

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY

2019-2023



Introduction

Our customers come first!

We deal with around 14,500 enquiries from the public every year and we are determined to deliver a high quality service for everyone.

We aim to provide our services in an easy to understand way and at a time that suits the people that really matter – our customers.

We have developed the My Three Rivers self-serve portal, and increased the use of social media as we transform the customer experience through encouraging 'digital by default'.

We also recognise that people might want to use different access channels for different enquiries - *one size does not fit all*. But for our customers the expectation should always be one-stop delivery and resolution.

Using technology helps us to deliver our services in a quick, efficient and cost-effective way. But we also want to offer the personal touch to people who need it. This will be delivered by our Customer Service Centre (CSC). We must find out what our customers want and expect and that is why feedback is so important to us.

It all comes down to three steps:



- Discovering - understanding the needs of the customer;
- Shaping - making services more efficient and easier to access;
- Delivering - measuring, improving and learning.

This Customer Experience strategy 2019-23 builds on our existing good work and will help us to make further improvements to the services we provide to our residents, businesses, stakeholders and visitors.

The changes that we make will be led by our customers - they are at the heart of everything we do.



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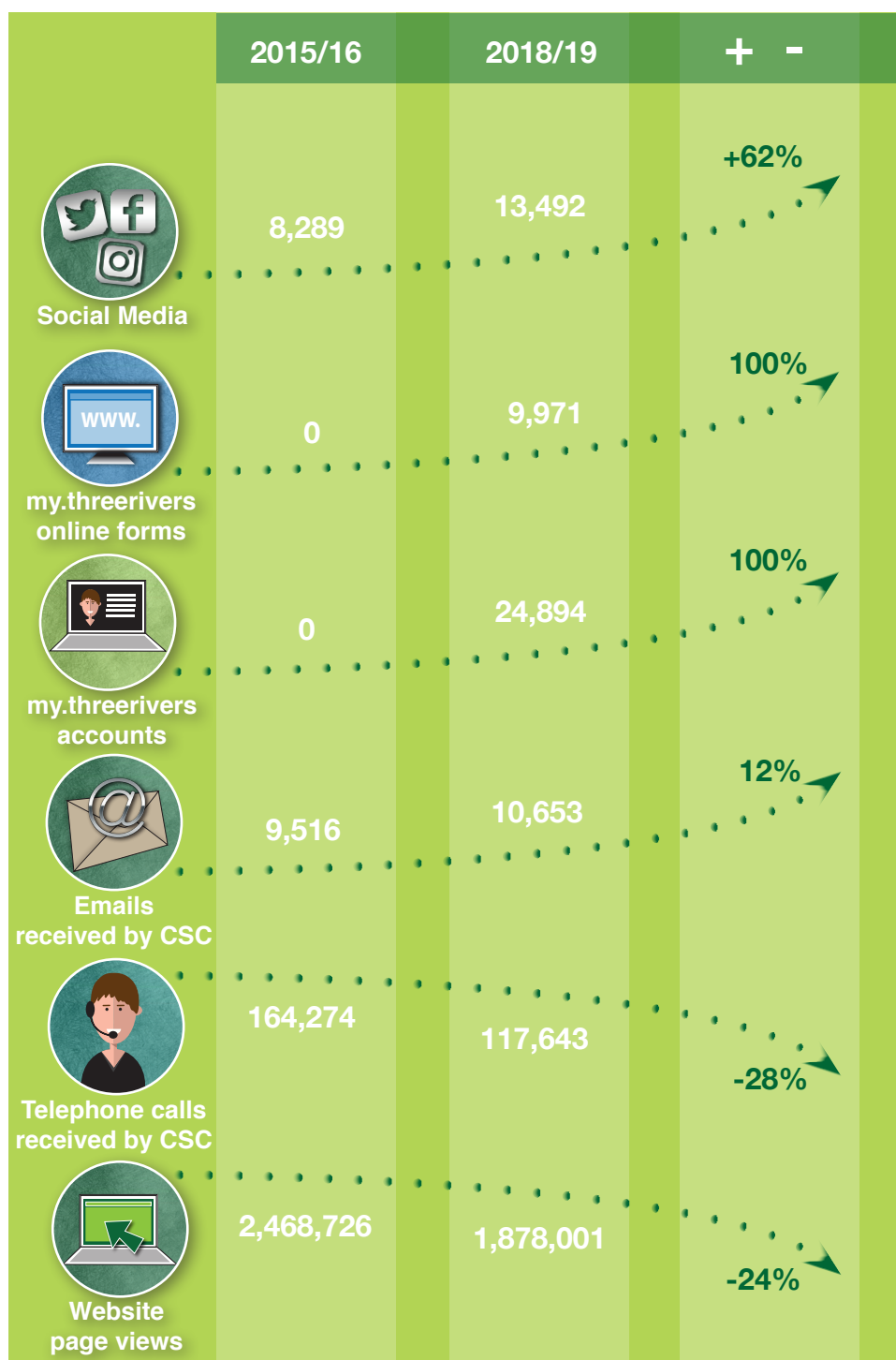
The journey so far . . .

