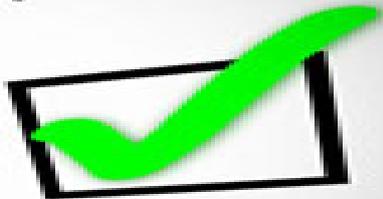




**COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR'S**

**Customer service**  
**Excellent** 

**CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY**

**2012-2016**

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Comhairle's Vision for Customer Service is:

- To provide a consistent, corporate approach to customer service delivery throughout the Comhairle, guided by our customer care standards;
- To increase the range of services are provided through a corporate team, based on convenience to the customer;
- To provide customers with the most cost effective channel for the service they need; and
- To achieve a high level of customer satisfaction and to use Customer views to help improve and shape future service delivery.

### This strategy:

- sets out the Comhairle's customer service standards;
- outlines how the Comhairle aims to provide services through the target operating model;
- provides details of the Comhairle's proposals for service channels ; and
- explains how the Comhairle will measure customer satisfaction.

Customers view the Comhairle as a single organisation and expectations for better quality services continue to increase. Customers dealing with the Comhairle should have a common experience and level of service regardless of which service they are seeking or which access channel they choose to use.

### Governance

The Customer Service Strategy operates on a four year rolling basis, updated to reflect changes in policy and procedure. The Comhairle has established a Customer Services Steering Group made up of senior officers from each Comhairle department to co-ordinate customer services across the Comhairle.

#### Key Outcomes for the Customer

- A consistent and informed service to customers;
- Customers can choose how and when to access Comhairle services; and
- Customers only need to provide information once.

#### Key Outcomes for the Comhairle

- Greater focus on service delivery;
- Evidence customer satisfaction;
- Processes are improved to prevent repetition or unnecessary delay; and
- A more cost-effective model .

## CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS

Clear standards are fundamental to the consistent and successful delivery of good customer service. Set out below are the minimum standards that should be applied across the Comhairle. Service Managers have responsibility for ensuring these standards are met within their service.

### Letter and Email

- When writing to us you can expect a full reply to your letter or email within ten working days or a progress report with timescales.
- The name and direct contact details of the staff member responsible for dealing with your query will be included in correspondence.
- Members of the public who correspond in Gaelic will receive a reply in Gaelic.

### Face to face

When you visit our offices you can expect our reception staff to:

- Wear name badges and be welcoming, polite and helpful.
- Attending to your query within ten minutes or provide an explanation for any delay.
- Keep to pre-arranged appointment times and let you know in good time if appointments are running late or have to be rearranged.
- Provide you with accurate up to date information.

You can expect our service access points to:

- Be accessible, clean, tidy and welcoming with clearly displayed opening hours.
- Provide consistent, up to date information on council services.
- Provide public access to the internet where practicable.
- Engage with customers through the medium of Gaelic or English in accordance with the customer request.

When we visit you at home you can expect that:

- Visiting staff will identify themselves to you with their Comhairle photo identity badge.
- We will inform you where an appointment is running late or has to be cancelled.
- We will inform you of the actions resulting from the visit and timescales.
- We will give you a clear explanation of the nature of a visit that is made without a prior appointment.

### Telephone

- We will answer your calls within ten rings.
- We will greet and give our name and service area.
- We will converse through Gaelic or English in accordance with the customer request. A translation service will be made available as required for other languages.
- When we pass your enquiry to a specialist, we will pass on your personal details and the nature of your query so that you do not have to repeat it to another person.

### Complaints

If we fail you on any of the previous standards and you wish to make a complaint, you can expect:

- Respect for your opinions and empathy for your views.
- An acknowledgement receipt within 3 working days.
- A full reply in 10 working days, or details of progress and timescales for a further response.

You can help us by:

- Letting us know if you have any needs that may affect how we provide your service.
- Being patient and polite when you talk to us.
- Contacting us early if you need to rearrange an appointment.
- Telling us what you think about our service and how we are performing.



## TARGET OPERATING MODEL

The Comhairle's target operating model focuses on economies and efficiencies, people and processes, with a view to providing better public services. The key assumption being that efficiency savings can be realised by handling all initial enquiries, service requests, payments, appointments and bookings through a single customer service function.

