

Customer Service Standards

“Striving for Excellence”

June 2018

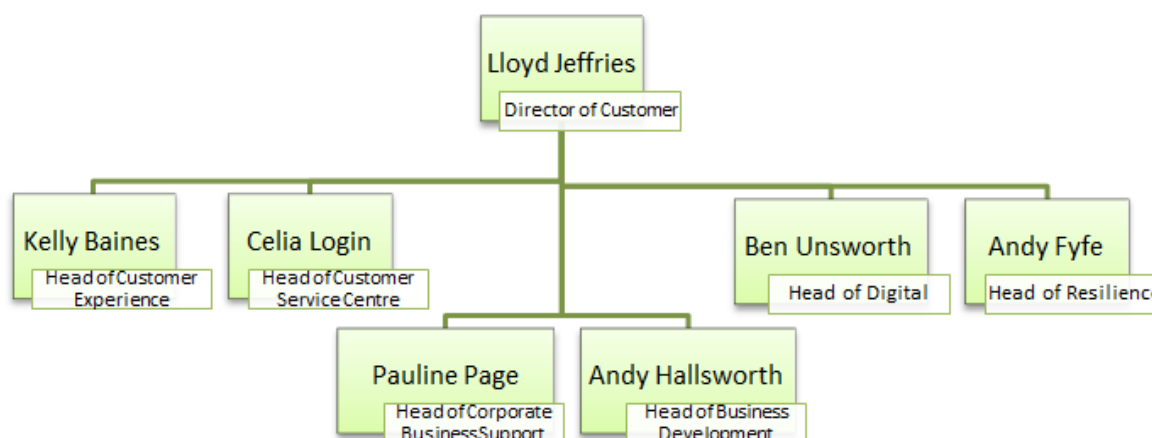
Lloyd Jeffries - Director of Customer

Kelly Baines – Head of Customer Experience

Celia Login – Head of Customer Service Centre

Introduction

In February 2018, a newly formed Customer directorate was launched bringing together all functions under the Director of Customer, Lloyd Jeffries, moving the digital team from Technology Services to report to the Head of Customer Experience. A newly-appointed Head of Digital will complete the Customer Senior Management Team.



The new directorate creates a more focussed team looking at the approach to customer experience, access channels and service delivery. A new customer strategy has been produced in draft and this is a timely opportunity to review the Service Standards and performance.

Background

In 2015, a set of Service Standards (inserted below) were agreed and launched. The Standards reflected the organisations ambition to become more digital, align with customer expectation and set clear accountabilities for employees. There was a focus on channel shift and delivering excellent customer services in the most cost effective way.

The standards were set using customer survey data, stakeholder engagement across all levels of employees in the organisation and a benchmarking exercise. This paper sets out the current performance and progress within each area of the Standards.

Customer Service Standards

Our commitment to you the customer

At Buckinghamshire County Council we are committed to providing good quality, simple to use services that represent value for money. Our website is full of information about the services we provide, many of which you can access online. New information and online services are being added and updated regularly.

If you have a query, there are various ways in which you can contact us. Whichever way you chose, we will always

- Treat you as an individual, protect your personal information and treat you with dignity and respect.
- Listen to you, respond to your needs, keep you informed and communicate clearly.
- Wherever possible, answer your enquiry the first time you contact us and if needed we will put you in touch with other organisations who can help.
- Provide easy to understand, useful and up to date information in a clear format and written in plain English.
- Give you choices in how to contact our services.
- Adapt to your needs if you have a disability.
- Ensure our staff are trained and able to deliver our services.
- Priority is given to those contacting us online or via web chat for general enquiries

When you self-serve through our website, we will:

- Make it easy for you to find the information and services you want.
- Work to improve our content and use your feedback to ensure our website has up-to-date and jargon free content with further information or contact points clearly signposted.
- Provide an acknowledgement that your transaction or enquiry has been safely received including details of what you can expect to happen next.
- Regularly add new online services so you can easily make more payments, applications and bookings online.
- Make it faster and easier to do business with us online, rather than calling, visiting or writing to us.

When you contact us via Web Chat, we will:

- Offer an extended service outside of our normal office hours during peak demand e.g. for school admissions or in the event of snow
- Give your enquiry priority over our general enquiry telephone calls into our Contact centre.

- Aim to answer within 20 seconds of receiving your query.
- Call you back if either you or we feel it is necessary. Answer your query as fully as possible. If we need to refer your query to a specialist we will pass on the full details of your enquiry, so you do not have to repeat yourself.

