

Sheffield City Council

Customer
Experience
Strategy
2024 - 2028

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v1.0 DRAFT



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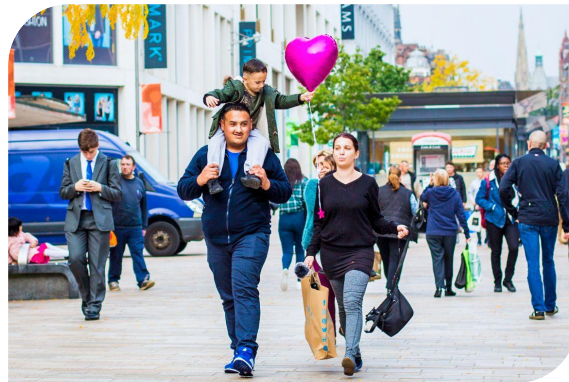
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Our strategy at a glance




Our vision: We offer great customer experiences for local people, communities and businesses by truly understanding and empowering them, being creative, and making it easy to reach the right solution for them.


Over the next four years, we will work as one council to deliver a better customer experience for our diverse people and communities through:




Empowered communities: We will connect more creatively with neighbourhoods and communities of interest, so local people can find the right support and solutions for them, whether provided by the council, themselves or others. This means we can bring our collective support to help people at the right time, and focus council resources on those who most need it.




Digital: We will expand our digital offer for customers to access reliable, seamless, inclusive and intuitive services, which are available 24/7. This means more people will want to use online options when interacting with us.




Phone and in-person: The digital shift means we can focus personalised support for those who rely on speaking with us by phone or in-person. This means customers can access us more quickly and get a better outcome.



Cross-council model: We will develop the roles, skills and tools to support more customers to get to the most suitable outcome when they first contact us. This means reducing demand caused by errors or repeated contact.



Connected response: We will strengthen how we provide a joined up response from the first point of contact to delivering a service. This means freeing up services to focus on people and their specific circumstances.



Developing the tools we need: We will focus on developing the people-centred ways of working, processes and infrastructure we need to deliver great customer experience for the long term, including smarter use of information and feedback from local people. This means we will be able to continuously improve and ensure we can keep meeting customer expectations in changing circumstances.

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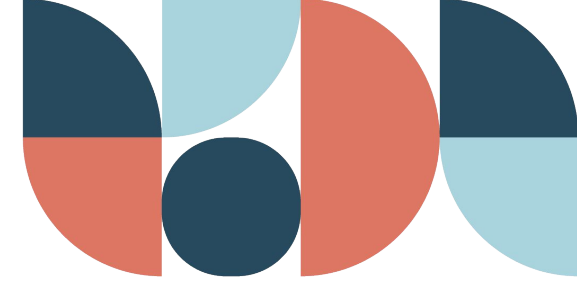
Delivering better experiences for our customers will be an ongoing journey, but we have clear priorities for the next 12 months:

- 1. Improving digital access**
Drive stronger use of digital tools and solutions for customers across all services.
- 2. Empowering communities**
Build creative ways to communicate, connect, empower and work with our communities.
- 3. Modern customer model**
Develop a cross-council model and ways of working to enhance customer experience.
- 4. A smarter experience**
Use data, insight and customer involvement to deliver better and more cost-effectively.



1 Our vision for customer experience

What 'customer experience' means to us



We use 'customer' in this strategy to mean **anyone interacting with or engaging with the council for a service, information or other type of support.** It is a deliberately broad definition, because customer experience is integral to everything we do. Even teams in the council which do not directly engage with members of the public, such as our support services, should ensure their work best contributes to what we want to achieve for our customers.

Depending on their circumstances, people will have different levels of capacity and willingness to interact with the council. Some people may not view themselves as 'customers' at all, particularly where more complex services are involved such as in some areas of Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and Housing. However, 'customer experience' is relevant to everyone because it is about how we behave and work with every person to get to the best outcome for them.

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Customer experience means

A complete journey for everyone - Providing a professional, accessible and responsive approach for people from the first point of contact to reaching a resolution that suits their circumstances.

Putting people at the heart of what we do - Considering what each person sees and feels in every connection with us, demonstrating flexibility and resilience in the face of changing circumstances.

Working as one council and community - Helping and supporting local people by joining together to achieve better outcomes, instead of tackling issues in isolation.

Customer experience does not mean

Just improving our call centre or our website - We need a connected approach focused on outcomes for our customers across all services, whether they interact with us online, by phone or in person.