In practice this means dealing with standard customer queries related to enquiries, payments, applications and bookings with one team and applying a standard set of rules to each query in order to guide customer service officers to the appropriate response. This is under-pinned by suitable IT systems for quick access to all relevant information and a reporting capability to provide meaningful management information on which to base future strategy.

Key elements are to:

- Simplify customer service processes by managing common transactions together;
- Standardise customer service processes across functions;
- Share the management of all front line activities across all channels; and
- Use CRM as a common platform across all channels Web, face to face, telephone and email.

As the target operating model is developed potential efficiencies are identified and within each service area. Unproductive or avoidable contact is reduced by ensuring accurate and up to date information is available on line. This is supported by web design that allows Customer Service Officers to quickly retrieve information and resolve enquiries without having to refer back to departments. Equally an interactive website enabling customers to pay, book, apply, check status, or request a service can significantly reduce the cost of service provision.

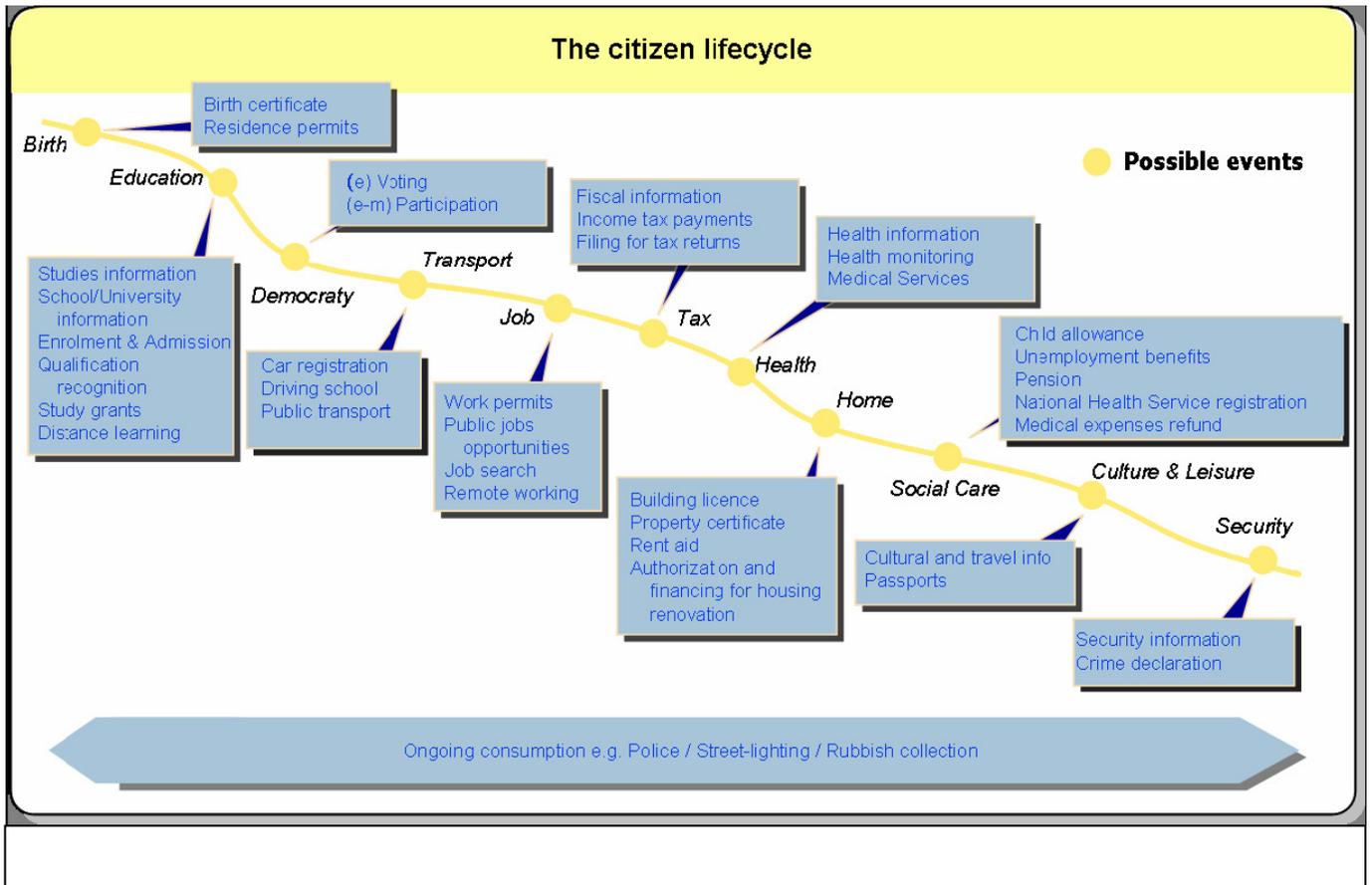
### Life Events

Whilst most customer requests tend to be for a specific type of service, the strategy recognises that people go through a series of 'life events', often requiring more than one service from the Comhairle.

