



**Blackburn with Darwen
Borough Council**

Digital Customer Strategy

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i. Document Ownership

This document is owned on behalf of the Council by the Exec Director of Resources, and is reviewed by:

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For Review:

All Directors
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1. Background

The Digital Customer Strategy sets out the Councils plan for the channels (or methods) it will use to deliver services, communicate with, and receive information from its customers using the resources it has available.

The Council has a responsibility to provide excellent services to the public and value for money to the tax payer. This strategy will provide guidance on the channels through which services are to be delivered, and an impetus for the improvement and development of digital services in all service provision. Where appropriate, services will be delivered by the approach of *'Digital First'*.

Purpose

In the move towards *'Digital First'* it will be important to understand the growth in digital usage both locally and nationally, and the increasing customer expectation for services to be provided in this way.

Nationally, 82% of the UK population is currently online and there is a clear opportunity for local government to deliver services digitally to them. Although 77% of adults in the UK use the internet daily, many of them have never had any online interaction with government agencies. However, this is changing at a rapid rate and the number of people using online government services has steadily increased from 39% in 2005 to 57% in 2011.

Locally, 15% of residents do not have an internet connection, although this increases to 42% for 64-75 year olds and 65% for those aged 75+. Access to the internet by home computer is falling, being gradually caught by those who access the internet via a mobile phone. Numbers accessing via a mobile increased from 28% in 2011 to 44% in 2013, with an additional 27% who access via a tablet. This all adds up to a rapidly changing pattern in internet usage.

In addition to adapting services to customer expectations a major driver towards *'Digital First'* is the significant potential cost savings. National research from 120 local councils estimated that the cost of contact for face to face transactions averages £8.62, for phone £2.83, but for web only 15 pence. Previous calculations within the Council have been broadly similar with these stated above.

In developing the strategic direction, due attention is given to the Corporate Priorities:

Council Objectives

1. Creating more **jobs** and supporting business growth
2. Improving **housing** quality and building more houses
3. Improving **health and well-being**;
4. Improving outcomes for our **young people** – education and skills
5. Supporting and helping the most **vulnerable people**
6. **Making your money go further** – supporting households in difficult financial times through efficient and effective use of council tax.

The Digital Customer Strategy also aligns with the overall Digital Strategy goals of:

- Delivery of cost effective and high quality systems and services to BwD employees, Partners and Customers.
- Provide higher quality and more efficient levels of service at reduced operating costs where appropriate
- Meet growing customer demands from digital services
- Respond quickly to changing customer, business and legislative requirements
- Work more collaborative and effectively with partners organisations

Key Drivers

The drivers for implementing a digital customer strategy are listed below and are led by the availability of technology, customer preference and the financial pressures facing the Council.

- Customer expectation – greater demand and expectation on services being available digitally 24-7.
- Value for money – increasing the amount of digital customer interactions will reduce the amount of resources required and provide efficiencies.
- Increased use of technology – utilising the existing systems available will increase the digital options available to customers.

Where we are now

The Customer Access and Digital Service Programme Board has been established to review digital progress across the Council and develop corporate strategies. Included in the remit of

the board is the review of business cases submitted by departments and the sharing of experience and knowledge on all digital matters. With the assistance of the board a number of key platforms and systems have been delivered across the Council, these include:

- Telephony systems – the delivery and implementation of Lync and Netcall.
- Web forms – the implementation of electronic smart forms on the Councils website. A total of 96 forms have been designed and rolled out across the web site.
- Queue Management System – the implementation across Blackburn Town Hall and Darwen Town Hall.
- Gov Delivery – the electronic communication system to residents and businesses of the Borough.

Whilst a number of departments and service areas have already embraced a number of digital projects to enhance the options to customers, the approach across all council departments is inconsistent. The vision and strategies that have been developed will provide a sound basis to assist departments with development in this area.

Vision, Priorities & Principles

2.1 Vision

“Enabling residents to access the services and information they need online.”

Across all sectors of the economy the spread of new technology has challenged old models of service delivery. Customers and service users are now able to access information through technology at the touch of button from a variety of devices. The Council has now committed itself to a *‘Digital First’* approach across all of its services, recognising that services should now be delivered in ways which keep pace with modern technology.

