Customer Experience Strategy 2021 - 2024

Cheshire East
Council

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Introduction

Cheshire East Council is committed to delivering the best outcomes for the diverse range of people living and working in Cheshire East. Our values commit us to listening and understanding to what our residents and businesses need and responding appropriately to put in place affordable services fairly and responsibly. This strategy sets out our vision to deliver against this commitment and to provide the best possible experience for our customers, whoever they are and however they contact us.

What does Customer Experience Mean?

'Customer Experience' refers not just to the services we provide as a council but also how we treat customers when they are trying to access those services. The Institute of Customer Service envisages an organisation which provides excellent customer services as: -

"…honest, gives good value for money, has a high reputation, meets deadlines, has quality products and services, has easy to understand processes, responds to criticism, encourages complaints and handles them well, and demonstrates that it is passionate about customers."

We know that we provide a wide range of services to our customers and we know that the experience will differ depending on the service accessed and the way in which it is accessed.

We also know that as a public service provider it is important that customers can trust us to design services which respond to their needs and the needs of the local area and that these are delivered in a way which provides value for their money.

Our Vision

We will put our customers at the heart of everything we do, reflecting their feedback in the design and delivery of services.

Putting customer first or at the heart of the organisation are phrases often used but rarely realised. However, it's not that complicated, and in practice it means remembering that as a local authority service provider, our purpose is to provide public services to the residents, businesses and visitors to Cheshire East and therefore every decision, business action or procedure should be in support of this. We need to ensure that we have effective engagement with customers which helps us to fully understand their needs and aspirations and that we use the data we gather to design services around customers true needs.

We will aim to provide a consistent and high quality of service wherever and however customers interact with us.

We are a large organisation providing over 500 services to 384,000 residents with multiple means of contacting us. We know that there is inconsistency across the council and that can be confusing and frustrating for customers. Customers need to be confident that they will receive a consistent customer experience irrespective of the service they contact or how that service is delivered. Where our services are delivered in partnership with other organisations, they will also be expected to provide a consistent experience to customers where it makes sense to do so.

We will ensure that our services are flexible and can adapt to the changing needs of our customers in the future.

We know that our population and its needs are constantly changing. The growth of technology has meant that our customers are more likely to want to interact with us via digital means and our services need to reflect this. We also know that we have an aging population who may be less digitally aware. The experience of COVID-19 and other crises, also demonstrates that we need to be able to adapt to circumstances which cannot be predicted. We therefore need an organisation and services that can be flexible and can adapt to these changing and sometimes conflicting demands.

We will continue to adopt a digital first approach, promoting and supporting self-service wherever possible.

Digital technology has changed the way people interact both socially and when requesting goods and services. We need to ensure that our digital services can meet this demand and that they are easy to use, secure and available at times that are convenient for customers.

However, Digital technology is not right for everyone or for every situation. We will continue to provide services through other means and will work within our communities to provide support to those who are digitally excluded.

We know that digital technology can help us to reduce costs, that by encouraging self-service by those who can, we will be able to focus resources on those more complex services and those customers less comfortable with digital technology.

We will co-design service delivery with partners to provide a unified and joined up customer experience

Many of our services are delivered in partnership with colleagues in Central Government, the Heath Service, the community and private sectors.
We know that this can sometimes cause problems for customers when dealing with multiple organisations. We will work with partners to join up services where that makes sense.

We will also support individuals and communities to help themselves by providing a supportive environment where partners, the voluntary sector, businesses, and most importantly, residents can thrive independently.

We will provide value for money

We must balance the needs and aspirations of individuals with the needs of the wider population and of our most vulnerable customers. We have limited funds available to us however and that means we cannot always deliver everything to everyone. Where we cannot deliver a service we will always explain why and work with customers to identify any alternative options for them. We will make best use of the money available to us by working in the most efficient way we can. We need to take an in-depth look at our service delivery to review the customer experience and improve the way we work, removing any part of our processes which do not add value and adopting innovative technology where this can help.

