| CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY | Charnwood
Leading in Leicestershire |

CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL
Access to Services

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

1. INTRODUCTION

Charnwood Borough Council's Mission is the same as the Vision expressed in the Charnwood Together Community Strategy: to improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in Charnwood. In doing this we aim to be accessible and understandable to all our service users.

Customer service is one of the main themes running through our organisation. People are a key theme of our Community Strategy and our Corporate Plan puts Customers and Partner at the heart of everything we do. Our Corporate Plan says that as the future of Local Government and the policies and procedures influencing Council business change, our Values will remain steady and provide clear guidance, an ethos, throughout the Borough Council.

One of our eight Values is to be Customer Focused and we aim to achieve this through our commitment to improve the delivery of our services to all our customers, including service-users and non-users, stakeholders, and partners. We will be an accessible and user focused organisation and place the customer at the heart of service delivery. We ensure that we know what local people want and will deliver this.

What is done by us?	What is done by Others?
Refuse collection and recycling	Schools – by the County Council
Street cleaning	Roads – by the County Council
Environmental Health (pest control, stray dogs, food safety)	Police – by Leicestershire Police Authority
Sports and leisure facilities (leisure centres, parks, playgrounds	Libraries – by the County Council
Arts and culture (museum, town hall, rural tours	Social Care – by the County Council and the NHS
Housing	Buses – by the private sector
Planning applications	Parks and playgrounds outside of Loughborough – by the Parish Councils
Support for new businesses and new retail development	Country parks – by the County Council
Other services are run by the County or in partnership. These include schools, childrens and elderly persons homes, highways and country parks.nnTransport services are run nationally or by private sector arrangements. The County Council is the highway authority for this area, but the motorways are managed by the Government's Highways Agency.	

2. OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE VISION

> Charnwood Borough covers an area of 27,906 hectares. It shares borders with North West Leicestershire, Rushcliffe (Nottinghamshire), Melton, Harborough, Leicester City and Hinckley and Bosworth Districts. With a population of 155,400 (Source: ONS mid year estimate), the Borough is one of largest districts in England. It sits centrally in the triangle formed by Nottingham, Leicester and Derby and overall is relatively affluent. Just over one third of the population lives in the thriving university town of Loughborough and of the remaining two thirds, many live in the larger villages/small towns of the Soar and Wreake valleys and on the edge of Leicester. The more rural areas are to the west (part of the historic Charnwood Forest) and to the east (the Leicestershire Wolds), which are characterised by smaller villages. Loughborough is a thriving commercial centre with strong associations, not only with further and higher education, but also with engineering, pharmaceuticals and a growing reputation in advanced technologies.
>
> **www.charnwood.gov.uk**

Our aim is to "ensure the Borough is recognised as Leading in Leicestershire for the quality of its living environment for all". To achieve this we will ensure that the services we provide to local people, local businesses, and visitors are readily available, accessible to all, are of a high standard and represent value for money.

This Customer Service Strategy defines our approach to achieving our core value of being **Customer Focused;** we will prioritise the needs and requirements of our customers and continually ask 'how can we make it better?'.

Through this Customer Service Strategy we will deliver:
- **Quality services**: which users perceive to be good, relevant, efficient, cost effective, consistent and delivered through a highly trained workforce
- **Responsive services**: that meet defined needs and increasing expectations.
- **Accessible services**: that provide a choice about how and when to access services
- **Value for money services**: that actively seek efficiency gains and productivity improvements

Our "customers" are the community we serve; local residents, local businesses and visitors to the Borough. The community includes those to whom we provide services. It also includes those to whom we do not provide services but with whom we interact e.g. those against whom we take action, and on whose behalf we act e.g. enforcement action for the public good. It encompasses our partners, statutory and voluntary, local and national.

This Strategy applies to all the services we provide whether they are provided by us, by our contractors, or in partnership with other private, statutory and voluntary, local and national individuals and organisations.

3. CUSTOMER ACCESS – HOW WE CAN BE CONTACTED

> Our main offices are located at Southfields Road Loughborough. Our other facilities include a depot at Limehurst Avenue Loughborough, a Lifeline service at Victoria Street Loughborough, a Town Hall in Market Place Loughborough, approximately 6000 housing and sheltered accommodation units throughout the borough, and leisure centre/swimming pool facilities in Loughborough, Mountsorrel and Syston.
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> Our main offices house our reception, switchboard and one-stop-shop facilities. The customer service centre provides face to face access through a reception point and a number of dedicated advisers. The contact centre provides telephone access through the switchboard and dedicated adviser service. Our website, www.charnwood.gov.uk, provides information and transactions such as payment facilities, reporting and application forms.
>
> **www.charnwood.gov.uk**

We will:

3.1 Ensure that all our services are easily accessible by all our customers.

3.2 Provide our customers with a choice of channels by which to contact us and work with our customers to inform our future access provision.

