

EXECUTIVE

Report title	Customer Strategy 2018-2022	
Executive Member	Executive Member for Finance and Governance	
Chief Executive or Director	Chief Executive	
Date	12 June 2018	
Purpose of the report	To set out achievements of the Customer Strategy 2015-2018 and present a revised strategy for the period to 2022.	
Summary of the report	The Customer Strategy 2015-2018 has been successful in developing a culture of customer excellence within the Council and improving the accessibility of Council services. The proposed strategy for 2018-2022 extends this approach across all services, focusing on understanding customer needs meeting them effectively and efficiently, and validating and communicating the Council's achievements.	
If this is a key decision, which key decision test applies?*	Over the financial threshold (£150,000)	
	Amends the Council's policy framework	
	Affects two or more wards	X
	Non-key	
For the purposes of scrutiny call in procedure this report is*	Exempt under s.12a Local Government Act 1972	
	Urgent	
	Non-urgent	X
If this is a confidential report, which category of exemption(s) from the Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972 applies?	Not applicable.	
Decision(s) asked for	That the Executive approves the proposed Customer Strategy 2018-2022.	
Impact of decision(s)	The Council's customers will continue to be at the heart of what it does, and a consistent approach to customer excellence will be delivered across all services.	

What is the purpose of this report?

1. This report summarises achievements delivered by the Customer Strategy 2015-2018 and presents for the consideration of Executive a revised strategy for the period to 2022, building upon achievements to date.

Why is this report necessary?

2. The Customer Strategy is a key strand of the Council's Change Programme, ensuring that customers are at the heart of the development and delivery of services. The Customer Strategy is approved by Executive. The most recent iteration has now concluded, and this report proposes a new strategy for 2018-2022.

Customer Strategy 2015-2018 – achievements

3. In June 2015, the Executive approved a corporate Customer Strategy for the period 2015-2018. This strategy set out a vision to 'transform delivery of services over the next 3 years, providing customers with excellent service and access to self-serve through an extensive range of e-services'. The strategy was underpinned by a programme covering the following project areas:
 - developing a **customer charter**;
 - delivering an **employee development programme** to embed the charter's principles;
 - introducing a new **customer relationship management** system;
 - redesigning the Council's **website, intranet and customer portal**;
 - redesigning **Middlesbrough House** as the Council's principle customer centre; and
 - delivering a **marketing and communications** campaign to promote the new approach.
4. These projects have now been concluded, delivering significant benefits and new capabilities on which the Council can build in future years. The key achievements of the strategy are set out below.

Customer charter

5. The charter was launched in summer 2016 and forms the cornerstone of the Customer Strategy, setting out the Council's commitment to putting residents and other customers at the heart of service delivery, and what the Council expects of its customers in return. The charter is prominently displayed across the central campus and in other service delivery points.

The commitments set out in the charter now form part of the Council's new corporate values:

- Passionate about Middlesbrough
- Integrity at our heart
- Creative in our thinking
- Collaborative in our approach
- Focussed on what matters.