Understanding our area and people

With an estimated population of 384,000, Cheshire East is the third largest Local Authority in the North West, and the fifteenth largest in the country.

Cheshire East is a prosperous area where residents have high expectations for good quality services. However, we also have areas of significant deprivation within our communities where customers rely on us to provide the support they need.

We have a maturing population which it is estimated will continue to grow over the coming years whilst we also have a reducing percentage of working age customers.

Our residents:[1] (see notes page 16)

51%
are female

49%
are male

17.5 %
of Cheshire East residents have a long-term health condition/disability.

40,003
residents are 'unpaid carers', with 8,024 providing at least 50 hours per week.

Between the 2001 and 2011 Census, the average age of residents has increased from 40.6 years to

43.6 years

By 2030, the average age of residents is expected to further increase to approximately 47 years.

The proportion of Cheshire East residents who classed themselves as White British is

93.6 %

5.1%
of Cheshire East residents were born outside the British Isles, with 2.7% born outside the EU.

The most common non-British Isles countries for residents to have been born in are Poland and India.
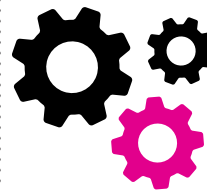
We have fewer 'working age' and under 16s living in our area compared to North West and national averages. However, our 65+ population is larger than average. This brings additional pressures for us in ensuring we have the capacity to deliver services to our residents as they need them.

3% of Cheshire East households have members for whom English is not the main language and, in half of these households, no members have English as their main language.

We know that our population, when compared to the region and the UK, has an older demographic profile.

20,225
active businesses

16m
visitors to Cheshire East

We have a smaller than average 'working age' population and more people in work (unemployment rate of 3.2%) - lower than regional and national averages and with a lower number of work-less households - those who are employed earn higher than average earnings.

Our Customers

Our research has shown that we have seven main groups of customers who all have different needs and circumstances. These groups provide a way of testing our services to ensure they are meeting customers needs.

We also know that within these groups some people are comfortable with technology and some are not, this will always be taken into account across these groups.

The seven main customer groups

- Business Owner
- Living Well
- Adult at Risk
- Economically challenged Adult
- Community Champion
- Well Child
- Vulnerable Child

Living Well

(27% of population / 12% of council spend)

Adults living fulfilled lives with stable economic foundation and households like **Adam**

"I am a healthy adult. I enjoy my leisure time, particularly running in the park and keeping fit. Where possible, I would like to support my local community. I rarely contact the council but when I do it's because something has gone wrong or I need a service that only the council provides."

Adult at Risk

(27% of population / 42% of council spend)

Adults living with a disability or illness (mental ill health or other condition) who need help to look after themselves, or protect themselves from harm or exploitation like **Brian**

"I live with a mental illness which means I can't always take care of myself. I need to help to stay safe and well although sometimes I don't want any help. I often feel lonely and not part of the community."

Economically challenged Adult

(14% of population / 8% of council spend)

Adults with financial challenges like **David**

"Although I have always worked, my income barely covers my living costs. I have no savings to rely on for unexpected costs. I rely on welfare support, without which my situation would be unbearable."
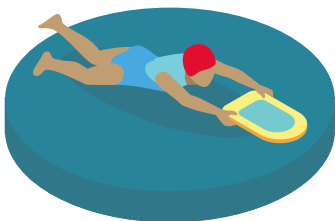
Community Champion

Individuals with a strong community interest like **Frances**

"I like to make sure my community is well looked after. When I see a problem, I will report it to the council. I like to have my say on any plans which affect my community and expect those views to be listened to."

Well Child
(14% of population / 6% of council spend)

Children with no long-term mental or physical ill health issues like **Chloe**

"I am a healthy child and live a care-free life, enjoy playing outdoors and swimming in the local pool. My parents organise a lot of my life such as ensuring I get a good education. I am really concerned about the environment and how to make it better."
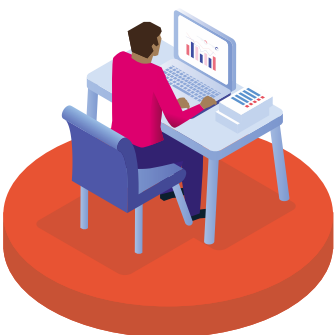
Vulnerable Child
(8% of population / 24% of council spend)

Children with long-term mental or physical health issues or with educational needs like **Ellen**

"I live with a long term health condition. My home life is difficult."

