

Appendix A - Birmingham City Council Customer Service Strategy

Achieving world class customer service for Birmingham



Making a positive difference every day to people's lives



Every single resident of Birmingham is our customer. We know we have not always made our customers feel valued or the focus of our attention and have not organised our resources well enough to meet their needs. We cannot say our customers have enjoyed “beautiful customer experiences” as a standard. We know things need to change, we want to create a shift in how we think about and interact with our citizens, for you to be at the centre of everything we do. This document sets out our strategy to deliver a customer experience that exceeds your expectations.

Our customers no longer compare us to other local authorities. The benchmark we compete with today comes from the Amazons, Ubers or Airbnb's. These and others are our “invisible competition”. You are, of course, unlikely to see us mentioned in any publication pitted against these mammoth organisations. This competition exists in the hearts and minds of you, our customers. Our customer service and care and how you interact with us are measured against these and other household brands.

We say, “Be Bold, Be Birmingham” and this drives our passion to transform the Customer experience of Birmingham City Council. The development and design of this strategy has been made possible by the involvement and encouragement of our management team and elected members, all of whom have a genuine desire to improve and excel for the city and to be the exemplar in our sector.

As we use this strategy to change the way we work across the organisation, you will start to notice some differences in how we interact with each other and increase our use of new technologies to improve services. This does not mean we will ignore those who are most vulnerable, but by making how most of you contact us as efficient as possible, we will be able to direct our resources to support those who need our help the most.

We will think ahead of your needs to reduce the times you have to contact us, and when you do need support, you will be able to do a lot more for yourself and others in your family or your community. For those who are unable to self-serve, our telephone and face to face services will be better prepared, and readily equipped with the information we need to best support you. Fewer of our online applications will need you to send us supporting information. Some online requests for service from you will be resolved immediately. In some areas, you may not need to apply for services as we will have pre-empted your need, we will know what help or services you need from us, and we will proactively approach you!

This strategy is a live document and we will constantly be looking for ways to improve the services we provide as technology evolves and will be looking to you to tell us whether we are making a difference. Our success in delivering the world class customer experience we aspire to can be measured against actions which are outlined in this strategy. Please always tell us when you think we are doing well, or where you identify we can still improve!