Customer excellence training

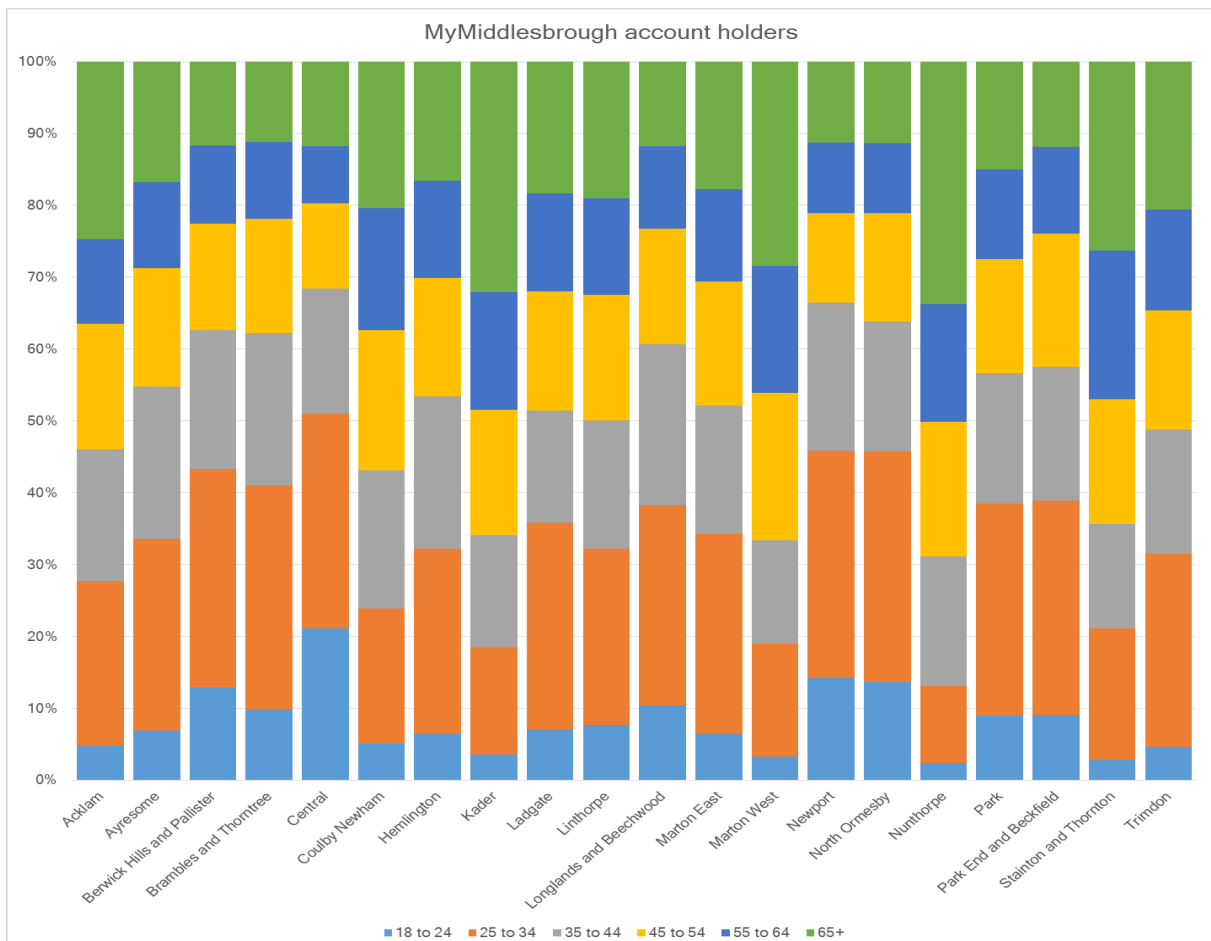
6. A comprehensive training programme was delivered to ensure that employees were equipped with the behaviours and skills required to embed the customer charter and provide an excellent customer service. 91% of Middlesbrough Managers, and 82% of frontline employees attended classroom or toolbox talk training, with the remainder accessing an associated module on the Council's elearning system. The latter now forms part of the Council's new mandatory corporate induction, and was updated in April 2018.

Customer Relationship Management system

7. The Council has replaced its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, allowing customers to set up accounts, undertake a range of transactions online, and track the progress of these. In addition to this, the Council achieved a 50% saving p.a. on CRM costs.
8. Phase 1 of CRM saw around 50 major transactions go online, including requesting a bin, recycling sacks, grass and hedge cutting, and reporting fly tipping, potholes and missed bins.
9. Completion of Phase 2 during 2018/19 will see, from an external perspective, customer complaints and information requests, and from an internal perspective, member enquiries available on the system, taking the total number of services available online to over 100. It is the first time that many of these services have been available online, enabling customers to access services at their convenience rather than just in office hours.
10. Future phases of CRM will focus on moving remaining 'high-volume, low-complexity' services online, including footpath issues and licensing and permits. The system will also support a planned pilot of mobile working within the Council's neighbourhood services, including environmental services and wardens.
11. Consideration will also be given to what assistance the Council can provide its customers in navigating Government application processes, such as housing benefits and Blue Badges e.g. providing additional explanatory material via the Council's website.

Website and intranet

12. The Council's new website was launched in September 2016, and the intranet in January 2017. Since the launch, web transactions have increased by 163% per annum.
13. Significant improvements were also made to the MyMiddlesbrough customer portal accessible through the website, and through which customers can access the CRM. Since the website launch, the number of MyMiddlesbrough accounts has increased from approximately 11,000 to just under 30,000 (28% of the town's adult population). As shown in the chart below, overall 47% of account holders are aged over 45, showing that age is not in itself a barrier to accessing online services.



