

Caerphilly County Borough Council

DRAFT CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY 2016-2020



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Man gwyrdach i fyw, gweithio ac ymweld



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1. Introduction

Caerphilly County Borough Council has a responsibility to provide a wide range of public services to the 178,000 residents of the County Borough as well as local businesses and visitors. Few organisations provide such a diverse range of services, so it is a real challenge to provide good customer service across all of them. This strategy defines the way in which we will provide access to these services for our customers in a way that supports the vision of the Single Integrated Plan – “To enhance the quality of life for all”, within the context of decreasing budgets and a society that is increasingly demanding access to digital services.

Strategic Outcomes

This strategy sets out how Caerphilly County Borough Council will develop the delivery of customer services across the Council from 2016 to 2020. It will show how we will retain a high quality customer experience whilst adding value for customers and delivering greater value for money.

The main strategic outcomes of the strategy are to:

- Ensure that customers receive a consistent, positive experience across all access channels.
- Maintain a range of contact channels for each service to ensure that customers with protected characteristics and/or specific language requirements or who are vulnerable or disadvantaged, can access services in a way that is appropriate for them.
- Migrate customers to the most appropriate contact method for their enquiry to generate efficiencies and savings.
- Minimise the cost of each transaction, including the cost of the “end to end” process.
- Ensure that every contact adds value for the customer.
- Reduce the number of customer contacts by ensuring that the way we deliver services does not result in unnecessary contacts.

2. Strategy Background

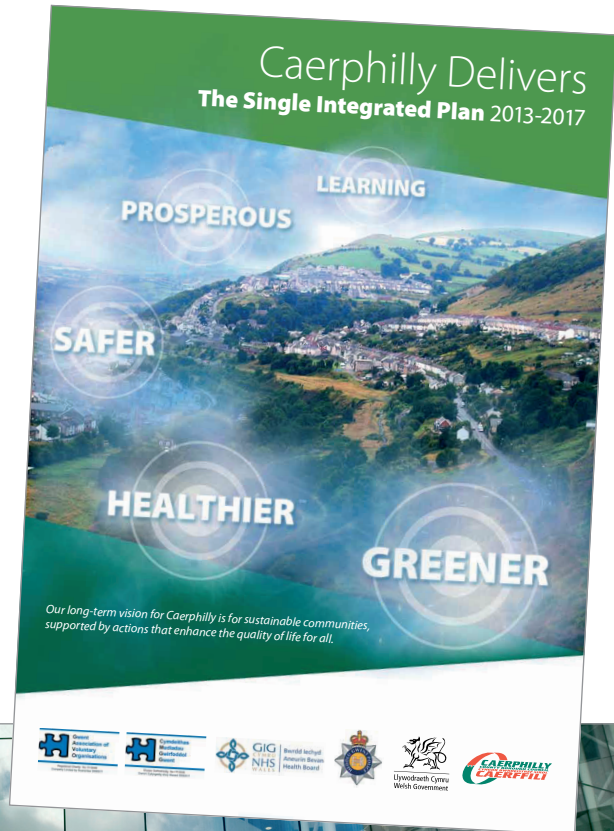
2.1. Customer Care Strategic Framework

In 2005 the Council agreed a Customer Care Strategic Framework that provided a firm foundation for the development of Customer Service Centres and other initiatives. Since then the strategy has been reviewed and updated, and much of the original objectives have been met. Over the last few years the financial environment in which we operate has changed significantly and customers are increasingly expecting services to be available online. As a result there is a clear need to update our approach to delivering customer services.

2.2. Single Integrated Plan

The Caerphilly Local Service Board's Single Integrated Plan, "Caerphilly Delivers", sets out a vision for improving the quality of life for communities in the County Borough. The Customer Service Strategy supports four of these priorities:

- P2: Improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the County Borough
- P3: Provide support to enable local people to compete for all employment opportunities.
- S4: Ensure people are supported to live in their own homes and communities in safety.
- H5: Ensure people are supported to live in their own communities to lead safe, fulfilled and independent lives.