A 'one size fits all' approach - We want greater connections and consistency for our customers, but tailored responses which reflect the diverse requirements of our different people and communities.

Being digital only - We will be digitally-enabled and increase digital access for those who want it, while investing in good conversations for those who need them.

Our vision for customer experience



We offer great customer experiences for local people, communities and businesses by truly understanding and empowering them, being creative, and making it easy to reach the right solution for them.



Digital access so you can use services 24/7 when and how it suits you.



Strong and connected local communities able to help you.



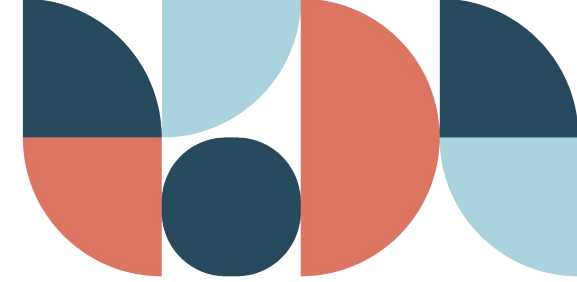
Personal conversations with people who understand what you want and need.



Working with you as one council so we are consistent and inclusive in what we do.

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Our outcomes for customer experience



We want to improve our performance so that we can deliver what Sheffielders want and expect. Putting our Customer Experience Strategy into practice will help us to achieve better outcomes for our customers, our workforce and the council as an organisation.

Our customers



- **Improved access:** Customers will be more able to get to the solution they need, whether online, by phone, or in person.
- **Joined up response:** We will have greater co-ordination of services for customers which considers them as a whole individual, family or community.
- **Quicker outcomes:** Customers will have faster response times and fewer transfers between teams or services when interacting with the council.
- **Clear and consistent approach:** Customers will have a fair, equitable and consistent experience every time.

Our workforce



- **Enhanced purpose in their roles:** Our workforce will be able to focus more time and effort on those who need their help.
- **Development opportunities:** Our workforce will have access to the training and career progression opportunities they need to deliver a great customer experience.
- **Increased productivity:** Our workforce will have better digitally-enabled tools, processes and connections to make it easier to deliver outcomes for customers, as well as the skills and confidence they need to use them effectively.

Our council



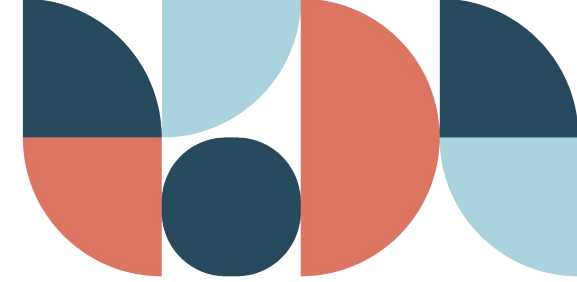
- **Better use of resources:** The council will have the right skills in the right places to best meet customer needs when they contact us.
- **Connected ways of working:** The council will be able to provide a holistic response by better joining up across services, so customers do not need to contact us multiple times.
- **Improved trust and reputation:** The council will see an increase in satisfaction and reduction in complaints as more customers get access to the most appropriate information or support at the right time.



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2 Knowing our customers

The people of Sheffield



Sheffield is a vibrant city – the UK’s first City of Sanctuary, home to people of all different cultures and backgrounds, and a place for many more to invest in, study, or visit. We want a great customer experience for all, regardless of circumstances or background. As set out in our Equalities Framework, we will provide supportive, accessible and customer-centred services which increasingly understand and meet the needs of all Sheffield’s communities.

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556,521 people living in Sheffield across **231,950** households



74.5% of people in Sheffield identify as White British and **20.9%** as Non-White



12% of people in Sheffield do not speak English as their main language

94,819 people aged over 65, and this is expected to rise by **14%** by 2030



207,362 children and young people in Sheffield, with 24% of children under 16 in relative low income households



69% of the working age population in Sheffield are employed. Nearly **14.5%** of people claim out of work benefits



34.4% of people in Sheffield live in the 20% most deprived areas of England

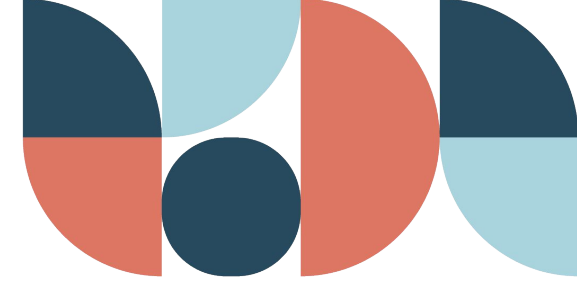


20.6% of people living in Sheffield have a long-term health condition or disability



4.5% of people in Sheffield are a member of the LGBTQ+ community

Our customers – key facts and figures



We work with 100,000s of customers every year, ranging from simple requests to helping with some of the most complex and vulnerable situations that people experience in their lives. The examples below illustrate the breadth and depth of our services – a snapshot of just some of our interactions and conversations with customers taking place every day.

