

To: Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board

On: 23 November 2023

Report by: Director of Finance and Resources

Heading: Customer Strategy 2023-2028

1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the Renfrewshire Council Customer Strategy 2023-2028
- 1.2 This report outlines the new Customer Strategy for the Council which was developed following consultation with customers and senior staff across the Council.
- 1.3 The strategy aims to build on the successes of the previous Customer Strategy and is developed across four key themes of Customer Contact, Technology and Innovation, Service Design and Culture and Skills.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board:
- Note the contents of the report and approve the Customer Strategy 2023-2028.
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3. **Background**

- 3.1 The previous Customer Strategy for the Council set out aims of developing digital services and providing customers with a choice in how they interact with the Council. The Council's Myaccount platform has been developed to now provide over 120 online services, and supports 100,000 users to interact with the Council at a time that suits them. The volume of transactions has increased since its inception and now handles over 160,000 customer requests per year.
- 3.2 Consultation with customers and staff was carried out over the summer period to provide insight into the current views and future needs of our customers. This insight has helped define the four themes for the new strategy.
- 3.3 Over 1200 customers and staff responded to the survey which was available online and through the Council's libraries.
- 3.4 Following analysis of the responses, the new strategy has been developed around four key themes.
- Customer Contact
 - Technology and Innovation
 - Service Design
 - Culture and Skills

Customer Contact aims to ensure all contact channels are developed to offer a consistent service to customers, providing digital options for routine and transactional services and supporting customers over the telephone for more sensitive or urgent enquiries. This theme also recognises that appropriate support should be available for customers when the need arises and not just restricted to core council hours.

Technology and Innovation supports the ongoing development of the Council's digital experience programme and continued availability of online and automated capability for transactional requests at the same time developing the skills of our staff to support customers who need more complex, sensitive or urgent assistance.

Service Design recognises the need to involve our customers when we change or implement services, the theme aims to embed the Scottish approach to service design across the Council. By doing so, services will be developed to meet customer need, and provide efficient end to end solutions to ensure as a council we are successful in getting it right first time.

Finally, Culture and Skills will look to develop all staff to deliver better Customer Service and further enhance the skills of front facing staff to equip them with the capability of supporting more complex and demanding customer need. Ongoing development of digital skills for staff and customers is essential and this strategy supports the work already underway with our partners to build a digital Renfrewshire.

- 3.5 An action plan has been developed for each theme and this will be delivered in conjunction with officers across all services to ensure the successful achievement of the four strategic aims.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – None
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – Working with the organisational development team, new training will be developed to enhance the customer service skills across the Council.
3. **Community/Council Planning** –
 - *Working together to improve outcomes – The success of this strategy will require collaboration across all council services and partners, to ensure the services we offer our customers are accessible, efficient and capable of fulfilling their needs.*
4. **Legal** - None
5. **Property/Assets** - None
6. **Information Technology** – The customer strategy will require the ongoing development of current and implementation of new technologies, supported by the ICT service.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for consideration of performance only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. **Health & Safety** – None
9. **Procurement** - None.
10. **Risk** - None
11. **Privacy Impact** - None
12. **Cosla Policy Position** – Non applicable.
13. **Climate Risk** – none.

List of Background Papers

(a) None

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Customer Strategy

2023 - 2028

1. Foreword from Convener and Director

Renfrewshire Council is committed to delivery excellent service to our customers. This strategy set's out how that will be achieved over the next 5 years.



This is an ambitious programme of transformation that will see the ongoing development of our digital service offering and investment in future technologies that will improve the service we offer our customers.

This strategy also recognises the need to invest in the skills of our people, enabling them the develop and adapt to fulfil the needs of our customers, no matter how they contact the Council.

Every customer interaction matters, and it requires a whole organisation approach to achieve excellent service every time.

As we develop new processes and services, we will ensure our customers are part of the process. We want to place the customer at the heart of our organisation and build a Council that has a caring reputation.

We recognise the council can be complex to navigate for some customers and the service we offer them will be inclusive and supportive, not only fulfilling requests from customers, but joining up services to make our offering more proactive.

All this needs to be done against a backdrop of significant financial pressures on the Council, therefore we need to be innovative and bold to deliver this strategy efficiently.

The strategy is ambitious, but the service we offer our customers is critical, and we will support the teams to deliver each action and realise the improved outcomes throughout the next 5 years.