3.3 Use new technology to increase accessibility of our services, offer more personally relevant services, and ensure integrated seamless delivery between services.

3.4 Design services in a way that encourages migration of customers to the most cost effective access channels.

3.5 Integrate efficiency, effectiveness and service excellence to achieve value for money.

3.6 Work in partnership with other organisations to improve access to services for our customers.

3.7 Inform our customers of the ways in which they can access our services.

3.8 Ensure the integration of and liaison between the customer facing 'front' office where the service is delivered and the 'back' office where the service is administered, to deliver a seamless service to our customers.

3.9 Deploy cost effective and innovative solutions to support access by customers and keep them informed.

Access channels:
For face to face contacts we will:

o Provide well trained, professional and knowledgeable staff to support the delivery of front line services.

o Provide modern, up-to-date facilities within a safe environment for our customers and staff.

o Provide facilities and amenities that are responsive to the requirements of the customer and meet our Disability Discrimination Act responsibilities.

o Ensure staff are provided with enabling technologies so that customer interactions are dealt with quickly and effectively.

o Ensure we meet our obligations under the Freedom of Information Act.

o Offer home visits to customers experiencing difficulties accessing our service, where appropriate.

For telephone contacts we will:
o Ensure the most effective use of the telephone system to meet the needs and expectations of our customers.
o Ensure that service contact numbers are arranged around specific services not a person or unit title.
o Streamline service contact numbers to ensure that all responses to enquiries are responsive and professional.
o Develop a knowledgeable and professionally trained contact centre team able to deal with a wide range of enquiries.
o Provide enabling technologies to support the delivery of modern and effective contact centre services.
o Provide minicom and language line facilities that are responsive to the needs of users.

For web and email contacts we will:
o Ensure our website is available 24/7 to access information and online transactions such as make payments or complete application forms across all our services.
o Ensure our website is accessible to those who have special access requirements by meeting recognised national website standards on accessibility.
o Use our website to provide information on the way we work, transparency of decision-making, and as a channel for influencing decision making.
o Ensure our systems, particularly those that support online payments, are safe, secure and robust to encourage public trust and confidence.
o Demonstrate efficiency savings and improved collection rates as a result of electronic payment services.
o Provide customers with electronic links to all services.
o Ensure we meet our service standards including response rates to customers.
o Provide customers with reference numbers to ensure that they can monitor progress of their enquiries.

In writing
o Ensure we meet our service standards including response rates to customers' written communications including faxes.

In any language
o Provide customers with a translation of any document or written communication in any language, in braille, on audio tape or large print when requested.
o Provide an interpretation service, including sign language, when requested.

In partnership
o Work in partnership with other organisations to share infrastructure and service provision in the borough.
o Work in partnership with other organisations to provide services through other outlets in a variety of locations throughout the borough.

With our customers

o Work with our customers to ensure we understand their access to services needs and expectations and use this information to shape our future access provision.

o Develop an understanding of how our customers prefer to contact us and how they prefer to be contacted by us.

o Ensure service standards are reviewed regularly using customer feedback and other data to maintain relevance.

o Monitor user statistics, conduct visitor research, and monitor quality of the information provide via all access channels, to support innovation and improvement.

Using new technology

o Exploit every opportunity to adapt e-government initiatives to benefit customers and seek to promote and push e-government take-up.

o Increase the opportunities for customers to carry out transactions electronically.

4. CUSTOMER CARE

In addition to the many thousands of written communications we receive each year via letter and e-mail, we deal with an average of 1,001,000 customers per year through our other access channels: Face to Face, through our telephony system and via our website.

Access Channel	Monthly average	January to June 2006 (inclusive)
Face to Face	5,561	33,369
Telephony	66,997	401,985
Web	10,846	65,075
Total	83,404	500,429

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We will:

4.1 Promote a culture of customer excellence amongst all staff and Councillors.

4.2 Develop and agree customer service standards with our customers and regularly report and review achievement against those standards both internally and externally.

