



Customer Strategy

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V0.1	July 2025	-	Original draft presented to Transformation Board and adopted in principle
V0.2	Feb 2026	AD Policy Performance and Customer	Minor changes and updates for version to Cabinet June 2026
V1.0	June 2026	AD Policy Performance and Customer	Approval date added – Cabinet 17 June 2026

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Strategy at a glance

This customer strategy is the means by which Castle Point Borough Council will deliver on the Administration's commitment to its residents as outlined in its [Corporate Plan](#) and [Community Commitment](#).

The strategy centres on delivering the Customer Service Standards, which commit to being clear, respectful & efficient and outline the following:

- We will make it clear how you can contact us or access our services
- We will be clear and treat you with respect
- We will listen and get things done
- How customer can help us meet these standards
- Service commitments
- What we'll do if things go wrong

The customer strategy will be delivered as a priority of the Council's transformation programme: the Castle Point Challenge: Fit for the Future, and the main areas of activity are listed below:

- Refreshing our Customer Service Standards
- Customer service training
- Customer care leads
- Customer service metrics
- Customer service team SLA
- Learning from complaints
- Developing a customer strategy
- Undertaking a resident survey
- Improving the user journey for our customers

By monitoring Key Performance Indicators, we will be clear where we are improving, and where further action is required.

Welcome and introduction

I am pleased to introduce our first Customer Strategy, setting out how Castle Point Borough Council will become a council which places you, our customers, at the heart of everything we do. The Strategy recognises the value of developing excellent services through working with you and continuously improving your experience by listening and learning from your feedback.

We want you to have quicker, easier, and better access to information and services, a great experience and excellent customer service whenever you interact with us – whether by phone, email, in person or by using our digital services.

Unlike many other councils, we are committed to ensuring you can contact us in the way which best suits you – and not forcing you to do everything online if it's not your preference to do so. We recognise that sometimes it is good to speak to a real person, especially when it's relating to important or complex matters. Therefore, for those customers who want to see or speak to someone in person, we will continue to provide a walk in service, where you can speak to our dedicated team, and a telephone service which will continue to resolve 95% of calls without the need to transfer to the back office.

For those busy residents who can't contact us during the day because they have work or other commitments, we will continue to improve our online services, so you can interact or access services from us at a time of day which suits you, no matter where you are. If you want to contact us at midnight, we'll make sure our online services are ready and able to use, and intuitive to follow.

Of course, customer service doesn't start and end with our fantastic team of Customer Service Advisors on reception or over the phone – it's something which needs to be important to every member of staff who interacts with our residents, wherever they sit in our organisation.

As an Administration, we are committed to providing all our residents with the best possible customer service. This commitment also extends to recognising when things haven't gone as smoothly as we would have liked, and in ensuring we fully investigate any complaints and learn from what has happened so we can improve our services going forward.

This strategy sets out our commitment to our customers, what you can expect from us and how we intend to continue to invest in providing, improving and modernising our customer service provision.

Cllr Dave Blackwell

Leader, Castle Point Borough Council

Setting the scene / situational analysis

Castle Point Borough Council serves nearly 90,000 residents, all with vastly different needs and requirements. We recognise that there is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to providing customer service.

Serving the residents of Castle Point

In 2024/25, 67,000 calls were handled across the contact centre and reception, 90% of which were successfully managed, but we were unable to answer 10%.

Reception welcomed over 22,000 visitors in 2024/25 and we saw over 900 vulnerable customers for face-to-face appointment to support them with enquiries and to complete benefit application forms

The Customer and Digital Services team responded to just under 26,000 emails

This strategy links to our [Corporate Plan](#), which includes an Ambition to Restore the Council to good health, making reference to customer satisfaction, as well as to our Administration's goals, including Satisfied Customers.

Our [Community Commitment](#) also states that we will 'Put people at the front of all our decisions', providing the services that matter and working with partners and the private sector to ensure they meet the needs of the whole community. It also includes a promise to undertake a resident survey so we can be better informed about your views and asking you what you want, rather than assuming we know.

Our organisational values are all intrinsically linked to the delivery of this strategy:

Value / Behaviour	What it means to us
Trust	Our customers, members and colleagues have confidence that we will do what we say
Respect	We create trusted and enduring relationships with our customers, colleagues and communities
Improving & Learning	We are continuously learning and innovating as we strive to improve our services to meet the needs of our customers
Customer Focus	We are service delivery focused and put the customer at the centre of what we do

Our Customer Service Standards sit at the heart of this strategy, outlining how we will work – you can read about these in the priority areas section of this strategy.