When you use one of our online forms, we will:

- Ask you for the relevant information we need to answer your query, so that we can give you a quicker answer that is right first time, without having to come back to you for more information.
- We will provide you with an acknowledgement that we have received your enquiry.
- We will respond to you with an answer within *24 hours (excluding Weekends and Bank holidays)*

When you contact us through our Social Media pages, we will

- Tell you how to contact us in case of an emergency
- Respond to queries/questions posted on Social Media within *2 hours during office hours*.
- Talk to you in a friendly, personal nature.
- If your enquiry is personal, we will ask you to contact us on a private channel of your choice.

When you telephone us, we will:

- Give you our name and department when answering the phone.
- Advise you of services and information on our website relevant to the nature of your enquiry.
- Use technology to ensure your call is directed to the most appropriate individual who will aim to resolve your enquiry without having to hand you over to someone else.
- Give you the option to be put straight through to the person you need to speak to through the use of voice recognition technology.
- When we do have to pass your enquiry to another department, we will provide the full details of your enquiry so that you do not have to repeat yourself.
- If needed, we will agree a convenient time to call you back.
- Keep the use of voicemail to a minimum. If you are asked to leave a message on our voicemail you will receive a response to your message with 24 hours. If a member of staff is away, they will provide alternative contacts for you to call.
- Provide emergency out of hours numbers for critical situations and concerns.

When you write to us, we will:

- Acknowledge your email, with details of when you will receive a full response and who to contact if you require more information.
- Acknowledge receipt of your letter within 5 working days and ensure you know who to contact for more details. Provide a full respond to your letter or email within 28 working days and ensure that you know who to contact if you require more information.
- Respond within 20 working days to requests managed under the Freedom of Information

Act 2000

When you visit us, we will:

- Keep County Hall reception opens from 9am - 5pm, Monday to Thursday and 9am - 4pm Fridays.
- Greet you promptly on your arrival and ensure that our name badges are visible.
- Aim to resolve general enquiries within 15 minutes of your arrival.
- Ensure all reception areas are clearly signposted and include a seated waiting area and private interview facilities.
- Provide specialist communication or access support as soon as possible.

When we visit you, we will:

- Make an appointment at a time and place, convenient to both you and us.
- Arrive promptly or inform you if we are delayed.
- Clearly display our identification and introduce ourselves, explaining the purpose of the meeting.

How you can help us:

- Provide all the information we need to progress your enquiry.
- Tell us when your circumstances have changed and let us know if you need to cancel an appointment or a request.
- Treat our staff with courtesy and respect. We will not tolerate the use of physical or verbal abuse in any form, including the use of foul and abusive language.

Feedback and Complaints

Our customer standards and hours of service will be reviewed regularly to ensure we deliver the best customer experience.

We will use customer feedback to help us make changes to our online services.

We are committed to delivering high customer service standards but if we fail to meet your expectations or you would like to provide us with feedback, please go to our ['Feedback & complaints'](#) pages for details on how to do this.

We will act quickly if we've got it wrong and take appropriate action to resolve issues.

Feedback will be responded to in full within 28 working days.

Progress

The Service Standards fall under a number of sub-headings that state a variety of ways for



customers to contact us and our intention to deliver excellent customer service through each channel. Since the Service Standards were launched in 2015, we have made huge progress to create easy to access, quality channels that provide value for money.



Underneath each sub-heading below, we are continuously working to improve and enhance the customer experience.

➤ **Our commitment to you the customer**

As part of our commitment to customers, we have recently produced a Customer Experience (CX) Strategy. This is currently in draft and will be subject to a Cabinet Member decision in due course. This customer experience strategy sets out the vision and the objectives to achieve our overall goals while recognising; our diverse and growing population, the growing demand on our services, the need to be more cost effective coupled with rising customer expectations.

The strategy outlines an updated approach to customer experience for both internal and external customers, working alongside, and in collaboration with, the Smarter Buckinghamshire Strategy, OD Strategy and Performing Better Everyday Strategy, to place our customers at the centre of our service design, empower employees to deliver

outstanding customer experience and introduce new and exciting digital solutions.

The Customer Experience vision

“We will continue to place our customers at the heart of what we do, to understand their needs and support them to do more for themselves.”

