

# Putting our customers first



A strategy for 2014 to 2017

*Altogether better*





## **Foreword**

### Welcome to Durham County Council's Customer First Strategy for 2014 to 2017

This refreshed strategy sets out how, over the next three years, we aim to transform the way in which our residents, visitors, businesses and partners access our services.

Our vision for this strategy is clear, we aim to:

***“Deliver customer service that provides value for money, flexibility and choice whilst placing our customers at the heart of everything we do.”***

We have come a long way since the new unitary council for County Durham was formed in 2009. At that time, we were committed to providing a consistent and responsive approach to all our customers whilst we transformed and harmonised the way we worked across services. Whilst our commitment to providing strong customer service has not changed, we are now working in an environment of increased demand for services. Changes to the welfare system and reducing budgets, will mean by 2016/17, the council will have experienced a 50% reduction in the amount of funding it receives directly from the government.

We have carried out a wide ranging consultation on customer contact and asking for feedback on how we should be delivering effective customer service in the future. These are the main things which you said:

- ✓ Make it easy for me to contact you.
- ✓ Get it right first time.
- ✓ Be clear on how and when I can expect services to be delivered.
- ✓ Give me choice of how I want to contact you.
- ✓ The personal touch is important.
- ✓ I'd like to be able to make more payments online.

We want to ensure we balance reduced resources with a commitment to delivering essential services in these ways which are important to you. This will mean providing better online services, encouraging self-service, working better with partners to join up services, whilst we continue to protect vulnerable communities.

This strategy document sets out our approach to these challenges over the next three years.

#### **Councillor Brian Stephens**

Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Local Partnerships.

# Delivering an altogether better Durham

The Customer First Strategy is central to ensuring that you remain at the heart of our vision for an altogether better place which is altogether better for people.

## Altogether wealthier

focusing on creating a vibrant economy and putting regeneration and economic development at the heart of all our plans



## Altogether better for children and young people

ensuring children and young people are kept safe from harm and that they can 'believe, achieve and succeed'



## Altogether healthier

improving health and wellbeing



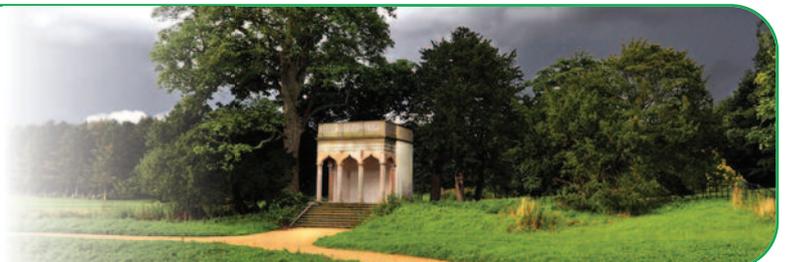
## Altogether safer

creating a safer and more cohesive county



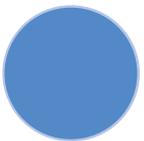
## Altogether greener

ensuring an attractive and 'liveable' local environment and contributing to tackling global environmental challenges



## Treating people fairly and respecting differences

We are committed to treating everyone fairly, with respect and dignity, regardless of background or abilities. We take account of differing needs and make appropriate adjustments to improve access to services. We will continue to train our staff, improve our buildings, provide accessible information and investigate all complaints fairly.



## Understanding our county and people

As County Durham is diverse in both geography and the make-up of communities, we need to ensure that we build a strategy which takes account of different needs and the ways in which we are able to interact with you. We also want the county to flourish as a place so we need to ensure all visitors and businesses can easily access information to enable them to visit or develop a business here.



## Changing technology and customer expectations

Each year we answer more than 910,000 telephone enquiries and deal with more than 270,000 face to face enquiries in our customer access points. While telephone is the preferred method of contact, the number of e-mails and web forms we receive are increasing significantly.

The internet is changing the way people interact, both in terms of social contact and when requesting goods and services. Communities are developing around interest rather than just location. The rise of social networking presents us with an enormous opportunity to engage with people in new and exciting ways.