3. Context

3.1. Poverty, Welfare Reform and Digital Exclusion

Caerphilly County Borough has higher than average levels of deprivation, debt, illness and disability across a wide range of measures. The County Borough also experiences higher than average levels of digital and financial exclusion, dependence on welfare benefits, and poor basic skills. In some parts of the County Borough levels are much higher than average.

Many of our customers and communities are also being severely challenged by the current economic environment and the UK Government's Welfare Reform programme. Some residents will struggle with maintaining their benefits claims on-line and some will struggle with the move to monthly payment. This may lead to an increase in demand for complex services and customers presenting with a range of issues that they need assistance with.

What parts of the Anti-Poverty Strategy could be supported by good customer service?

Providing residents with information and advice to enable them to increase household income, reduce energy costs, develop skills to improve their financial capability and prepare for the introduction of Universal Credit.



3.2. Social care

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act has introduced a duty for local authorities to provide information, advice and assistance to help people understand how the care and support system works, what services are available locally, and how to access the services they need now and in the future. We will ensure that all customer contact points across all access channels will be able to provide appropriate information or advice about the services that residents may need and be able to signpost them to appropriate resources or advice.

3.3. Medium Term Financial Strategy

One of the most significant challenges facing the Council is the need to make savings each year until 2020. It is inevitable that this will result in lower staffing levels which will make it increasingly difficult to maintain service levels, or even to continue providing some services. The effects of these service reductions will be mitigated in part by reducing the overall cost of customer contact. This will be achieved by:

- “Pooling” of customer access points to establish a “single front door” approach to delivering customer service.
- Helping customers to use lower cost access channels and reducing the need for customers to contact us face to face unnecessarily.
- Reducing the need for customers to contact us by making our processes more effective and customer focused.



3.4. Equality and Welsh Language

The Council will continue to develop our customer contact provision across all access channels to ensure that no one is disadvantaged by a lack of access to services or face barriers to receiving an equal service, including the development of digital services that are essential to many customers with communication disabilities. Customers will be given choices in how they contact the Council, in terms of methods and formats of communication and in terms of their preferred language. Customer facing staff will have the appropriate skills and knowledge to support that choice.

The Customer Service Strategy supports the Strategic Equality Plan across the board, but specifically links with Strategic Equality Objectives 3 and 4, Physical Access and Communications Access, by helping make Council services accessible to everyone. It also links with Strategic Equality Objective 6, Diversity in the Workplace, which covers the training made available to Customer Services staff on raising their awareness of Equalities and Welsh Language issues, especially the latter in terms of the requirements of the new Welsh Language Standards from March 2016 onwards.

4. Current Customer Service Provision

4.1. Phone Calls

There are over 2,000 extensions on the corporate telephone system which received 1,930,000 calls during 2014, with additional calls being received at some smaller sites not connected to the corporate system. Of the 1.9 million calls received 82% were answered within our target time of 20 seconds. However, performance levels are inconsistent across service areas with the proportion of calls answered within 20 seconds varying from more than 90% to less than 70%.

A further 5% were answered in more than 20 seconds, 7% were unanswered and 6% did not get through because the extension was busy. Performance levels vary across service areas with more than 13% of calls being unanswered in some service areas.

4.2. Corporate Customer Services

We have established five community-based Customer Service Centres that provide a wide range of services in Caerphilly, Blackwood, Pontlloftyn, Bargoed, Risca and at the Corporate HQ in Ystrad Mynach. The Centres have been well received by customers with about 390,000 customer contacts, including 262,000 payments and 128,000 service requests, being dealt with during 2014. The Customer Contact Centre handles about 400,000 customer contacts per year including telephone calls and on-line customer contact (e-mail, web forms and fax) for a range of service areas including Waste Management, Environmental Health, Highways, Licensing, and Blue Badges, as well as providing a switchboard and general enquiries service for the whole authority.

