



Customer Access Strategy

2018–2019

FOREWORD

BY THE LEADER OF ROTHERHAM COUNCIL

We as a Council are now in our fourth year of reforming our services, practices and cultures following Government intervention. We have redesigned what we stand for as a local authority, what our priorities are, along with our promise to you as Rotherham residents and our ambitions for the future.

As part of these reforms we have defined a new vision for the borough which sets the priorities for the way the Council works. These priorities include making sure every child has the best start in life and ensuring every adult is secure in a clean safe environment and part of a community where opportunity is extended to everyone.

In order to work toward these priorities we are committed to being a modern, efficient Council which provides value for money and has the needs of you our residents at the centre of our decision making.

Like all local authorities across the country, we are having to deliver against a reduced budget and an increase in demand for our services. However, while we are becoming smaller in size, we are focused on being bigger in influence, which means a changing role for us as a Council.

This strategy sets out how we will turn our vision into a reality for our customers. It explains how we will meet customer needs and demands using our resources most effectively and make sure all our customers have access to services irrespective of their circumstances.

But perhaps most importantly, it outlines how we will strengthen customer relationships, improving experience and increasing satisfaction by continuing to work closely with our customers to ensure your needs are met.



Cllr Chris Read
Leader of the Council

Why do we need a Customer Access Strategy?

People regularly use the internet for all kinds of reasons. Being able to 'self serve' at a time to suit yourself and your lifestyle gives people greater control and independence and puts them in touch with information and services any time of day or night. We want to encourage and support more of our customers and communities to have these same choices too.

This strategy sets out how we will make it easier and more attractive for people to access services online, whilst at the same time making the best use of technology to work in a more cost effective way. Increasing the number of people who regularly 'self-serve' rather than choosing to phone or visit a council office, will help us target our resources more effectively to prioritise the people and communities who need help the most.

Of course we also understand that going online isn't for everyone. Our communities are diverse with a wide range of people who have differing needs and preference. This strategy has therefore been designed to make sure everyone has equal access to the information and help they need regardless of their individual circumstances, whilst also helping and supporting people to enjoy the wider benefits that being online can bring to their daily lives. For example, looking for jobs, saving money, finding out about personal interests and hobbies and keeping in touch with family and friends.

DID YOU KNOW:

- Over 30,000 people have already signed up to 'Your Account' giving them 24/7 access to Council Tax, Benefits and Bin collection information. Once you've registered there will be no more need to file your paper Council Tax bill as your electronic version will be available to view online whenever you need it. Just one of the many benefits you could have by signing up.
- In 2017 we received over 54,000 online forms for a range of service requests – a much easier and faster way to tell us about the things that matter to you and no postage costs either
- You can pay online for a range of services, as well as via the automated telephone payment line. We received over 150,000 payment transactions using these methods last year
- 62,000 people have already signed up for email alerts and the number is growing. Look for the 'stay connected' button at the top right of the Council's website home page. You can register with your email address or using your preferred social media account, keeping you up to date about subjects you're interested in
- Liking' our Facebook page means you will regularly receive information and news about Council services, events, consultations and much more
- Following us on Twitter means you'll receive Council news as it happens

We want everyone in Rotherham to make the most of all the digital opportunities available and help and support more of our customers to get online so that this becomes the natural way they do business with the Council.

Doing things digitally and doing them better

The Council's Digital Strategy sets out our vision for putting technology at the forefront of our journey and recognises what digital can do for Rotherham.

When we talk about 'Digital' we mean the Council's website, social media messaging (eg. Facebook, Twitter), Your Account,' website forms and emails. In the future 'digital' services may also include other options such as voice activated information.

By expanding what we provide digitally customers will benefit from an even wider choice of online services – all of which are accessible any time of day or night giving customers immediate access to information and advice and a written record that can be saved to their own devices. Working digitally also means that as a Council we are able to promote news and opportunities, and talk to our customers and communities much faster and across wider geographical areas at the touch of a button.

There's always room for improvement and we want to make our online access easier and give our customers an even better experience so they increasingly choose to access services this way.

WE WILL:

- Make as many of our services available online as we can so that customers can do what they need to do at a time to suit them without having to contact the council using other means
- Make sure our online services are designed for use on smartphones and tablets so that the growing number of customers using mobile devices can access Council services regardless of the device they use
- Increase the number of services you can access through 'Your Account' and make it easier for you to register. For example by allowing you to 'sign in' with the same username and password as other Council online accounts or by using your social media account details (eg Facebook, Twitter)
- Make it easier to book and pay for events and services in one easy step
- Improve the layout of our website and make the content more user friendly so that information is easier to find and access
- Continuously review the search words and phrases our customers use so that the search results are more accurate
- Improve our online processes so that you only have to tell us your information once

- Provide more online forms so we can help customers to provide us with the specific information we need rather than expecting them to tell us in an email
- Where possible allow customers to upload copies of documents online instead of asking them to provide original paper versions
- Make better use of online maps so that customers can pin a location to make it easier for them to report things
- Introduce more online videos to visually help, guide and inform our customers about the things they need to know
- Make sure our digital services meet accessibility standards
- Join our systems together so you can more easily access your information and track the progress of your applications or reports
- Introduce 'web chat' to guide customers to the information they're looking for or help them if they appear to be 'stuck' on a page
- Always prioritise your online safety by implementing best practice security measures. For example, the 's' in the website address https stands for 'secure.' We will also share helpful hints and tips with our customers to help them feel more confident about the way they access and make use of online services
- Make more use of social media to stimulate online interest and increase participation
- Make sure you know what to do and where to go if things go wrong or something is really urgent
- Keep up to date with new technology so we can continue offering customers a greater choice of digital 'self-serve.'
- Encourage customers to communicate with us online so letters and paper documents are only used when there is no other choice



Help and support for all our customers

Some of our customers may not even be aware of all the digital services currently available to them and we know we need to do more to promote them. Other people want to do more online but don't currently feel able to. This could be due to a lack of confidence in new technologies, or nervousness about the safety of conducting business in this way. For others, the cost of equipment, and mobile or broadband charges might prevent them from accessing services digitally. Whatever the reason, we want to do all we can to help as many people as possible enjoy the benefits that being online can bring.