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We handle over **1,250,000** calls directly to the council every year, with more coming into our services and strategic delivery partners.



We have over **7,800,000** views of council web pages each year.



There are over **45,750** in-person visits to our FirstPoint sites at Howden House and in local areas each year.



We have over **20,000 families** currently registered and signed up to receive updates from our Family Hub and Start for Life services across the 7 hubs in the city.



We issue around **10,780** parking permits and over **10,200** Blue Badges each year.



Sheffield has **17,040** businesses, with 86% being micro-enterprises with fewer than 10 employees.



We provide ongoing social care support to nearly **8,000** adults and carry out around **10,000** assessments or reviews each year.



Our social care teams work with over **3,700** children and young people so they feel safe and have a sense of belonging.



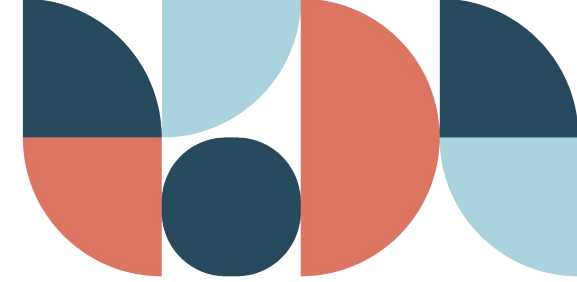
We handle around **4,140** planning applications on average each year.



We own and manage just over **38,000** council properties to around **42,700** tenants, covering repairs and other services.

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How customers prefer to contact us



Sheffielders are positive about the city but they want to see us improve how we as a council work with them:

"Bring the website into the modern age - I can do my shop online, why can't I do more things with the council there?"

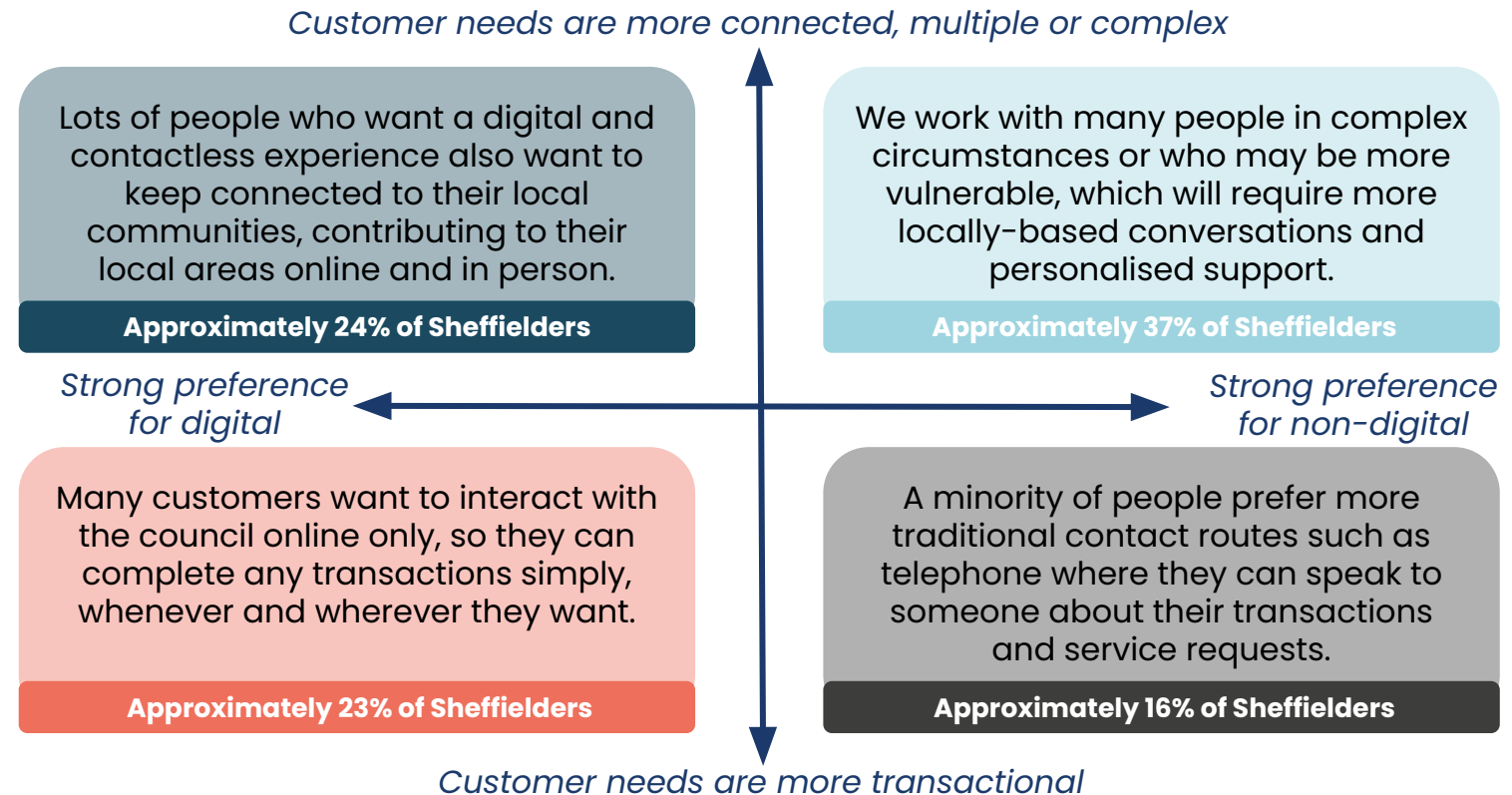
"I had to wait a while when calling but, to be fair, once you get through they were helpful."