4.3. Housing

The Housing Division received a significant number of calls during 2014 with the Upper Rhymney Valley Office receiving 67,000 calls, the Eastern Valley Housing Office 42,000 calls and Housing Rents 44,000 calls. The reporting of council house repairs has been centralised with the establishment of a central repairs team which received 55,000 calls during 2014 and processed 26,000 repair requests.

4.4. Social Services

The only service area, apart from Corporate Customer Services, to have adopted a contact centre approach are the Adult Services Duty Information Team (ASDIT) in Adult Social Services which received 29,000 calls during 2014, logging 19,000 contacts during 2014/15.

ASDIT has recently merged with the Children's Services Contact and Referral Team which received 12,000 contacts, to form the Information, Advice and Assistance service to comply with the Social Services and Wellbeing Act.

4.5. Library Service

A key part of our Customer Services Strategic Framework in 2005 was the development of customer service centres in our larger towns to make it easier for residents to deal with the council in person. This has now been achieved through the development of award winning integrated Libraries and Customer Service Centres in Caerphilly, Risca and Bargoed. These new facilities also provide residents with access to a range of service partners such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter Cymru, Gwent Police, and Credit Unions. This development programme has resulted in the Welsh Government acknowledging us as a leading authority in the co-location of service provision in libraries. The Blackwood Customer Service Centre, which was developed as a “proof of concept”, was relocated to Blackwood Library in December 2015. Footfall in libraries has increased significantly during this development programme, with 985,000 visits being made to our 18 libraries during 2014/15.

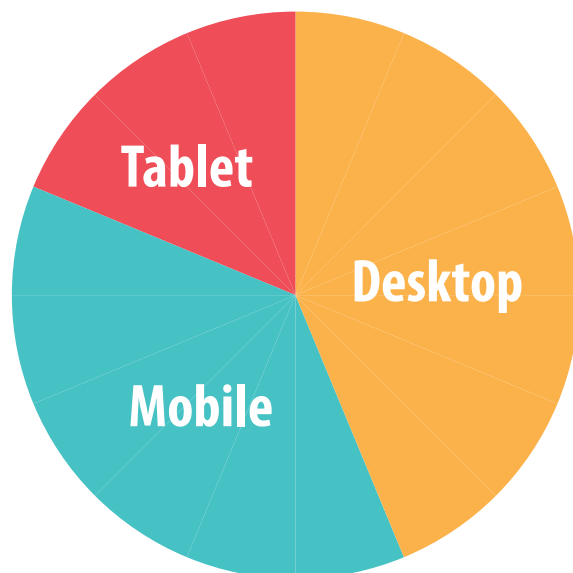
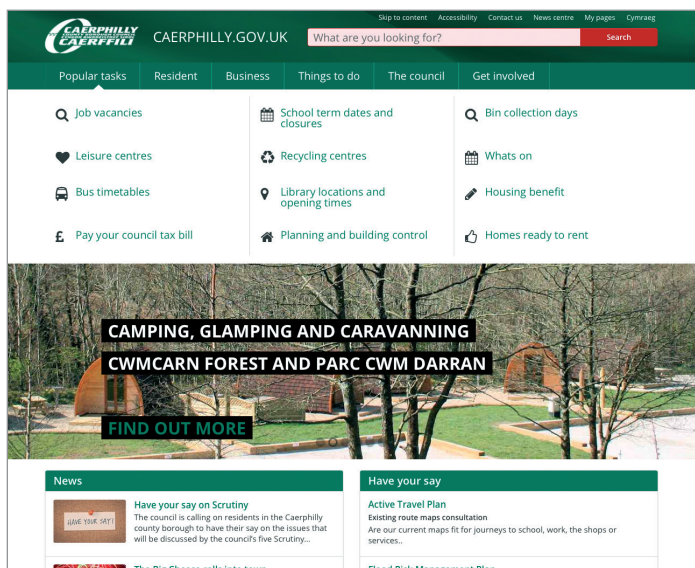
4.6. Council Tax, Benefits and NNDR

The Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rates (Business Rates) and Benefits Teams received 196,000 calls during 2014.