Customer excellence

o Ensure the political decision making processes evaluate and challenge actions and recommendations from the perspective of the customer.

o Ensure that performance management and service delivery planning processes have a customer service focus that encourages all services to put the needs of the customer first.

o Ensure that information from the Corporate Complaints Procedure is used to inform service provision and improvement.

o Ensure that services share customer data and information and learn from each other.

o Promote the work of the Service Development Officer Network as customer service champions in all services to energise services to consider innovative changes to their services to meet the needs and expectations of their customers.

o Provide appropriate customer care training for all staff and Councillors.

o Ensure that staff are trained to an agreed level of customer service.

o Provide appropriate training that supports the Disability Discrimination Act and other relevant equalities legislation.

o Ensure that our staff recruitment, training and development processes recruit and equip staff with the right skills to deliver high levels of service that are responsive to the needs of our customers.

o Ensure that as many enquiries as possible are dealt with at the first point of contact.

Customer service standards

o Develop and agree customer service standards with our customers in each service to ensure that our customers have a voice in the standard of services

that are provided and a means of checking that the service they receive meets that standard.

o Use management reporting processes to ensure that services are aware of their performance.

o Inform our customers of the standards and services' performance against them.

o Regularly review our customer service standards to ensure they meet the needs and expectations of our customers.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

"Consultation is important because listening and responding to the public, as citizens and service users, is fundamental to the work of councils. Without it, councils cannot be sure that their services are the right ones or that they are democratically accountable for their actions". 'Connecting with Communities' - Audit Commission / ODPM.

We are committed to reporting back to residents on a 'you said, we did' basis to justify the need and usefulness of consultation. This is supported both pre and post-consultation by relevant communications strategies.

We currently employ several engagement channels both informally and formally which are continually monitored and reviewed. These include the citizens panel, focus groups, participation panels, e-jury, Charnwood News, surveys and questionnaires. As well as administering the Borough's BVPI tri-ennial surveys.

We are raising awareness of the services we offer through the AZ Campaign, which further aims to increase customer awareness of the various channels available to access our services.

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We will:

5.1 Promote open, honest, effective communication and consultation with our staff, local and national media, our stakeholders and partner organisations and the communities we serve.

5.2 Build our reputation as "Leading in Leicestershire" by promoting a better understanding of the services we deliver and the variety of channels by which customers can access those services.

Communication and consultation

o Implement and manage the corporate identity and embed the 'Leading in Leicestershire' strap line.
o Ensure that planning across all services takes into account the views of all local people and communities gathered through consultations and the need to communicate those plans effectively both internally and externally.
o Ensure communication and consultation are integral considerations embedded in project and service planning.
o Communicate and consult with staff on key issues and ensure they are informed and invested in the Council's priorities and plans.
o Maintain a consultation database to track what information is known to us to prevent any waste of time / resources spent asking residents what we already know.
o Share common data with services and partner organisations so that the sum total of consultation knowledge benefits the Council and our partners.
o Seek the help of partners when planning to consult when appropriate.
o Promote consultation and communication champions amongst key staff and provide training to develop their communication, consultation and media relations skills.
o Ensure that the Council's key messages and key policies are understood and articulated.

o   Undertake an annual programme of consultation and communication, including the current AZ of services campaign designed to raise awareness of services and the access to those services.

o   Increase community engagement in terms of the services required, delivered and available and develop/embed toolkits to promote this.

o   Promote the Customer Service Strategy to all our customers, linking directly to the accountability of the whole authority and ensure that our customers understand our Customer Service Standards and what it means for them.

6. DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

Of the population of 155,400 (mid-2003):
♦ 18.5% of the population are aged under 16 years, and 17.4% are of pension age
♦ There are 60,472 households in the Borough, with an average household size of 2.42 persons
♦ 10.8% of the population (16,573 people) are of Black and Minority Ethnic origin. The largest BME groups are Indian, Other White and Bangladeshi
♦ 15% of the population have a Limiting Long Term Illness
♦ 9.9% of the population provide unpaid care to a relative or neighbour
♦ Overall levels of deprivation are relatively low, but there are small pockets of more severe deprivation in parts of Loughborough Hastings, Loughborough Storer and Loughborough Shelthorpe wards
♦ There are 3,525 children aged under 16 years and 3,673 people aged over 60 years living in income deprived households
♦ 24,261 pupils attend an LEA school in Charnwood
♦ 82.8% of the working age population in Charnwood are economically active
♦ There are 1,378 people claiming Job Seekers Allowance in the Borough
♦ 83.9% of businesses in Charnwood employ less than 10 people
♦ Average household income in the Borough is £31,234
♦ Offences recorded by the police in 2004/05 shows falling Vehicle crime and Burglary but Criminal damage remains high, and Assault offences continue to increase
♦ There are 60,472 cars and vans in Charnwood, and this is the most common method of travel to work (67.6%). 7.4% of the population travel to work by bus.
(Charnwood Community Profile, Research & Information Team, Leicestershire County Council)
www.charnwood.gov.uk