Our priorities:

- To transform our customer experience so that we can deliver preventative solutions and better support our customers, using data and feedback to improve service delivery
- Deliver customer service that provides value for money, flexibility and choice whilst placing our customers at the heart of everything we do
- To become brilliant at the basics, to allow customers to find what they need, when they need it with ease and at speed, to keep them informed and to manage their expectations
- Deliver our services, transact and engage with our customers where they already are, through social media and messenger apps
- Protect the vulnerable by using our resources effectively and work in collaboration with our partners to achieve better outcomes for our residents
- Ensure that the customer experience is not led by technology but by the needs of our customers
- Support and empower our staff with the tools and support they need to make a positive difference to customers at every interaction

The Service Standards tell our customers that we are committed to delivering services in a way that they want to access and to provide good quality, simple to use services that represent value for money.

➤ **When you self-serve through our website**

In February 2018, the website and digital team moved to the Customer Directorate and was given a change of focus and a new direction.

With over two million visits a year to our website, a programme of work called “Brilliant at the Basics” has been launched to achieve our ambition of creating a digital front door to the organisation, creating a platform that our customers can interact with us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The programme aims to deliver a 4* Socitm rating by 2019 and improve customer experience

Due to limited capacity some core activities had become difficult to manage. With over 1000 requests a month for web changes to be made across the 3000 pages on the main website. The main Bucks website scored a Socitm rating of 2* consecutively in June 2015 and 2016. We have also experienced an increase in services setting up separate websites (microsites) due to limited functionality on the main website coupled with restricted resource.

Since the Brilliant at the Basic programme launched in February 2018:

- We have recruited 3 fixed term posts to assist with the programme
- We have been awarded a 3* Socitm rating
- We have launched a project to put our Schoolsweb extranet on a new platform and are creating a one stop shop for our customers
- We have launched a project to create more functionality within the main BCC website to migrate microsites, deliver a better customer experience and re-engage services.
- We have launched a new customer effort score with feedback options on every page of the website.

➤ **When you contact us via webchat**

We have recently launched webchat on the BCC website. We recognise that webchat is the fastest growing online channel and plan on using the insight gained from customers to drive improvements on our webpages. Our advisors are trained to deal with multiple chats and our aim is to help customers that go online stay online. We are investigating the opportunities to use artificial intelligence in the form of Chatbots in the future, to further drive efficiencies and provide a 24/7 service to customers.

Webchat is now also available to employees when contacting the HR service desk and is already receiving high levels of satisfaction. We are planning on launching the service on our commercial site, Shop4Support, with push-out options to talk to a specialist when customers spend time looking at products without progressing through to checkout.

➤ **When you use one of our online forms**

More than ever customers expect to not only find information online but transact online, providing and receiving information to access services without ever telephoning or visiting us.

BCC use Firmstep as our customer account and self-service platform. We have recently recruited additional resource within the team, accelerating the number of transactions customers can access online.

We have developed more opportunities to self-serve, placing customers at the centre of our design principles, adopting a digital by default approach wherever possible.

We currently have over 80 customer forms that customers can access through our website. In May 2018, we had over 17,200 forms completed by customers. 47,000 customers have accounts with us and are able to track progress and see all of their interactions with us.

Our waste permit process serves over 2000 customers a month, providing an instant permit for residents with commercial type vehicles to allow them to bring their waste and recycling to our recycling centres. Permits are then scanned, either from their mobile phone or from paper copies. They can also retrieve their permits through their account, update their permit and check when their permits are due for renewal.

We've built over 100 internal forms ranging from keeping record of all of our customer service centre calls allowing us to easily report our common queries, querying databases or requesting a BCC swipe card. Our maintenance reporting form receives around 500 reports per month from schools, libraries and other council buildings allowing them to report any issues quickly and easily.

We also have various internal processes that start from an online form; our library volunteering form allows residents to apply to volunteer at a library, while internally it takes the member of staff through the checking process from DBS checks to interview and induction all through an online dashboard.

➤ **When you contact us through our Social Media pages**

Buckinghamshire County Council currently has 14,000 followers on Twitter and 2,899 followers on Facebook, these channels are in the main used to utilise customer engagement and communications manage these channels by pushing relevant content. Customers can contact us via these channels and receive a response through our communication team.

The Customer team is currently working in collaboration with the Communications team to enhance this service and push any contact from customers through to the Customer Service Centre to be answered in the same way as the telephone or webchat. This will become a managed operational channel and customer details and queries will be logged to provide a more accurate customer record that will be able to put through to services with progress update opportunities and allows customers and services to view customer history.

➤ **When you telephone us**

We have delivered a 32% reduction in budget since 2015, through efficiency savings. We have achieved significant channel shift with 273,000 calls reducing to 185,000 in 2016/17, and have maintained an impressive first call resolution rate of 63%.