Councillor John Shaw
Convener of Finance, Resources and
Customer Services Policy Board

Alastair MacArthur
Director of Finance and Resources

2. Introduction

The Council and Community plans strive to make Renfrewshire a Thriving, Well, Fair and Safe community, where everyone who lives, works or visits feels included, supported and valued

This Customer Strategy continues the work of the previous strategy and has been developed to shape the way in which the Council understand it's customers and redesign service delivery to meet their needs.

Although this is called the "Customer Strategy", the term customer can be used to describe anyone who: lives or works in Renfrewshire; anyone who visits the area; or any party with an interest in the area and has reason to interact with the Council in some way.

This is a Customer Strategy for the whole Council, it is not just a strategy for the Customer Services teams. It aims to deliver better interactions and outcomes across all Council services. The strategy recognises that our customers are changing, and we need to adapt to reflect this. We have an aging population; we are seeing an increase in customers where English may not be their first language and our communities are becoming more diverse.

Therefore, we must ensure our customers are central to everything we do; the services we provide, the information we make available and the work we do with the wider community to make Renfrewshire a better place is all done for the benefit of our customers.

The Council Plan and Community Plan provide a clear direction of travel for the organisation, and this strategy will support the delivery of their stated goals and intent, with the focus on how they affect our customers.

There are other strategic programmes across the Council which have a direct impact on the services we deliver to our customer or the way in which we operate as an organisation. The customer strategy must integrate with these and recognise the role they play together to enable consistent and successful outcomes.

In addition, the Digital and Data Strategies are key enablers and will provide essential building blocks for the successful delivery of this Customer Strategy.

It is also important that the implementation of this strategy contributes to achieving the core Council values; we are Fair, we are Helpful, we are great Collaborators, and we value Learning,

It is a simple exercise to translate these values to our customers and how we interact with them. Our services and process should be Fair, when dealing with our customers our staff should be Helpful, we are great Collaborators involving our customers in developing the services we offer and finally we value Learning if we get something wrong, we learn from that and make changes to prevent it happening to other customers. This strategy will help to embed these values externally and strengthen the work being done to live them internally.

3. What we've learned

Customer research

We carried out multiple short customer surveys over a 4-week period to help us understand more about our customers, their habits, and their view of the service we currently offer. We received over 1,300 responses and the insight gathered has helped us shape this strategy.

What our customers told us

Our customers are already digitally connected with over 90% of respondents currently having a mobile phone. 74% of those managing their phones with monthly contract and 26% on a pay as you go tariff. Of these, 81% prefer to use wi-fi at home to enable online access, and 13% utilise mobile data packages. 2% use public wi-fi services through libraries or other outlets and only 4% of respondents indicated that they do not use online services through their mobile phone.

Digital connectivity was further demonstrated when we asked which channel our customers would prefer to use to access the Council for a non-emergency issue. 61% of respondents would rather do this digitally, either through the Council's website, social media or by sending an e-mail. 29% would prefer to continue to use the telephone and 6% would choose to talk to someone face to face.

Understandably, this preference changes when asked about an emergency or sensitive issue where 72% would prefer a telephone call or face to face appointment.

The Council's website was also used by most respondents at some point, however only 36% were satisfied with it, further demonstrating that work is required to improve the service we offer through that channel.

The research looked at the age profile of respondents, with over 90% being between 25 and 75, with the largest group being aged 55-64, providing assurance that any insights gathered from the data is not limited to only the younger generation of digital natives.

In terms of location of respondents, they were spread across all post code areas from PA1 to PA12, with the higher number understandable in the more populated areas of PA1-PA5 and PA8, again providing assurance that any insight is not limited to the views of those solely in the more urban areas.

Staff research

As well as gaining feedback from our customers we carried out a survey of senior officers to understand their views on the service we deliver and their aspirations for future development.

It was important to understand how we view ourselves and compare this to the views of our customers and ensure the needs of Council services are factored into the key strategic aims.

What our staff told us

There is a strong recognition across the Council that our staff do a fantastic job delivering service to our customers, however all recognised areas where we can make this even better.

Our staff work extremely hard to respond to the needs of our customer, however some of that effort is required to compensate for poor processes and legacy systems with limitations. Having a focus on improved service design, with modern and more flexible systems, our staff will be equipped to work smarter and more efficiently to improve outcomes for everyone who interacts with the Council.