We will:

6.1 Work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination.

6.2 Work towards achieving equality for all by removing direct and indirect discrimination.

6.3 Aspire to meet and where possible go beyond our legal responsibilities regarding equal opportunities legislation.

6.4 Provide all services and employment opportunities fairly, without discrimination, and abide by all relevant Codes of Practice.

Leadership and commitment
o Nominate a Cabinet Lead Member and Senior Management Team Diversity Champions.
o Achieve Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government by 2007.
o Embed equality and diversity throughout our service planning and project management processes.

Consultation and community involvement
o Consult with customers from all sections of the community, including those who are potentially 'hard to reach'.
o Develop innovative ways of engaging with 'hard to reach' communities based on their individual needs.

Service delivery
o Provide good quality services in a fair and equitable way to all groups and individuals in all communities throughout the borough.

- o Provide our services in a manner which is fair and which does not lead to discrimination in the way that those services are delivered.
- o Identify changing community needs and expectations, whilst recognising the diversity of local communities.
- o Maintain equalities monitoring systems in all services.
- o Integrate equalities monitoring processes within performance management and service delivery planning processes.
- o Gather information through the variety of forums and panels and other sources to ensure we are responding to the changing needs within the community.
- o Ensure that all services undergo an equalities self-assessment, based on the Equality Standard for Local Government framework, to measure their level of achievement against the Equality Standard.
- o Require tenderers to satisfy certain equal opportunities criteria when being considered for the award of new contracts or the renewal of existing contracts.
- o Recognise that people with disabilities have specific access requirements to enable them to use our services. Where access is difficult and where an adjustment cannot be made because of practical or cost reasons, an alternative arrangement will be offered so that a person with a disability is still able to access the service.
- o Make reasonable adjustments to enable members of the public to access information.
- o Provide information on services in formats such as Braille, large print, on audio tape, on disc and in community languages.
- o Provide language interpreters, including sign language, where appropriate.

Workforce
- o Work towards a workforce that reflects the local population to ensure we know and understand their needs.
- o Promote a working environment that values and respects the identity and culture of each individual by not tolerating acts of discrimination or harassment.
- o Train and equip our staff to provide our services in a non-discriminatory manner.
- o Provide appropriate workplace adaptations and aids for our staff with disabilities as well as flexible working arrangements for members of staff with carer responsibilities.

7. DATA MANAGEMENT

Provision of access and support to the Council's key information systems within Housing, Planning, Revenues and Benefits, Environmental Health, Environmental Services, Leisure and Cultural Services by providing a quality, integrated, responsive, flexible and seamless data management infrastructure.
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We will:

7.1 Implement a customer led performance management framework to improve performance and service provision.

7.2 Use new technology to promote a customer-centric culture and extend the integration of customer service delivery across all channels and services.

7.3 Use customer data/intelligence/demographic information to promote customer segmentation and single customer view.

7.4 Meet our legal responsibilities regarding Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Environmental Information legislation and in particular the protection of confidential and sensitive information.

Data management

o Develop a strategy and management processes designed around our business requirements to deliver data/information/knowledge about our customers, including collection, validation, processing, storage and analysis.

o Integrate data/information/knowledge management processes within performance management and service delivery planning processes.

o Consider the development of a joint customer information sharing protocol between agencies and partners (having due regard to our legal responsibilities under Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Environmental Information legislation).

Customer Relationship Management

o Continue the integration of workflow technologies and customer-facing front and administrative and professional back office systems through the customer relationship management software.

o Enable information about our customers and services to be recorded once and shared across all services and with our partners where appropriate.

Customer segmentation and single customer view

o Investigate the use of customer segmentation (the practice of dividing a customer base into groups of individuals that are similar in specific ways such as age, gender, interests, service requirements, etc) and the single customer view (ability to access all the information held about a particular customer including service take-up, transaction levels, etc, through one channel) to inform strategies and plans and measure performance.