Business Owner
(As of 2018 there were 20,225 businesses located in Cheshire East.)

Business owners operating within the Cheshire East area like **Gary**

"I run a business in the Cheshire East area. I spend a lot of time on administration which reduces the time I have for my business. I normally contact the council for services such as planning, licensing or food safety. I am interested in sharing ideas with other business leaders and would like to be involved in the regeneration of my area."

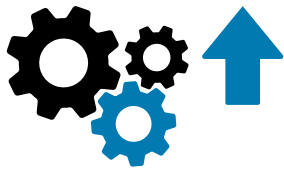# Customers of the future² (see notes on page 16)

The population of Cheshire East is estimated to grow by **31,000/8%** with the largest increase in the over 65 age group (24.5% increase).
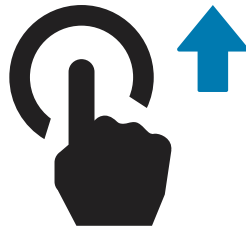
Increasing numbers of customers are using (or want to use) digital means to contact us.

There will remain some customers who are unable or unwilling to use digital.

The number of working age residents (16-64) is estimated to increase by **4,500/1.9%**

Customer expectation in terms of speed of response and quality of service are continually increasing.

Customer priorities when dealing with organisations remain relatively unchanged.

Our Services[3] **(see notes on page 16)**

We provide over 500 services in support of our communities, economy, health, education and environment.

Key facts and figures 2019/20

3,170
Planning applications registered.

3.5 million
visits to council-owned leisure facilities.

87%
of our secondary schools are rated as good or outstanding (North West average 67%)

560,000
telephone calls answered.

14 million
bins emptied per year.
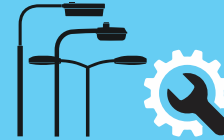
40,000
street lights maintained.

72%
of our social care users are satisfied with the service we provide (North West average 68%).

1.4 million
visits to our libraries.

169,000
digital forms completed.

Our performance

The results from our Residents' Survey in 2019 show that customers rate some of our services highly such as waste and libraries, whereas others, such as planning and highways services, need improvement.

Feedback also showed that customers have concerns about the value for money provided by the council, how well informed the council keeps its customers and the extent to which we listen to and take account of customers concerns.

Positives

67%
attitude
of staff.

62%
ease of
payment.

77%
Library
service.

64%
ease of finding
information.

84%
Waste collection
service.

64%
Leisure
services.

Negatives

48%
speed of
fulfilment.

Issues not resolved/
response/action late/
contact not returned/
unable to contact.

53%
I am not well informed
about the services
and benefits
Cheshire East provides.

20%
Planning
Services.

40%
Fairness
of charges.

50%
Council does not
listen to concerns
of residents.

46%
Parking
services.

28%
Highway
Service.

What do we want to achieve?

An organisational culture that focuses on the customer and a consistent quality of service

- We will work as one organisation offering a clear and consistent experience

- Our staff will have the knowledge, skills, capability and tools to deliver a consistent and high quality of service wherever and however our customers interact with us

- Through understanding the customers' requirements, the customer experience will be right first time, delivering what they need at the first point of contact. As a result, they will benefit from a quick, efficient and responsive service

- Our services will be available in a way that allows all our customers to access clear information.

- Customers will be provided with information which clearly sets out our services, access routes and waiting times and will be kept informed of progress so they don't need to follow up enquiries unnecessarily

- To be seen as approachable by our customers, welcoming feedback, being willing to admit our mistakes and always learning from these

By 2022 our Customer Experience Strategy will be adopted across the organisation. We will have an agreed set of standards and will have a baseline of our current position across all services.