4.7. Website

In recent years more and more customers are choosing to use the internet as a method of contacting us, with increasing numbers of contacts now arriving via the web, e-mail and social media. During 2014 there were 8.6 million hits on our web site which represents about 690,000 individual customer visits, with customers viewing an average of 12 pages per visit. This is an increase in visits of about 40% compared with 2011.

In UK wide benchmarking of local government websites by SOCITM, our web site has been in the top 10 for customer satisfaction for the last 5 years. The benchmarking survey also found that 80% of customers using the site found the service or information that they required, making the CCBC website the 4th best in the UK. In the 2015 SOCITM ‘Better Connected’ survey, the CCBC website was rated as ‘Three Stars’ and one of the top five council websites in Wales.



Over the last few years there has been a significant increase in the use of smartphones and tablet devices to access the internet. Monitoring of the types of devices being used to access our website has shown that in early 2014 about 48% of visits to the website were made using smartphones and tablets. However, customers using Desktops/Laptops viewed more than three times as many pages per visit than customers using smartphones and tablets. This increase in the usage of smartphones and tablets was one of the key factors in deciding to redevelop the Corporate CCBC website so that it was easier to use on Smartphones and Tablets.

In addition to the main CCBC web site we provide websites to serve specific purposes, such as the marketing of tourism venues or improving the uptake of school meals. The 10 most popular of our specialist websites received 2.7 Million hits during 2014. The most used website was the Leisure Lifestyle Website which received 1.2 million hits.

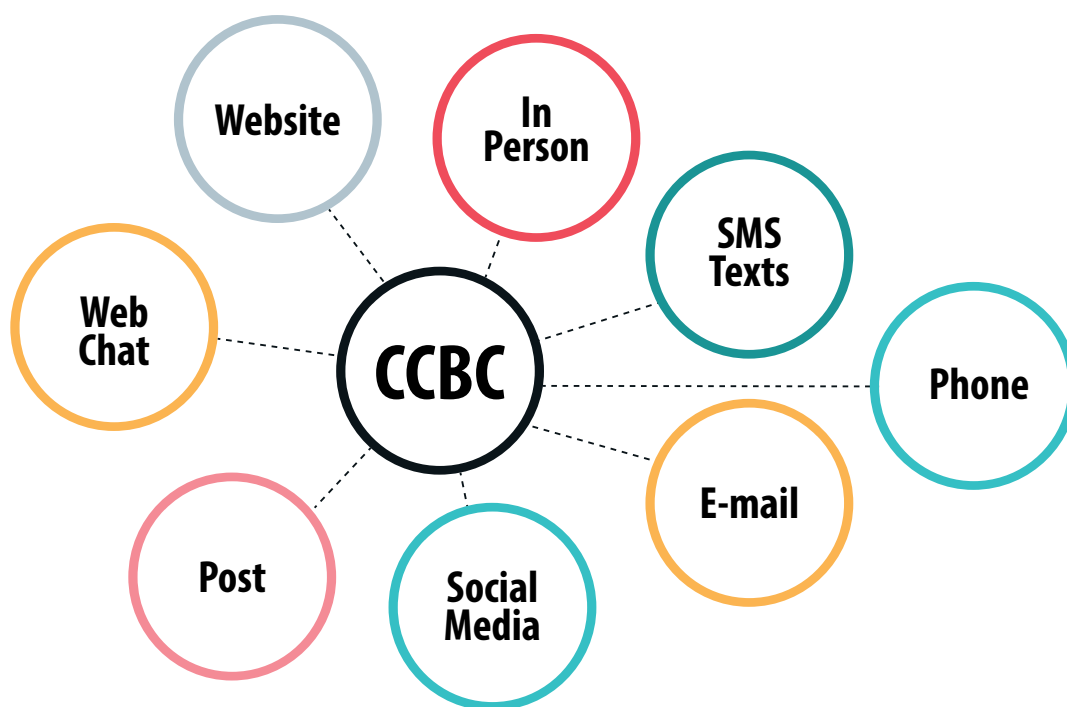
5. The Customer Service Strategy

5.1. Overview

This strategy sets out how Caerphilly County Borough Council will develop the delivery of customer service to residents and businesses across the county borough, to users of council services, visitors to the county borough and anyone who has to conduct business with the council. The strategy applies to all services of the Council from 2016 to 2020. It will show how we will retain a good customer experience across council services whilst adding value for customers and delivering greater value for money. The strategy will be supported by a Delivery Plan that will be monitored by the Corporate IT Strategy Group which will also be responsible for the approval and monitoring of projects arising from the strategy and ensuring that the strategy remains relevant.