We know that your expectations around access to our services are changing. There is demand for faster, easier contact at a time and place that is convenient to you and we need to meet this demand. We also need to ensure we are providing services which give good value for money at a time when we have fewer resources and are having to be more efficient. This means improving our online services to offer better electronic and information services.

We want to make improvements to our internet services so we can provide better quality and more convenient services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We know there are some people who do not have access to the internet and will ensure the right help is available to those who need it.

The Digital Durham project is aiming to widen access to superfast broadband across the county which will give even more residents the opportunity to use our services online. This project will result in 98% of properties having access to superfast broadband by 2016.

## Case Study

### Moving school admissions online

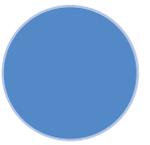
School admissions moved from paper-based systems to web-based systems by encouraging parents to apply online. Historically, parents had two options when applying for a school place; online and via a paper-based application form inside the Parents' Guide to School Admissions publication.

The paper application form and the Parents' Guide to School Admissions publication was abolished and replaced with an information postcard signposting parents to apply online. This resulted in a significant increase in online applications between 2012 and 2014:

- online primary admissions increased from 36% ➔ 2014 = 79.8%
- online junior admissions increased from 31% ➔ 2014 = 81.6%
- online secondary admissions increased from 25% ➔ 2014 = 81 %

These changes allowed us to make savings whilst improving customer service.





## Customer First

We want to ensure that you can access our services in a variety of ways; that our service delivery is effective, fair and efficient and that our staff are helpful, knowledgeable and friendly.

Our vision is to;

**“ Deliver customer service that provides value for money, flexibility and choice whilst placing our customers at the heart of everything we do. ”**

### Key Outcomes

We are working towards three outcomes to ensure we truly put the ‘customer first’ and to provide cost effective services.

**A range of effective and easy to use ways in which our customers can deal with us.**



**Responsive and customer focussed services.**



**Customer feedback informs learning and results in improved services.**



The rest of this strategy outlines how we will deliver these outcomes.

# Outcome: provide a range of effective and easy to use ways in which our customers can deal with us

## What this means

We know that you want to be able to contact us in different ways depending on your enquiry.

We need to develop our website to make it easier to use council services online.

The rise of social networking provides us with an enormous opportunity to engage with people in new ways.

The telephone is the most popular means of contact from people and we will continue to develop our telephone technology. We have contact centres across the council dealing with a range of services. We will review this to consider joining up services where appropriate and work towards making it easier for you to contact us.

We want to ensure that where you need to see us in person, you are able to do so. However, providing services face to face is the most expensive way to interact with people. As we are in a climate of reducing resources, we will need to carry out a review of our customer access points to consider where they should be located in future, based on customer need and providing value for money. We will ensure that you are aware you can access service information in any of our buildings and we will continue to explore opportunities to deliver face to face services outside of the traditional access points, working with other familiar service providers.

In 2013/14 we received 812 reports of fly tipping through the online form on our website.

In 2013/14 9,055 street lighting requests were logged by our Customer Service Officers.

## Did you know?

If you follow us on Twitter and Facebook: You can get regular updates when weather causes disruption to our services.

## Our commitment to you. We will:

- Make the website easier to use.
- Enable you to access information about your dealings with the council securely online.
- Ensure you know of all the different ways you can contact us.
- Review our Customer Access Point provision.
- Provide you with more and better self-service facilities.
- Use Social Media more widely for you as a customer.
- Provide opportunities for you to use online services and continue to expand broadband in the county.
- Ensure we can deal effectively with out of hours emergencies such as flooding incidents.
- Make it easier for you to telephone us by reducing the number of phone numbers we publish.
- Make better use of our buildings to enable you to get information on services in person.

## Timeline for delivery



# Outcome: responsive and customer focussed services

## What this means

It is important that everyone who works in the council puts you at the forefront of the way we work and deliver services. To ensure we are as responsive as possible, we will continuously look closely at the way we respond to enquiries and make the service as efficient as possible.