Signed

Leader of the Council

Chief Executive

WHY WE NEED TO CHANGE



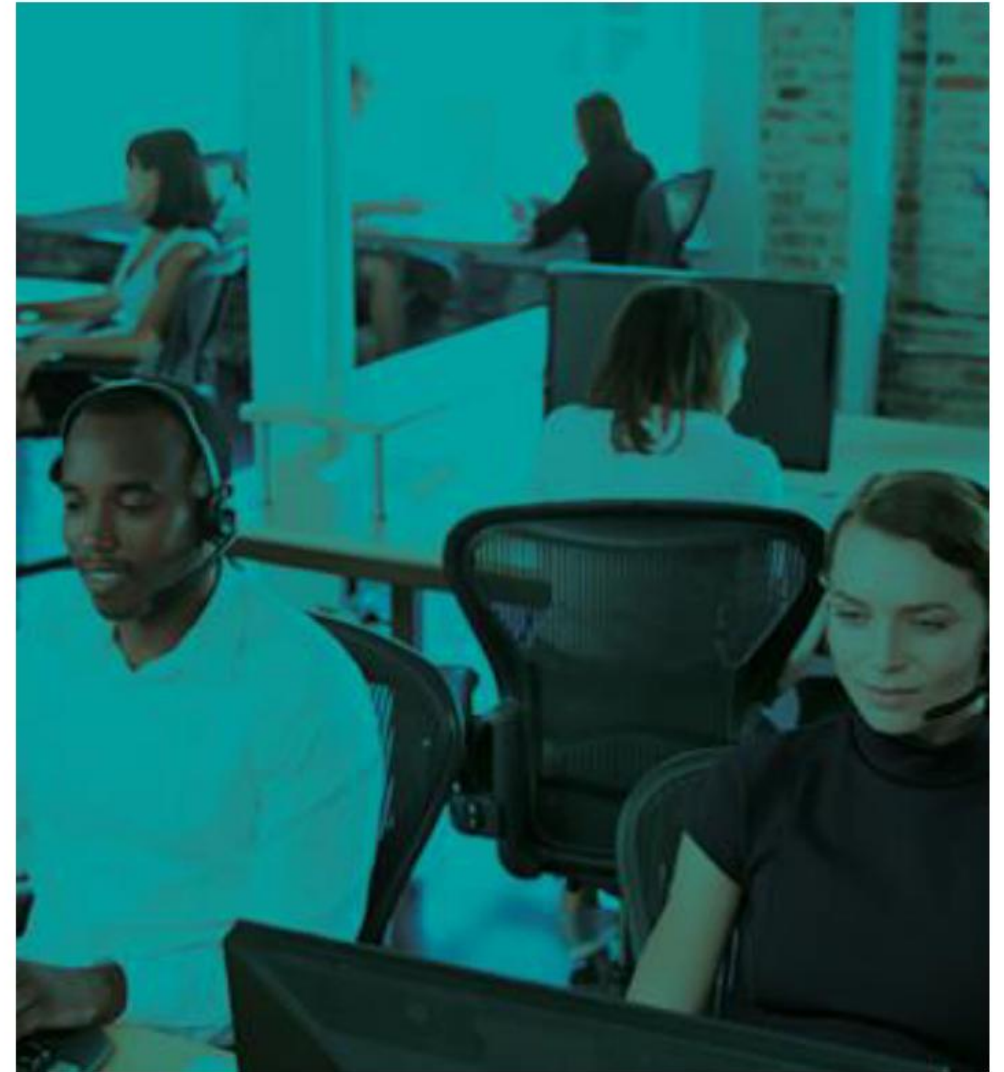
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Why we need to change

In November 2020, Birmingham City Council started an ambitious journey to transform the way our customers experience our services. We engaged a forward-thinking organisation to partner with us and help us understand where we were going wrong. We commissioned them to review services to our citizens and provide us with insights on how we can improve.

Our partner confirmed our suspicions; we do not provide consistently high-quality customer service across the board. In places, our customer service offer is both quite traditional and inadequate. They found gaps in our level of customer care and a significant number of areas where we must improve. This has only strengthened our resolve and provided us with essential guidance on where we need to start. Their insights were many in number and significance; here are some of the headlines.



Some web forms are being utilised

We want you to make requests for services at any time of the day or night, and that is why we have invested in digital technologies to put services online. So far, we have put 170 of our own forms online, some of which need further enhancements to improve your journey to them, which can be disjointed and inconsistent. We need to develop more forms, reduce the links, simplify the self-service tasks, and remove the various printable PDFs on the website that you still need to download and print off.

Limited customer service feedback sought

Only 5% of our services ask customers about satisfaction with their services. This means most of our organisation do not know what you think about our services, how easy or not it is for you to transact with them, or how you feel they need to improve.

Excessive points of contact

We have too many points of contact for our customers. This creates many invisible barriers for you to navigate. We also know this causes confusion and frustration. We need to rationalise the way you contact us and simplify our processes. We need to untangle the lines of communication and streamline your contact.

Under-utilisation of the BRUM account

Only 21% of our services have services available on our customer portal (Brum account). This causes our customers a great deal of confusion and disruption, e.g. having to sign on multiple times to different portals for different services. We need to change this and remove barriers that can prevent you from accessing our services.

Services in demand

We know our services are very much in demand by you. We work hard to ensure we have sufficient staff and resources to cover that demand. However, we also recognise demand outstrips our ability to supply all the services you need. So, we will work with you to understand the pattern of your needs and match the staff and resources to the demand for our services. We will make better use of technology to provide insight into your patterns of demand

Resources where needed!