We will review the training we provide to all staff, embedding the values contained within our Customer Experience Strategy and ensure they have the knowledge and skills to deliver this.

We will have a culture where the needs and aspirations of customers are considered at every stage of our service design and delivery, where staff are encouraged to be innovative and to continuously improve the customer experience and where there is clear ownership of the customer experience across the organisation.

Services that are based on our customers' needs

- We will use customer feedback and data to design and offer services based on what customers need and what works for them. Customer Feedback and data will enable us to continuously assess our services and influence the design of policies, services, systems and processes

- We will work with partners and residents to co-design services ensuring we maximise the skills available, supporting people to help themselves and creating a seamless customer journey

- We will review our existing services so we fully understand the customer journey from the customers perspective and will redesign these to make them simpler and easier for customers to use and for us to administer

- We will listen to what our customers are saying when they contact us and respond quickly. Customers will have timely and information and advice

- Sometimes our services are required to protect individuals or our environment. These will also be delivered in a clear and consistent way which makes it easy for customers to understand

- Through a better understanding of our customers, we will proactively identify and offer services that individuals might need from the council or our partners. We will provide them with the support they are entitled to and reduce the need to be reactive to situations which could have been prevented

- When things go wrong, we will learn the lessons and make changes to ensure they do not happen again

- We will have a transparent relationship with our customers where they will have the opportunity to assess our performance and will be provided with information to understand how money is being spent and how decisions are made. They will feel listened to and that their opinion counts

- We will also focus our efforts on preventive services providing recreational, educational, informative and informal services which improve our customers well being

By 2022 we will have:-

- Completed an in-depth review and re-design of those services where feedback from customers has identified the need for an improved customer experience and we will have developed plans to review our remaining services

- Reviewed our customer engagement processes to ensure a wider participation and greater access to real time feedback

- Improved the information we provide to customers giving greater clarity on decisions made and how money is spent

- Created a customer insight tool where information can be shared across the organisation and with partners where appropriate to help to shape service design and delivery

- Developed an approach to personalised contact, enabling customers to receive proactive information on topics of interest to them or to their local area

- Reviewed our approach to complaints management ensuring all lessons learned are widely shared

Solutions that promote self-service and help staff in providing a consistent, quality customer experience

- We will improve our digital offering for customers, enabling the majority of our services to be accessed easily on-line

- We will promote digital as the access channel of choice for most services, enabling customers to help themselves through self-serve first

- We will focus our resources on the more complex enquiries, where digital may not be appropriate and for those customers who are unable to use digital channels

- We will improve the technology that supports our Contact Centres, ensuring staff have the tools to support customers

- We will use innovative technologies to improve the customer experience and to provide value for money for customers

By 2022 we will have a new website, providing easy access to council services 24/7

We will have a "My Account" allowing customers to access personalised data and to track service requests

We will have updated technology within the Contact Centre that supports customer contact through a variety of methods

By 2023 we will be using technology in several ways to pro-actively identify and resolve issues, to reduce the cost of administering our services and to personalise our services

Feedback

Be involved in decision making in Cheshire East…

If you would like to be involved in consultations undertaken by Cheshire East Council, you can do so by registering for updates on the Consultation pages or joining the Digital Influence Panel. Please visit **cheshireeast.gov.uk/consultations**

If you would like to view the results of previous consultations undertaken by Cheshire East Council, please visit **https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/ council_information/consultations/consultation-results/ consultations_results.aspx**

www.cheshireeast.gov.uk

Footnotes

[1] **Borough profile 2019/20; Place scorecard 2019/20; Economic Strategy for Cheshire East 2020 to 2025**

[2] **Cheshire East Borough Profile 2019/20 https://www.instituteofcustomerservice.com/research-insight/uk-customer-satisfaction-index** The 2019-20 UK Customer Experience Decision-Makers' Guide © ContactBabel 2019

[3] **Borough profile 2019/20; Place scorecard 2019/20; Contact Centre data**