14. The redesigned Customer Centre at Middlesbrough House was opened in April 2017, focusing on customer self-serve, rather than the traditional reception model. Current data shows that on average 63% of customers at Middlesbrough House self-serve, with the remaining 37% requiring support from a member of staff. This has seen customer waiting times reduce significantly from what had been on occasion a maximum of two hours to 20 minutes, with an average waiting time of 3-4 minutes. Work is now ongoing to reduce waiting times further.

Marketing and communications

15. The marketing and communications campaign focused on raising awareness of the customer charter (as outlined above) and the ease of being able to complete a wide range of transactions via the MyMiddlesbrough portal. Campaign materials offered clear messages and an eye-catching design, were clearly visible across the town, and continue to be refreshed.

Lessons learned

16. In summary, the Customer Strategy 2015-2018 has delivered a wide range of benefits for customers and for the organisation that provide a platform for future development, including:

- a clear and well-understood Customer Charter that forms the basis of the Council's relationship with its customers, and provides a means of holding services to account;

- a streamlined model of access for high-volume, transactional services, prioritising 24/7/365 online self-serve or assisted self-serve where appropriate, that is in line with customers' experience in retail, banking and other sectors; and
- a flexible CRM system that provides a cost-effective means of increasing the number of transactions available online in future years.

17. The cultural changes highlighted above have also been seen internally, with support services developing and communicating 'service promises', adopting a business partnering approach, and receiving annual feedback on performance which is used to improve service delivery.

18. The main lessons learned from implementation of the 2015-2018 strategy are:

- while the Council will continue to provide services in ways that can be accessed by all customers, including by telephone and face-to-face, there is clearly an appetite for online self-serve in many areas, as evidenced from the significant increase in uptake of self-serve since 2015;
- there is a need for the Council to further develop its processes and internal resources in order to drive the customer excellence ethos;
- while the strategy applied to all Council services, the main focus in 2015-2018 was developing centralised contact e.g. through the website or through the main walk-in contact point (Middlesbrough House), so further work is required to ensure an appropriate consistency of approach across services and other venues such as community hubs; and
- similarly, further work is required to develop customer insight and dialogue, to ensure that customer excellence is delivered across all services, and that this can be clearly demonstrated.

Customer Strategy 2018-2022

19. Lessons learned from the 2015-2018 strategy have informed the development of a proposed revised strategy for 2018-2022 (in line with the current Strategic Plan period), together with the issues set out in the following paragraphs.

20. The Strategic Plan 2018-2022 sets out a priority under the 'Business imperatives' aim to 'gain a greater understanding of the needs of our customers and of our partners, by introducing new ways of improving communication and consultation'.

21. This priority will be supported by a number of key initiatives, including the forthcoming Social Regeneration Prospectus, and a new corporate communications strategy. The Customer Strategy 2018-2022 will make a major contribution to the achievement of this priority by continuing to develop the Council's customer insight, and ensuring that this is used to shape both policy and service delivery.

22. The Digital Strategy 2018-2022 (also presented to this meeting of the Executive) sets out a vision for the Council to make full use of digital solutions for the benefit of all the town's communities. Online communication, consultation and customer transactions will be taken forward through the programme underpinning the Digital Strategy.

23. The Middlesbrough Community Survey 2017 (again, also presented to this meeting of the Executive) highlights the different communication preferences of different groups across the town, in respect of print, digital and direct contact.

24. It is important to note, in the light of these findings, that the Digital Strategy will support the achievement of the aims of the proposed Customer Strategy 2018-2022, and not vice versa. This means that customers will continue to be able to access services by telephone and face-to-face where this is needed.

25. The proposed Customer Strategy 2018-22 is at Appendix 1. In line with the Council's Strategic Plan, the document has been edited by the Plain English Campaign and will receive its Crystal Mark accreditation. The vision of the proposed strategy is:

By 2022, we will be recognised for customer excellence in everything we do, working with our customers to provide value-for-money services that meet their needs.

26. The themes of the strategy are:

- Customer insight;
- Customer-focused culture;
- Customer information and access; and
- Customer standards and outcomes.

27. These align with those of the Cabinet Office's Customer Service Excellence ® standard (CSE), and the strategy proposes to apply this standard systematically across services to ensure a consistent approach, and seek accreditation where relevant to demonstrate the Council's success.