"Support new, innovative ideas whilst giving members of communities more autonomy in creative solutions to their local issues."

"Why do I need to go to lots of different places or people to sort things out?"

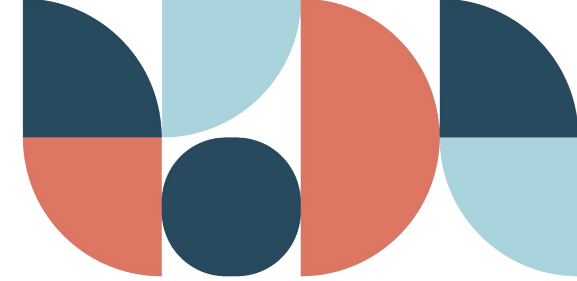
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Our customers have different preferences for how they contact and interact with the council, based on their circumstances, needs and their level of digital skills. The chart below shows how these preferences can vary in different situations. We will make it easy for Sheffielders who want to interact with us digitally to do so. For those who rely on contacting us by phone or in person, we will make our services more personalised and accessible.



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Our current ways of working



What we can build on

We have developed how our customers can access and interact with our services over recent years.

Care and knowledge of our workforce:

Our staff are experts on their services and local areas, and many of them are Sheffielders. We need to make it easier for them to use their knowledge to support their community.

Improving customer service performance:

We have improved our performance in areas such as increasing the proportion of calls answered. We need to help more customers get the right response at the right time.

Expanded online access and payment options:

We have increased the number of online services and improved how customers can pay online. We need to keep growing our digital offer and make best use of technology for customers.

Learning from feedback to the council:

We have improved how we respond to and learn from complaints. We need more two-way conversations and regular feedback from local people to support customer-focused services.



What we want to do better

Although we have made some progress, we need to go further to improve customer experience.

We want to be clearer on where to contact and how:

Customers say our website is confusing and we have too many phone numbers. We need to free up our teams delivering services from managing unnecessary or duplicated customer contact.

We want more reliable ways to contact us, including digital:

Some customers who would prefer to use online options have to phone us instead, which causes longer call wait times and repeated conversations.

We want to make it easier to get to a solution:

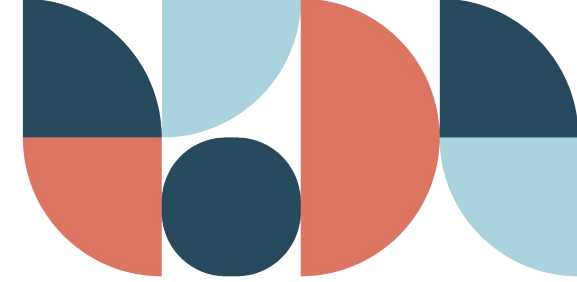
We are not delivering great customer experience if people are frequently requesting updates, not getting a clear outcome, or being transferred between services unnecessarily.