How we made this strategy

Members and officers collaborated in the production of this strategy, which has been developed as part of our internal transformation programme: the Castle Point Challenge: Fit for the Future.

Our [Corporate Plan](#) made clear the Administration's absolute commitment to Customer Focus, and officers have been clear that this must be a priority.

This strategy was developed as one of many projects / tasks within the transformation programme centred on customer service, including:

- Refreshing our Customer Service Standards
- Customer service training
- Customer care leads
- Customer service metrics
- Customer service team SLA
- Learning from complaints
- Developing a customer strategy
- Undertaking a resident survey
- Improving the user journey for our customers

A **user journey** in the context of a **local council** refers to the step-by-step experience a resident or visitor goes through when interacting with council services. It maps out the entire process from the user's perspective, highlighting their needs, actions, emotions, and potential pain points at each stage.

Priority areas / target

Our customer service standards set out our vision, aims and expectations for how we will interact with our customers and highlight our priorities.

Our Customer Service Standards: Clear, Respectful, Efficient

We will make it clear how you can contact us or access our services

- By providing a variety of ways for you to contact us, for example:
 - Digital (website, e-form, email etc) where possible and appropriate, because it is often quicker, more convenient for you and cost-effective
 - Telephone through our Contact Centre on 01268 882200
 - Face-to-face appointment where necessary to resolve your query
- Although we are increasingly providing services digitally, we will give you the option to speak to someone, particularly if your query or needs are complex and require us to work across a number of service areas
- Where you have a disability, we will work with you to find the best ways to communicate with you and to access our services
- Where English is not your first language, and you are unable to communicate with us through a family member or a friend, we will endeavour to support you in other ways.

We will be clear and treat you with respect

- Deliver a personal service, however you contact us, treating you with politeness, respect and understanding
- Be clear and easy to understand in all our communication with you
- Keep your personal data secure and ensure your confidentiality
- We will use plain English in our communications with you

We will listen and get things done

- Answer your query at the first point of contact or, when this cannot be achieved, we will provide clear information about next steps, so you know what to expect
- Take care to fully understand and respond appropriately to your needs
- Keep you informed with up-to-date information and explain what we have done and why
- Make sure our staff have the skills and tools to deliver the service you need

- Work together across the Council to provide a service that minimises your efforts
- Provide clear signposting to partner organisations where we cannot help you directly

You can help us to help you keep our promise by:

- Treating us politely and with respect
- Understanding that aggressive behaviour stops us from being able to help you
- Letting us know if you have any specific needs
- Giving us all the information we need to deal with your enquiry, including any documentation that we may request from you
- Working with us to resolve issues in a positive way
- Giving us feedback to let us know what we are doing well or help us to improve

Service commitments

We will:

- Continually improve the ability to interact with us digitally and increase the number of services you can access online
- Be proactive in sharing relevant information through our social media channels
- Continue to review and improve the menu of telephone options available to you when you call
- Update voicemails and telephone messages to ensure they remain accurate and customise these to inform you of any matters of importance in the Borough, relevant to your query
- Make sure our buildings are fully accessible for those occasions when we need to make a face-to-face appointment with you
- Aim to greet you on arrival when you visit the Council Offices - although most face-to-face meetings are by appointment only, we do understand things come up unexpectedly. If you call in without an appointment, we'll do our best to find someone who can help but please note we may not always have someone available.

If things go wrong

- We always strive to provide you with excellent customer care but there may be times when you are dissatisfied, or we get something wrong.

- If we don't meet your expectations, we'll do our best to put things right quickly and fairly. If you are still dissatisfied, then we have a formal [complaints procedure](#)
- Our commitment to you is simple: excellent service, respectful communication, and clear guidance at every step.

With the customer service standards guiding our work, we will look at how we measure the impact of our work and this strategy.

Next steps & governance

How will we deliver this strategy? Appendix One is a delivery plan outlining the actions we will deliver as part of our transformation programme.

Progress will be reported to the Transformation Board on a bi-monthly basis. The Board is attended and sponsored by Cllr Tom Gibson, Portfolio Holder for Special Projects & Assets, followed by an update to the Leader, Cllr Dave Blackwell and Deputy Leader, Cllr Warren Gibson.

This strategy will incur minimal new cost and will mainly be delivered with existing resources, with the exception of a resident survey, which will go through usual governance routes.

