



Customer Service Update

May 2022

Introduction

Hello and welcome to the first citizen update on behalf of the Customer Service programme. We are planning on issuing you a monthly update to keep you abreast of changes, developments, and progress as it happens.

As you may already know the new Corporate Customer Service Strategy was launched in March 2022, after being agreed by Cabinet last December 2021. Work is progressing quickly and the first year of the plan identifies how the council *must* and *will* get the basics right of good customer service. We know we need each and every one of our employees must put people first all the time every time. Sounds simple right? Well – when we look at something as simple as the number of complaints made, we know we are not always getting it right.

**Any feedback if welcome – please contact the team at:
customerserviceprogramme@birmingham.gov.uk**

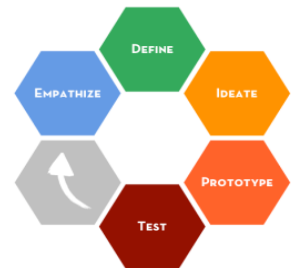
Human Centred Design

As a first for Birmingham, the programme team are using the Human Centred Design approach which is a creative approach to problem solving and puts people at the heart of the process. The process allows us to build services around user needs and behaviours (not systems and processes).

The approach makes us look at the end-to-end customer experience and leads to solutions that are fit for purpose and meet customer needs.

Where have we started?

We have identified the top 50 council services that are in greater demand by our citizens. We have begun with Bereavement services, Waste Management, Housing Repairs and Highways. Through user research and data analysis the team have sought to understand the current customer and employee experience, including where it works and where it needs to improve. From this, the team has developed a common 'gold standard' experience that is intended to provide a basis of best practice that will underpin future activity of the Customer Service programme.



What the team have found

Communication

"Things just go into a **big black hole**". (A citizen reporting a missed bin collection). There is a lack of follow-up from the council to inform people what is happening after accessing a council service. Customers would rather know things are going to take longer (or not happen at all), than not being told anything.

There is no transparency

"You get a different reference number which **restarts the clock**". (A citizen making a highways complaint). Customers don't know why things happen (or do not happen).

Citizens expect the council to be proactive

"If it's not on the ticket, **they won't do it**". (A citizen raising a highways issue). People feel like they must report everything in granular detail to get things done.

Citizens should be treated empathetically

"The person I spoke to **didn't understand or care**". (A citizen looking for benefits support). People want someone to take ownership of their enquiry, rather than passing it on. People referenced the council's culture, processes and training when receiving customer service.

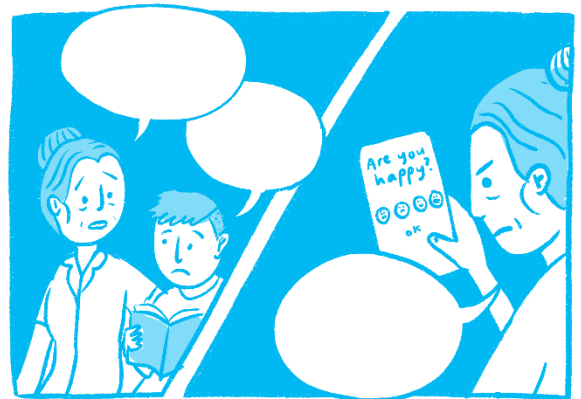
Research Outputs

Here is one example of the outputs found in the research.

Housing Repairs – storyboard

Jillian and her son, Jake, have had a water leak in their flat, which has caused damp for several months now. They are starting to get mould in some rooms and the air is not nice to breath. It is affecting their health and they feel embarrassed to invite friends to come over.

Getting a suitable appointment is tough as Jillian has shift work and she needs to juggle looking after her son and her elderly father.



It's most frustrating when they wait in all day for a repair to be done and no one turns up! You can't contact the repair team directly and must go through the BCC contact centre... it's a long-winded, lengthy process.

Housing repairs opportunities for improvement:

- Communication and flexibility around appointment times is key
- People want their needs to be considered holistically
- People want to share feedback about their experience in the right way, at the right time

- Expectations around repairs, including emergency repairs, need to be managed
- There are some examples of good practice where repairs were proactively undertaken

Introducing the 'gold standard'

This discovery set about to understand the common experience of customers to establish a high-level standard that is intended to be broadly applicable to any service area.

What does the gold standard look like for customers?



People of Birmingham can easily check online for live updates to find out if we're already aware of issues or if there are planned works in progress.



People are always kept updated on the issues they want to be notified about. They never have to chase us and can check progress easily online.

People feel empowered. They can get things done independently online, including rescheduling, or cancelling appointments if they need to.

Next Steps

We now have over 50 recommendations that the programme and service areas need to consider, each details the insight and includes a recommendation for the service area to take forward. We will update you on progress in our next citizen briefing.

Getting our staff to think differently - We are using the new Customer Charter to support a culture change with all employees. The Charter defines the minimum standards of customer service that every employee should be delivering in simple plain English. It also defines how we want citizens to treat our employees. To find out more about the charter [click this link](#)



If you wish to talk to the programme team, please drop them an email on customerserviceprogramme@birmingham.gov.uk.

Thanks for reading.