WE WILL:

- Encourage all customers to make use of digital 'self-serve' so they can find out about the things that matter to them – not just Council services.
- Promote online services at every opportunity to increase interest and awareness
- Provide digital assistance in every library and Customer Service centre so that customers who need help feel supported and able to access the services they need. This might mean showing people how to set up an email address or helping them complete an online form. Whatever their needs are, we will support all customers in a way that best suits their situation and reason for contacting us
- Enable all our frontline staff to support customers to access online services, equipping them with mobile devices and tablets so they can show customers how to find information and services using devices they are more familiar with – not only at Council offices but for staff working in the community too
- Create 'digital champions' to work closely with customers and communities to increase their online interest, confidence and skill. This might include coaching individuals, attending group meetings to show what's available online, or putting people in touch with providers of basic ICT courses such as the ones currently provided in libraries, education services and the voluntary sector

- Work with our communities, partners, voluntary sector and charitable organisations to implement schemes that are designed to increase digital inclusion
- Work with the business community to identify other organisations who could help us increase the number of people who can get online and stay online. We will also seek out events and activities to further promote and encourage digital engagement
- Continue providing free Wi-Fi for public use in Council owned buildings such as libraries and customer service centres, and subject to funding look to extend this to other locations such as the town centre
- Make sure all our services are accessible so that regardless of anyone's personal situation, no one feels disadvantaged. We realise that going online isn't for everyone and for some services there may be other self-serve options available too. For example text messaging, automated telephone service. Customers can also still contact us by phone or visit us at a Neighbourhood Hub



What we need from you

We want to continue offering value for money services to all our customers and communities. Supporting and encouraging more people to 'self-serve' frees up valuable resources which means we are better able to assist our most vulnerable customers and prioritise support for people who need help the most.



HERE ARE SOME SIMPLE AND EASY THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP US ACHIEVE THIS:

- Before thinking about visiting a Council office or picking up a phone, visit www.rotherham.gov.uk
It's open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.
- Encourage your family and friends to do the same, or offer to help family members who aren't able to do this themselves. Many people don't realise how many different things they can do online and could be missing out on a number benefits and opportunities.
- Sign up to 'Your Account' – it only takes a few minutes but gives you personalised access to your key services such as Council Tax and benefits. We will be increasing the number of services available through 'Your Account' and once you're signed up we will be able to keep you updated with any changes
- If you currently make cash payments to the Council why not consider using another method? You can pay online for lots of services using debit and credit cards and Paypal. There are other self-serve options too such as payment by automated telephone. Or why not set up a Direct Debit for your Council Tax? Simply sign in to 'Your Account' and follow the instructions

- ‘Following’ us on Twitter and ‘liking’ our Facebook means you’ll be able to find out what’s happening in your community, engage in conversation with people who have similar interests, and be in touch with Council news as it happens
- Sign up to email alerts to be automatically notified about the things you’re interested in
- Let us help you to help yourself – we want everyone to benefit from accessing services online so will always encourage you to try it for yourself. If you’ve never been online before, or aren’t sure how to access a service we will support you by either talking you through the process or sitting with you to show you how it works.
- Make use of the digital skills training and support the Council offers – call into your local library to find out more
- If we make you an appointment, please let us know if you can’t attend beforehand so we can offer it to someone else.
- If you do need to come and see us, make sure you bring your documentation and information so we can deal with your request faster and reduce the number of times we need to see you
- Keep us updated with any changes that could affect the services you receive from us
- Be polite and respectful – we want to help you but will not deal with violent, rude or disruptive customers.



Your experience matters

Regardless of the type of enquiry, or the way a customer accesses a service, we need to make sure their experience is a good one. Our customers should not need to know or understand how each Council department works. But they should be able to expect excellent customer service and things done right the first time.

Our services should be designed and built around the needs of our customers and communities. Which means involving our customers more and listening to their feedback so that wherever possible we continually develop and improve what we do.



WE WILL:

- Encourage your feedback by making it easy for you to tell us what you think about the way we deliver our services. For example through social media, our website, resident surveys and consultations
- Listen and respond to what you tell us, take your views into account to influence change and make sure we tell you what we've done as a result
- Redesign our services by removing unnecessary tasks so the customer journey is as short and simple as possible and you only have to tell your story once
- Review the range of telephone numbers we use so that where there is a need to provide service in this way, it's as easy and simple as possible
- Be clear about the different stages of a process and the timescales involved so you know what to expect
- Confirm receipt of your enquiry and keep you informed of progress when you have asked us to do something
- Invite customers and communities to help us design and test drive new services/processes
- Acknowledge when we've got it wrong and take steps to put things right as quickly as possible

- Make the most of every contact by making customers aware of other services that might be of benefit
- Encourage our workforce to think digitally and continuously look for ways we can improve our service delivery
- Provide all our employees with the appropriate training to deliver excellent customer service and set clear standards to measure how this is achieved
- Continuously review the way we work so we use what we have learned from our customers to shape what we do in the future