We want to strengthen community engagement:

We have lots of relationships with people within their communities, but we cannot always connect them quickly to the resources and help they want.



Our commitments to all of our customers



It is important that we are clear and consistent in what customers can expect from us as a council, regardless of the service or how they contact us. We will demonstrate flexibility and resilience in the face of changing circumstances and we make the following commitments to engage, empower and enable all of our customers.

Engage

We listen and respond to customers effectively and efficiently, always putting them at the heart of designing, delivering and improving our services.

- We will provide an efficient, responsive and high-quality customer experience, delivering within clear timeframes.
- We will proactively engage with communities and use feedback, compliments and complaints to continuously improve.
- We will be creative in how we work with communities and use technology - including a digital by design approach.

Empower

We empower people to reach the right solution for them by being accessible, person-centred and proactive on equalities, diversity and inclusion.

- We will make it easy for you to find local resources, information and self-serve if you wish to do so.
- Our services will be accessible to all, including local people with disabilities or with additional access requirements.
- We will interact with you with care and sensitivity, respecting your circumstances, preferences and rights.

Enable

We are clear, transparent and considerate when we interact with customers, supported by the right digital tools, information, skills and behaviours.

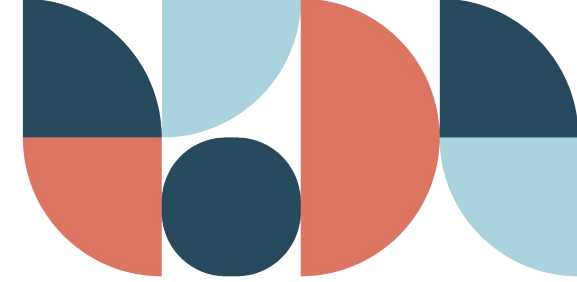
- We will communicate clearly in plain language and provide transparent information about our services.
- We will ensure our staff and contractors have the training and tools they need to give great customer service.
- We will keep you informed on the progress of your queries and the rationale for decision making or service changes.



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3 Delivering better customer experience

Contacting us in the future



For customers who want to use our services online, we will make it simple and accessible. We can then focus our phone and in-person contact points for people who really need them, providing a quicker, more personal experience. We will work as one council to be flexible and resilient. This means that we will respond effectively to different circumstances and you can contact us online, by phone or in person if you need to.



Online



Phone



In person

We will make it easy for you to use services online, while improving accessibility for those who rely on phone and in-person.

- Our digital offer will be user-friendly, easy to navigate and up-to-date so you will want to use it first where possible.
- Our digital offer will be expanded so you can do more day-to-day transactions online reliably, 24/7.
- We will offer advice and assistance to help you do more online where you can.
- We will use new technologies such as AI and automation safely and securely to enhance your customer experience.

If you want to call, we will use this first conversation to reach a clear outcome or next step for you.

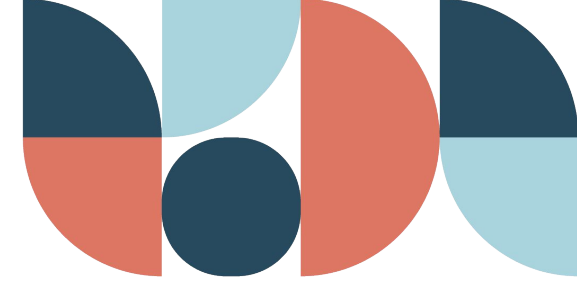
- We will make it clear who you need to call and why by streamlining our contact numbers and using voice automation to help connect you to the right place.
- We will keep your wait time to an absolute minimum and keep you informed of how long you may need to wait.
- If we cannot resolve your call and you need specialist advice or support, we will help you understand what happens next.

We will enable our workforce and inclusive places across the city to help you in person if this is better for you.

- Welcoming in-person places will be available across Sheffield if you cannot access services by other routes.
- We will work in partnership with communities so these places are in the most suitable and accessible locations.
- If you are facing more difficult circumstances, we will work with you in a joined-up way to help find solutions.
- We will support all staff to know how to connect you to someone who can help.

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Connecting with communities in the future



We also need to connect more with our different communities in the future so we can deliver better customer experience. These communities might consist of local neighbourhoods, or shared interests or backgrounds such as younger people or those of a different ethnic identity. Connecting in this way will help us work together to find the right support and solutions, whether provided by the council, yourselves or others.