It is important that we are giving out the right information, advice and support and that our staff are courteous and polite. We will review our quality assurance systems and deliver a new programme of customer care training so our staff can deal confidently with customers.

We will look in-depth at a number of our key areas of service delivery to review the customer experience and improve the way we work. This will mean eliminating wasteful parts of our processes, reviewing our letters, forms and information to ensure they are clear and easy to understand.

We need to be clear about the standards of service you can expect to receive when you contact us. We will monitor our performance in relation to timeliness and quality of service and use this to make improvements where we can.

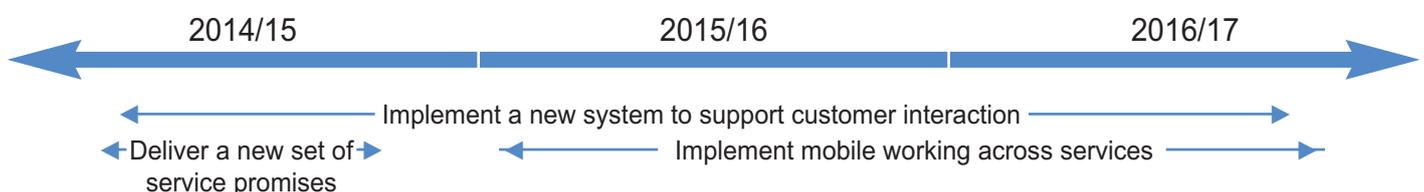
In 2013-14, 38,000 people were helped to stay in their own homes through community based services such as home care, day care, equipment, adaptations and respite care arrangements.

In 2013/14 customers submitted 16,901 requests regarding delivery of refuse and recycling containers.

## Our commitment to you. We will:

- Be clear on how you can expect services to be delivered and by when.
- Gather information on your needs to improve the way we deliver services.
- Improve the way we interact with you using new customer care training.
- Ensure our communications are as clear as they can be; ensuring forms and letters are easy to read.
- Identify where technology can improve the way services are delivered.
- Review our working practices to meet your needs.
- Continuously keep your needs in mind when you ask us to provide you with a service.
- Keep you informed of progress when you have asked us to do something.

## Timeline for delivery



# Outcome: customer feedback informs learning and results in improved services



96% of complaints received in 2013/14 were resolved by the council without the need for referral to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Did you know?

that you can have your say on Council services at [www.durham.gov.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.durham.gov.uk/haveyoursay)

## What this means

Due to reducing resources and increasing demand for services we need to think differently about the way in which we deliver our essential services. This may mean changing how we provide services or introducing charges for services which were previously provided free of charge.

When introducing these changes, we need to consider how it will affect our communities. We need to capture this information both before and after implementing new ways of working and also when reviewing how that change has been received.

It is important that we get your views so we can learn from your feedback and use it to review the way we provide services. It is also important for us to find out the reasons people contact us and we will use that information to help improve our services. We need to build our information systems so we can adapt services to meet the different needs of our communities.

In 2013/14 48% of customer feedback was given via the website.

## Our commitment to you. We will:

- Take your views into account both before changing services and when you give us your feedback on how we are delivering services.
- Monitor the impact of changing the way we deliver services on our communities and use that information for the future.
- Review the way in which we deal with all customer feedback, including complaints, compliments and suggestions.
- Tell you when feedback has been used to shape service provision through the 'you said, we did' approach.
- Encourage you to give us your ideas on how we should deliver services in the future.
- Ensure we acknowledge where we have got it wrong and be clear on what we have to do to put it right.

## Timeline for delivery



**Please ask us if you would like this document summarised in another language or format.**

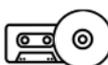
العربية (Arabic) (中文 (繁體字)) (Chinese) اردو (Urdu)  
polski (Polish) ਪੰਜਾਬੀ (Punjabi) Español (Spanish)  
বাংলা (Bengali) हिन्दी (Hindi) Deutsch (German)  
Français (French) Türkçe (Turkish) Melayu (Malay)

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**Braille**



**Audio**



**Large  
Print**