

Customer Experience Strategy 2020 to 2024

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Foreword by Executive Member for Customer Experience

I am delighted to be launching this strategy, and making commitments to our residents and other customers, about the experience they can expect when dealing with Bracknell Forest Council.

These unprecedented times, with the uncertainty about the future due to the Coronavirus, mean that customers are even more reliant on the Council. They look to us for leadership, for clarity and reliability of information, and for quality of service. But their expectations are ever-changing, influenced by their experiences with other organisations, as well as their need for safety and security.

We want to build on the achievements delivered through our previous Customer Contact Strategies. Already well underway on the journey to digitalising our services, we aim to extend this capacity during the lifetime of this strategy. We are making a promise to our customers: that accessing all our services will be simpler, clearer, faster - and safe.

We will use our approach to dealing with customers to address the challenges of the present and future:

- We face growing demand from increases in housing and population in the borough. A welcome development, with lively and active communities and increased economic activity. But we must adapt to meet the needs of these communities, without increasing costs.
- Like most of the country, the make-up of our communities is changing. We see increased numbers of older people, with a need for more targeted services and support.
- The uncertainty of the future due to Covid-19 means we need to be able to respond quickly and effectively to people's concerns, to local outbreaks and to changes in demand.
- The likely economic pressures and subsequent challenges faced by the public sector cannot be ignored, and we must design and deliver services in ways that reduce costs, without damaging outcomes for people.

We are building in resilience for the future, ensuring that our approach to dealing with customers is agile – adapting to changing circumstances – and intelligent, using good quality data and insight to inform decisions and design of services.

We will take a whole council approach to how we deal with our customers. Our values and behaviours will demonstrate that customers are at the heart of everything we do. Service design and structure will address the needs of customers, and staff will receive the right training and development to ensure they deliver on our promises.

We will meet customer needs in ways that are simpler, clearer, faster, and safe. Customers can count on Bracknell Forest Council to deliver good, timely, efficient, and cost-effective services.

Councillor John Harrison

Executive Member for Customer Experience

1. Introduction

Purpose

This document provides a comprehensive overview of the Strategy for Customer Experience at Bracknell Forest Council for the period January 2021 to December 2024.

It sets out the vision that we will provide an excellent experience for all customers – residents, partners, businesses and suppliers – whenever and however they deal with us. Acknowledging the constraints on council finances, we will meet customers' needs in the most efficient and cost-effective way we can. We will ensure that customers can access services where and when suits their needs. *We will design and deliver good services, that meet our customers' needs in a timely, efficient and cost-effective way.*

Scope

The objectives of the document are to:

- Set out the strategic objectives and themes for Customer Experience to deliver corporate priorities.
- Describe the underlying approach to Customer Experience to support the achievement of corporate priorities and address the challenges we face.
- Set out an outline programme of projects to deliver the Customer Experience strategy 2021 - 2024.
- Help to inform the organisational format and structure of the Customer Experience function, to ensure that we have the right team in place to deliver on our promises.

2. Executive summary

The overarching aim of this strategy is to ensure that our approach to managing customer experience supports the council's strategic objectives, as laid out in the Council Plan. Recent events have added to the requirements for customer contact to be well designed, so that the Council can meet the broad range of customer needs, ensuring customers have a good experience, while maintaining safety and wellbeing. As in previous strategies, digital transformation is at the heart of our approach to customer experience.

The strategy is focused around five key aims:

1. Organising ourselves around customer needs

- Transforming our customer service model to reduce demand and be increasingly digital
- Restructuring diverged teams into a single point of contact
- Simplifying our telephone contact
- Expanding the current range of services offered by Customer Services
- Increasing first point of contact resolution

2. Designing excellent customer experience

- Accessibility by design – designed for mobile use and accessibility
- Time and place agnostic – accessible at any time, any place, any device
- Efficient and simple – tell us once, eradicate unnecessary process steps
- Clear and easy to use – applying our service design principles
- Harnessing technology – self-service, Artificial Intelligence, Robotic Process Automation

3. Growing a “Customer First” culture

- Extending staff training
- Introducing quality standards and professional accreditation
- Tracking customer enquiries through a single CRM system
- Reporting on performance and customer satisfaction
- Learning from complaints and customer feedback

4. Digital by design

- Digital principles – based on Government Digital Service
- Facilitated digital – support from Customer Services
- Digital inclusion – building the digital skills of our customers

5. Using data and intelligence to improve customer experience

- Ensuring quality data
- Analysis of customer activity
- Using analysis to simplify and ensure accessibility of services
- Using intelligence to target services at the right people

The strategy links closely with the Digital and ICT Strategy 2021 – 2024, and to our approach to Communications and Marketing, and how we manage council accommodation.

