



Improving Customer Service

Our Customer Access Strategy



The Vision for Transforming Customer Access in Braintree

As part of our Customer First Programme, Braintree District Council have transformed the way that we deal with customers through the use of technology, the improvement of our processes and working with local, regional, national and private sector partners.

Our Customer First Programme has come to an end and we are looking to set the direction to further improve our Customer Service in line with our customer requirements.

Braintree District Council's Corporate Strategy for 2008-12 sets out the priorities for the Authority over this period.

The following statement is one of six priorities for the Council.

'We deliver excellent, cost effective and valued services'

The targets laid out below are the outcomes we will deliver from our Corporate Strategy and form the basis of the Customer Access Strategy.

The Outcomes we expect

We are putting the following in place to ensure that we deliver excellent, cost effective and valued Customer Service.

Our Strategy

Priority 1 People will find it easier to contact us and we will provide speedier responses.

Priority 2 Greater use will be made of our website and more transactions will be able to be dealt with electronically

Priority 3 People will be able to access a range of public services through a shared 'one-stop shop' office and customer service facility.

Priority 4 People who come to live in the District will be able to easily find out about the District and the services that are provided here

Priority 5 Our citizens will be more satisfied with how they feel about the Council and about whether we provide value for money

Purpose of this Document

This document sets the direction and priorities for Customer Services until March 2012. During this time we will be conducting wide ranging consultation with customers and partners to ensure that we are delivering the right service to meet your needs.

This document will set out what we want to achieve under each priority, what we have done so far to achieve it, and how we are going to improve.

There is an Action Plan at the back of this document that gives details of projects and performance targets against these priorities which will be updated annually.



People will find it easier to contact us and we will provide speedier responses

Our aim is to get you to the right people to answer your query; the first time you contact us, however you contact us.

We aim to provide you with a variety of methods to contact us to suit your needs, and to provide consistent levels of service, whether it is web, telephone or face to face.

What we have done so far to improve your service

Website

We have improved our website to include a number of online transactions that you can access 24/7. These include:

- Paying your bills
- Applying for Planning Permission
- Reporting problems
- Applying for licenses
- Applying for a job
- Checking account balances
- Finding out about your local area
- Changing your address

Telephone

- We have introduced a Customer Service Centre, one number 01376 552525, and specially trained customer service staff to deal with your enquiries



- We have upgraded our telephone system to route you to the right person for your call, without the need to be transferred
- We have introduced software that ensures we have the history of when you have contacted us before with an issue, to help us to deal with your query more effectively
- If you have been sent a letter we ensure that the contact details for the person you need are on that letter so you speak to the right person to deal with your query
- We have introduced a 15 second target for answering your phone calls to our Customer Service Centre



- Introduced SMS (texting facility) to remind you of special collections for bulky waste items, and a sign up facility to remind you of your waste collection pick up dates

Face to Face

- We have reviewed our office buildings and have improved them to ensure they are more accessible.
- We have improved our reception and interview areas to reduce your waiting time and improve the access to information for the officers who are helping you.
- We have created more private interview areas to deal with more sensitive queries
- We have joined our main reception, planning and environment receptions so that you have one place to go for all of these queries

What we will do to improve your service

Website

We will improve our website to make more transactions available online, including

- Making more payments services available online
- Introducing a look up facility for your refuse and recycling dates
- Encouraging your feedback and using it to introduce facilities that are helpful to you on our website
- Giving you access to community groups and more information about what's going on in the District
- Re-launching our campaign to make you aware of the services that you can access online

Telephone

- Extending our 15 second target for answering telephones across the whole authority.
- Continually monitoring performance against answering times so that we can improve our service
- Reviewing our telephone answering system to make sure that you can be connected to the right person to deal with your query, the first time you contact us

Face to Face

- Reviewing the services provided at all offices to make services accessible to you in locations which minimise the need for travel, and provide you value for money
- Working with other public services to ensure that you can come into our offices or ring us and get answers to your questions about a range of services
- Continuing to ensure that all customer services staff are fully trained to deal with your queries
- Introduce Customer Mystery Shopping exercises to test our Customer Service across the organisation and ensure that it continues to deliver high levels of service to everyone
- Work with the Authority's Employment and Equalities Group to carry out Equalities Impact Assessments for face to face, telephone and web access points to ensure that all our customers are being dealt with according to their needs
- Provide clear and concise information leaflets for you that are easy to understand and provide the information required.