With our digital offering continually evolving with the launch of Fix My Street and increasing customer forms assisting with straight forward transactional tasks, the telephone channel is seeing more complex queries coming through to our advisors and we are seeing a trend for longer handle times.

Future developments of the telephony channel include an appetite to deliver more at the first point of contact, working with services to enhance advisors learning and creating deeper integrations that will assist back office teams deliver their services.

We are looking to implement a best in class voice recognition solution that will enable us to, filter calls to the right place, prioritise our queues and support the delivery of transaction tasks for those customers that cannot access online services (for example – renew a library book)

➤ **When you write to us**

We are working to reduce customers having to write to us unless they wish to do so and a recent example of placing just one paper process online has resulted in a 98% uptake. A



process that previously required BCC to post out a paper form and then the customer to complete and send back with a cheque for payment has resulted in over 800 instances of online completion and payment. This saves the organisation over £5000 in postage, paper and admin costs and vastly increases the customer experience.

➤ **When you visit us**

We carried out a major refurbishment to our County Hall reception area in 2017 to incorporate a self-serve area and two pods for those visitors who require a private area in which to have conversation.

The staff are equipped with iPads to allow them to quickly and efficiently check in people coming for meetings which makes up over half of the reception footfall.

We have integrated the reception staff into the Customer Service team and provided training to ensure they are offering the same high levels of service as our Customer Service Advisors. They are able to assist customers in accessing information from the Internet and completing transaction online, and can do so on behalf of the customer if they are not able to do so themselves.

We have listened to our customers' feedback and increased our County Hall Reception open from 8.30pm – 5.30pm, Monday to Thursday and 8.30pm – 5.00pm Fridays.

➤ **Feedback and Complaints**

The Compliments & Complaints Team was created in 2012. Since then we have integrated together all compliments and complaints from across the organisation to be managed and recorded in one place. This has provided improved reporting with more information about why our customers make complaints. This includes Statutory Complaints for Children's and Adult Social Care as well as all other complaints dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Process.

The number of complaints recorded over the last 5 years has been steady with no significant increases. The number of compliments recorded has been increasing steadily also as services become more aware of the need to record them so that we can celebrate our successes.

In 2016, the corporate complaints process was reduced from a 3 to a 2 stage process bringing down the total timeframe the organisation has to deal with complaints before going to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

In October 2017, we launched an Improvement Plan for corporate complaints. So far we have set an internal target of 10 working days to respond to complaints. This has reduced the timescales so far but is an ongoing goal. We are working on the quality of responses and each Business Unit has a Complaints Lead to ensure ownership and accountability of complaints. Our focus going forward will be to continue to reduce timescales and to record actions taken from learning. An annual report on complaints is presented to the Regulatory and Audit Committee.

Review

We intend to review the current standards and ascertain if they are still the right measures. We would like to re-engage with stakeholders and customers to ensure the standards are relevant, ambitious and align to expectations.

Challenges and Opportunities

The challenge has and always will be measuring the standards outside of the core customer functions such as the Customer Service Centre and Digital team, where statistics are easy to obtain and performance is measured and monitored. This review will provide the opportunity to build accountability for customer experience across the wider organisation, we propose to ensure the standards are embedded and quality monitored through the following activities:

Vision



Using the Service Standards and Customer Experience strategy we will provide a clear, inspiring vision for customers and provide the tools for employees to deliver it consistently

- We will launch the refreshed Service Standards and Customer Experience strategy and work with Communications to ensure all staff are engaged. We will hold roadshows during National Customer Service week.
- Customer Experience induction training will be designed and implemented for all staff.
- We will work with the Learning and development team to create Customer Experience E-Learning Modules for all staff to complete.

Governance



We will ensure Customer experience is quality monitored and all employees are empowered and accountable

- We will build a network of CX champions within teams to drive innovation in customer experience and ensure accountability for the Service Standards. The champions will meet monthly and will provide updates and share best practice.
- We will measure performance at the Customer Focus Group and invite champions to deliver project updates.
- The Customer, Digital and Technology Board will have oversight of performance metrics.

Metrics



As part of the review we will build in performance metrics

- 4* Socitm Website
- Customer Effort scoring
- Customer Service Centre performance
- Mystery shopping data

Time Line

Launch new standards 1st – 5th October 2018 during National Customer Service week with a series of customer roadshows and activities surrounding the week long event.