5.2 Priorities & Principles

Blackburn with Darwen Council will be a Council that listens and responds to local people, businesses and people who need and use Council services.

We will be easy to do business with, we will treat you as an individual and we will give you choice and control whenever possible over the services you receive in order to meet your needs.

We will promote and develop the use of modern technology but also have the personal touch where applicable. We will provide high quality services that are value for money and easy for everyone to use.

We will be open and transparent, and respond positively to requests for information. We will give you easy access to the information you require in order that you can access information and the services we provide.

We will try and get it right for you the first time and make it our priority to deal with queries and problems as quickly and efficiently as possible, at the first point of contact.

During all our interactions we will treat customers with respect, ensuring equality of access and fairness. We will be welcoming, friendly, helpful and polite at all times. When we get things wrong we will apologise and put it right as quickly as possible.

How will we achieve our vision?

Delivering services on line and through digital means will be the first option for council services, with the website, social media, and the customer portal becoming the primary means for contacting the council. This approach will drive the customer contact from traditional channels such as, face to face, postal and telephone contact, to on line delivery which meets the expectations of our customers and delivers departmental savings through cheaper and more efficient channels.

We recognise that not all users of the Council's services may be able to use digital services independently. To accommodate those individuals, the Council will adopt an approach of '*Assisted Digital*'. Departments and service areas should consider how they will provide this assistance at the same time as they are digitally transforming their services.

This strategy sets out our approach to the growing number of channels through which residents can access services, and explains how we ensure these channels are utilised in all areas of the Councils business.

The financial climate within the Council is also a significant driver of our approach. As well as enhancing the customer experience, the strategy is also intended to reduce the waste and duplication that can result from the failure to embrace available technology.

6.1 Customer channels

The residents of Blackburn and Darwen contact the Council in a number of ways and for a wide variety of reasons, in most instances, these interactions are simple and routine with most users preferring the quickest and most convenient option. This document focuses on three key types of contacts between the authority and the citizen:

Transactions (e.g. application forms, reporting an issue or problem, paying a bill, etc)

Interactions (e.g. obtaining advice, providing evidences/information)

Information Provision (forms or leaflets, web pages, etc.)

Customers currently access council services through a range of different channels including:

- Face to Face;
- Email;
- Website/Internet usage;
- Assisted technology;
- Telephone;
- Social Media, and;
- Post/White mail

These channels have varying levels of effectiveness depending on the nature of the service being delivered and differ in terms of their cost effectiveness. The choice of access channels available to the public is growing as new technologies are developed. The challenge for all Council departments is to maximise the technology available, extend the offering to customers and promote channels to the public that are both cost effective and convenient.

Approach

2.2 The need for customer insight

The process of developing and implementing a customer access and digital strategy needs to be guided by insight into all council services and its users. The information required by each department would include details relating to:

- The customer;
- The contact reasons;
- The services being provided;

- The current contact channels at the customers disposal, including numbers of contacts for each channel and the effectiveness at which service requests are handled:
 - Face to Face;
 - Email;
 - Website and Internet usage;
 - Assisted technology;
 - Telephone;
 - Social Media, and;
 - Post/White mail

It is crucial that baseline data is captured to understand the number of customer contacts, interactions and methods used. This data will provide invaluable information on the costs of the service provision and allow a monitoring of subsequent channel shift by service users.

See Appendix A for an example of customer and contact data.

2.3 Service redesign

The most important part of this strategy is the need to redesign services to adopt the '*Digital First*' approach. This will enable and support a shift from the traditional contact channels to online options. The key factors to an effective channel shift strategy would therefore be:

Detail - the deliberate design of the channel strategy for **each type of service**, bearing in mind the level of human interaction required and the needs of the targeted customer base

Fluidity – the constant reviewing of the effectiveness of the channel strategy for each type of contact bearing in mind changing technologies, channel hopping and changing customer habits.

Simplicity – the optimum channels for the council should be the easiest to use for the customer to enable a shift in customer behaviour.