What decision(s) are being asked for?

28. That the Executive approves the proposed Customer Strategy 2018-2022.

Why is this being recommended?

29. To ensure that the Council's customers continue to be at the heart of what it does, and that a consistent approach to customer excellence is delivered across all services.

Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended

30. There are two other main potential decisions:

- To not update the Customer Strategy. This is not recommended given the centrality of customers to the Council's approach to transformation, and would give rise to an inconsistent customer experience across services.
- To merge the Customer Strategy with another corporate strategy, such as the Digital Strategy. This is not recommended as it brings the risk of the profile of customer excellence being subsumed within the drive towards service digitisation, which cannot alone meet the needs of all customers, and will never meet the needs of some, more vulnerable customers. It is important therefore the Customer Strategy is maintained, and has a separate identity within the organisation.

Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)

Legal

31. Implementation of the Customer Strategy will enable the Council to operate within the resources available to it while meeting customer needs professionally, efficiently and effectively, assisting the Council to comply with its legal duty to achieve best value in the delivery of its services.

Financial

32. Many of the initiatives set out within proposed strategy are likely to be delivered via the Digital Strategy programme, for which provision has been made within the Council's Change Fund. Other than this, the majority of costs will be in officer time.

33. Additional costs are likely to relate to CSE standard certification, which is estimated to cost an average of £5,000 per service area, every three years, and which is anticipated to be met from existing budgets. There may also be further costs for staff training and improving customer information in some service areas. These costs will be finalised as the Programme Definition Document for the strategy is developed, and approvals sought as appropriate, in line with the Council's agreed Programme and Project Management Framework.

The Mayor's Vision for Middlesbrough

34. The strategy underpins the Council's Strategic Plan for this period, which in turn sets out how the Council will contribute to the delivery of the Mayor's Vision for Middlesbrough.

Policy Framework

35. The strategy is fully aligned with the priorities of the Strategic Plan, supporting in particular its business imperatives and social regeneration aims, by ensuring that customers are at the heart of value for money services, and those services are accessible 24/7/365, following a digital-by-design approach.

Wards

36. Implementation of the proposed strategy will positively impact on residents of all wards in Middlesbrough by improving services in line with customer needs.

Equality and Diversity

37. The proposed strategy has been subject to a Level 1 equality impact assessment (at Appendix 2). This identified that no negative differential impact on diverse groups and communities within Middlesbrough is anticipated from the activity set out in the strategy.

Risk

38. Implementation of the proposed strategy will address in part the key risk set out within the Council's Strategic Risk Register of 'failing to deliver required transformation of

services, culture change or savings'. Risks specific to the programme underpinning the strategy will be managed in line with the Council's Programme and Project Management Framework.

Actions to be taken to implement the decision

39. The proposed strategy sets out a range of initiatives to be implemented in the period to 2022, including:

- a gap analysis of all service areas against the CSE standard to inform a corporate action plan for the 2018-2022 period;
- the development of Digital Citizens' Panel and customer reference groups, both on and offline, to develop customer insight and to inform the Council's approach;
- the development of a core customer document set in Plain English to be available online and in print where appropriate;
- the development and publication of customer service standards for all services and publication of service performance against these;
- the continued development of MyMiddlesbrough and the digitisation of customer transactions, wherever appropriate;
- ensuring that all major customer access points provide the same core offer as the Middlesbrough House Customer Centre; and
- the development and publication of a customer satisfaction index, with the aim of achieving and maintaining a high level of satisfaction across all services.

40. If the proposed strategy is approved, a Programme Definition Document will be developed and approved in line with the Council's agreed Programme and Project Management Framework, justifying the business cases for these initiatives and identifying detailed delivery timelines.

Appendices

- 1 Customer Strategy 2018-2022
- 2 Customer Strategy 2018-2022: Impact Assessment

Background papers

16/06/15 Executive Customer Strategy 2015-18

Appendix 1: Customer strategy 2018-2022

Introduction

We are delighted to introduce our new customer strategy for 2018-2022.

Over the past three years, we have put our first strategy into effect. That strategy set out an ambitious plan to promote customer excellence across the council and significantly improve the quality and availability of customer services online.