3. Building on the achievements of the previous strategy

Bracknell Forest Council has had a Customer Experience Strategy since 2003. The focus of these strategies has variously been on simplifying and improving customer experience, channel shift, the move to digital and delivering improvements in efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

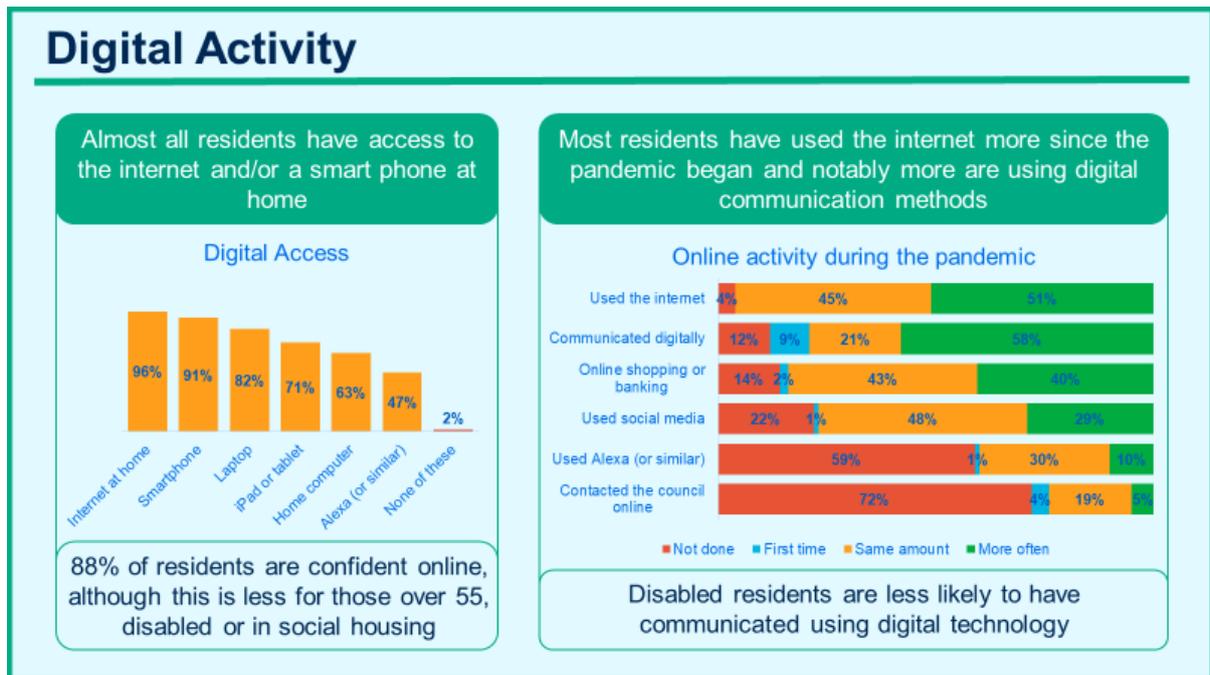
The most recent strategy (Customer Contact Strategy 2017 – 2020) had a strong focus on introducing digital channels to supplement existing channels, and on moving traditionally in-person and physical services to their digital alternatives. That strategy has had some notable successes, including:

- A top-class, fully accessible website
- Introduction of web-chat to our website
- Use of email for large mailings, replacing printing and posting
- Reducing cash and cheque payments
- Extending the use of social media to engage with residents
- SMS being used for reminders, e.g. unpaid council tax bills
- Online bookings for services such as bulky waste collections
- Online bookings for events in Parks and Libraries

In recent months, the Coronavirus pandemic has forced us to find new ways of delivering services that don't require customers to be present. This has been challenging, but we have managed to deal with nearly all customers who would normally attend in person, either on the phone or online. We don't want to lose this progress, but to cement it into our new operating model for the future.

4. The Customer Experience Blueprint

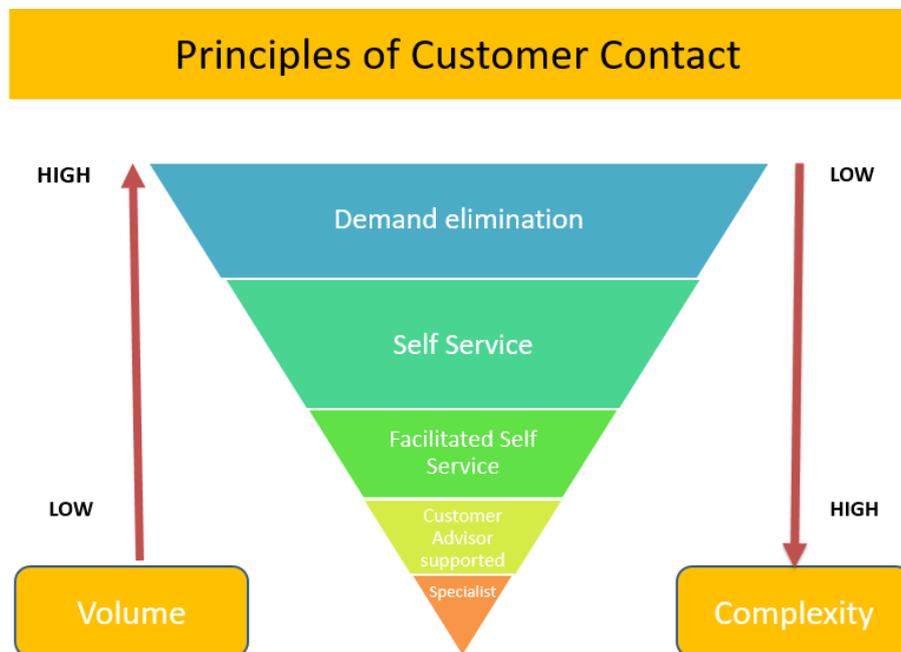
Evidence from our Residents Survey in recent years has demonstrated that most of our customer base has access to the internet and is comfortable using digital services. This has been borne out during the Coronavirus pandemic, as more of our services have moved online. Our 2020 Coronavirus-specific survey confirms this, although it is evident that there are members of the community who are less likely to have access to the internet, or the skills needed to use it.