The Tell Us Once service the Comhairle has now introduced is based on the principle of a single contact by a customer enabling a range of services to be advised of a change in circumstances.

The chart overleaf gives an indication of some of the key changes associated with life events.





It should not be necessary for customers to understand the complexities of the Comhairle’s internal workings and departmental structures.

**Integrated Services**

Public Sector Reform has potential to bring additional benefits that could build on existing joint arrangements such as IPS for Passport Administration; NHS WI for Patient Travel; and HHP for Out of Hours provision.

The Comhairle recognises that for some customers there will remain a need for face to face service provision and seeks to counter the costs of such provision by bringing services together in the one location.

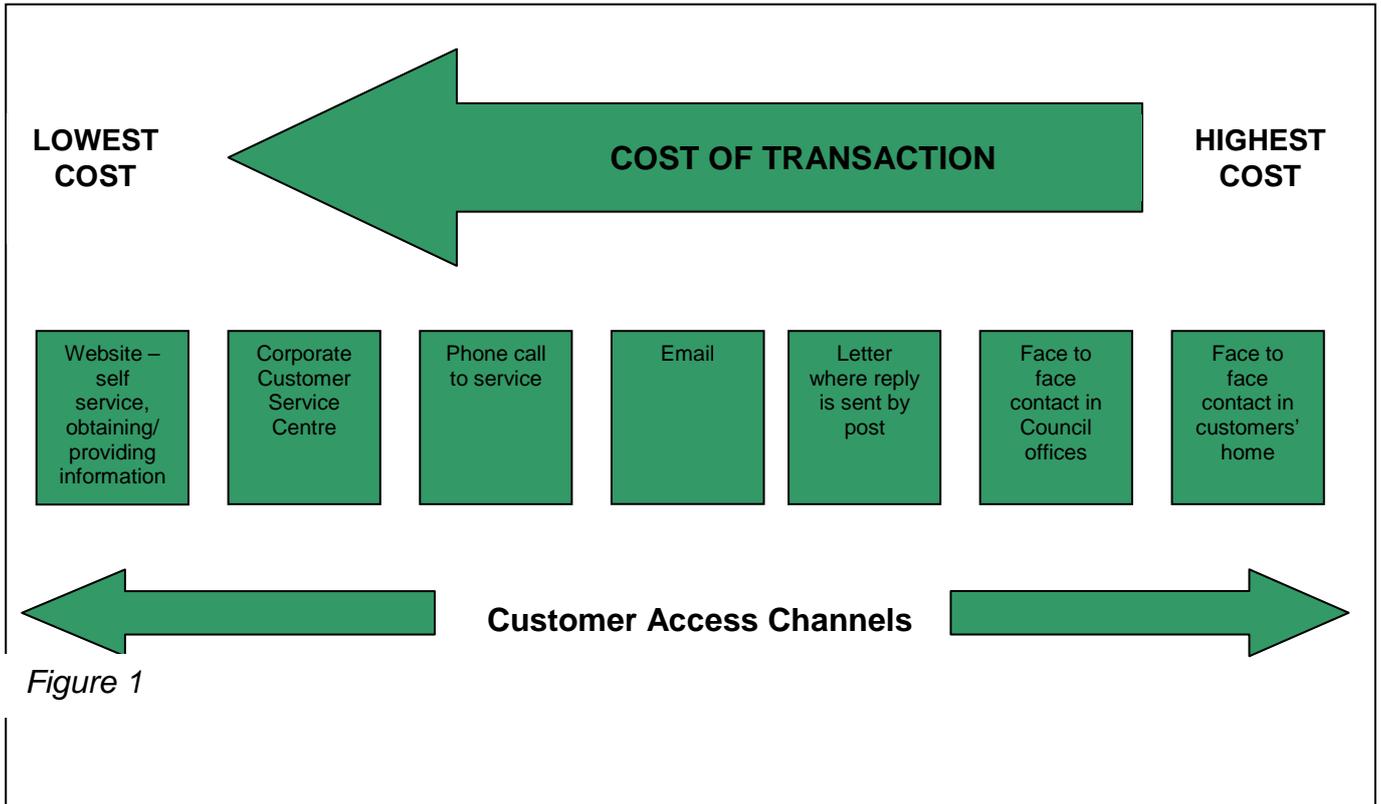
The implementation of a corporate reception facility at Sandwick Road has reduced the requirement for department specific receptions, freed up office space, reduced unplanned meetings and enabled us to provide a consistent and measurable approach to handling customer enquires.