Measuring success

We currently record and monitor the following customer service Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

- Percentage of calls taken from customers by the Customer & Digital Services team that are resolved without the need to transfer to the back office
- Total number of calls received by the Customer Service Centre
- Percentage of abandoned calls (Customer Service Centre only)
- Total number of calls received by Reception
- Percentage of abandoned calls (Reception)
- Number of people seen face to face via Reception
- Number of emails handled by Reception
- Number of emails handled by the Customer Service Centre
- Number of customers assisted by Peabody (through the Service Level Agreement with Council)
- Number of residents given support by Customer Service Centre to complete online forms (face-to-face and over the telephone)
- Number of e-forms submitted through the Council's website

KPIs relating to calls received, visitors seen, emails responded to and queries resolved without need to transfer to the back office are reported to Cabinet as part of the Corporate Performance Scorecard every three months. These indicators will also be reported to the bi-monthly Transformation Board. Service performance is also reviewed each month at team meetings held by the Assistant Director for Policy Performance and Customer.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Customer Strategy Delivery Plan (as part of the Castle Point Challenge: Fit for the Future Transformation Programme)

Workstream	Actions	Project Lead and Resources	Timescales	Performance Targets / Outcomes	Risks
Customer Service <i>Providing the best possible customer service for our residents, businesses and visitors</i> Workstream Lead: AD for Policy Performance and Customer	Review and refresh of the Customer Service Standards, setting out what customers can expect of the Council and how customers can help the Council to keep its promise	Customer & Digital Services Manager	New Customer Service Standard drafted: end Jul 2025 Presented to Transformation Board and shared with Cabinet Members: Sep 2025 Soft launch: Oct 2025 Formal adoption and monitoring: June 2026	New Customer Service Standards in place, with a range of metrics to report against	Customer Service Standards are unknown to staff and customers, mitigated by an internal and external comms campaign

Workstream	Actions	Project Lead and Resources	Timescales	Performance Targets / Outcomes	Risks
	Programme of training on customer service	Learning and Development Lead	Plan: Apr-May 2025 Deliver: from Jun 2025 (training programme is ongoing – all Council training programme to be launched through new e-learning platform)	Positive feedback from training	Cultural resistance to change, mitigated by comprehensive training programme and strong focus on learning from mistakes

Workstream	Actions	Project Lead and Resources	Timescales	Performance Targets / Outcomes	Risks
	Establish a Customer Care Leads group to share learning and feedback between front- and back-office parts of the Council Group to be identified as part of rollout of refreshed SLA where services will be asked to identify a single point of contact for customer service-related matters (see action below)	Customer & Digital Services Manager	Establish: end Jun 2025 Ongoing discussion and sharing of learning at “Late Opening” training sessions: From Jul 2025, and ongoing	Better understanding of pressures across teams, ultimately reflected in better satisfaction levels	Front- and back-office are not joined up leading to poor customer experience, mitigated by this group being established

Workstream	Actions	Project Lead and Resources	Timescales	Performance Targets / Outcomes	Risks
	Refresh the SLA between Customer and Digital Services and the Service Areas	Customer and Digital Manager	Finalise revised SLA: Apr 2025 Meet with service managers to socialise: Apr-Jun 2025 Delivery (through quarterly meetings with service managers and through “Late Opening” training sessions): from Jul 2025, and ongoing	Positive feedback on the support provided by Customer & Digital Services to the rest of the organisation	Inconsistency of advice given by the Contact Centre or Reception and that give by the Service Area

Workstream	Actions	Project Lead and Resources	Timescales	Performance Targets / Outcomes	Risks
	New range of customer service metrics developed and used to measure impact Use of data to inform understanding about channel shift	Customer & Digital Services Manager (working with Corporate Business Manager and other T4 managers across the Council)	Develop: end Jun 2025 Pilot: Jul-Aug 2025 Report: Quarterly from October 2025 Analytics: Develop PowerBI dashboard end May 2026	Some metrics have targets – held in Ideagen – others are “data-only” to provide context to performance	Metrics are not recorded and updated, mitigated by use of Ideagen system and clear accountability for entering data into the system