Some of our tools and systems are outdated or under- utilised. This can mean we end up using valuable staff time to complete tasks and activities a system is more than capable of handling and can often do in a fraction of the time. We will look to use technology to provide simple activities and reinvest the time saved on helping our citizens who are most in need of support.

Email contacts aplenty

We want our customers to contact us digitally, but we don't necessarily make this easy for you, or us. We don't think using emails helps you, and we find them difficult to process. We need to redesign your interactions with us digitally to make it as easy as possible to tell us what you need. We need to reduce the number of email addresses and increase the amount of well thought out electronic self-service access tools.

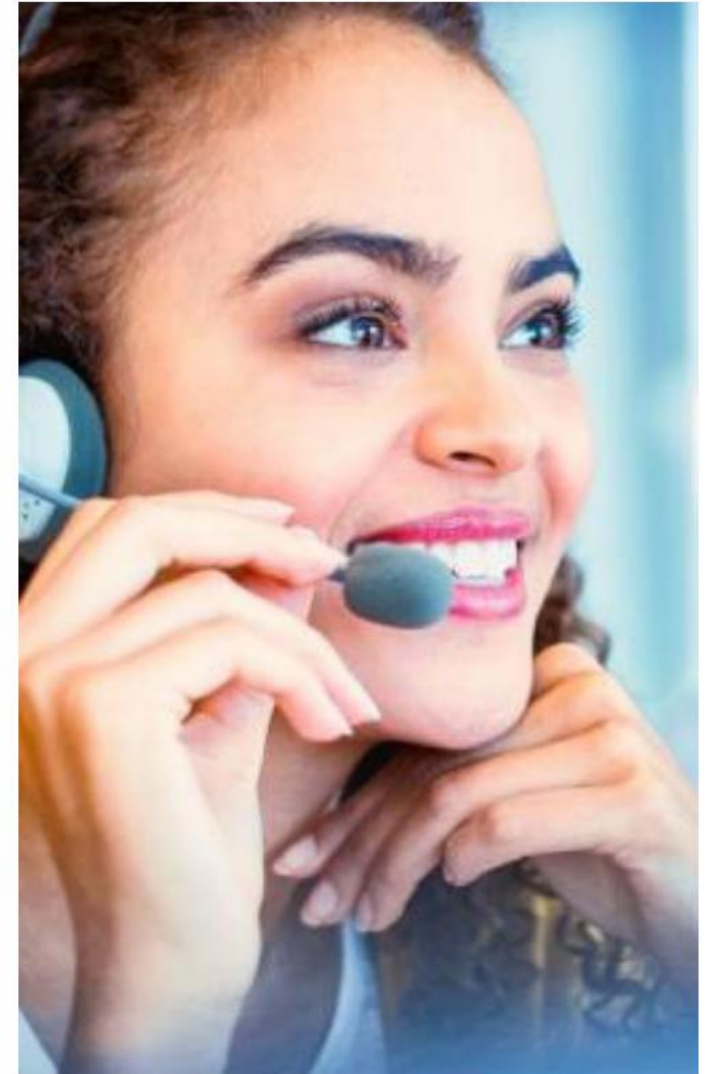
Contact centre under-utilised

Only a small fraction of our services are provided through the contact centre. This means most callers to the Council are not speaking to dedicated customer service staff trained to respond to your needs. We need to redesign our services to make sure qualified customer service staff are at the end of the line when you call.

Learning from complaints

We can learn a huge amount by listening to customers and reviewing feedback that we receive via our complaints process. We must improve and embed a process of learning from complaints so that we can better serve our communities and continue to drive up service quality

We recognise many of the areas for improvement identified through our review of customer service require changes to our systems and tools. The reality is that technology continues to transform at a tremendous rate, and we need to leverage it better. We are investing in these advances in technology deliberately so those of you who want to can interact with us at a time convenient for you. Your experience of interacting with the multitude of services that are straight-forward will be significantly improved. We can then redirect some of our staff to support those in our city who have more complex needs and require more support from us, be that online, over the phone or face to face. We can finally match our ambition and drive with the innovation and technology which now exists and is well within our reach!