Inclusion – no group should be denied access to a service because of disability, language or cost of the access channel (e.g. mobile phone costs, broadband access). Options should be made available other than the organisation's preferred method of contact

Cost effectiveness – particularly in the current economic climate, finding ways in which to deliver services effectively but at lower cost will be increasingly important.

In order to maximise efficiencies, departments will also be expected in any service redesign to explore and where possible integrate digital solutions with back office systems.

2.4 Minimising avoidable contact

Local authorities are fundamental points of contact for the citizen when seeking access to public services. Key services are provided for their local communities that greatly affect the quality of life for individual citizens and the overall community

However, both local authorities and their customers also have limited resources and want to interact as efficiently as possible. By identifying customer contact that is '*avoidable*', the local authority is better placed to redesign the way services and information are made more accessible for their customers, so they do not have to make unnecessary, valueless contacts which are both frustrating for the customer and inefficient for the Council.

2.5 The need for organisational challenge

In considering '*Digital First*', there will be considerable challenge and change required to existing organisational practices. This strategy needs to become an integral part of the department, its business plan, and embedded in the way the objectives are defined, measured and realised. It cannot be super-imposed onto existing practices, and as such, is likely to require considerable departmental change.

What difference will this strategy make?

For **Customers**, the Council should strive to meet the expectations of customers that modern technology brings; primarily, delivery of this strategy will mean extended choice in terms of how they access services – by telephone, in person or through self-service. It will also mean a more direct route to information about Council services available, and a more rapid and direct resolution of issues. It will mean they get the services that meet their needs, and that are tailored to suit them.

For the **Council**, it will mean having real and detailed insight into current and unmet demand for services, together with a clear view of the services being delivered to specific groups of people across all Council services. This understanding coupled with the development and introduction of technology will enable future service delivery to be tailored to fit customer needs and deliver more efficient services in a cost effective manner.

Appendix A – Example of Customer Insight

Benefits and Council Tax contact summary

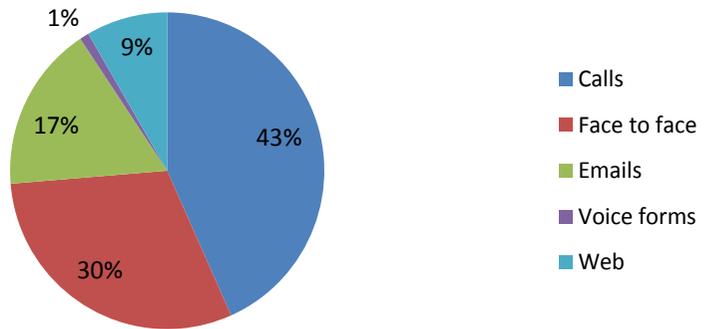
December 2015	Benefits	Council tax
Calls	2870	2841
Face to face	2011	11
Web	1125	442
Emails	63	44
Voice forms	555	1013

Top 10 contact reasons

Contact reason	No of contacts
Existing claim progress (benefits)	817
Post summons advice (council tax)	379
Landlord enquiry (benefits)	324
Letter response (benefits)	311
General council tax advice	302
Change of address (council tax)	290
Bill response (council tax)	253
General benefits advice	249
Housing benefit payment enquiry	233
Exemptions & discounts	209

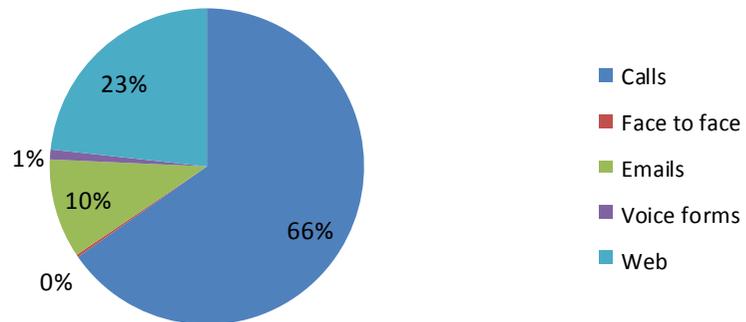
Benefits channels

December 15



Council tax channels

December 15



Appendix B - Digital Customer Strategy (Visual model)

