- Be easy to contact;
- Provide the help needed quickly and effectively.

However, the future has some major financial challenges for us. We have to adapt to ensure the resources we have are used in the most productive and cost effective ways.

Our customers are also under financial pressure as a result of the recession. There are a number of changes to national policy such as the welfare reforms, which will mean that some of our customers will need extra or different help in the future.

The findings from our research have provided some useful information about what changes are needed and why; more details can be found [www.trafford.gov.uk](http://www.trafford.gov.uk). In response, this strategy proposes 5 'priorities for change' with a range of actions to support the changes being made. These are summarised on the next page and described in more detail on pages 7 to 17.



# PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE

## PUTTING CUSTOMERS FIRST

Ensuring that customers are kept up to date on where their query is up to and being honest and open about the way we work.

Improving our methods of communication and ensuring feedback is two-way, makes sense and happens regularly.



## WORKING TOGETHER

Getting better at the ways we gather and use customer feedback and learn from customers' experience, to improve services and the impact they have.



## MAKING EVERY CONTACT COUNT

Working with partners to ensure customers can access the right information in the right place at the right time.



## LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

Building and maintaining a culture of customer service excellence across the council and with partners.



## CUSTOMERS ONLINE

Supporting an increase in online activity, particularly in communities where people are less likely to go online or for customers who have particular access requirements.

Increasing the range of online services we offer to increase the level of self-service activity by our customers; whilst avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach by designing the website with customers to meet their needs.



# PUTTING CUSTOMERS FIRST

**Ensuring that the customer is kept up to date on where their query is up to and being clear and open about the way we work.**

**Improving our methods of communication and ensuring feedback is two-way, makes sense and happens regularly.**



## HOW WILL WE DO THIS?

We want customers to feel they are being listened to and their queries dealt with quickly. We will:

- Put in place systems to provide text or email updates to customers who have reported a problem.

As a council we must ensure that customers have access to the most up to date information, and if a customer calls us by telephone finding the right number to use is not a confusing experience. We will:

- Ensure the most up to date information is available on our website, provide a date to show when the information was updated and enable staff to update it more often.
- Explore the possibility of a free-phone number for some information and advice services and review the range of telephone numbers on which the customer can contact the council.

Technology is ever changing. We must keep pace with the opportunities this gives the council – to improve the customer experience and to reduce our costs. We will:

- Increase the range of services accessed online, making sure these are promoted and supported by online video training guides.

Social media (eg Facebook and Twitter) is a powerful tool. This means we can use it to communicate quickly and openly with our customers. We need to use this much more effectively so it is a two way communication tool between the council and its customers. We will develop ways to gain customer feedback about the council through social media channels. This will mean issues being discussed in the community are understood and acted upon as quickly as possible. We will also promote events,

opportunities and provide alerts about any problems affecting the borough such as traffic issues.

A direct way of enabling the customer to be in control is through providing those who are eligible with a Personal Budget. With a Personal Budget people can decide how money for their social care support needs is spent. We call this 'personalisation'. It is working really well in Trafford for adults and older people, and children's services are developing it for children, young people and their families. We will continue with this approach, exploring how it could be developed for non-care services.



Through talking to customers we learned that customers don't know about the council's Customer Pledge. This is a directory of council services and includes the service standards which customers can expect when contacting the council. Staff told us they find this document useful. It is an important document for both customers and staff so we will be reviewing and promoting it more effectively and setting out how we will check it is making a difference to the customer experience.

Good communication with customers and our staff is vital – to provide progress updates, share feedback and promote new ways of working. We will:

- Introduce a “you said, we did” page on the council website so customers and staff can see what

changes have been made as a result of feedback;

- To show we are honest and open about our decisions we will also have a section “we can't because” which will explain why we sometimes can't alter the way we work;
- Review the staff newsletter so it includes positive and negative customer experiences, and examples of how feedback has been used to improve services;
- Provide regular political briefings for councillors and MPs about how we are performing on customer service and setting up a regular communication from the Chief Executive to staff and councillors which includes customer feedback;
- Develop a Communications Strategy later this

year, which will capture these activities and more;

- Provide a central point of contact for any business enquiries and ensure our business customers can share their feedback in ways which best suit their needs.
- Listen to customers and use feedback to develop and improve our services. This may involve changing policies and checking they are meeting customers' needs. We will also make sure staff receive training and we will let customers know if any of our policies or services change.