Consultation

- Introduce a Customer Panel to ensure that we are designing services that customers need and that we are focusing on the priorities of the customer



Priority 2

Greater use will be made of our website and more transactions will be able to be dealt with electronically



We believe that customers are using the website more and want to be able to contact us at times which are convenient to you.

There are currently 25,000 visitors to our website every month!

We understand there will still be some times where you would like to speak to someone or come and visit us, and that you should continue to have the choice as to how you wish to contact us.

What we have done so far for your service

- Invested in improving our website and its content to allow you to serve yourself online, 24/7 for a range of transactions
- Used the website to get feedback from you about the issues that matter to you, including planning consultations, and consultations on our policies

- Promoted the website to ensure that you know it is there and you know how to access it
- Worked with libraries across the District to promote the internet facility they provide for those customers who do not have internet access at home

What we will do to improve your service

- Increase the number of services available to you online
- Actively market the benefits of using our website widely across the district
- Ensure that the information on our website is up to date
- Use the website to encourage your feedback on a wide range of issues that affect you
- Introduce self-service kiosks in our offices at Causeway House to make it easier for you to find the information or apply for the service you need



People will be able to access a range of public services through a shared ‘one-stop shop’ office and customer service facility

We think that you should be able to access all the public services you need as readily as possible, and that by working with our public service partners we can make this easier for you.

What we have done so far for your service

- Integrated our Witham offices with Witham Library to ensure that you can access Essex County Council services and Braintree District Council services under one roof
- Ensured that our Customer Services staff have access to the Essex County Council information store to answer your Frequently Asked Questions and direct you to the right department within Essex County Council to answer your query face to face or on the telephone

- Integrated our website with Essex County Council’s website so that for some services you can link through to the right department at Essex County Council for your query.

What we will do to improve your service

- Work with Essex County Council and other public services to design a joint service facility in Braintree
- Continue to improve our links with Public Service Partners to ensure that the information we provide you is up to date and accurate
- Continue to work with Essex County Council to identify opportunities to deliver improved service through working together.



Priority 4

People who come to live in the District will be able to easily find out about the District and the services that are provided here

When you move into the District we want to make you feel welcome in your new community and we would like you to get a good first impression of us, and our district and to easily access our services.

What we have done so far for your service

- Welcome guides are sent out with every Council Tax bill for a new resident
- All our contact information is made available on your Council Tax bill, so that you can contact us by web, email, telephone, or visit us
- We have set up roadshows across the District, in supermarkets and town centres to promote our services and the ways in which you can contact us
- We have a Council Page in the local paper, which is used to give



you information about the services we provide and how to access them

- We have revamped the front page of the website to give you up to date news about us and provide information about our services
- We have a magazine (Contact) which is sent to all residents to give information about Council services and current issues

What we will do to improve your service

- Set up Summer Roadshows to give you information about the services we provide and how to access them
- Improve our Contact magazine to make it more relevant to your local area
- Improve our service content on the internet and ensure that it is up to date and relevant



Our citizens will be more satisfied with how they feel about the Council and about whether we provide value for money

We believe that you want to receive excellent services but that you don't want to pay more than necessary for them.

We want to make sure that we can show you that you get value for money from the services we provide.