	Systematic approach to capture and share learning from complaints Appropriate reporting of performance responding to complaints and learning from complaints received to Member (consistency of approach across Housing and Corporate complaints) – to Audit & Governance Committee	Democratic Services Manager (working with other T4 managers across the Council) Democratic Services Manager Housing Customer Relations Officer	Approach: end May 2026 Deliver: from Jul 2026 (through reports to Transformation Board) Housing Complaints annual report - Jun 2025 and yearly after that Corporate Complaints annual report - Jun 2026	Number of complaints received (Stage 1 and Stage 2) Number of complaints responded to in time (Stage 1 and Stage 2) Number of complaints upheld (Stage 1 and Stage 2) Ombudsman referrals and findings	Learning from corporate complaints is not captured and shared, leading to the same mistakes re-occurring causing wasted time and reputational damage
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Workstream	Actions	Project Lead and Resources	Timescales	Performance Targets / Outcomes	Risks
	Develop a Customer Strategy	Director for Corporate & Customer (working with Assistant Director for Policy Performance and Customer and the Digital and Customer Services Manager)	Initial draft: end Jun 2025 to Transformation Board Refine: from Sep 2025 Formal adoption by Cabinet: Jun 2026		Capacity to deliver the strategy mitigated by aligning actions with those in this transformation programme.

Workstream	Actions	Project Lead and Resources	Timescales	Performance Targets / Outcomes	Risks
	Conduct an annual residents' survey	Assistant Director for Policy Performance and Customer (working with Policy Performance and Customer Lead and commissioned provider)	Agree delivery approach and agree questions: Sep 2025 Delivery of survey: Feb-Mar 2026 Analysis and results: PLT June 2026; Cabinet Jul 2026	Range of metrics to be driven from questions in the survey	Funding not available for the survey, mitigated by a request through the Fit for the Future Board for funding. Resident lack of engagement with the survey and poor response numbers, mitigated by working with an engagement company and running a campaign to encourage responses.



Customer and Digital Services: Service Level Agreement 2026/27

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Martin Roberts (Customer and Digital Manager)

Ben Brook (Assistant Director for Policy Performance and Customer)

Effective from: 1st April 2025 (version 1.1)
Document: Customer and Digital Services SLA 2026/27
Version: 1.2 (reviewed April 2026)

Introduction

Agreeing and complying with this SLA will ensure continuity, clarity and ownership of responsibility and the required high level of service to our customers.

Customer and Digital Services and Service Areas must ensure that the terms of this SLA meet the standards as set out in our [Customer Service Standards](#).

This SLA defines the responsibilities of Customer and Digital Services and the Service Areas. It also describes how the SLA will continue to be managed and developed

This SLA provides a framework for discussion and agreement across all Service Areas, it is intended to be a fluid document, ordinarily updated annually, which can be revised in response to feedback received through any ongoing customer engagement and any service improvements / changes which are implemented by the Council.

Scope of Customer and Digital Services

The Customer and Digital Services team is the first point of contact for phone or face to face enquiries for Castle Point Borough Council. It aims to provide a high-quality seamless service for the customer and to enable Service Areas to focus on in-depth service delivery.

Customer and Digital Services will employ and train staff who will resolve as many enquiries as possible at the first stage of contact avoiding the need to refer the customer to the Service Areas.

The Customer and Digital Services team provide Reception, Switchboard, Contact Centre and Digital services for the Council. Customer Service Advisors, Customer Service Specialists and Customer Service Team Leaders are arranged into two teams, with one team principally supporting the Benefits and Revenues services and the other supporting the remainder of Service Areas set out on the following page. The Customer and Digital Advisor principally supports the development of digital services. A structure chart is attached at Appendix A (page 8).

Reception & Switchboard Services - to meet and greet all visitors to the Council and to manage the switchboard. To resolve basic enquiries at the first point of contact where possible and where this will not detract from the smooth running of the meet and greet and switchboard functions. Where appropriate, to signpost customers to the appropriate Contact Centre team or Service Area to enable their enquiry to be resolved efficiently.

Contact Centre Services - to resolve as many face to face and phone enquiries as possible, on behalf of the following Service Areas:

Building Control	Benefits	Planning
Environmental Health	Housing Options	Street Scene
Parks & Open Spaces	Council Tax	Refuse & Recycling

Digital Services – to support the development of digital services through the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and promote such services to customers

Hours of Service

The service will be available at the following times and venues:

Reception/switchboard/general enquiry service at the Kiln Road Office -

Mon / Tue / Thursday	-	8.45 am to 5.15 pm
Wednesday	-	10.00 am to 5.15 pm
Friday	-	8.45 am to 4.45 pm

Out of hours enquiries will be manned through the 'Out of Hours' emergency service.