Extract from Covid-19 Residents Survey

The formation of a Ways of Working Group to support the recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic has helped to shape this strategy and design the future model for how we interact with our customers.

Our plan for our customer experience can be summarised in the following model:



Where possible, we will look to eliminate, or at least reduce, the level of demand placed on the council. This can be achieved both by improving the information we provide through our website and by harnessing the enthusiasm in the community for volunteering and providing support.

Most transactions – those that are high in volume, but relatively simple – will be completed online, by the customer themselves. Those without the digital skills to do this alone, or without access to digital services will be supported by a member of staff, or a volunteer, to complete the transaction online using publicly available ICT equipment.

Where this isn't possible, due to the complexity of the issue, or the abilities of the customer, then a Customer Service Adviser will complete the transaction on the customer's behalf.

Only when we reach the very complex, but lower volume, interactions, will customers deal directly with a specialist. These would be things like a social care assessment. Although we shouldn't abandon the prospect of creating an online self-assessment, or of providing help using a chat-bot or virtual agent.

5. The Key issues and challenges for BFC

The Corporate Priorities for BFC are set out in the Council Plan 2019. They are subject to some revision due the Coronavirus Pandemic and a fresh commitment to review our approach to equalities and racism.

The Council Plan

To deliver on all our objectives and make sure that Bracknell Forest stays prosperous and remains a good place to live, work and play, we have focused our Council Plan on 6 strategic themes:

- value for money
- economic resilience
- education and skills
- caring for you and your family
- protecting and enhancing our environment
- communities

Strategic themes

The borough of opportunity



Since the adoption of this new Council Plan following the 2019 local election, the landscape we operate in has changed dramatically, leading to further development of the Council's strategic direction.

The Impact of Covid-19

Coronavirus has been a real game-changer in the world of customer contact. We have seen a massive increase in online and telephone interactions, and a corresponding reduction in face to face contact. People have come to expect ways of meeting their needs that don't require personal contact and enable them to stay safe. Service providers, including the Council, have had to adapt. The Council has managed this very successfully, and the measures put in place have worked very effectively. The ongoing uncertainty about how the Coronavirus can be controlled and the likely delay until a vaccine becomes widely available, means that we will need to continue to provide services in this "Covid Secure" way for the foreseeable future.

In response to the crisis the Council has produced a Strategy for Renewal. It has been titled as a "Renewal" as opposed to "Recovery Strategy" to make it clear that we are not striving to get back to how everything was in February 2020, before the pandemic struck.

There are four important pieces of context that shape the strategy for renewal:

- ***The Council and its partners have a clear community leadership role***
- ***We will continue to adapt to the impact of the pandemic on our communities and may need to re-prioritise some objectives in the Council Plan 2019***
- ***Pre-COVID-19 financial pressures are likely to increase, and decision making must reflect this***
- ***The overarching priority is the health and economic well-being of residents***

Against this context (which shapes the approach) there are seven principles (or pillars) to BFC's approach:

1. ***Work with partners and communities to protect and promote the physical and mental health of our population***
2. ***Support town and neighbourhood centre vitality and look to support our local economy by retaining businesses within the borough***
3. ***Provide short term support and refocus some activities to deal with post COVID-19 spikes in demand***
4. ***Integrate services with partners and locate them wherever possible within the community that use them***
5. ***Look to involve the community and voluntary sector in supporting people and services wherever possible***
6. ***Containing/reducing expenditure in the long term (including refocussing/delivering differently/stopping some services)***
7. ***Maximising the opportunities to address carbon reduction across all our activities***

We recognise that one of the major challenges relates to how we interact with customers across a wide variety of activities. A Ways of Working (WoW) sub-group has been established to define the new approach to how we work with customers, including looking for opportunities to integrate with partners and locate services at the heart of the communities that use them. The principles developed by this group will significantly influence how we design our services for the future.

Our Commitment to Equalities and Tackling Racism

Equalities and Racism have attracted national attention in recent months, through the *Black Lives Matter* (BLM) campaign. This campaign has given a renewed impetus to the need to maintain social justice and equality of opportunity. The Council Management Team (CMT) are reviewing how we look at discrimination and equality in all its guises and have challenged themselves to ensure that they genuinely lead the organisation in a way that leaves no room or hiding place for racism or discrimination of any kind. The answers may not be simple and there may be no quick fixes to some issues but CMT want to work with all staff to address them, and not just while BLM is in the news.