COMMUNICATING

ENGAGING

EMPOWERING

PARTNERING

WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

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We want you to feel informed about your local communities and our services, so that you can be clear and confident on what is happening and why.

We will help this by using plain language whenever and however we communicate, and improve accessibility for those who speak English as a second language. We will be proactive in providing information through online customer portals, social media or other routes.

We want you to be involved and able to influence services and support in your local communities. We will work with those who feel less engaged to help meet different needs, and tackle inequalities.

We will further develop our Local Area Committees and other community networks to support this. We will work with communities to listen and learn, using your insight to shape and improve what we do.

We want you to feel empowered in using your local knowledge, resources and pride to develop creative ways to address issues earlier together and unlock other opportunities.

As a council, we will offer our skills and connect others to support this goal. We will get out of the way where others are better placed to help. In this way, we can find better solutions and reduce demand on limited council resources.

We want you to feel that you can trust the council to work with you and on your behalf, always focused on the best interests of our local communities.

We will work with you to ensure that our services are designed and developed for and with you as our customers. This will help your experience to be as seamless as possible from beginning to end, always focused on the right outcomes.

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Enabling customer experience in the future



We must develop how we work as an organisation and with our suppliers and system partners if we want to support delivery of a great customer experience for everyone in our communities. We will need improved customer-focused skills, tools and business intelligence across the council.

Skills and culture

Our workforce will have the training, information, and behaviours they need to support our diverse range of customers, including showing kindness, humility and a focus on each person as an individual. This means:

- Staff appropriately skilled in engaging and responding to customers, including dealing with issues or complaints.
- Our values, including people at the heart of what we do, embedded in our recruitment and management.
- All customer-facing staff able to confidently navigate and connect you to the best point of contact for your situation.



Digital

As set out in our Digital Strategy, we will offer reliable, seamless, inclusive and intuitive services, which are available 24/7 and managed sustainably. This means:

- Embracing emerging technologies and establishing efficient, effective digital and ICT capabilities to support our customer experience ambitions.
- Promoting digitally preferred routes into all services, which enables frontline staff to focus on customer outcomes.
- Offering support to help customers and staff to maximise their use of digital routes and services.



Data and insight

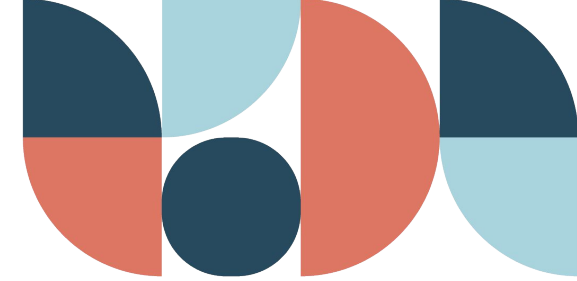
We will combine our data and knowledge to drive great customer experience, using customer insight to improve performance and delivery. This means:

- Developing a better overall view of customers through high-quality, connected data.
- Using data to target resources where they are most needed, improving responsiveness and outcomes.
- You can rely on us to keep and use your information safely and securely.
- Staff can rely on having up-to-date information to underpin great customer experience, services and decisions.



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Customer journeys in the future



The examples below illustrate our ambitions for great customer experience, with people able to reach the right solution for them.

Bhavna - Digitally confident business owner



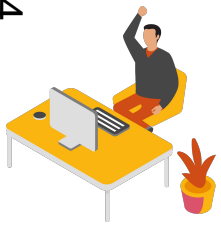
Bhavna has just graduated from university in Sheffield and she has started her own business in the city. She has recently moved flat and she uses her car a lot to get around.

Bhavna logs onto her personalised customer portal online. This enables her to easily pay her business rates, apply for a parking permit, and change her address.

She uses a chatbot to check what her new status as a non-student means for paying council tax. Information she has already provided is used to set up her council tax payments.

Bhavna's online profile guides her to other information that may be helpful as a business owner. She uses this to speak to a specialist advisor about possible business grants.

Adam - Working council tenant

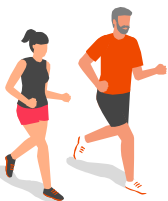


Adam is a working single parent living in social housing. He usually sends some money home to his family, but is currently living paycheck to paycheck and has found it difficult to support himself. He has noticed an issue with his plumbing.

Adam calls the council's main number and organises a repair visit. The advisor guides him through the online process for next time. Noticing some potential debt issues, they point Adam to further support about his financial circumstances.