The main strategic outcomes of the strategy are to:

- Ensure that customers receive a consistent, positive experience across all access channels
- Maintain a range of contact channels for each service to ensure that customers with protected characteristics and/or specific language requirements or who are vulnerable or disadvantaged, can access services in a way that is appropriate for them.
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5.2. In-Person Services

The cost per contact for in-person services is higher than all other contact channels. Because of this they need to be about “high value” work rather than simple transactional contacts and we must do this in line with our current duties under Equalities and Welsh language legislation.

We will develop the role of “the front desk” to offer a wider range of services in one place to provide a more joined-up service to residents and to comply with our responsibilities under the Equalities Act and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.

We will provide a better signposting and referral service, with customer facing staff being more proactive in ensuring residents can access these services.

We will improve the way we deal with more complex or specialist issues at customer access points cross the county borough by developing appointments systems to better manage waiting times and improve access to specialist services and advice.

We will also build on our links with LSB partners, including the third sector, to offer a wider range of services and information to meet our obligations under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act, and outcomes P2, P3, S4 and H5 of “Caerphilly Delivers”.

Mrs R is beside herself.

She has popped into the local office because she has had a letter telling her that she has Council Tax arrears. She has worked for 50 years and has never owed a penny.

She leaves the office much happier. The staff in the office have arranged a repayment plan for her Council Tax and have provided her with leaflets on how to reduce her water rates and save money on her gas and electric. They have told her about a group in the library that can help her learn how to use the tablet computer that her son bought her so that she can Video Call her grandson in New Zealand.

She also has an appointment with a social worker to help her with the care needs of a sister that she looks after and a Blue Badge is in the post.

We will develop the role of the ‘front desk’, whilst controlling the cost of delivering “in-person” services, we will reduce the number of simple transactional activities that are completed “in-person”, such as receiving payments, providing information, and non-complex service requests. In general terms this may involve.

- Encouraging customers to make payments via Direct Debit, Online payment, automated payment line or phone payment
- Redesigning processes so that they take less time or are easier to provide via self-service and are more efficient.
- Encourage the use of other channels, particularly digital services, by those who are able to do so. This will ensure that expensive in-person services are targeted at disadvantaged or vulnerable customers who are unable to use lower cost channels.
- Providing supported on-line services in Libraries and other venues, where customers can use the internet but with support available to help them use the technology.

5.3. Telephone Services

We will build on the success of the Corporate Contact Centre by transferring, where appropriate, further customer contact from service areas to Corporate Customer Services, redesigning processes to reduce customer demand, encourage customers to use self-service and reducing the end-to-end cost. It may not always be appropriate to transfer contact handling to Corporate Customer Services, in which case improvements will be made by sharing technology and expertise.

We will reduce the range of numbers that we advertise to make it easier for customers to access the service that they need, to control call handling costs and to simplify our service marketing. We will retain a switchboard service, embedded in the Corporate Contact Centre, utilising a single switchboard number for the authority.

As part of this strategy we will update our Customer Service Standard for dealing with customers on the phone. Corporate IT Strategy Group will monitor performance against this standard across the Authority at service and corporate levels and include it in a corporate scorecard of Customer Service Performance Indicators. This monitoring will include analysis of system data, “mystery shopping”, and customer feedback. In high volume areas we will introduce call coaching programmes to monitor the quality of call handling by staff on an individual basis and as part of the Customer Service Training Programme.