OUR PLAN TO CHANGE



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Our plan to change

We know you, our customers, expect us to modernise the way we interact with you. We also know many of you are “tech- savvy” and expect the same level of technology and web experience you receive from our “invisible competition”. We accept the challenge and have a plan to change your experience of interacting with us. We also recognise there will be times when you need to contact us in traditional ways, which is fine. We want to make your digital experience simple and accessible, but we recognise not everyone is digitally enabled. We will still provide the same level of help where and when you need it. We will provide the right service access at the right time for the correct type of transaction.

We will do this by building our solutions and improvements on the following foundational principles:

Redesigned service delivery

We are going to change the way we deliver our services. We will reset our processes and working arrangements to better meet your needs. We want to predict your service requests when we know what you need, and we want to intervene earlier when we see our customers need specialist support from us.

Customer-centric culture

We will rethink the way we view our customers in the services we deliver. We will create a culture where customer service is owned by everyone working for us to reflect your importance to us. We know Birmingham City Council exists for our customers, not the other way round!

Modernised tools and technology

Our tools and technology need modernisation. We know we need to keep up with the ways and means our customers want to communicate and interact with us. For example, at a basic level we know it is not always easy to make payment for our services, so we will change our payment options and make it easier for you to pay for the services you use. We will however commit to go much further than this by leveraging the latest technologies on a continued basis to support you in the best way possible.

Use your data wisely/proactively/logically

We know you only want to give us your information once. You want us to use that same data (like your address) to populate our other systems and provide other services, so we don't have to ask you for the same information repeatedly. We also know you would like us to tell you about the services you might be entitled to before having to ask. We will make sure we use the data sensitively and only where appropriate.

Making contact easy

We are going to redesign the way you contact us. We will simplify the whole experience and provide easy access to the services you need.

Measuring the important things

We want to be transparent in all our dealings with you. We will measure your satisfaction and tie it to our performance monitoring; this will ensure transparency. We will publish our targets and results. We will become confident in our ability to deliver excellent service, and we will share our successes and learning points with you. We also need to learn from complaints and ensure that feedback regarding the quality of our services is heard and acted upon to drive up customer satisfaction levels across all service.

OUR PROMISE TO YOU



Making a positive difference every day to people's lives



Our promise to you

Through this strategy, we commit to change the things you tell us are essential. We have developed a set of customer promises, and we will hold ourselves accountable to ensure we deliver on them.

We need each other

We are the UK's largest Council, but we are equally a connected group of small communities. We understand the importance to you of the communities we serve, and we want to build a solid connection with them. We will seek to form genuine relationships with community groups, third sector organisations and faith groups serving our communities. We want to partner with these organisations and combine our efforts and energies to help better the communities you live in.

Fast track decisions

We will look for opportunities to fast-track decisions to enable you as customers (residents and businesses in particular) to navigate our administration quickly. We will seek to pre-validate your application/request where we know you meet the eligibility criteria. This means you will not be asked to wait weeks for the critical support you need.

Knowing what you need

We already know what our customers want from us before contacting us, e.g. the services we provide. With that in mind, we are going to pre-empt as much of your contact as possible. We will actively look for opportunities to make your life easier and speed up your interactions with us.

Tell us once!

If you provide us with information about you, we will, with your permission, use that same information to populate our other systems. You will only need to tell us once. We will then share that information (appropriately) with the Council's different teams when required.

Customer-driven innovation

We know we cannot improve things without fully involving you in what we are doing. With that in mind, we are looking for opportunities and avenues to work with you to get your views and ideas on how things can change and where we might save money. The people of Birmingham are well known for their interest and desire for innovation, and we want to tap into that potential!