Adam's shift at work changes but he is able to amend his repair visit appointment online. Following his initial conversation, he is pleased when someone from the council gets in touch and provides early help to address his money difficulties.

Caspar - Concerned about his older mum



Caspar lives in London but he is concerned about his mother Dahlia who is getting older and has recently lost her husband. He wants to know what support is available.

He finds some local services online but is still concerned. He rings the council and speaks with an adviser who is knowledgeable in health and social care services.

Together they arrange to meet with Dahlia at her home. This conversation explores Dahlia's interests and what is important to her. It focuses on how she can live her best life at home.

Dahlia is helped to join some social groups so she feels less lonely, and starts to be supported by a local voluntary service. Caspar can receive regular updates online.



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4 How we will achieve it

Our journey to better customer experience



We have big ambitions for our communities and customers and there is a lot we want to change. Delivering better experiences for our customers will be an ongoing journey. Investing and developing our technology, people and partnerships to support this will take time. However, it is critical for our communities and our sustainability as a council, so we are committed to making the changes we need over the next 3 to 4 years.



Short term

A focus on practical improvements to customer experience online and by phone, while developing the wider foundations we need across the council.

Medium term

Building more consistent and connected ways of working across the council, and trialling more creative approaches to empower communities and use digital.

Long term

Embedding new ways of working, while continuously reviewing where we are innovating and growing what works to keep delivering better customer experience.

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Improving website and online access

A better path from beginning to end for customers, with clearer presentation of information, and a better look and feel for our main website. Quicker development of online transactions for customers.

Community engagement

Testing new approaches to engaging, empowering and enabling people in local areas.

Implement a modern customer model fit for the future

Connecting teams with the right abilities, responsibilities and behaviours across the council to support the different circumstances of our diverse customers.

Tools and training for our workforce

Enabling our workforce to have the right information, tools and skills to deliver great customer experience.

Increasing use of automation and AI

Using emerging technologies and our digital infrastructure to improve customer journeys and free up staff time to support customers who need more help.

Expanding innovation

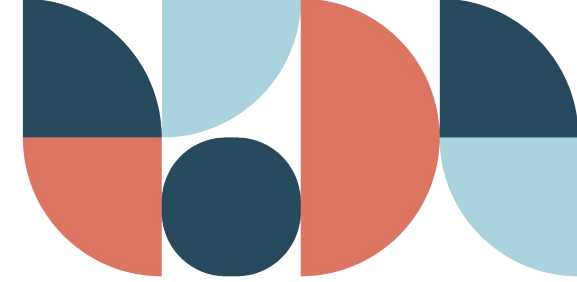
Building on pilots and redesigned customer journeys in key areas to expand what works across the council. This includes establishing how our welcoming in-person places best connect and work with local communities.

Continuously improving

Embedding how we use feedback, local voices and community insight to keep delivering on the expectations of our customers.

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Our priorities for the next 12 months



Our priorities for the next 12 months will establish the foundations we need to deliver better customer experience across the council. We are focusing on improving digital access, empowering communities, developing a modern customer model, and a smarter experience.

Priority 1: Improving digital access

Driving stronger use of digital tools and solutions for customers across all services.

Quicker development of improvements to customer access through online routes, focusing on the most common day-to-day transactions.

- Begin work on the integration and user-friendliness of the end to end customer journey through our online presence and digital applications.
- Further pilot and expand use of automation to free up time for staff to focus on customer outcomes.
- Reduce the number of contact numbers and email addresses we publish, making it clearer and simpler on who to contact when.

Priority 2: Empowering communities

Building creative ways to communicate, connect, empower and work with our communities.

- Review our in-person places across the city and develop plans for their use which support our wider strategic ambitions.
- Complete our review of Local Area Committees and implement key recommendations, building greater consistency and connections within communities.
- Pilot and compare how 'team around the person/place' models can work best for different communities.
- Rationalise and improve all written communications for our most commonly used services.

Priority 3: Modern customer model

Developing a cross-council model and ways of working to enhance customer experience.