5.4. Demand Management

Many of the contacts we receive are as a result of things that we have not done or have done poorly, such as sending letters that could not be understood. By analysing this “Unneeded Demand” we can identify opportunities to change processes that will improve the customer experience and reduce the costs of service delivery. As part of the Delivery Plan the Customer Service Project Group will develop a programme of work to measure Unneeded Demand across the organisation at service and corporate levels, identifying key opportunities for improvement. Identifying key opportunities for improvement will be monitored at a corporate level by CITSG.

6. Self-Service, Digital Services and Channel Migration

6.1. caerphilly.gov.uk

Over the last few years people have increasingly used Smartphones and Tablet Devices to access the internet. As a result we have redeveloped our web site so that it works as well on Smartphones and Tablet Devices as on PC's and Laptops. We have also taken the opportunity to refresh the web site with a greater focus on providing services. We have re-evaluated all content on the site with much of it being rewritten to make it more usable, removing superfluous graphics, and making the most popular on-line services much more obvious.

To encourage customers to use the website we will continue to develop it to maximise its usefulness to customers and to make it as easy as possible to use. We will monitor use of the web site and regularly review how it is used and perceived by customers to guide ongoing development. We will add functionality to the site, such as web chat, location based services, and personalised content to increase its actual and perceived usefulness to customers. We will also pro-actively raise awareness of the website and encourage customers to use it.

6.2. Digital Services

Self-service, especially online service, is significantly cheaper to support than either telephone or in-person services, providing an opportunity to reduce the overall cost of delivering services. For many customers, Digital Services can often be more convenient due to their 24/7 availability and are essential for some customers with communication disabilities. When we review or redesign a process we will ensure that whenever possible they are optimised for self-service and focus on moving those customers who are able to self-serve to these Digital Services.

Some service requests are complex and the cost of developing them for the web may significantly outweigh any savings. For these services a phone call or a face-to-face interaction may be more cost effective when considering the total cost of delivering the service. For some customers Digital Services are not accessible, so we will ensure that processes include options for these customers to receive the service in a way that is suitable for them.

6.3. Multi-channel integration

Not all interactions are completed in a single channel transaction with customers often switching across channels to complete various parts of the transaction. Research has shown that most on-line transactions are to either gather information or to complete basic tasks such as completing simple forms. If any degree of problem solving is required, or if the customer is unsure about the information available, many will gather information online but then make a phone call, or visit an office to complete the transaction.

For some service requests it is more efficient to have a conversation with the customer and in some cases the customer has to visit an office, for example to produce documents. Many of these interactions will start with a visit to our website for information. To ensure that we provide the best possible service to these customers whilst reducing costs, we will design services where the onward process is integrated across channels and that as much as possible of the process is completed on-line. For example, customers will be encouraged to book an appointment online or to fill out an online form so that essential information is gathered in advance of the appointment.

Mr E wants a badge

Mr E wants a Blue Badge for his mother to make it easier to park when he takes her shopping. He visits our website and applies on-line. He finds that she needs to visit an office to be assessed so makes an appointment online. He receives an e-mail confirming the appointment at her local office along with information about the documents he needs to bring and how to get there. Because Mr E has already filled in most of the application form online the assessment doesn't take long and his mother receives her Blue Badge in the post a few days later.

6.4. E-mail

Free-format e-mail is as expensive to deal with as a phone call and on occasions significantly more expensive, often due to missing information. There is a place for free format e-mail, but for large volume services we need to move away from free format to encourage the use of web forms. To do this we will rationalise the number of e-mail addresses that we advertise and whenever possible respond to e-mailed service requests by sending the customer a link to a web form to complete.

E-mail is a useful tool to encourage customers to choose online services. Whenever possible customers will be asked for their e-mail address at each contact. To encourage them to make future contacts with us via online services we will send them a confirmation e-mail as soon as possible with options to opt-in to e-mail notification messages about services or subjects of interest to them. They will then receive targeted e-mails relating to the subjects that they have subscribed to, such as planned roadworks or library events. E-mails will include links to the online service they are interested in along with information to raise awareness of other online services.