Three Rivers District Council's previous Customer Programme strategy from July 2012 focused on 'Changing the face of Customer Services'. Its aim was to identify how external customers accessed our services and its approach was to develop:

- A new customer relationship management system
- Upgrade the Three Rivers District Council website
- Channel migration – extending the methods our customers have to interact with the Council
- Process Re-engineering

The strategy had a number of successes in creating and implementing digital platforms, which will allow for continued customer channel migration and improved service efficiency. These included:

- Implementation of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system
- My Three Rivers customer self-service portal
- Message at the start of phone calls directing people to the automated payment line



Firmstep online forms and my.threerivers accounts came into service on 1 April 2018.

What we do know about the current customer experience

Delivering services to local businesses and residents, enabling people to report and request services, dealing with enquiries across all service channels and enabling people to access information, is big business for the Council.

The following information about customers and customer transactions gives a flavour of the number of interactions handled by the Council during financial year 2018/19:



117,643

Telephone calls received by Customer Service Centre



9,971

Online forms submitted via my.threerivers



10,653

Number of emails received by Customer Service Centre



24,894

my.threerivers accounts



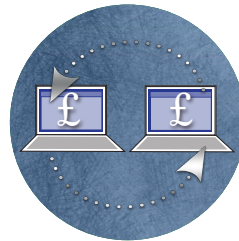
1,878,001

Pages viewed on the website



38,024

Number of Council Tax bills sent out



1,983

Number of people signed up to e-billing for Council Tax



3,986

Households received assistance with a Council Tax Support claim



13,442

Followers on our Social Media platforms



37,450

Properties get household waste and recycling collections



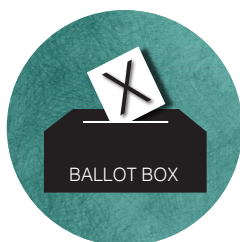
22,581

Signed up to our Garden Waste service



62.4%

Recycling percentage is the highest in Hertfordshire



91.67%

Percentage of people who responded to the Annual Canvass



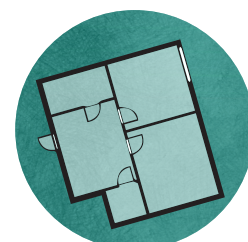
842

Number of households on our Housing Register



2,057

Number of Business Rates bills sent out



1,588

Planning applications submitted

Customer experience vision

The customer experience vision we have is to be open, honest and respectful to customers and by listening and learning from feedback given to us work together to find solutions and take responsibility on our service delivery. We will also work smartly for our customers by ensuring services are delivered via the most appropriate channel.

Positive customer experiences reflect good customer service interactions; the vision sets the context for colleagues who deal directly with the public and local businesses. If we can't help, then we will tell our customers and offer alternative

solutions or direct them to where they may get assistance, if available.

We are working continuously to realise the Customer Experience vision by putting customers at the heart of everything we do. We have developed a set of customer experience values which articulate the behaviours and expectations we expect of our staff towards all our customers. It is not the intention of the strategy to build unrealistic expectations for our Customers, rather to encourage and enable self-help wherever possible

Our guiding principles for our vision will be:

| Take Responsibility | Open, Honest and Respectful | Work Together to Find Solutions | Listen and Learn | Work Smartly |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Accept responsibility for service delivery | Be open and honest in dealings with customers | Actively seek to resolve customer concerns | Enable customers to give feedback on processes and services and learn from this | Increase access to digital services and transactions |
| Set clear expectations about services delivery | Act morally and ethically | Review and expand communication channels | Listen to and reflect on customer concerns | Make better use of data to understand the needs of our residents |
| Deliver what has been promised | Be friendly and helpful | | Understand the customer's point of view | Ensure services are delivered via the most appropriate channel |
| Make available quality information about services | Be professional and courteous | | Communication with our customers will be two-way. Will be responsive, consistent and effective in our communications | Value the workforce across the District and enable them to deliver services effectively and efficiently |
| Keep information clear, relevant and up to date | Be clear and concise | | | Design and functionality of the reception area and meeting rooms |
| Increase first point resolution | Be transparent in communications | | | |
| | Manage customer expectations | | | |



Discovering

Understanding services and customer needs



The rationale

To improve services the Council will require a better understanding of who their customers are and what their expectations are. Particular methods of contact, such as face-to-face, a telephone call or letter costs more per transaction and officer time than other contact streams, such as online and email. The Council needs to understand why customers prefer to use these contact streams and how to encourage them to migrate to online services.