What we have done so far for your service

- Independent specialists have reviewed our Customer Services and recommended improvements
- Introduced Customer Surveys for our services to encourage feedback to help us improve our service

What we will do to improve your service

- Reduce the cost of our Customer Service function and improve performance
- Use some of the savings we make to improve call answering
- Improve our Customer Satisfaction Survey to encourage more response and make it easier for you to feed back suggested improvements
- Compare our Customer Service Centre with similar authorities to

ensure that the service you are receiving gives value for money

- Work with partners to look at how working together can improve the value of Customer Services whilst still retaining the excellent level of service you expect
- Develop Customer Care Standards across all of our services to make sure that you receive a consistent level of service from us all.



Action Plan 2008/09

2008/09 will be a year of consolidation of the progress that has been made in improving Customer Services, and of consultation with Customers to determine our priorities for Customer Service for the next three years.

We have developed an action plan that sets out how we are going to achieve each of the objectives in our Customer Access Strategy. This includes target dates and is split into short, medium and long-term targets for this year.

Short Term Actions – To be in place by 31st July 2008	
Ensure all face to face, and Customer Service Centre staff receive a consistently high level of Customer Service training and that any new training requirements are delivered effectively and as quickly as possible	July 2008
Summer Roadshow, fete promotions and campaign programme to raise awareness of the services the Council provides	July 2008
Council page in local newspapers to be revamped to raise awareness of the services the Council provides	July 2008
Benchmark our performance and improve our service by sharing information.	July 2008
Redesign the structure and role of Customer Services to reduce cost of Customer Service Centre by £40,000.	July 2008

Medium Term Actions – To be in place by 31st October 2008	
Develop a rolling programme to assess customer views about the way we provide our services and to identify improvements which can be put in place to ensure customer satisfactions increases	October 2008
Review our telephone system to ensure that it is getting you to the right person to answer your query as quickly as possible.	September 2008
Conduct Equality Impact Assessments on Face to Face, Telephone and Web access Channels to ensure that it is as easy as possible for everyone to access our services	October 2008

Medium Term Actions – To be in place by 31st October 2008

Introduce a Customer Panel and hold our first Panel meeting to get feedback on our services and improve them	October 2008
Increase the number of services that customers can access online	August 2008
Improve the website's content management process, to ensure that information on the website is up to date and relevant	September 2008
Provide all domestic waste and recycling dates on the website	August 2008
Review the services provided face to face at all of our offices to ensure it continues to provide you with the services you need	September 2008
Link to Essexlife.org from our website to provide information on Community groups and resources	August 2008
Replace the district wide Contact magazine with three localised versions to give you more information about the area you live in	October 2008
Work with you to update all of our Customer Service Standards and targets and publish them widely so that people can be clear about what to expect when they contact us and about the level of service they will receive	October 2008

Long Term Actions – To be in place by March 2009

Carry out Mystery Shopping exercises, publish results and produce action plan	March 2009
Introduce Customer Care Training as part of the Induction Programme and an ongoing training programme across the authority	December 2009
Work with Essex County Council to create shared customer service facilities and service access points at different locations within the district	March 2009
Review and reproduce the Welcome guide to provide useful information to people moving into the district	December 2008

Our Performance

To ensure that we meet our objectives, we will need to continually measure our performance and track it as we make improvements.

We will use the following performance measures to track our success in achieving our objectives.

Indicator Ref	Indicator Description	Target 2008/09
BV3	The percentage of citizens who are satisfied with the overall service provided by the authority	TBC
LAA	The percentage of people who feel that Braintree District Council provides good value for money	TBC
Local PI	Method of contact with the council and satisfaction with contact experience	TBC
NI14	The proportion of Customer contact that is of low or no value to the customer (to be measured from Oct 2008)	New target, not fully scoped
CHLP5	The percentage of enquiries resolved at first point of contact	75%
CHLP7	The average telephone response time in the Customer Service Centre	15 secs
CHLP6	The number of transactions carried out via the Council website	30,000 p.a.
Local PI	The number of unique visitors to the Council website	300,000 p.a.
CHAI1	The £ amount of electronic payments made to the Council through the internet	N/A
Local AI	The number of calls received by the Council per month	N/A
Local PI	Unit cost per transaction Face to Face Telephone Calls Website transactions	To be average or lower than peers