

Blaenau Gwent Council Customer Services Strategy

2023 - 2027



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Foreword

Welcome to the Customer Service Strategy

The strategy sets out the key outcomes, activities and behaviours that Blaenau Gwent Council will pursue in support of our corporate priorities and a culture of continuous improvement.

Understanding the experience of our key community groups will allow us to provide services where and when they are needed along with supporting the corporate approach to reducing inequalities. As the demand for council services increases, listening to our customers, the residents of Blaenau Gwent is essential to our success on delivering excellent customer service.

Blaenau Gwent Council is committed to putting the customer at the heart of service delivery and, leaders in our organisation actively support this, as well as utilising customer insight to inform policy and strategy.

Along with guiding our customer service to be the best it can be for all our customers the strategy links to our Corporate Plan 2022 -2027 and complements our Digital Strategy 2023 - 2027 that likewise will allow and continue to inform our work in delivering the best customer service.

The journey to achieving what is set out in the strategy will involve the experience and expertise of all our council staff and partners.

This strategy has been developed in consultation with a cross service council officer group (Wider Corporate Leadership Team), elected members and Corporate Leadership Team. This will ensure customer service has a prominent presence at the centre of all service development demonstrating its strategic importance.

This Customer Service Strategy will ensure that service provision is designed and delivered to meet local needs and that services improvements are customer led and outcome focused.

Steve Thomas - Leader

Helen Cunningham - Deputy Leader

Introduction

Where we are now

Blaenau Gwent is committed to its customer service delivery and ensuring a positive customer experience for all.

In 2022 a review was undertaken in relation to customer service delivery across the organisation, part of which included understanding the access points across the Council (from telephony, face to face, email addresses).

The objective of the review was to:

- > Understand what our customers think of the way we interact with them
- > Establish what barriers our customers face when contacting us and;
- > To obtain ideas / suggestions as to how customers would like to interact with us in the future

The key themes and priorities of this strategy have been developed through various methods, including:

- > user research, feedback and engagement with our customers
- > senior management and elected member feedback
- > undertaking desk top research, and
- > discussions with partner organisations

We work with customers who find themselves digitally excluded and learn from their experiences to better support them.

What we are trying to achieve

Blaenau Gwent is committed to its customer service delivery and ensuring a positive customer experience for all.

This strategy sets out our ambition to deliver a positive customer experience throughout the Council, putting the customer at the heart of everything we do.

The importance of customer service delivery has never been more vital. As demand for council services increases, the way in which we respond to our customers' needs to be consistent (irrespective of what service customers are accessing), accurate, effective and efficient

Our customers and staff have been the driving force behind the creation of our Customer Service Standards and Customer Service Charter (in draft). We believe our customers have the right to know what level of service they can expect from us and how we will put things right if / when things go wrong.

Blaenau Gwent Context

This strategy will support the Council’s vision of being “a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities”

It will help to deliver the Council’s Corporate Plan Priorities:

An ambitious and innovative Council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place (closer to our communities)

Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent

Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities

This strategy is aligned to the ambitions of the following key plans and strategies:

- > Customer Strategy (in draft)
- > Workforce Strategy
- > Commercial Strategy
- > Communication Strategy
- > Commissioning and Procurement Strategy
- > Medium Term Financial Strategy
- > Decarbonisation Plan

This strategy demonstrates the Council’s commitment and investment into becoming a customer focussed Council by:

- > providing equal access to services
- > supporting learning and developing skills
- > identifying and developing the right technology in the right way
- > improving collaboration with others

66,900

people live in Blaenau Gwent



30,000

households in Blaenau Gwent

There are 4,035
Welsh Speaking
Residents

7,497

Residents visited our
Community Hubs in
2022/23

There
are over
90

services in Blaenau Gwent that
can be transacted on-line



58,821

calls were handled in the
Contact Centre in 2022/23

@ 6,500+

residents contacted us via our
info@ email address last year



Blaenau Gwent has
17,845 followers on
Facebook



Blaenau Gwent has
13,698 followers on
X



150,000 people visit
our website each
quarter

7.3%

of households do not have
internet access



93.5%

of households with internet
access have superfast
broadband

Our Principles

The strategy sets out the commitment of Blaenau Gwent Council in providing excellent customer services from highly skilled staff, thus enhancing the experience received.

It is underpinned by three key principles and three priorities. These are essential to the delivery of a positive customer service experience across the Council.

Principle One

To deliver a Positive Customer Service experience.

We will do this by:

- > developing a shared vision on how the Council improve and deliver its services
- > influencing behaviours that put the customer at the heart of everything we do
- > developing a customer-centric approach to delivering services
- > working as one to remove silos
- > developing a data driven culture to improve and design services
- > developing an innovating and intrapreneurial culture to modernise the Council
- > developing an open culture where information is shared and reused where able to
- > learning from customer feedback, both positive and negative and using this to improve service delivery
- > working with customers who are digitally excluded

Principle Two

Invest in our staff to support customers and to resolve queries at first point of contact where possible.