Early intervention counts

There are times when we know early intervention will save money and reduce disruption for you. We will build the tools and systems to ensure we know when we need to intervene to help you and help us, e.g. we can install damp monitoring into our houses, so we know if there is a problem. We can then intervene early and fix any related problems before it causes associated health issues.



WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT



Making a positive difference every day to people's lives



What can you expect

Birmingham City Council officially came into existence in 1838 (incorporated) and in 1974 became the metropolitan district council we are today. In those early years it was logical to arrange ourselves by work divisions.

In 2021 we no longer need to bind our work structures and organisation to these old patterns. We are now free to organise ourselves to best suit modern ways of working and in a way our customers can access. We know these technologies will continue to evolve and provide new opportunities and our commitment is to embed this continual improvement into the way we work.

We'd like to do lots of things, and we will need to prioritise them within the confines of the budget available to us to implement this strategy. We expect this strategy to lead to a reduction in our overall spend on our customer service. We have identified five 'themes' to coordinate and manage their delivery and have categorised actions into three levels of complexity:



Our four themes, to organise activity



A customer focussed council



A connected council



A smarter council



A connected city

Complexity levels of customer service

- Fix the basics
- Raise the standard
- Set the standard

The following pages of this strategy introduce each of these themes in more detail and set out the types of things we will do to improve our customer service to you.

A CUSTOMER FOCUSED COUNCIL



Making a positive difference every day to people's lives



A customer focussed council

Our customers are the more than 1.1 million citizens who live in our city. They are supported by over 11,000 city council staff, 88% of whom live in the city themselves. We are the largest local authority in the United Kingdom, and Europe. While our size sometimes makes getting the consistency of services challenging, we are ambitious and want to be the quality standard for excellent customer service across the public sector.

We want to engage with you through multiple forums, so we prioritise our changes around the things that really matter to you. Our aim is that you will notice a direct and fundamental difference when engaging with us as we will be much more focussed on you and your needs, not just the service the officer you are talking to sits in. This includes being much more proactive, updating you and supporting your needs before things get bad, while at the same time enabling you and the community around you to help yourselves more.

We don't think excellent customer service should be limited just to the council. We are calling on our partners across the public sector to join us in raising standards of customer service in our city. Together we will meet your expectations for customer service.

Fix the basics

Our contract with you

We will develop a customer charter, setting out the customer service standards you can expect from us **by May 2022**.

Communicating change

We will launch an annual customer services communications plan, starting in **January 2022**.

Owning customer service

We will ensure that all 11,000 of our staff have completed customer centricity training by **December 2022**.

Accessibility

We will review all our websites to ensure that they cater for everyone's accessibility needs by **December 2021**.

Complaint Analysis

Where we don't always get it right, we will listen and act swiftly to resolve complaints and ensure that the root causes are known so that we can fix service issues in the longer term to avoid repeat complaints by **October 2021**.

Raise the standard

Giving you a voice

We will launch customer service panels, for citizens, young people etc, **by August 2022.**

Testing our services

We will recruit and launch our first mystery shopping teams in **by August 2022.**

Unblocking services

We will have reviewed all our major **processes** to remove unnecessary steps and blockers by the **December 2023.**

Understanding you

We will use publicly available data sets to really understand the make-up of those in Birmingham and use this information to help shape our services by **December 2022**

Set the standard

Sector leading customer service

We will create a customer service Centre of Excellence by **April 2023.**

A CONNECTED COUNCIL



Making a positive difference every day to people's lives



A connected council...

A major challenge we recognise is that trying to navigate to the support and services you need can be complex and confusing at the best of times, and to make things worse can be exceptionally frustrating when we ask you to provide the same information over and over.

Through the connected council theme, we will to bring everything we do together through a 'Single Front Door', employing technology across our telephony, digital and face to face assets, to make it easier for you to interact with our services. Like our "invisible competition" we will look to personalise contact to your circumstances as much as possible from reminders for appointments, to re-using data you have already shared with us to helping you through different stages of your life.

Our aim is that where possible you do not even notice many of the services that we have done for you because we have been smarter in the way we deliver our services and not had to bother you.