**“Good communication with customers and our staff is vital”**



# MAKING EVERY CONTACT COUNT

## Working with partners to ensure customers can access the right information in the right place at the right time.



### HOW WILL WE DO THIS?

To ensure that the council's staff are using their time, skills and resources in the best way on behalf of customers, we will organise staff to provide either telephone or face-to-face support for more difficult queries. We will promote online services for less difficult tasks. In doing this we would be providing a staged approach to dealing with customer queries, depending on the number and difficulty. This will take time to implement. This will be supported by training, improved communication and investment in computer systems. We describe our plans for this later in this document.

I need a Blue Car Badge

Please call 0161 912 2000 and we will make an appointment for you at a library nearest your home.

I have just been evicted and need a place to stay

Please come in and talk to our staff in our Housing Options service

Further examples of how we want to make every contact count are included in the rest of this document.

As part of the development of this Strategy, we have looked at how we deal with complaints compliments and comments from our customers. We are now making changes including:

- One system for recording, monitoring and reporting customer feedback;

- Reintroduce the Corporate Complaints Manager duties within Access Trafford;
- Changing the web pages and online forms to make them easier to use;
- Working with customers to resolve their complaints as quickly as possible;
- Making sure our complaints, compliments and comments leaflets are easy to understand;
- Revising the way we monitor and learn from the complaints we receive;
- Reporting and reviewing regularly the actions taken in response to customer feedback;

Our Complaints Review Delivery Group will help make these changes happen, working with all departments to check they have been successful.

We are committed to ongoing improvement at our Customer Contact Centres. We will do a review to see how this could be done in greater detail. Some changes which can be done quickly include providing a welcome at our Contact Centres and libraries from easily identifiable, smart and professional customer advisors; and making sure calls are answered by someone who will always try their best to solve our customers' queries while they are on the phone.

We have also been conducting a review of information and advice services provided by both the council and our partners; this has been a significant piece of work which started at the end of 2012. Improving the promotion of more services, not just council services is an important recommendation from this review. There are a number of opportunities we are already exploring including:

- Opportunities with Trafford NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and local pharmacists to look at how we can promote health and wellbeing messages more locally eg drug and alcohol advice, stroke prevention, falls prevention, telecare, sexual health, fire safety and winter health;
- Building upon the successful 'Books on Prescription' service by extending to other areas through 'social prescribing'. Support GPs and other health professionals to spot problems and 'prescribe' a service in addition to any health support;

- Widening the Human books initiative for Autism (which took place at Urmston Library) so it is available in other places and supports other life experiences as well.

Our plan is to develop a central facility for face-to-face access to information and advice with links to other places across the borough. This will be supported by the the development of common service standards, adopted by the council and our partners, to ensure we provide quality information and advice across the borough.

Improvements in the coordination of health and social care services are already being experienced by social care customers as they told us in a recent survey that they are finding it easier to find information about services which they are interested in using.

In addition to the provision of information and advice, we will continue to work with our health partners to promote health and well-being services through various customer contact and communication channels, to help reduce the differences in health across the borough.

In the summer, we will be reviewing some of the services provided by Public Health which aim to improve peoples' lifestyles eg smoking cessation, weight management, drug and alcohol misuse services, to further improve the impact they are having on the well-being of Trafford's residents.

**“Our plan is to develop a central facility for face-to-face access to information and advice with common service standards for all involved”**

I want to renew my library books

You can do this quickly and easily by going to [www.trafford.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.trafford.gov.uk/libraries)



Trafford Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has recently launched a project to develop a Patient Co-Ordination Centre; the aim is to encourage other organisations to work together to bid to run the centre. The centre will link to 'single access points' for patients, families and carers and will ensure co-ordinated care is provided and wrapped around the individual patient to meet their needs. Our local NHS community service provider, Pennine Care, is developing one of the first single access points in Sale for adult community health services; here patients can now use a single telephone number to speak with someone directly for help in getting hold of the right service or healthcare professional in a more timely way. This service also handles

new referrals and some enquiries for district nursing, treatment rooms, district nursing liaison, community matrons, physiotherapy and podiatry.

The 'single point of access' approach will be completed in phases and will also link to all GP practices. There is a commitment from all partners to continue discussions about how this will work practically for health, social care and our information and advice services locally, for the overall benefit of Trafford.