The success of our approach is demonstrated by the fact that the number of transactions completed through our website increased by over 160% in 2017. And the 2017 Middlesbrough Community Survey demonstrates that local satisfaction with core services remains comparable with national averages, often exceeding them.

However, there is much more we need to do to make sure that our customer service is comparable with the best. As cuts in public spending continue to reduce the finances available to us, it is more important than ever to make sure that we involve customers in designing services to make sure that they meet customers' needs while being as efficient as possible.

So our strategy for 2018-2022 has a significant focus on working with our customers in designing and delivering services, and recognising and communicating our achievements.

Dave Budd
Mayor of Middlesbrough

Tony Parkinson
Chief Executive

Who are our customers?

A customer is a person, family or business we provide services to, either directly or through a third party. This includes citizens of Middlesbrough but can also include people and businesses from elsewhere.

We currently provide over 500 services to over 140,000 local residents and 2,500 businesses. By 2026, we expect our population to rise to more than 155,000.

Core local-government services such as waste collection are provided to all residents, while other services are tailored to customers' needs. For example, we currently protect and support around 2,000 local children and over 8,500 vulnerable adults.

As the city centre of the Tees Valley, Middlesbrough receives over 10 million visitors each year and is home to 20,000 university students.

The great majority of our services are currently available across all channels (face-to-face, phone and online). Some services are free, while others are charged for.

From the 2017 Middlesbrough Community Survey we know that 64% of those who responded were satisfied with the way we run things, and that this compares well with available local-government averages, particularly given Middlesbrough's comparative level of disadvantage. We also know from other surveys that satisfaction with adult social care and with some children's services is high. However, we also know that we can improve further.

We know that involving people in our work improves levels of satisfaction with it. We also know that we need to do this in a way that meets all local needs. While online is an increasingly preferred method of communicating and dealing with us, we know that the majority of local people still favour printed information. We will need to continue to address these needs as we continue to develop our online presence and capabilities.

What our customers can expect from us

We are committed to delivering excellent customer service in all services. Our customer charter is the basis of our approach to customer excellence. It sets out our commitment to putting customers at the heart of our services, and what we expect of our customers in return. The charter is prominently displayed in all of our buildings.

The commitments set out in the charter now form part of the following new corporate values.

- Passionate about Middlesbrough
- Integrity at our heart
- Creative in our thinking
- Collaborative in our approach
- Focussed on what matters.

Customer Charter

Middlesbrough Council is committed to providing excellent customer service. This Charter outlines our commitment and the standards that every customer can expect from us.

Our staff will:

- Keep you, the customer as our focus
- Support you to 'do it online'
- Only ask you once
- Keep it simple
- Aim to get it right first time
- Treat you fairly and honestly

How you can help us to help you:

- Use middlesbrough.gov.uk whenever possible
- Keep us up to date with any change in your situation
- Give us feedback and suggestions on how to improve our services
- Be honest and fair with all Council employees