Customer and Digital Services Responsibilities

- Deliver service standards as set out in CPBC's Customer Service Standards and work to the agreed Corporate Complaints procedure.
- For each enquiry, determine the specific nature of the enquiry and identify the customer's needs. Respond appropriately as agreed in the general terms of this SLA or, where applicable making appropriate use of the CRM system and the CPBC website.
- Only transfer calls to the Service Areas if the customer enquiry cannot be dealt with by Switchboard or the Contact Centre. If Service Areas advise that there is no availability to take calls to the back office – this should be an exception and not a blanket policy – then a message will be taken and a call back email sent to the Service Area.
- Support specific activities such as customer surveys, promoting new service initiatives as agreed with Service Areas and their managers (team meetings will be included as per 4.2).
- The Customer and Digital Manager/Customer Service Team Leaders and Service Area SLA Lead (See Section 4) will develop new scripts and processes and will update information in the CRM as and when required, in consultation and agreement with Service Areas. For example, website updates so links from the CRM to the website are up to date and fit for purpose.

Service Area Responsibilities

Each Service Area will nominate an SLA Lead (typically this would be a Manager or Team Leader) who will be responsible for managing, on a day-to-day basis, the relationship between the Service Area and Customer and Digital Services, ensuring that the service meets the requirements defined in this document as well as acting as a customer service champion in their respective service area.

Each Service Area will:-

1. Maintain staff levels throughout the standard Council hours of service to ensure that they can receive and handle enquiries via Customer and Digital Services (including when team meetings are taking place, and an enquiry requires urgent referral).
2. Provide a minimum of one week's notice to the Customer and Digital Manager/Customer Service Team Leader to request team meeting cover. This is to ensure there is adequate resource to cover the added call enquiries, agreement will be dependent on resources available.
3. Inform Customer and Digital Services, in a timely manner, of all changes to integrated systems, service initiatives, procedures, guidance, letter or leaflet distribution, and web information that will impact on the advice, information, or service which Customer and Digital Services provides to customers, including where it may lead to a significant increase in the volume of queries.
4. Inform the Customer and Digital Services team of any website updates, so links from the CRM to the website are continuously up to date and fit for purpose.
5. Work with Customer and Digital Services to offer training and refresher training to ensure staff have a general awareness of the Service Area, its limitations, and the customer's expectations of that service. The Late Opening on each Wednesday morning from 9.00-10.00am is a good time to provide the training as the team is available at this time for a pre-planned training session or discussion.
6. Maintain and update information on publications available to the public and provide sufficient supplies for Customer and Digital Services to distribute and display. If the decision is made to have a digital information display in reception, services should maintain and update information provided through this display.
7. Maintain an appropriate Outlook mailbox for receiving call back e-mails from Customer and Digital Services and ensure that call backs to the customer are made in a timely manner.

8. Ensure contact details for their respective staff are kept up to date.
9. Answer calls that are transferred from Switchboard or the Contact Centre to the Service Area, avoiding blanket policies of not taking calls from customers.
10. See “drop-in” customers who present at the Kiln Road offices, even if to advise that an appointment needs to be made.
11. Advise Reception of any visitors to the Council, providing a name and reason for visiting. If the visitor is known to be aggressive, please also advise of this.
12. Work with Customer and Digital Services to identify ways to develop and/or improve the service to the customer, including where service requests can be made available digitally.

Liaison & Performance Monitoring

Service SLA Leads will meet every quarter with the Customer and Digital Manager and or Team Leader, to address any operational issues, review performance, and identify any areas for development. Changes to services offered do not need to wait for this meeting to inform the team.

This SLA will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure the SLA is accurate, robust and reflective of current arrangements.

Following review, the Customer and Digital Manager will update the SLA to be approved by Assistant Directors and cascaded to all relevant parties

The Customer and Digital Manager will monitor performance using information gathered from CRM systems and relevant reporting tools.

Information will be reported through the corporate performance monitoring tool

Managing Demand

Where unforeseen circumstances could have a significant impact on Customer and Digital Services and is likely to result in increased volumes of contact from customers, the Service Area SLA Lead will liaise with the Customer and Digital Manager to determine how best to manage this.

Unforeseen circumstances could be;

- Staff absence (delays or services unable to meet customer needs/expectations)
- Business Continuity (for example in severe weather conditions, flooding/snow)
- Trending news specific to your service

Options of support include;

- Recorded telephone messages (liaising with IT)
- Website headlines, updates bulletins/news (liaising with Communications)
- Social Media updates (liaising with Communications)

Appendix A: Customer and Digital Services Structure Chart