Our customer base is broad and accounts for everyone who lives, works, visits, learns and has an interest in the area. All of whom have different needs at different times and look to us to fulfil these. Dealing with such a broad base brings its challenges in ensuring all areas of the Council have the same ability to deliver every time against these needs.

Our leaders have a desire for services to be more accessible, responsive, consistent and transparent and to achieve this, greater emphasis is required in the development of not just our systems and processes, but in staff communication, collaboration and service delivery skills. We receive great feedback from our customers, but not always. We need to understand better when a customer has a negative experience and learn from that to improve on future interactions.

4. Strategic Themes

From the responses gathered from customers and staff we can see there are common themes that will form the focus of this strategy. Four strategic themes have emerged that, when delivered, will improve the service offered to anyone who needs to interact with the Council.

These themes are described in more detail below, with specific actions outlined later in the document.

Customer Contact

The current primary method of contact from our customers is the telephone with over 300,000 calls answered in the customer service unit each year and a similar number across the rest of the Council.

The research shows there is a desire for this to change for non-emergency interactions, and additional work is required to ensure digital services are expanded to meet the needs of our customers.

Telephone contact is still seen as the preferred primary channel for emergency or sensitive issues and therefore staff skills should be developed to support these more than simple transactional requests.

Our customers want a choice of how they contact the Council, and we have to create an offering which is sufficient to allow them to make that choice. All contact channels should be available, offering the same experience irrespective of how the customer wants to interact.

The time of day when a customer wants to interact with us was also important to understand. Over 86% of respondents want this to be Monday to Friday and few customers want to have to interact with the Council during a weekend. However, if they do, they should be able to access a range of appropriate contact channels to make their requests.

Customers also want to deal with their request in one single contact, no matter how they choose to contact the Council. We have a solid track record in achieving this; however, we have room for improvement. From the research, 27% of all contacts felt that they did not manage to achieve everything they want to first time, either over the telephone or online. We need to understand better where our processes are failing and create more robust end-to-end solutions to reduce the need for multiple contacts from our customers.

Getting it right first time for our customers should be the main priority, a customer is willing to wait a little bit longer for good service from a knowledgeable and understanding member of the team rather than have a poor experience dealt with ineffectively in a short period of time.

Technology and Innovation

The world we live in has changed significantly in the last 3 years, as have the expectations of our customers. Technology is now central to everyday life and individuals expect to be able to interact with organisations digitally.

Over the past 5 years, the Council has invested in creating an online customer portal, integrated with the main Council website, however the pace of change in the world of technology shows that we can't stand still, there is still significant work to do to ensure our online platform delivers a simple, user centred and effective digital experience.

From our research, we understand that over 90% of respondents have and use a mobile phone for online interactions, we must therefore ensure that all digital interactions can be managed across that platform and not be reliant on having a tablet device or PC at home.

We also have a lot of work to do to ensure that irrespective of how our customers choose to contact us, their experience and outcomes are the same. Information provided across contact channels must be consistent, accurate and up to date and all process must be supported across all channels for residential customers. Business customers require the same level of consistency of information; however, they are more likely to be able to interact digitally and should be supported to do so.

The digital experience we offer must be multi-channel, and flexible to allow customers to switch between channels seamlessly as they progress through their interaction. A customer who starts a request online should be able to complete that over the telephone if they experience issues or the request becomes more complex. This can only be achieved through a fully integrated digital experience platform and the Council must continue to develop this approach.

It is also important to recognise that a lot of interactions are for simple, transactional requests which should be easy for customers to complete, over 50% of customers surveyed would be likely or extremely likely to use simple chat bot and Automated Intelligence (AI) technology on the Council's website if that were available for routine transactions. Investment in technology will have to be in line with investment in additional training for staff to ensure they are available to support vulnerable or more complex customer issues.

Service Design

The Services we deliver are for the benefit of our customers, and therefore should not be designed without their input. The Scottish Approach to Service Design provides a clear, robust method of designing and re-designing services with the customer at the heart.

We will work with our change and transformation teams to embed these principles in every new initiative, transitioning away from the more traditional project and change management frameworks which are more internally focussed and allowing our customers to be a more integral part of what we do or want to do as a Council.