We need to look at how our approach to Customer Experience can support this drive. We can ensure our services are designed with accessibility and equality at their heart. We can analyse how customers use our services, and how satisfied they are, to make sure we are meeting the needs of all our communities. We can provide knowledge and insight about our customers and services, to enable evidence-based decision making. A key priority for this Strategy, and a theme cutting across all objectives, is the continued commitment to ensure accessibility of all services provided for the public and internal, and other, stakeholders.

The Council's Financial Position

Even before the Coronavirus Pandemic hit, the financial position for the public sector was challenging. In the face of a growing and aging population and increased demand for council services, we need to be ever more efficient. The impact of the pandemic has been enormous, with spiralling costs in some areas where demand has increased, or we have had to adapt services to continue to deliver. At the same time our income from services has reduced. The result of this, and the ongoing uncertainty of the impact of the pandemic, means that our financial position is even more challenging. Changing our approach to Customer Experience can help reduce costs by reducing demand, encouraging self-service and using digital channels for more outbound, proactive communications to reduce avoidable contact.

These priorities, together with the information gathered in stakeholder workshops, the outputs of the WoW sub-group and the new Customer Experience Strategy, have informed the strategic objectives, themes, and projects, shaping the Customer Experience Strategy for 2021 – 2024.

6. Opportunities for positive change in Bracknell Forest

Coping with the Coronavirus pandemic has been the council's top priority for the short term and the implications of the pandemic will need to be planned for and managed for the medium and longer term. The Renewal Strategy will have a real impact on how the council is to deliver services in the future. Certainly, councils are building on a greater acceptance of using Digital solutions to provide services. In the period following the lock down (from March 2020) there began a rapid take up of digital tools to maintain life as normal for people, and business as usual for commerce. At Bracknell Forest Council we saw progress in a matter of days to establish ways of working that would normally take months, or even years, to design and implement.

The Customer Experience Strategy will focus on supporting a programme of renewal and change by enabling the adaptation of existing, or development of new, services to meet new and changing needs, building on a greater acceptance of using Digital by our customers:

- Citizens
- Businesses
- Partners and Other Agencies

CMT has established a Ways of Working (WoW) group, specifically tasked with refreshing our views on the ways in which we work and interact with customers. A key question is how we maintain excellent service delivery, which could offer entirely new options for how we work in community partnerships with other organisations, while maintaining social distancing and ensuring we manage the risks related to Covid-19.

The Renewal Strategy provides a chance to reflect on the establishment of a range of innovative and agile “emergency” measures implemented to help to cope with the Coronavirus crisis, that could be designed to leave a lasting legacy on a number of the functions of the Council, for example:

a) Dealing with enquiries on the phone rather than face to face

Since the March lockdown the Customer Services Team have dealt with 100% of their visitors to Time Square over the phone. These are people who would normally have met face to face with a Customer Service Adviser. We do not want to return to the way things were before, as that model is costly and inefficient. As we can deliver the same outcomes, and meet our customers' needs, without meeting with them in person, we should continue to do so. Where it is necessary for a personal meeting, this should be on an appointment basis, so that highly trained Customer Service staff can be working on other things until they are needed to meet with a customer.

b) Outbound calling to support vulnerable residents

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Customer Services team dealt mainly with incoming enquiries, both on the phone and online. The pandemic brought a new requirement, for the team to make regular contact with vulnerable and shielding residents. This experience has demonstrated the value of proactive out-bound calling in managing needs and reducing avoidable contact. It has also demonstrated the team's ability to deal with customers with higher needs, and in sensitive situations.

c) Meeting needs quickly and flexibly

The traditional model for local authorities to address needs has been to deliver a top-down service and make incremental improvements. But in recent months a new order of things has emerged. This includes:

- A rapid reconnection with the local voluntary and community sector (VCS), quickly building or strengthening relationships into solid delivery partnerships for meeting the needs of vulnerable people.
- Mass citizen participation in community responses, notably in NHS, councils and local VCS organisations rapidly recruiting and deploying thousands of volunteers.
- Extensive development and use of “match-making” platforms to connect vulnerable people with those able to help.
- A re-evaluation of vulnerability and need. Some groups are becoming vulnerable for the first time and others are now vulnerable in new ways. Local authorities are quickly trying to ascertain who may need help and how best to reach them.
- Different demographic groups experience inadequacies in some service models (e.g. some new groups of people having to apply for universal credit).
- Rapid adaptation of existing services, or development of new services to meet new needs.