In order to achieve this channel shift it is important to evaluate all aspects of the current customer journey and the associated cost to deliver each process.

This then allows the Council to identify areas for improvement and where potential savings can be made.

In order for the Council to make informed decisions based on real data, they need a comprehensive understanding of its services and their customers. This will enable the Council to make decisions based on its customer needs and not assumptions, or continued use of historic back office processes without review.

Customers are made up of various groups:

- Residents and Visitors to Three Rivers
- Partners and other Government departments
- Suppliers, Businesses
- Other Local Authorities

How we envisage this will be achieved:

- Putting customers at the forefront of everything the Council does by embracing new technology.
- Establishing costs of delivering services using the current contact streams and their current take-up.
- Understanding the current and future needs of customers, customer groups and identifying ways of meeting them.
- Through service reviews using Business Process Reengineering (BPR).
- Developing a better understanding of who the Council's customers are, what their needs are and how they prefer to access services.
- Ensuring the Council's services and processes are reviewed regularly and changed as required so they are delivered effectively and efficiently.
- Helping customers to develop their skills so they can use online services but also providing suitable alternatives for those who cannot access them.
- Using new technology and contact streams to measure customer access and gather data.
- Using data and insight to ensure where possible all customer journeys are online end-to-end processes.
- Understanding which services have most contact and via which channels.
- Focus groups for staff and customers
- Online survey on our current access channels

Shaping

Making services more efficient and easier to access



The rationale

The shaping phase consists of evolving the way the Council delivers services and the contact streams they are accessed through.

By utilising the information the Council collects in the discovery phase they can continuously develop online services and look to introduce brand new features such as automated web chat function.

Ensure that accessing services is easier and quicker for customers by streamlining and improving the customer journey. This includes reducing internal duplication by reviewing internal processes and removing historic approaches.

The Council will ensure customers can submit a request/enquiry and make payment without the need of having to contact the Council via face-to-face or by phone, through online transactions and viewing their accounts instead. They will need to clearly communicate, advertise and promote these options and ensure they are functional for the customer requirements. The Council corporately are tasked with recording all customer contact so they

can develop bespoke profiles for customers, listing all of their transactions and contact made with them via 'My Three Rivers'.

It is particularly important staff are skilled in being able to identify where customers may need additional support and how best to signpost them. It is key that face-to-face remains to ensure the demographic are not alienated and in fact benefit from the changes that are made. Services encouraging their customers to use more cost effective payment methods, such as e-billing, taking payment upfront and direct debit take-up. This will reduce the need for invoicing and service costs.

These are the actions that we anticipate will come from the discovery stage. This part of the strategy will be a working document which will be updated once the discovery stage is completed.

How this will be achieved:

- Equip managers and staff so the Council can be completely agile at work.
- Ensuring all new starters have an understanding of the Customer Experience Strategy and the part they play within it.
- Invest to improve as opposed to invest to save. Develop ICT capabilities to handle modern requirements.
- Removing the need for paper documents and printing.
- Corporate approach to encouraging customers to move to more efficient and effective methods of interacting with the Council.
- Redesigning services based on customer feedback.
- Increase online availability, which includes access to accounts, balances and payments.
- Review of current targets and customer service standards/measurements in place.
- All services that have the capability of being online are available.
- The Council has clear and consistent customer and staff standards across the authority.
- The Council will use new technology and customer preferences to provide better customer contact.
- Security governance will be compliant and up to date.
- Customer feedback will rate the Council's services as comprehensive, simple to use and easily accessible.
- Increase back office integrations to deliver end-to-end services.
- Increase the number of customer email addresses and mobile phone numbers captured, ensuring they are correct in the Customer Relationship Management system and across the Council to enable digital engagement.
- Proactively using customer history as provided by the Customer Relationship Management System to develop services that respond to the needs of the diverse communities.
- Using the data and feedback to reduce face-to-face contact.



Delivering

Measuring, improving and learning



The rationale

The delivering phase is about the Council consistently evaluating and improving the customer experience. It is imperative that the Council follows up on the shaping phase and design processes utilising everything they have learnt in the previous two phases. This will give the Council a unique insight into customers' perspective and therefore a greater understanding of their needs.