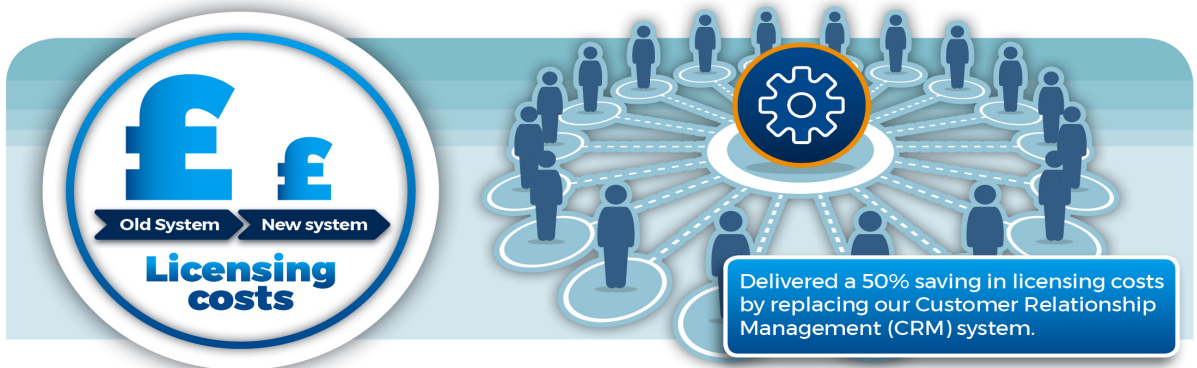
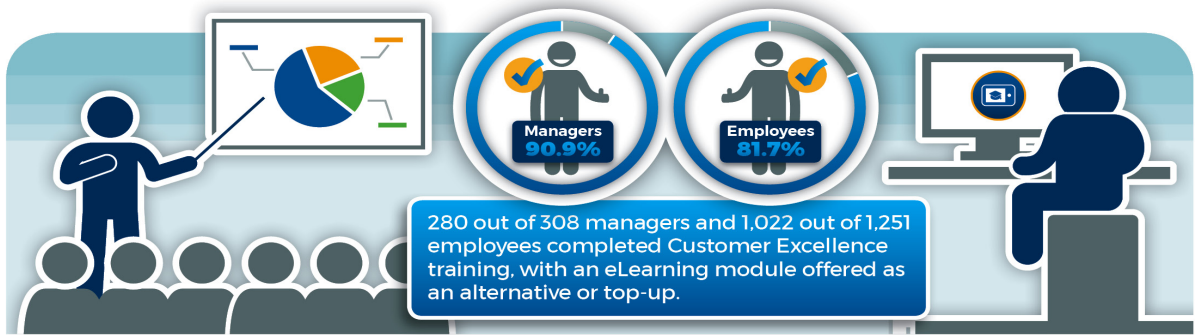
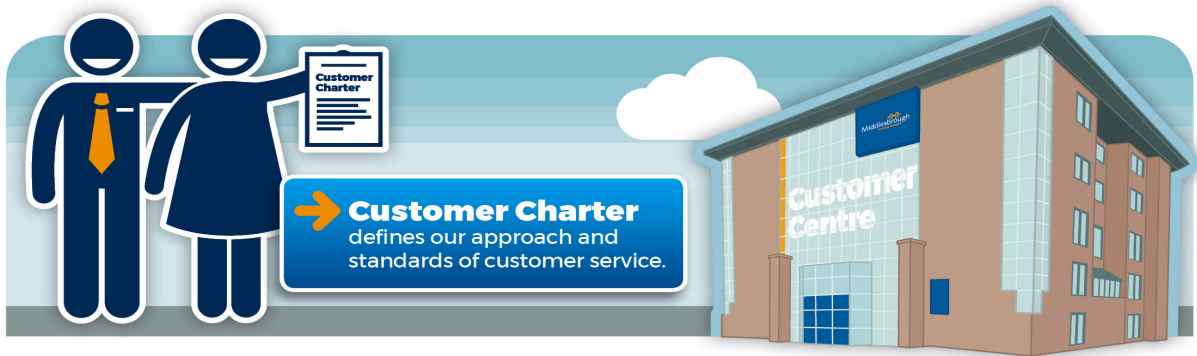
To contact us go to **MyMiddlesbrough** on our website or call our Customer Centre on 01642 245 432.