Fix the basics

Getting our information right

We will review and update information and materials we provide about our services on our website by September 2022.

Raise the standard

A single front door

We will have a broader range of services through our, dedicated and specialist customer service team by **March 2023**.

Speeding up your frequent tasks

We will identify the top 50 service requests and prioritise digitising them, with many available online by **August 2022**.

We will develop the technology to share your information, in a safe and secure way, so that you don't have to keep repeating information to us approach by **March 2023**.

Helping you stay on top of things

We will be able to send you simple reminders for your appointments by **June 2022**.

Tell us your info once only

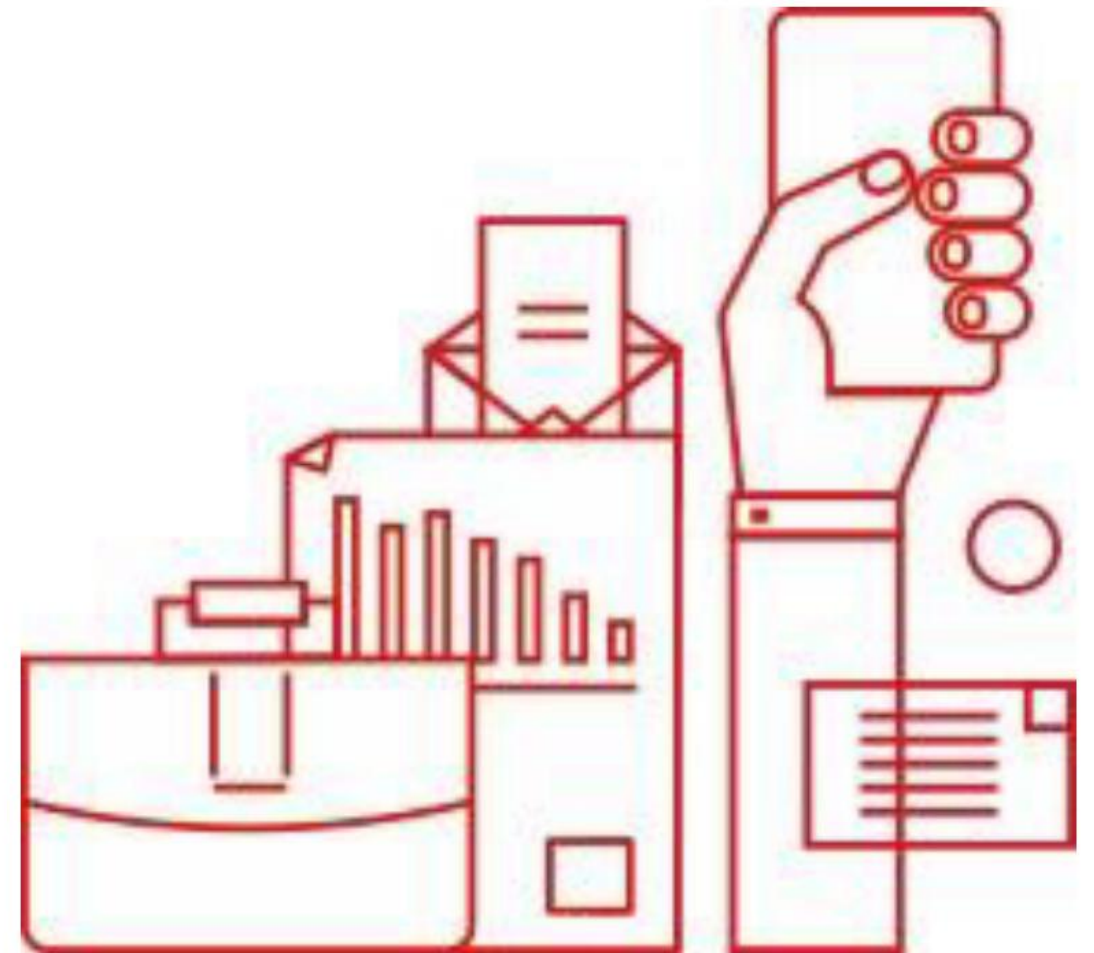
Setting the standard

Personalised service alerts and reminders

We will personalise automated reminder texts and emails, based on your circumstances and preferences (e.g. channel, time, messaging etc), so you never have to miss a deadline or an appointment with us, by **March 2023**.