This shift has happened across the country, including here in Bracknell Forest. We need to capitalise on these developments and find ways of cementing the role of communities and volunteers in the continued delivery of our services. The library service, which has a great track record of working with volunteers, has seen numbers drop during Covid, mainly due to the closure of libraries and the age of many of the volunteers. We now need to work to re-establish this cohort of community-minded citizens as a core element of how we deliver our services for the longer term.

d) Making better use of data

Throughout the pandemic, the value of reliable, accurate, timely data has become ever more apparent. We need to establish automated reporting of key customer metrics so that we can better understand what our customers need from us, and respond more quickly to those needs.

e) Shift to digital for traditionally “analogue” services

So many services that would previously have been done in person – from consultations with a doctor to renewing a bus pass – have moved to be online. We are now able to meet the needs of many customers online, where previously we would have insisted on meeting in person. We now have an opportunity to normalise this approach to those services, rather than going back to our previous delivery model. This will require a determined approach, as well as potentially some investment in ICT and digital developments.

f) Rapid development and deployment of new services

Many councils have used low code platforms to build and deploy new applications rapidly, enabling them to meet emerging needs. Bracknell Forest Council has also quickly launched new services, including managing distribution of Personal Protective Equipment, outbound calling to vulnerable residents, distribution of food, home deliveries or “Select & Collect” for the library service, and many more.

The council has now invested in a Low Code platform, to facilitate further rapid development and deployment of applications that support digital delivery of service. An implementation programme of prioritised applications will be developed early in the first year of delivery of the strategy, with a view to maximising the value from this platform.

7. Objectives and aims of this strategy

We will organise our customer experience model around customer needs. This will include:

1. Transforming our customer service model to reduce demand and be increasingly digital. More online information will enable customers to resolve their own enquiries, and community support and volunteering will mean that more needs are met in the community, rather than needing to rely on the council.
2. Restructuring diverged teams into a single point of contact, to make our structure more cost-effective and build resilience into our operation. We will use skill-based routing to ensure enquiries are dealt with by the most appropriately qualified and experienced staff.
3. Simplifying our telephone and email contact to make it simpler and clearer for customers how to contact the council when they need to. We will reduce the number of contact numbers and email addresses we publish, and make appropriate use of IVR to route calls, and structured forms to manage emails.
4. Expanding the current range of services offered by Customer Services will mean that customers have less need to deal directly with specialist staff, freeing up these officers to deal with more demanding, complex, and higher value interactions.
5. Increasing first point of contact resolution leading to increased customer satisfaction. We will make sure Customer Services staff are well trained and equipped with the information and technology they need to be able to resolve more customer enquiries.

We will design excellent customer experience into everything we do, by:

1. Building in accessibility by design. All our services will be designed with accessibility at their heart, and so that everybody can use them. We will test our services with assistive technologies, and with users with different needs.
2. Being time and place agnostic. We will ensure our services are available online and at any time, from any place, and using any device. We will specifically design for mobile use, as we know this is how the majority of customers access our web-based services.
3. Making things efficient and simple for customers. We will create a single account, so customers need only tell us information once. We will eradicate unnecessary process steps from all of our services so that the customer journey is as straightforward as it can be.
4. Making things clear and easy to use. We will apply our service design principles to everything we build, and will use our checklist to make sure services meet our Customer Experience blueprint.
5. Harnessing technology to enable self-service wherever possible. We will make use of Artificial Intelligence and Robotic Process Automation where this is appropriate, and it makes the experience for the customer smoother.

We will continue to grow a “Customer First” culture across the organisation, by:

1. Extending customer care training to all employees, not just those working in customer-facing roles.
2. Introducing quality standards for customer services functions, and achieving a professional accreditation for the service.
3. Tracking customer enquiries through a single CRM system, and owning those enquiries in Customer Services until they are resolved.
4. Reporting regularly on performance and customer satisfaction to Delivery Directorate DMT, CMT and Elected Members.
5. Improving complaints handling, and sharing learning from customer feedback.

We will make sure all our services are “Digital by Design” by:

1. Using the GDS Digital principles in the design of everything we do. Measuring our service design against these principles to determine our level of success.
2. Offering facilitated digital access to those who don't have the skills or access to the internet at home. Support will be provided by staff from Customer Services and Libraries, as well as from volunteers, to help people use our online services.
3. Increasing digital inclusion. We will work with our partners to help in building the digital skills of our customers and reducing their risk of being left behind in this digital world.

We will use data and intelligence to improve customer experience, by:

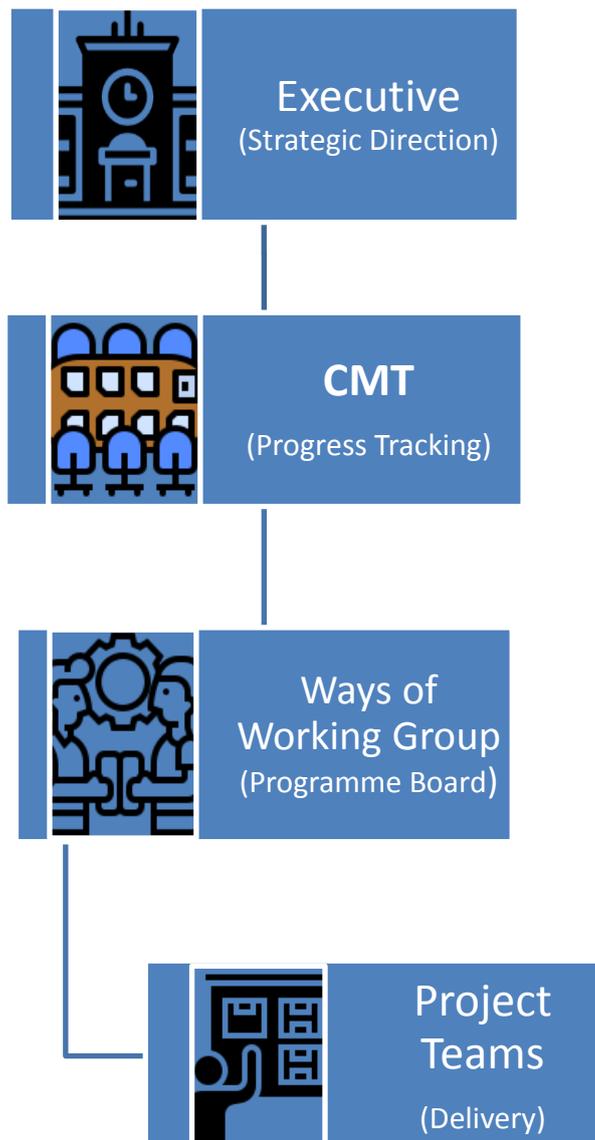
1. Ensuring the quality of our data, both about customers and about our services.
2. Analysing customer activity, to understand what services they use and value, and what services they search for.
3. Using analysis to identify where services cause problems for customers, and to simplify and ensure the accessibility of all our services.
4. Using demographic and service data analysis to create intelligence about our customers, so that we can target services at the right people and the right locations.

8. Structure for delivery and governance of the strategy

Each project established under the strategy will be managed by an appropriate project team, with representation from the area affected by the change, along with colleagues from Digital, ICT, Finance and Human Resources, as appropriate. Larger projects will be overseen by a project manager from with the ICT team or from Transformation.

To oversee the whole programme of work, a board will be established, based on the Ways of Working group, with additional representation from frontline services across the organisation.

CMT will receive a progress update every six months, and an annual report will be made to the Executive, which will include the work programme for the following year to be approved.



9. Measuring progress against the objectives

Each project delivered under this strategy will be evaluated upon completion, to ensure it delivers the expected benefits. In addition, a number of performance indicators will be established for each of the strategic aims. Some of these will include:

1. Organising ourselves around customer needs

- Customer satisfaction surveys to include asking how easy it was to get the service the customer was looking for
- Reporting on the range of services offered by Customer Services
- Customer surveys to include measuring first point of contact resolution

2. Designing excellent customer experience

- Monitoring accessibility of our website and online services
- Monitoring how many customers access online services,
- Monitoring use of “tell us once” services
- Customer surveys to include how easy it is to use our online services
- Measuring the number of services available through online account
- Reporting new uses of Robotic Process Automation

3. Growing a “Customer First” culture

- Monitoring and reporting on staff training in customer care
- Achieving Customer Service quality standard
- Achieving Customer Service professional accreditation for staff
- Monitoring the number of customer enquiries managed through the CRM system
- Regular reporting on performance and customer satisfaction metrics
- Regular reporting on learning from complaints

4. Digital by design

- Using our checklist for all services to ensure their design is based on Government Digital Service
- Monitor support provided by Customer Services staff to enable customers to access online services
- Measuring participation in digital inclusion / digital skills development programmes

5. Using data and intelligence to improve customer experience

- Achieving a satisfactory rating in our next Digital Maturity Audit
- Regular reporting of customer interactions, by channel
- Monitoring abandoned online transactions to identify usability issues

10. The Customer Experience Work Programme

The Customer Experience Strategy sets out how services will be developed to support the Council's priorities from January 2021 to December 2024. For the Strategy to deliver the maximum benefits then it must be properly aligned with the Council's Plan and the Renewal Strategy following the Coronavirus pandemic.

The programme of work for the first year of the strategy is reasonably well defined. We will continue the roll-out of webchat, SMS, online payments and other existing digital channels to increase their impact and the return on investment in these technologies. We will begin the move to a cloud hosted contact centre, based on cloud telephony using Microsoft Teams. As part of this project we aim to streamline the customer contact structure, introduce IVR and skill-based routing, to simplify the customer experience of contacting the council. We will begin a review of the current CRM system, with a view to creating a single customer online account, bringing together the separate accounts currently in use. New applications and online services will be built using the Low Code platform, and we will identify customer-facing services where Robotic Process Automation can support their delivery.

Further projects will emerge during year one, to be approved by the Executive and delivered in subsequent years. A timeline for the work programme is included at Appendix D.

11. Improving processes and customer experience through service design

It is important to understand that moving a process online is not a matter of simply doing the same thing but through a browser: it also requires changes to policies and practice. Technology is only one component of digital change and can only deliver expected organisational benefits and savings in conjunction with:

- Processes that are efficient and fit for purpose, and
- The adoption of new ways of working by all stakeholders

The organisation must recognise the need for business transformation and be supportive of the Digital and ICT, Customer Services and Renewal strategies.

It has been said that most of our services were not designed for the digital age. But the reality is that most of them simply were not designed. They have developed, grown, altered, and expanded over the years, as new requirements emerge, or resourcing constraints come into play. Moving to a more digital model of delivery gives us the opportunity to design these services anew. Service redesign will be at the heart of our digital development work, and will be delivered using the Government Digital Service design principles (see Appendix B)

Change management approach

As much as we can, we want to involve users in designing, testing, and implementing the changes we introduce. By developing newly designed services in the open, and testing with real users, we can ensure that they are engaged throughout the process, and this helps to ensure effective adoption of new services.