**“We will continue to work with our health partners to promote health and well-being services through various customer contact and communication channels, to help reduce the differences in health across the borough.”**

## Building and maintaining a culture of customer service excellence across the council and with partners.



### HOW WILL WE DO THIS?

We understand it is frustrating for any customer to receive different levels of customer service from one organisation. We want to ensure that when a customer contacts us, they get an excellent service, regardless of the department they are contacting. To help to demonstrate this, we aim to achieve the Customer Excellence Standard for the council by making excellent customer service part of everyone's role.

I am interested in starting my own business – where can I find more information?

You can do this quickly and easily by going to <http://www.trafford.gov.uk/business/>

Staff training and effective communication are essential. It is important to review training material available, ensuring that the council and partners provide consistent information and advice which helps to provide value for money. We will invest in effective customer service training which all our staff will complete. We will invest in new technology to improve the quality checking which will help our staff to improve the levels of service provided to customers. We will also:

- Review the council's staff induction and communication arrangements, ensuring excellent customer service becomes a part of everybody's role.
- Provide training for all staff on the new customer complaints and feedback process.
- Carry out refresher training (where needed) about benefits information and advice for customer

service advisors. We will provide newly appointed staff with a benefits expert from the Revenues and Benefits Service, ensuring we are giving accurate information regarding the ongoing welfare reforms;

- Ensure calls and enquiries made to any service are answered by fully trained customer service advisors;
- Undertake a comprehensive review of our telephone policy, including the use of voicemail, capturing customer and staff feedback about how well we respond to calls;
- We will work with customers to develop and promote a new kite mark standard for council and partner services, aiming for excellent customer service across organisations working in Trafford.



I'm looking for career opportunities

Visit our website

<http://www.trafford.gov.uk/jobs>

You can also use the computers in libraries to do this if you don't have a computer at home

## Getting better at the ways we gather and use customer feedback and learn from customers' experience, to improve services and the impact they have.



### HOW WILL WE DO THIS?

The council has been going through some significant changes in the last few years. This will continue for the future whilst we adjust to our new funding arrangements. As an organisation we will be very different by 2016 and we realise this could be unsettling for customers. However, if customers become more involved in how services are designed it will help reduce any concerns they may have as they will feel involved in decision-making and see how they have influenced change.

We have started to develop new arrangements to better connect the council and its partners with local residents, communities and customers. Our Locality Partnerships have been set up in the north, south, west and central areas of Trafford and are made up of councillors, local people as Community Ambassadors and staff from the council and partner organisations. They will be the first point of contact for engaging with the wider community over important issues, for example, how local services are delivered.

**“We have started to develop new arrangements to more meaningfully connect the council and its partners with local residents, communities and customers”**

We also need to develop a greater understanding of which services really make a difference to customers' lives and why. This will be crucial for developing new and innovative ways of providing services so that when we design a service it is the most effective it can be.

I want to report a faulty street light

You can do this via our website [www.trafford.gov.uk](http://www.trafford.gov.uk) and click on the link in our popular tasks section



We will:

- Continue to have conversations with our customers to understand each other better, knowing how we can help each other for the good of the borough;
- Ensure our new Locality Partnerships and Community Ambassadors create strong links between the council and customers in Trafford;
- Offer more ways for customers to share their experiences and ideas. However, we will get smarter at how we do this so customers feel valued and not pestered for their feedback from different places;
- Develop more creative ways to learn from customers' experience when designing services;
- Make sure that customer information shared and received is managed centrally, making as much use of it as possible.

**“We will offer more ways for customers to share their experiences and ideas”**

# CUSTOMERS ONLINE

**Supporting an increase in online activity, particularly in communities where people are less likely to go online or for customers who have particular access requirements.**

**Increasing the range of online services we offer to increase the level of self-service activity by our customers; but avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach by designing the website with customers to meet customer needs.**



## HOW WILL WE DO THIS?

The internet is now used for many day-to-day activities such as making job applications, bill payments and entertainment.

We know that in general Trafford residents are well connected and very active on the internet. However, our current website is limited in what can be done online - so customers end up calling us or coming to see us in person to resolve their query. We also know there are some customers in certain areas of the borough who prefer to do things face-to-face rather than online, mainly because their access to a computer is limited or they do not have the knowledge or confidence to use a computer. However, the cost of face-to-face and telephone contacts between the council and its customers are significantly higher than online contacts. Therefore it is in our interest to increase the level of online self-service activity, particularly for less complex/high volume tasks as we outlined earlier in the Strategy.