Digital to promote healthy lifestyles

We will identify the top 50 service requests and prioritise digitising them, with many available online by **August 2022**.



A SMARTER COUNCIL...



Making a positive difference every day to people's lives



A smarter council...

We must work smarter to meet your needs.

We recognise the majority of you just want to transact efficiently with us for what we call our universal services, those services every household receives like street-cleaning and waste collection. You do not want anything more than a simple straight-forward relationship with us, and that is what we must provide. We will invest in cutting bureaucracy and unnecessary steps to make doing business with us easy.

Some customers need more help, support and guidance, often from more than one of our targeted and specialist services - for things like help with skills, accessing benefits, homelessness prevention etc. We understand if we do not help you quickly, often your problems will become more acute and difficult to resolve. We will identify people most in need and intervene earlier, to prevent those customers having bigger problems. We will join up these services more effectively, so you do not have to make multiple applications or tell multiple services about the help you need. In doing so, we will create a service which takes into account all your needs and all the possible services we can offer, not just the one you ask us about.

Fix the basics

Connecting our teams

We will create a network of customer service champions, **by December 2021**, across services, to work together to identify new ways of working better for you.

Where we receive cross service and multiple team complaints, we will form working groups on your behalf to resolve and fix local Issues that communities face by working collaboratively with partners and the community to address the root causes of complaints.



Raise the standard

Redesign our customer service set up

We will create a new team to provide earlier support and intervention, bringing together the parts of the council providing the **top 50 targeted and specialist services**, by **January 2023**.

One view of you

We will develop our single view of you, sharing data safely and securely across the **top 10 service areas**, by the **December 2022**.

Getting ahead of demand

We will look for ways to work smarter, pre-empting your contact wherever possible across the top 10 service areas, by the **December 2022**.

Set the standard

Pointing you to services

We will identify the **top 20 related services** (e.g. school applications and local summer activities) and start automating linked messaging by **December 2024**.

Keeping you informed

We will identify the **top 5 activities** you would like to know about in your area (e.g. planned roadworks) and trial pre-emptively tell you, by text or email, by **December 2022**. We'll then plan for more!

A CONNECTED CITY COUNCIL...



Making a positive difference every day to people's lives



A connected city...

Our communities are the lifeblood of our city. We however recognise we are not the only place you go to for support when you need it most, and that we need to partner with other public sector bodies such as the NHS and the myriad of critical local community groups, to provide much more seamless ways of supporting you. The Covid-19 pandemic has showed us the power of working together with our partners and our communities and the greater positive impact it has. We will build on the lessons we learned during that time!

You will feel the impact of this part of the strategy in many ways, from truncating simple processes like the elderly / vulnerable leaving hospital to receive care at home so you can get home quicker and not be asked the same information over and over, to seeing a much greater presence in the community with our locality-based service staff working with partners through shared service centres so you get the right support from the right organisation(s).

Fix the basics

Signposting for you

We will identify the top 50 non council service requests and ensure we prioritise and signpost to them on our website by **March 2022**.

Easy searching

We will improve search capabilities on our website, so it is easy to find the right service provider for your needs, by **March 2022**.

Community hubs

We will conduct a review of our properties by **June 2022**, to identify the best locations for community hubs / one stop shops, with partners.

Raising the standards

Asking you to help out

We will trial using digital technologies with a first cohort of 10 citizens, linking them to family and friends who can help out with their care, **by January 2023**.

Located together for you

We will co-locate with other service providers and partners, able to jointly support your needs, **by December 2024**.