Subject matter experts from service areas will be involved in the design, testing and implementation of newly designed services, to ensure that they meet the needs of customers. We will test new services with real users and use their feedback to inform further development.

Our approach to communication and engagement will ensure that all parts of the organisation, and our customer base, understand what we are doing, and why we are doing it. People who want to, will have the opportunity to get involved in designing and testing the changes we make.

12. Conclusion

The Council will always be judged by residents on the quality of the experience they have in their interactions with us. In times of financial challenge, and with a community that is comfortable with digital services, we have the opportunity to maintain the highest quality of customer experience while reducing costs, through a programme of consolidation and digital transformation.

Those of us tasked with moving society on from the Coronavirus crisis already acknowledge that not everything could, or indeed should, go back to the way it was before. The huge challenges of climate change, sustainable transport, health, equality and social care issues are being viewed from a perspective where opportunities to change must be embraced.

However radical (or otherwise) the agenda for moving through the so called “new normal” to a changed society may be, our recent experience has certainly accelerated the acceptance of digital solutions for customers and service providers alike, and the council must seize the moment to capitalise on this major behavioural change.

About Bracknell Forest

Bracknell Forest lies 28 miles west of London, at the heart of the Thames Valley and within the county of Berkshire.

Our economy is of above average size and productivity, compared to the county and nationally. Good access links, a well-educated labour force and the quality of the environment are key attractors to the companies that have and continue to locate here, including a number of multi-national organisations.

The borough has experienced pressures on housing, infrastructure services and environmental assets including sites designated as being important for nature conservation at an international, national and local level.

A thriving population

The borough's population is 121,676 (Mid-2018 Estimates, based on Census 2011). The demand for an increased number of households still causes pressure for more housing. The population is relatively young (median age 38.7 years). 14.5% of the population is aged 65 or over, compared to 17.7% nationally, although this is expected to grow.

Health

The health of people in Bracknell Forest is generally better than the England average. Life expectancy is increasing and is currently 81.3 years for men and 85.1 years for women. These are higher than the England averages which are 79.5 years and 83.1 years respectively. Smoking related deaths (272 per 100,000 population) and deaths from heart disease (31.7 per 100,000) and strokes (59.29 per 100,000) are below national levels.

Schools

Bracknell Forest has 36 primary schools, 7 secondary schools (including 8 academies), 1 special school and 1 Pupil Referral Unit. 83% of schools are rated good or better. Under new reporting measures from the Department for Education (DfE), all secondary schools in England have their average examination results reported using numerical rather than alphabetical grades. For 2019, a standard pass has been set at a Grade 4, and a good pass at Grade 5.

Bracknell Forest young people continue to perform in line with the national picture. Provisional results show that, 76% achieved 4+ in English Language or Literature, 73% achieved 4+ in mathematics, 67% achieved combined English and mathematics 4+, the average attainment 8 score across the borough was 47.2

A desirable place

Bracknell Forest covers 109 sq km of central Berkshire and includes the town of Bracknell, together with Sandhurst town and the villages of Crowthorne and Binfield, along with Warfield and Winkfield. Close to London, the area has easy access to the motorway network (M3, M4, M40 and M25), Heathrow, and direct train links into London.

The north and east of the borough form part of the Metropolitan Green Belt, whilst land south of Bracknell and east of Crowthorne is internationally important for nature conservation. The borough is proud and protective of its green character, with a third of our area comprising woodland. The borough also has one of the highest ratios of publicly accessible open space to its population, and much of this open space is maintained at a high standard.

Housing

The average house price has remained well above the national average for many years. As of May 2020, the average house price in Bracknell Forest was £336,871 compared with a South East average of £319,108 and a national average of £245,385.

Finding acceptable locations for new housing and providing appropriate infrastructure continue to be major challenges for partners and residents.

The council's Core Strategy Development Plan Document requires approximately 11,000 new dwellings between 2006 and 2026 to be built. The number of dwellings in the borough stands at 53,335.

Cohesive communities

The 2011 Census showed that 84.9% of the population was 'White British' and 15.1% of the population was BME and 'white other'.

The proportion of school pupils from Minority Ethnic Groups has increased steadily over the past few years rising from 16.1% in 2011 to 21.9% in 2018. 12% of pupils in Bracknell Forest schools have English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Despite the steady change in the composition of the population, the area is generally a cohesive community where people get on well together.

Deprivation

Bracknell Forest is one of the least deprived areas of the country (ranked 284 out of 317 local authorities in England on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019).

Bracknell Forest is within the economically buoyant Thames Valley and already a premier business location. But the aspiration is to make the local economy even more successful throughout the borough.

Town centre

The £240m Lexicon opened on 7 September 2017. The Lexicon has created a new social and cultural heart for the area - bringing a high-quality mix of shops, restaurants and entertainment within vibrant public spaces to the Town Centre.