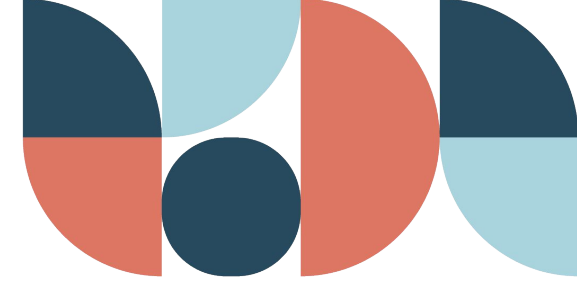
- Design and begin to implement an effective council-wide model for Customer Experience. This will mean customers engage at the most appropriate point and we are resilient and adaptable to changing circumstances.
- Redesign priority customer journeys to reduce transfers and increase resolution at first point of contact.
- Build stronger connections, through a strengthened knowledge base and information sharing, between first points of contact and service areas.
- Strengthen standardisation for common customer requests.

Priority 4: A smarter experience

Using data, insight and customer involvement to deliver better and more cost-effectively.

- Develop and agree integrated datasets and insight dashboards for monitoring customer performance and outcomes.
- Implement customer care training and develop customer service career pathways.
- Develop a connected council-wide approach for strengthening use of customer involvement and feedback in the design and delivery of services.
- Agree and implement recommendations of the Digital Strategy to underpin digital access.

How we will know we are delivering successfully



We will be open and accountable in showing how we as a council are putting this strategy into practice and delivering better customer experiences. This will include working together with our suppliers and partners to achieve shared goals.

How we will deliver against this strategy

We will put in place the resources and infrastructure required to deliver the vision and ambitions in this strategy by:

1. Driving delivery through **our council-wide Customer Experience Programme** as part of our Future Sheffield transformation, underpinned by a clear Customer model and business case for change.
2. Regular reporting of progress against the priorities set out in this Strategy to the **Future Sheffield Board** and **Strategy and Resources Committee**.
3. An **annual update on the Strategy** to review overall progress and determine priorities for the next year, so our aims and work for the Customer Experience Programme remain relevant for all of our customers and communities.

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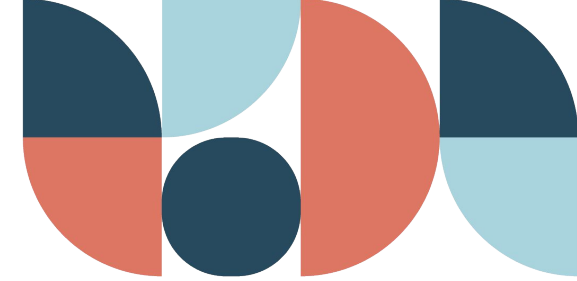
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Measuring success

We will regularly monitor progress against key council-wide success measures regarding customer experience. This may require further development of our data and performance management activities to reflect our ambition, but key measures are likely to be:

Improving digital access	Empowering communities	Modern customer model	A smarter experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in total number of transactions undertaken online. • Reduction in phone calls into our core Customer functions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce number of in person visits to Howden House due to online and local access points. • Increase in people accessing prevention and early help services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase resolution at first point of contact for our core Customer functions. • Reduce average call wait time and call abandonment rate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase overall Customer satisfaction (<i>measured through feedback and resident surveys</i>). • Reduction in total number of complaints and response time.

Listening and learning from all of our customers



Listening and learning from diverse voices across Sheffield will be critical for delivering better customer experiences. This is particularly important for people who may find it more difficult to have their voices heard. This includes those with disabilities, speak English as a second language, or have protected characteristics.

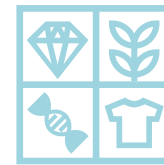
We will enhance our efforts to connect and engage with all different parts of our communities to keep developing and improving how we work, as well as championing equalities, diversity and inclusion across our city.

We will make it easier to provide feedback on our services and your experiences. Key ways of listening and learning from our customers to help deliver better customer experience will include:

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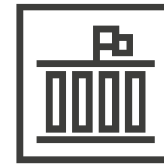
Local people: We will develop a refreshed, modern approach to engagement, consultation and involvement. This will include using new and existing groups of people of all ages, background and communities with lived experience to develop and improve our services.



Businesses: We will use our links with well-established business forums to develop and tailor changes which can best support our business customers. This will be particularly relevant in relation to contacting and interacting with us online.



Our workforce: We will use a Customer Champion network across our workforce to foster innovation and share good practice, empowering teams to make positive changes to customer experience.



Councillors: Our Councillors are vital links into our communities, actively representing local views and driving improvements. Local Area Committees will also enable, engage and empower local people.

We will always try to do our best but we may not always get it right. If you make a complaint, you can expect for us to be prompt and clear in our response. In addition, we will develop how we collectively use feedback, complaints and compliments to learn and improve how the council works.

DRAFT

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