They will be able to see how effective the services are delivered by customer feedback and comparison of data to ensure the quality is maintained but delivered in a more efficient manner. Senior management will need to lead by example and ensure their services are embracing this approach to improve customer contact streams. They will also be responsible for communicating to all staff within that service area, the importance of the customer experience and transforming processes.

Corporate buy-in is paramount to the success of the Strategy. The Council will need to push positive change, as a team or the aims will not be

achieved. Staff will work with customers to help them understand the benefits of moving to modern channels and to remove any barriers to them doing so. A vital role in customer satisfaction is to ensure there are consistent customer standards across the whole Council.

All staff will understand the level of service they are expected to provide and that they have the skills they need. They will monitor service levels and provide feedback on areas for improvement where required.

These are the actions that we anticipate will come from the shaping stage. This part of the strategy will be a working document which will be updated once the shaping stage is completed.

How this will be achieved:

- Invest to improve as opposed to invest to save.
- Ensure where possible all of services are accessible via a range of different methods by default and are available 24/7.
- Informing customers of the standard of service they should expect and encouraging customers to make comments and suggestions.
- Maximising the use of technology across the Council.
- Embedding a culture of self-service through automated processes.
- Providing skills to the workforce and Councillors to promote a self-service culture.
- Consulting to better understand customer needs.
- Utilising customer information to continually improve processes and minimise service failure.
- More time dedicated to improving.
- Deliver dynamic and interactive services to meet customer expectations.
- Using the data and feedback to reduce face-to-face contact.
- Retention of a professional customer focused workforce.
- Front line staff to increase first point resolution is achieved and to coach customers in the use of self-service.
- Encouraging customers to take a self-help approach and seek information online first.
- Enabling all customers to access services, whether they have technical skills. Providing secure and easy access to use online transactions.

How success will be measured:

- A new set of measurements to be brought forward after the shaping stage
- Ensuring all employees and Councillors are fully integrated into the digital workflow.
- Monitoring customer feedback and satisfaction from all access channels and sharing this with all service areas.

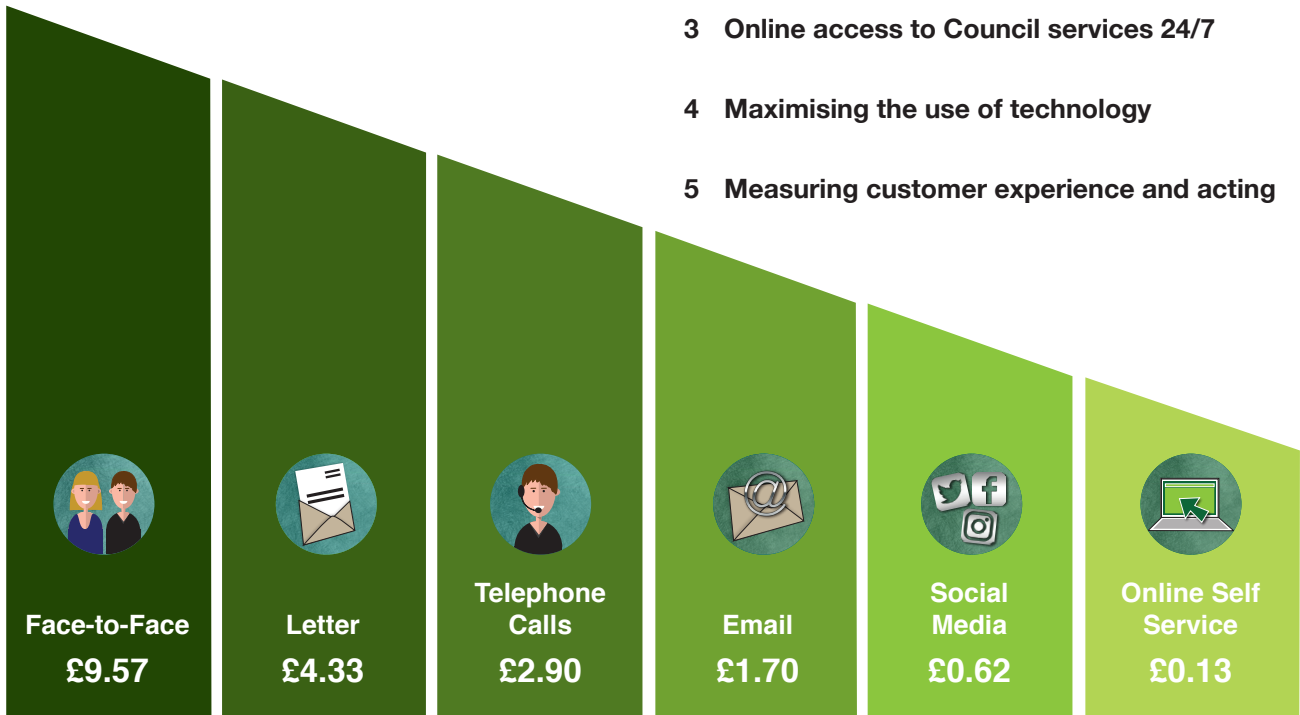
Benefits to the Council:

- Reduction in printing
- Reduction in postage
- Reduction in manual processes
- Improved reputation and presence



Five priorities to encourage channel shift

- 1 Digital by default
- 2 First point resolution
- 3 Online access to Council services 24/7
- 4 Maximising the use of technology
- 5 Measuring customer experience and acting



Figures supplied by DWP, LA's and Adult Social Services*

Starting with the most expensive and resource intensive contact stream, the Council will promote channel migration as follows:

Reduce Face-to-face

- Improve online access channels for simple transactions.
- Provide multi skilled pools of staff that can assist with the channel migration, increasing customer self-service take-up.
- Developing digital platforms and tools that allow 24/7 access for customers.
- Improving Wi-Fi connectivity in all Council public spaces.
- Encouraging smarter working practices to avoid duplication of future work/contact to avoid customers visiting unnecessarily.
- Increased joined up working with back office services and data sharing with partners to improve customer processes.
- Removing the need for customers to provide hardcopy evidence.
- Develop a streamlined evidence upload process that is used across the Council.

Reduce correspondence by letter

- Reduce print and postage costs in line with ongoing services reviews, for reducing back office inefficiencies by moving over to electronic solutions.
- Explore the use of SMS to enable savings in print and postage in all services.
- Promote e-billing across the Council and this to be adopted by all services.

Reduce telephone calls

- Use our communication platforms to their full potential.
- Customer Service Center to promote online services to all callers.
- Capture customer data to promote and enable digital engagement and positive behaviour change.
- Continue to provide a high quality Customer Service, by improving internal processes so the Council can achieve first point resolution.
- To provide consistent training to all customer focused staff so they have the knowledge and expertise to deliver comprehensive services.
- Improve online access channels for simple transactions.

Reduce email contact

- Migrate incoming emails to integrated online forms and processes that capture all information required and automatically routed directly through to the relevant service area.
- Automates responses with timescales for customer.
- Introduce and increase the usage of internal dashboards, which will replace internal shared email inboxes, which will allow users to allocate and see a full audit history of tasks undertaken. This will also remove single points of failure.
- Reduce the volume of incoming emails.

Increase social media activity

- Understand the customer's needs and opinions by engaging with them via social media, which will allow the Council to be proactive and prompt with responses.
- Implement the use of chat box in the Council
- Implement the use of social media sign-in facility for the my.threerivers platform

Increase online transactions

- Integrate customer journeys across the Council optimising use of all systems and re-engineering or building new processes to ensure end-to-end digital services are available for customers whilst using the most efficient and effective use of resources.
- Using the Council's website and the my.threerivers self-service portal to offer online services. The self-service portal uses the customers profile to personalise services and improve access.
- Refine the Council's website and the my.threerivers portal to ensure content is kept updated, modern and where possible be interactive to meet the business purpose and to enhance customers' digital access, improving the commercial offer.
- Develop customer feedback mechanisms and user testing as part of the Council's redesign.
- Implement the use of automated chat box in the Council, using it as a triage for customer contact.
- Use of internal electronic online forms across the Council to improve efficiencies and introduction of internal dashboards.



Conclusion

This Strategy sets out how the Council will develop customer access to its services from 2019-2023.

New technology continues to emerge and customer preferences change, the Council must be willing to adapt to change customer contact streams and the way they deliver services based on this. An action plan will be developed to identify how best to implement this strategy. This will include a full costing exercise.

Equality and Diversity

In Three Rivers we value diversity and acknowledge that 'one size does not fit all', both in respect of access to and provision of services and in employment. The Council aims to build on its long established commitment to Equal Opportunities to ensure that we tackle inequalities and take advantage of the strong business case for sound practice on equality and diversity. In March 2006 the Council revised and updated its Policy commitment to equality and diversity, which has also been further updated in 2009, 2012 and the latest update in 2018. You can find this on our website

threerivers.gov.uk

An Equalities Relevance Test (ERT) has been completed for this strategy. The ERT can be found in the Equality and Diversity section of the Three Rivers District Council website.