Data protection

o Ensure compliance with all relevant legislation including The Freedom of Information Act 2000, The Data Protection Act 1998, and The Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

o   Make as much information available through the publication scheme in accordance with the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

8. PERFORMANCE AND PLANNING

The Council is united by the ambition to achieve the vision set out in the Corporate Plan and to be a truly excellent Council meting the needs of the Borough through the delivery of high level services established through effective project management and efficient use of resources. The leadership statements to the Corporate Plan set out the vision of leading in innovation, to lead in quality services and to lead in the community.

The Charnwood Scorecard is the management system that enables Charnwood to clarify it's vision and strategy and translate them into action. The Scorecard is organised around four principal values – one of which is to be an excellent Council. Under those four perspectives sixteen goals are set out from the Corporate Plan which are the focus for the medium term and which will be pursued through Directorate Service Delivery Plans.

Service Delivery Plans explain how Charnwood Borough Council will deliver the Scorecard goals and other high level targets set out in the Corporate Plan. The SDP tasks show with whom accountability rests as each target has a responsible owner attached to it.

The Performance Team meet quarterly with Directors to monitor performance against a range of indicators – these are displayed as a Directorate Scorecard and mirror the four principles of the Charnwood Scorecard.

The three year Performance Review Programme outlines the reviews for a given time period - the reviews are proportionate and focus on the most serious challenges and biggest opportunities for service improvement.

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We will:

8.1 Use a customer led performance management process that evidences success and supports responsive action.

8.2 Use an annual review programme of service/performance, value for money, and risk assessment to inform service provision and delivery.

8.3 Review service delivery and service development proposals to ensure they provide value for money in addition to meeting the needs and expectation of customers.

8.4 Manage changes to service delivery and access channels as a result of those reviews.

8.5 Learn from the best and be prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

8.6 Continue to implement an effective e-government programme to deliver service excellence and efficiency savings.

8.7 Continue to implement the transformational government agenda by using technology to transform service provision and delivery.

Measurement

o Integrate customer service standards monitoring processes within performance management and service delivery planning processes.

o Comply with Section 4 of the Local Government Act 1999 and with Audit Commission Guidance in relation to the maintenance of performance indicators and conformance with performance standards.

o Monitor and publish national and key local performance data.

Evaluation/review

o Deliver best value services by undertaking an annual programme of best value and performance improvement reviews to ensure we are competitive, comparing ourselves against other local authorities and private sector partners, consulting with our customers and challenging existing ways of working.

o Ensure that all reviews contain elements of efficiency and effectiveness, including assessing if processes are undertaken in the most cost effective way and meet the requirements of its diverse customers.

o Ensure that budgets are reviewed to ensure there is a clear idea of whether they are being met and are realistic.

o Ensure that large capital expenditure projects are reviewed within the programme of work.

Management

o Ensure we use professional project management methodology during the delivery of projects.

o Ensure that effective risk management is part of the project management methodology.

o Identify and re-engineer our service processes if required.

Improvement

o Integrate best value and performance improvement plans within performance management and service delivery planning processes.

Information technology

o Provide appropriate infrastructure and business systems and to support effective and efficient service delivery to customers, including both operational functions and management information.

o Explore how technology can be used to join up information across our organisation to make access to related services easier for our customers and to ensure that when our customers provide us with information we use this information corporately and share it across all services.

o Explore how technology can be used to improve ease of reporting for key service areas and how different delivery channels can be used to enable customers to check on progress.

o Work with partners to explore ways of improving access to services and information.

o Implement policies and procedures to ensure compliance with all relevant data protection legislation and to ensure data is securely, effectively and appropriately managed.

Transformational government

o Use management processes and tools such as Business Process Re-engineering to design service provision and delivery around our customers.

- Use enabling technologies to reduce paperwork, duplication and routine processing, maximize delivery capacity and streamline processes.
- Work with partners to investigate opportunities for providing shared services in all aspects of service provision and delivery.
- Explore opportunities for standardisation, simplification and sharing of service provision and delivery.
- Improve professionalism in terms of the planning, delivery, management, skills and governance of IT enabled change.

9. IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Improvement Plan is a rolling programme that records what we are going to do to achieve this Strategy. It is also a record of what we have achieved so far. This Plan forms one of our key Corporate Projects and as part of the project management process we regularly monitor and evaluate our actions and progress to ensure the implementation of this Strategy.

The Improvement Plan for the year 2006/2007 is attached as Appendix A.