To help more customers get online we will

introduce a range of things, some of which we are doing already. We will:

- Increase the availability of computers in communities for training and access to the internet. We will do this by exploring ways to work in partnership with technology suppliers and local groups, bidding for funding to purchase computers. Availability of these computers would be prioritised for the areas in Trafford where there is lower online activity or interest;
- Promote opportunities for purchasing ICT hardware and software at reduced rates.
- Learn lessons from departments in the council which have successfully supported more customers to access services online;
- Continue to roll out our 'Go On Gold' training programme for the elderly and disabled people, in partnership with our community computer training providers, promoting training to customers in areas where there is lower online

activity or interest;

- Explore how we can increase the availability of the 'TeleTalk' systems in community buildings. TeleTalk is a system which allows the customer to communicate face to face via a video and audio link to the council;
- Increase the level of council Wi Fi hot spots in our libraries and in some areas of the borough so customers with smartphones or tablets can contact the council via our App or mobile version of the website for free;
- Provide online video training guides for customers on our website, showing how to do a task via a step by step guide if they need help;
- Show customers how to get help online when they visit us, instead of waiting to speak to one of our customer advisers;
- Review our online 'chat' service to help customers access help or a service via our website instantly.





- Work with partners including the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, New Economy and Business Growth Hub to encourage more businesses to get online and access the significant business growth benefits it offers.
- Work with internet providers to identify ways to improve ICT connectivity in Trafford and identify ways to increase business take up of broadband services.

We have already said that we intend to promote and increase our customer online self-service activity. In order to build customer confidence we need to make some significant improvements to our 'Customer Relationship Management' (CRM) system. This is a system which many councils and other organisations use to record customer information and provide a connection between the customer at the front door and the support services 'behind the scenes'.

A CRM system should also enable:

- A better online experience for both the customer and staff

- Improved management information
- Better coordination of information about our local businesses and how we are engaging with them
- Streamlined processes which save time (and money!)
- An integrated corporate complaints system
- An appointment booking system
- A customer 'golden record' – removing duplication of customer information held across council departments.
- Links to feedback being shared through social media, so we can quickly respond
- A 'one system' and centralised approach for freedom of information requests

Investment in an improved CRM system will therefore:

- Provide the council with a central source to capture compliments, complaints and consultation information;

- Enable us to proactively monitor service levels;
- Provide us with new technology to ensure our customers' needs are met.
- Enable an open discussion with our customers.
- Be at the heart of delivering efficiencies by increasing online transactions and more efficient business processes.

Opportunities for use of the CRM system across organisations will be explored to support the implementation of the information and advice review recommendations.

A mobile version of the council's website is already under development so customers can access council services from a smartphone; this will be launched later this year. In addition, we will update our smartphone App and Council website, so they work in line with the new CRM system.

This strategy recommends these actions are included in a digital strategy, which should be developed by our technology and communications departments.

# HOW HAVE WE DEVELOPED THIS STRATEGY?

This strategy has been developed in consultation with a range of customers. We have completed a number of activities to ensure any recommendations proposed are evidenced.

The activities we have completed included:

- Customer journey mapping to assess effective processes and quality of customer care
- Focus groups with a range of people to:
  - > review the council website;
  - > suggest improvements to the complaints process;
  - > confirm the appetite and readiness for channel shift and;
  - > find out what barriers there are to channel shift.
- Questionnaires/surveys:
  - > To understand where people go to find out about council services;
  - > Assess the value of a customer pledge and directory of services;
  - > To assess quality of customer care.

More information about this and a summary of the findings gathered as a result of the above activities can be found at [www.trafford.gov.uk](http://www.trafford.gov.uk)



# TIME TABLE



## AUTUMN 2013

- Mobile version of council website goes live

## WINTER 2013

- Customer pledge updated and promoted
- Council Wi-Fi hotspots increased
- Changes made to council website
- Telephone Policy & numbering reviewed
- Digital Strategy launched
- Communications Strategy launched

## SPRING 2014

- Customer Insight mechanisms and approach agreed and implemented
- Complaints Review short term changes completed
- Review of Access Trafford completed
- Customer service training reviewed, promoted and delivered
- Benefits of Go On Gold training reviewed
- Tele-talk system installed in more community settings
- Video training tools developed and launched

## SUMMER 2014

- Partnership opportunities implemented to make every contact count
- Information and Advice Hub established
- Locality Information and Advice Gateways established
- Customer Excellence Standards pursued
- CRM changes implemented