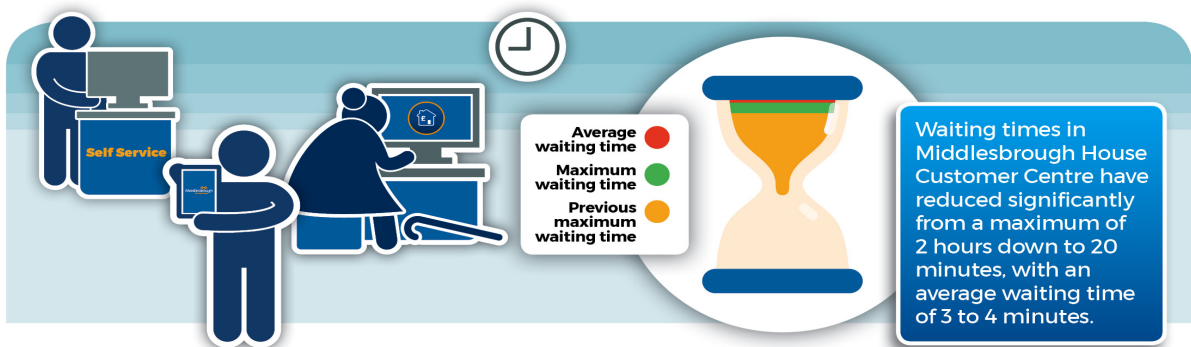
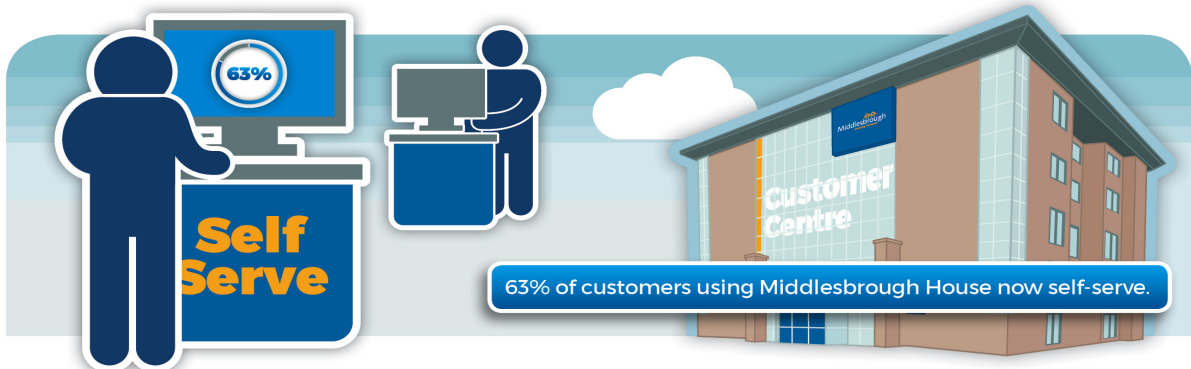
middlesbrough.gov.uk Middlesbrough making a difference

In 2015, we launched a customer strategy to incorporate the principles of the customer charter across all services, and to increase access to online services. This strategy has been successful in improving customer choice and has delivered a significant 'channel shift' for some simpler, high-volume services (this means more requests for these services are being done online, rather than by phone, or face-to-face).

How are we doing?

The following graphics summarise our progress so far in providing excellent customer service in all areas.





Our work so far has shown us that there is a clear appetite for online dealings in many service areas, and we need to continue to develop this in future to make sure that our approach is consistent across all services and meets customers' needs, particularly those of vulnerable groups.

In developing our strategy for the next four years, we have taken this learning into account, together with the priorities of our strategic plan and other important documents such as the Middlesbrough social regeneration prospectus and our digital strategy.

Vision for 2018-2022

Our vision is that by 2022, we will be recognised for customer excellence in everything we do, working with our customers to provide value-for-money services that meet their needs.

Our strategy has the following four themes, which work together.

- Customer insight
- Customer-focussed culture
- Customer information and access
- Customer standards and outcomes

These themes are in line with those of the Cabinet Office's Customer Service Excellence ® standard (CSE), and we will apply this standard systematically across services to make sure we follow a consistent approach that drives continuous improvement. We will apply for CSE accreditation where relevant to demonstrate our success.

Our priorities

Customer insight

Customer insight means:

- knowing our current and potential customers;
- understanding their needs and preferences when dealing with us;
- involving them appropriately in designing services; and
- understanding their current satisfaction with services.

Over the next four years, our priorities within this theme are as follows.

- We will develop a digital citizens' panel, making it easier for customers to get involved with us, including in developing strategies and policies.
- We will develop specific customer-reference groups for all service areas, using them to involve customers in designing strategies, policies and services.
- We will develop 'real time' customer feedback mechanisms when services are provided, so that people are able to rate transactions in different channels shortly after completion.
- We will make sure that customers can easily tell us how they want us to communicate with them (for example, email only) and that these preferences are applied across all service areas.
- We will make sure that we collect, store and use customer information in line with the requirements of the EU General Data Protection Regulation.

Customer-focussed culture

Our priorities within this theme are as follows.

- We will make sure that the customer insight we gather guides the development of our strategies and policies, and that this can be demonstrated.
- We will review our complaints procedures, to make sure that they are easy to use and result in complaints being settled as soon as reasonably possible.
- Building on the work we have done during 2015-2018, we will refresh our employee-development programme to make sure there is continuous improvement in our customer service.
- We will make sure that employees remain involved in our pursuit of customer excellence, by giving them regular feedback (including feedback from customers, where appropriate), discussing customer service in appraisals, and encouraging them to put forward their ideas.

Customer information and access

Our priorities within this theme are as follows.