We will do this by:

- > assessing the skills and capabilities required
- > providing ongoing mentorship and training to all customer service representatives
- > collaborating with partners and organisations around training
- > creating a customer service network
- > developing a customer service champion network
- > creating a Customer Service Charter and Standards
- > developing staff skills to future proof customer service delivery and the organisation

Principle Three

Develop a culture that supports digital improvement, innovation and continues to make the best use of new technology.

We will do this by:

- > reviewing and assessing current systems and processes used across the Council that supports customer service delivery
- > understanding what our customers' needs are, putting them at the heart of everything we do
- > reviewing services so that they are fully accessible and meet all required standards
- > making it easy to find and understand information online
- > making it easy for customers to contact and transact with us online
- > increasing the number of services available online
- > continually move with the times but ensuring customers' needs always come first
- > supporting the building of services that are fit for the 21st Century

Our Priorities

Priority One - Designing Services to meet the needs of our customers.

Aim: Identify customer needs and priorities across Blaenau Gwent through ongoing engagement.

The active participation of people who have used our services can bring valuable knowledge and experience which will contribute to the design, planning, delivery and evaluation of our services as we move forward.

This strategy builds on a solid foundation and further develops the work that is already underway in the organisation to support the delivery of customer focussed services.

At all times we must strive to meet our customers' expectations and deliver an excellent quality of service.

We will do this by:

- > working with our customers and stakeholders to help shape our services
- > community engagement with community groups, 3rd sector partners and Community Hub attendees
- > continuing to review and redesign our services to make us efficient and effective
- > monitoring and improving our communication processes with our customers, making it easier for customers to understand letters etc. to be able to contact us via their preferred method.

Demonstrate delivery by:

- > Example of key performance indicators - % of customers accessing front facing services rating the service they receive as excellent or good; total number of complaints received per thousand population.

Priority Two - Delivery of a customer focused culture

Aim: A positive customer experience to be provided at all times. It is important that all staff work within a customer focused culture, putting the customer at the heart of everything they do.

The variety and breadth of the services we provide preclude the establishment of a single model of customer care.

We will have in place a range of tools and processes that are tailored to the specific needs of the customer, the service required and the delivery of that service.

We will do this by:

- > delivering customer service training as part of induction for all employees
- > learning from complaints to improve service delivery
- > embedding customer service delivery within business plans
- > continually measuring customer service satisfaction
- > developing a customer service charter and standards (in draft)
- > providing information and advice to our customers in a concise and professional way
- > utilising all communication channels, linking to Corporate Communication Strategy
- > undertaking first contact resolution where possible

Demonstrate delivery by:

- > Example key performance indicators, % resolution at first point of contact
- > Example key performance indicators, % of customers who rated services received as good / excellent

Priority Three - Redesigning Services, giving our customers the choice on how they interact with us.

Aim: Digital technology is changing the way that we communicate. There is an expectation by many of our customers that we will offer a wide range of digital services. Customers should have the choice of how they want to communicate with us.

We will do this by:

- > further development of the My Council Services platform
- > developing phase 2 of Community Hubs delivery
- > transforming the Corporate Contact Centre to understand why customers are contacting us and what is important to them
- > the development of the Digital Exclusion project, supporting our customers to be more digitally included where they want to be
- > providing a website that meets the needs of customers
- > communicating in plain language, accessible formats with inclusivity for all

Demonstrate delivery by:

- > Example key performance indicators, % resolution at first point of contact
- > Example key performance indicators, % of customers who rated services received as good / excellent

Customer Service Standards and Customer Charter

To support the successful delivery of this strategy there are some clear links to the level of service that customers can expect to receive, whatever channel they choose to use.

Our current Customer Service Standards and Charter (in draft) underpins our customer services delivery model and describes the basic standards of service that a customer can expect from Blaenau Gwent Council.

Within our Customer Charter the term “customer” relates to all residents, visitors, businesses who use the services we provide.

Transforming our customer service delivery will undoubtedly impact on the standards outlined in our Customer Charter.

It is important that these changes and their impact are considered. The charter will be reviewed and updated regularly throughout the life of this strategy.

Monitoring and Review

The structure for customer service within Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is as follows:

- > Leadership through Cabinet Members, the Leader and Portfolio Member for Corporate Overview and Performance
- > Chief Officer Commercial and Customer
- > Service Manager Customer Experience and Transformation;
- > Customer Experience Team Lead

The strategy will have a set of delivery plans against each priority and each priority will have a number of key success measures.

Information will be included in the quarterly Joint finance and performance report which is part of the committee forward work programme, including an annual quarter 4 position.

The Future Working Programme Board chaired by the Chief Executive will receive progress updates on the implementation of the strategy.

The Service Design and Digital Board which has representations from across the service areas will review its terms of reference to support monitoring and delivery of the strategy.

A midpoint review of the strategy will be undertaken.

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