6.5. Social media

The way in which we communicate over the web is evolving rapidly and we have successfully embraced a number of social media platforms over recent years as an integral part of a drive to deliver and develop new channels for communication and engagement. This has given us significant opportunities in terms of reputation enhancement, engaging with residents and businesses, encouraging greater two-way dialogue. We will actively develop communications through these new and developing channels, especially where it encourages customers to move to self-service, or it supports the needs of customers who would otherwise be disadvantaged, or it improves citizen engagement. Whenever possible we will integrate these new communications channels into our Digital Services and other access channels, ensuring that they are cost effective and deliver the Customer Service Strategic Outcomes.

6.6. Moving contact on-line and Digital Inclusion

The proportion of people in the UK using the Internet continues to grow, with growth in the last 2 years largely being driven by growth in the use of tablet devices, particularly by older people. However, for some people in Wales there are still significant barriers to accessing on-line services with Welsh Government research estimating that 19% of Welsh adults did not use the internet. However, 35% of those aged 50 and over, 31% of social housing tenants and 38% of Disabled People did not use the internet, groups that are disproportionately represented in the population of Caerphilly county borough.

Being able to access the internet is only one part of the picture, with many people able to access the internet but lacking the skills, enthusiasm or confidence to use digital services. The National Survey for Wales 2014/15 found that amongst adults in Wales who use the internet at least once a week, only 62% had visited a Welsh Public Service website in the previous 12 months with less than 41% completing any sort of transaction such as booking an appointment or paying a bill

For a large percentage of our residents, the barriers to using CCBC on-line digital services are much lower. To increase uptake amongst these residents we will implement a marketing strategy, including the active promotion of on-line services during customer contacts using other access channels and regularly communicating with customers via e-mail and new media. We will monitor how customers use and perceive our Online Services to identify barriers to their use and develop these services to remove those barriers.



7. Customer Service Standards

Our customer service standards are in need of review in light of recent changes in policy, legislation, priority, customer expectations and new technologies. We will review these standards as we move towards greater use of digital services to ensure our standards are fit for purpose. The revised standards will be monitored by the Corporate IT Strategy Group.

8. Customer Service Skills and Competencies

8.1. Customer Service Competencies

Customer Service is now one of the nine core competencies that defines every job in the Council and is defined at 5 different levels. This has meant that over the last few years standardised customer service competencies have been included in all new or updated Job Descriptions and should also be a key part of the Performance Development Review and on-going performance discussions. To support staff in meeting the Customer Service competencies and ensure that they apply common standards and values, understand their role and provide a consistently good customer experience across the organisation we will implement a corporate customer services development programme.

8.2. Customer Service Training

A key part of ensuring that customers receive a consistently good customer service is ensuring that staff who deal with customers are properly trained and informed. To achieve this we will implement, over the next two years, a centrally organised Customer Service Training Programme consisting of short courses for customer facing staff, supported by a variety of on-line and off-line resources.

9. Information Management & Technology

IT solutions will continue to be developed or revised to support the further provision of streamlined digital services to customers as part of a defined programme of work. This development plan will be approved by the Corporate IT Strategy Group (CITSG) and underpinned by redesign of business processes and use of consistent software development principles based upon innovative, reliable, cost-effective software and hardware technologies thereby maximising the business benefit derived from the available resources. Each project within the plan will be subject to the approval of a viable Business Plan by CITSG.

In order to achieve such business benefits, new technologies and approaches will be researched and adopted where appropriate. Examples of such enhancements considered for future deployment are the enhanced use of map-based location data and enriched citizen "self-service" facilities.

Monitoring customer service performance is recognised as a key principle of this strategy. To support this process, the management and performance information requirements of each development will be assessed and the currently available facilities will be supplemented or revised as the development of digital services progresses to build a consistent experience across the key customer service systems.

The development of each digital service will incorporate business process and information requirement reviews to ensure that the data collected is limited to that required to deliver an efficient and effective service. The results of each information requirement review will inform the Authority's records management function and facilitate effective retrieval, retention and disposal of information collected.