- We will develop a standard set of documents about our services for customers, written in plain English, to be available online and in print where appropriate, and update this regularly.
- We will make sure that our customer access points are of a high and consistent standard, and promote customer self-serve wherever appropriate.
- We will introduce an improvement plan for the website and MyMiddlesbrough, making more transactions available online where appropriate, and making the site more personalised and even easier to use.
- We will regularly refresh our marketing campaign for MyMiddlesbrough so that our customers know what is available online and how they can access it.
- We will improve our management information on channel shift, so that we can evaluate and demonstrate the success of our approach and identify and deal with any issues as they arise.

Customer standards and outcomes

Our priorities within this theme are as follows.

- We will develop (with help from our customers) and publish customer-service standards for all services, and regularly publish our performance against these standards.
- We will develop and publish a customer-satisfaction index, with the aim of achieving and maintaining a high level of satisfaction across all services.

- We will involve our customers in testing and reviewing our performance (for example, through a 'mystery shopper' programme).
- We will compare our performance against others in local government and other sectors, where appropriate, to make sure that we continue to improve.
- We will achieve CSE standard for the Middlesbrough Customer Centre, and other sites where appropriate, to demonstrate our success.

Measuring our success

If we are successful in meeting our priorities, we will see continued improvements in the following measures of our performance up to and beyond 2022.

- Customers involved in designing services
- Customer satisfaction with website
- Customers dealing with us online
- Customers dealing with us by phone
- Customer satisfaction with online self-serve
- Customer requests dealt with first time
- Average time taken to settle complaints
- Complaints upheld
- Customer satisfaction with services
- Costs per customer transaction

We will regularly report our progress on our website, adding other measures as information becomes available.

Appendix 2: Customer Strategy 2018-2022 - Impact Assessment Level 1: Initial screening assessment

Subject of assessment:	Customer Strategy 2018-2022			
Coverage:	Overarching / crosscutting			
This is a decision relating to:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> Service	<input type="checkbox"/> Function
	<input type="checkbox"/> Process/procedure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Programme	<input type="checkbox"/> Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Review
	<input type="checkbox"/> Organisational change	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state)		
It is a:	New approach:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Revision of an existing approach:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
It is driven by:	Legislation:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Local or corporate requirements:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Description:	<p>Key aims, objectives and activities This document sets out the Council's approach to achieving customer excellence across all service areas in the period 2018-22.</p> <p>Statutory drivers Local Government Act 1999 – the strategy will be a key contributor to the delivery of Best Value. Equality Act 2010 – the strategy will ensure that the approach to customer is differentiated in line with needs.</p> <p>Differences from any previous approach The document builds on the strategy agreed by Council in July 2015, remaining consistent with the target operating model and principles originally agreed by the Executive.</p> <p>Key stakeholders and intended beneficiaries Customers (both internal and external), visitors to the area, employees and elected members.</p> <p>Intended outcomes To achieve customer excellence across all services and become recognised as such.</p>			

Live date:	As soon as the report is approved.			
Lifespan:	Financial years 2018/19 to 2021/22.			
Date of next review:	The Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis and reviewed annually.			
Screening questions	Response			Evidence
	No	Yes	Uncertain	
Human Rights Could the decision impact negatively on individual Human Rights as enshrined in UK legislation?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No. No proposed activity set out within the Customer Strategy will contravene Human Rights as identified in national legislation.
Equality Could the decision result in adverse differential impacts on groups or individuals with characteristics protected in UK equality law? Could the decision impact differently on other commonly disadvantaged groups?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No. The strategy will ensure that due regard is given to the need to promote equality in relation to customer access, provision, uptake and outcomes. Where the means of accessing services change, this will be informed by customer insight and service expertise. As a result, there are no concerns that the strategy could have a disproportionate adverse impact on groups or individuals with characteristics protected in legislation.
Community cohesion Could the decision impact negatively on relationships between different groups, communities of interest or neighbourhoods within the town?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No. The strategy supports the Strategic Plan 2018-22, which includes commitments to improve community cohesion. As a result, there are no concerns that the proposed activity could have an adverse impact on community cohesion.
Assessment completed by:	Paul Stephens, Head of Strategy, Information and Governance			
Date:	12 April 2018			
LMT approver:	James Bromiley, Strategic Director of Finance, Governance and Support			
Date:	12 April 2018			