**CHANNEL STRATEGY**

The chart below shows how the Comhairle provides its services through a range of channels which range in cost from web services to face to face contact.

Without compromising the quality of the service provided the Comhairle will seek to migrate customers to the most cost effective channel for the service they need.



**Face-to-Face Contact**

For some customers face-to-face contact is vital to ensure social inclusion for those who are unable to access other access channels.

The transfer of customer services in Stornoway to the Town Hall has proved popular with customers. The Comhairle will continue to expand the range of services available to customers centrally but will also actively encourage customers to use other access channels. An initiative is also underway that will enable customers to make payments at local outlets and post offices which should be both more convenient for customers and reduce face to face contact with the Comhairle.

Area offices also provide a face-to-face enquiry service to customers and the objective is to offer a one-stop shop approach in each location with geography being no barrier to the range and consistency of services being delivered. The implementation of the CRM system into each office is now informing service demand and building a picture of customer contact. It also enables work to be handled in any office, increasing service resilience and making the best use of resources.



## Telephone Contact

The telephone is the primary means by which customers currently contact the Comhairle. The Comhairle's use and advertising of telephone numbers has been rationalised. The volume of calls being handled by the Customer Service Team has increased in line with the strategy for customer services to handle elements of pay, book, apply, report and initial contact.

As well as providing an audit trail, enquiries are now routed to employees who are appropriately trained to deal with them, so that the caller can receive a fast, professional and informed response.

The next stage of the development will be to focus on reducing the transfer of calls and exploring the potential integration of the existing switchboard service and customer service telephone numbers.

All Comhairle literature and directory listings need to be presented in an easy to use format so that both internal and external users of the Comhairle's services get access to the services they need quickly and effectively.

## Self-Service

Encouraging greater use of online services is a key element of the Customer Service Strategy. This is both advantageous to the customer and reduces the cost of the Comhairle.

The web will be promoted as a key communication channel enabling public information to be accessible in a standard format and on a timely basis. Improved functionality and transactional capabilities will encourage customers to self serve, reducing front office costs associated with enquiry handling, bookings, payments and eligibility assessments.

The intranet is also the Customer Service Officers information source and the challenge is to encourage service areas to ensure web content is up to date, letting them know what customers are asking for and what has the potential for avoidable contact.

Officers will be trained to use the website to provide assisted access to customers in person or on the telephone.

Work is also ongoing that will enable electronic service requests to be logged directly into the CRM system and to be handled in accordance with the other access channels but at a significantly lower cost.



## CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The implementation of the CRM system has built up a picture of demand by location, channel and service area. Equally it has provided the necessary management information to monitor and manage performance more effectively. There will be continued focus on performance management within the Customer Service Team section and better measurement will drive the setting of realistic targets for service improvement.

A nationally accredited customer service training programme has been introduced, initially within customer services, but will be available to all Comhairle staff through the staff appraisal process.

The Comhairle is also participating in a standard approach to measuring customer satisfaction within local government – the Customer Satisfaction Measurement Tool (CSMT) - and this tool had already been used within Customer Services and some service specific areas.

The first survey undertaken in 2011 showed 93% satisfaction with the service provided by the Comhairle at the Town Hall customer access point.

The second Audit of Best Value in June 2011 found that most services perform well but that the Comhairle should do more to provide evidence of self-assessment in the form of customer satisfaction measurement.

To address this, the remit of the Customer Services Steering Group has been extended to oversee the implementation of an action plan relating to Customer Satisfaction Improvement.