Benefits

The number of people claiming out-of-work benefits has been increasing since January 2018 alongside the national trend. As of March 2020 the percentage of the population aged 16+ stands at 1.6%. This represents 1,240 people. The figure remains lower than both the South East and national averages (2.2% and 3.1% respectively).

Crime

Crime is low in the borough and decreasing. In 2019/20 overall crime decreased by 1.8% compared to 2018/19. Decreasing from 6,406 recorded crimes in the borough to 6,289 recorded crimes.

Government Digital Service Design Principles

1. Start with user needs

Service design starts with identifying user needs. If you don't know what the user needs are, you won't build the right thing. Do research, analyse data, talk to users. Don't make assumptions. Have empathy for users and remember that what they ask for isn't always what they need.

2. Do less

Government should only do what only government can do. If we've found a way of doing something that works, we should make it reusable and shareable instead of reinventing the wheel every time. This means building platforms and registers others can build upon, providing resources (like APIs) that others can use, and linking to the work of others. We should concentrate on the irreducible core.

3. Design with data

In most cases, we can learn from real world behaviour by looking at how existing services are used. Let data drive decision-making, not hunches or guesswork. Keep doing that after taking your service live, prototyping and testing with users then iterating in response. Analytics should be built-in, always on and easy to read. They're an essential tool.

4. Do the hard work to make it simple

Making something look simple is easy. Making something simple to use is much harder - especially when the underlying systems are complex - but that's what we should be doing. Don't take "It's always been that way" for an answer. It's usually more and harder work to make things simple, but it's the right thing to do.

5. Iterate. Then iterate again

The best way to build good services is to start small and iterate wildly. Release minimum viable products early, test them with actual users, move from alpha to beta to live adding features, deleting things that don't work and making refinements based on feedback. Iteration reduces risk. It makes big failures unlikely and turns small failures into lessons. If a prototype isn't working, don't be afraid to scrap it and start again.

6. This is for everyone

Accessible design is good design. Everything we build should be as inclusive, legible and readable as possible. If we have to sacrifice elegance - so be it. We're building for needs, not audiences. We're designing for the whole country, not just the ones who are used to using the web. The people who most need our services are often the people who find them hardest to use. Let's think about those people from the start.

7. Understand context

We're not designing for a screen; we're designing for people. We need to think hard about the context in which they're using our services. Are they in a library? Are they on a phone? Are they only really familiar with Facebook? Have they never used the web before?

8. Build digital services, not websites

A service is something that helps people to do something. Our job is to uncover user needs and build the service that meets those needs. Of course, much of that will be pages on the web, but we're not here to build websites. The digital world has to connect to the real world, so we have to think about all aspects of a service, and make sure they add up to something that meets user needs.

9. Be consistent, not uniform

We should use the same language and the same design patterns wherever possible. This helps people get familiar with our services, but when this isn't possible, we should make sure our approach is consistent.

This isn't a straitjacket or a rule book. Every circumstance is different. When we find patterns that work, we should share them, and talk about why we use them. But that shouldn't stop us from improving or changing them in the future when we find better ways of doing things or the needs of users change.

10. Make things open: it makes things better

We should share what we're doing whenever we can. With colleagues, with users, with the world. Share code, share designs, share ideas, share intentions, share failures. The more eyes there are on a service the better it gets - howlers are spotted, better alternatives are pointed out, the bar is raised.

Much of what we're doing is only possible because of open source code and the generosity of the web design community. We should pay that back.

Customer Experience – Service Design Checklist

Blueprint	Yes	No	Notes/ Comments
Have you identified all the steps that are not customer value from the process and removed them, where possible?			
Does the new process make best use of online self-service / web content / web forms to allow the customer to self-serve?			
Does the new process include online payments / e-billing?			
Have all references to cheque and cash payments been removed as an option to pay?			
How will the process make effective use of drop-boxes? (to ensure that customer contact is channeled effectively)			
Is appointment booking included in the new process?			
Can the e+ card be used more effectively by the service?			
Has the new process stopped use of internal mail/ courier service?			
How will the service make use of GovDelivery, Gov.Notify and other digital communication channels to better communicate with customers?			
Can the voluntary or community sector help with delivery of this service?			
Is your customer contact channeled to the most appropriate person to deal with it, and self-service by the customer as much as possible? E.g. General queries to Customer Service, complex queries to specialist staff			
Has effective call routing, including IVR where appropriate, been implemented for calls taken for this service?			
Does the new process take calls into Customer Service and escalate only to appropriately trained staff in the back office, when needed?			
How well are supporting services signposted on the BFC website?			
Is there a self-assessment process for customers enquiring about access to the service?			
Are all customer records and documents stored and shared digitally			

and not in hard copy?			
Does there need to be integration between back office and CRM systems?			
Is the service designed in a way that enables staff to role model the new values and behaviors?			
Have digital signatures been included in recommendations?			
Have performance reporting requirements been included in the new service?			
Have you identified cost and time savings from the AS IS and TO BE service design?			

Additional Information

Is there any additional relevant information? If so, provide it here.

Customer Experience Work Programme