We also must get better at managing change across the Council. New processes and services must be built end-to-end, ensuring that back-office functions can fulfil requests as easy as front-end services can receive them. There is no point in developing a strong, consistent, and effective digital experience for our customers if our council services are unable to deliver on our customer needs effectively. Adopting true service design principles in all future change will ensure our processes are joined up and fully developed across the fulfilment cycle.

Service design is also about ensuring the customer is kept up to date with their requests, without the need for them to contact us again. We need to ensure that regular feedback at each stage of a process is provided, removing the need for the customer to contact multiple times, and achieving the aim of getting it right first time.

Culture and Skills

We want to create an organisation that cares for its customers, one which can understand and respond effectively to their needs. From the internal research, our service leaders understand that more needs to be done to improve training and development of customer service skills across the Council.

Every conversation or interaction with the Council should matter, we should be able to join up services through observation and learning to support customers and create the reputation of a caring organisation. We should use data, information, and insight to pro-actively ensure customers are engaged with services which are appropriate to them at that time. The Council's Digital and Data Strategies will be key in enabling the successful delivery of this strategic aim, recognising that sometimes customers need a helping hand to navigate the complex council landscape.

In conjunction with Organisational Development, we will create a toolkit for all members of staff to provide them with the skills and knowledge to delivery exceptional customer service every time. The Council is a large organisation, and this will be a significant piece of work, however over the next 5 years, we will aim to create a customer culture, where everyone recognises and understands the contribution they make to deliver for the people of Renfrewshire.

We can't just stop at Customer Service development. Digital is a key enabler of this and other strategies and we must ensure that our people and our communities are equipped and enabled to transition and exist in a more digitally operated organisation. We will continue to work with Renfrewshire's digital partner network "Connect Renfrewshire" to understand user needs and translate these into future plans for ongoing development.

Living the Council's values will be key in ensuring successful delivery of the aims within this strategy; inside the organisation and across the community as a whole.

5. Measuring Success

Governance

The approval of the strategy will be obtained from the Finance, Resources and Customer Service Policy Board and regular updates will be provided to that board.

This strategy is owned by the Head of ICT, Transformation and Customer Services and progress will be monitored and reported through the Digital Board to the Corporate Management Team.

The convener of the Finance, Resources and Customer Service Policy Board is also a member of the digital board and will receive more regular updates through that means.

Actions and Outcomes

From the strategic themes outline above, the following table outlines the actions which will help deliver the key outcome of making Renfrewshire a more caring and customer focussed organisation that recognises the value in delivering exceptional service first time.

Strategic Theme	Action	Outcome
<i>Customer Contact</i>	Continue to increase the number of digital services available	Customers will have more choice in how they contact the council
	Develop our services across all contact channels	The service a customer receives will be the same whether they call us, visit us or do it online.
	Review of the out of hours service we offer our customers	Services will be always available online with additional support provided for emergency issues.
	Conduct a review of our processes to understand where things are going wrong	We will aim to get it right first time for all customer requests
	Skills development programme for customer services staff to support more complex and sensitive issues	Our staff will be trained to support customers irrespective of their needs
<i>Technology and Innovation</i>	Continue delivery of the Digital Experience Programme	Our customers digital journey is seamless and consistent
	Ensure all digital platforms are built for mobile first	Customers will be able to use our online services on their preferred device
	Ensure information is consistent across all customer contact channels	We will provide the same answer to our customers irrespective of where they ask
	Implement AI/Chat Bot functionality for routine transactional services	We will offer our customers the option of using AI / bot

		functionality for quick and routine transactions
<i>Service Design</i>	Review of internal change management framework to embed Scottish Approach to Service Design	All projects being managed by the Programme Management Unit will ensure our customers are involved in the change
	Create Customer Research panel to support User Centred Design (UCD)	We will have a large pool of customers who are willing to provide input to future changes
	Up-skilling sessions for all staff to understand Service Design and End to End delivery	Staff will understand Service Design and use the techniques for continuous improvement
<i>Culture and Skills</i>	We will match our customer data across all systems and make this visible to all staff who need it.	We will be able to pro-actively link services for our customers and provide solutions where required
	Develop customer service toolkit training for all staff	All staff will understand the importance of good customer service and have the skills to deliver it
	Culture change activity to make the customer more central to service delivery	Our customers are seen as being central to everything we do
	Digital Skills training for staff	All staff will have the digital skills they require for their role
	Digital Skills training for the wider community	All customers will have the digital skills they require to allow them to interact with the Council