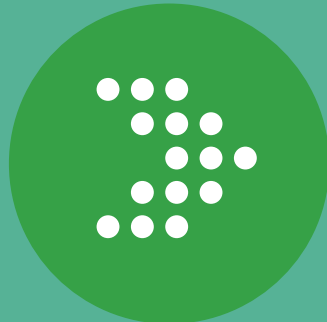




Tower Hamlets Customer Service Transformation Plan



Introduction

Welcome to the Tower Hamlets Customer Service Transformation Plan.

In the Tower Hamlets Strategic Plan 2018 to 2021 we set out our plan for achieving a fairer, cleaner and safer borough. The borough has come a long way in the last three years. We have had to change the way we do things and, in spite of the ongoing reduction in our budget, we have protected frontline services and continued to modernise and improve them. One of our three main strategic priorities is to be 'A dynamic outcomes-based council using digital innovation and partnership working to respond to the changing needs of our borough'.

This plan contributes to achieving this priority. It sets out how all parts of the council will provide efficient, effective and excellent customer services. Our aim is to make sure our customers, whether they are residents, visitors, or local businesses, have a positive experience.

We know that we need to change and improve our approach to customer service in Tower Hamlets. The way we currently provide customer services is largely based around having contact face-to-face and by phone, and there are too many follow-up calls and visits. Options for contacting us online are limited. Our customers also tell us that it is difficult to get through on the phone.

The current contact methods are not sustainable as they are inefficient, expensive, and do not offer good customer service.

We want everyone to understand and agree with our new approach to contact methods. That is why we have decided to develop our new approach in two phases.

This document sets out the first phase – producing a summary document setting out our new approach and main priorities. It also provides a series of actions we will take.

Further conversations with our customers, staff and councillors will take place in 2018/2019, helping us to further shape our plan. We will then produce a detailed plan and a programme of work to make sure that we keep to our promise to radically improve customer services in Tower Hamlets.



John Biggs
Mayor of Tower Hamlets



Councillor Amina Ali
Cabinet Member for Culture,
Arts and Brexit



Our main priorities

The Tower Hamlets Plan 2018 to 2023 is the shared vision between us and our partners, including the police and the NHS, for the future of our borough. It sets out the main aim of 'tackling inequality by building a strong, inclusive and fair borough' and the main priorities, which are:

- a better deal for children and young people;
- good jobs and employment;
- strong and safe communities; and
- better health and well-being.

Our Strategic Plan 2018 to 2021 sets out how we will achieve our long-term ambitions for the borough.

Our three priorities are as follows.

Priority 1: 'People are aspirational, independent and have equal access to opportunities'

Priority 2: 'A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in'

Priority 3: 'A dynamic, outcomes-based council using digital innovation and partnership working to respond to the changing needs of our borough'

This transformation plan is one of the ways that we are trying to achieve the strategic priorities set out in the Tower Hamlets Plan and the Strategic Plan.

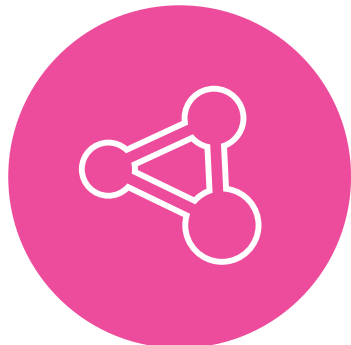
We are doing this by:

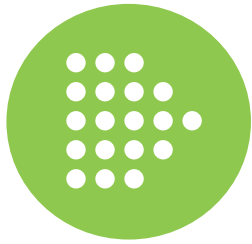
- continuing to take early action;
- using online methods to respond to the changing needs of our borough;
- looking for the best outcomes for our residents and customers.

Who are our customers?

Our customers are varied and have a range of needs. Everyone who lives, works, studies, visits or does business in Tower Hamlets will use a council service in some form, whether they are visiting one of the council's parks, applying for a parking permit or simply walking down one of our streets.

Some of these services, such as homelessness advice and support, are provided when people ask us for help. Others, such as child protection or enforcing planning rules, are part of our duties to look after people and the borough.





How we currently provide customer services

We receive over three million phone enquiries every year. We currently have over 30 external telephone numbers, one corporate contact centre and six mini contact centres. 54% of those who responded to the Annual Residents' Survey 2018 told us that it was difficult to get through on the phone.

Our website does not consistently allow people to apply simply and easily for all of our services. This means that people have to have a face-to-face meeting or phone us, which costs us much more money to handle, and also leads to dissatisfaction when customers have to wait to speak to someone.

Also, when customers give us their details they are entered onto different databases. This is very inefficient as it means customers have to provide their details each time they apply for a service. This means that it is hard

for us to plan services around our customers' needs. It also means that our customers can find it hard to make their way around council services because they can be dealing with a number of different services at the same time (council tax, housing benefits, housing, and early years' for example).

The most popular method of contact is currently by phone. In 2017, 78% of people surveyed contacted the council by phone. We also know that many of our residents have access to the internet and can use online self-service. The Annual Residents' Survey 2018 found that:

- **92% of residents have access to the internet;**
- **69% of residents browse the internet for information about goods and services;**
- **53% of residents shop online; and**
- **65% of residents use internet banking.**

However:

- **only 41% of those with internet access pay for council services online.**

Face-to-face contact is the most expensive form of customer contact, costing approximately £10 for each contact. Contact by phone and online is considerably cheaper. Contact by phone costs us approximately £6 for each call. The Government estimates that online contact is generally 20 times cheaper than face-to-face contact. The Society for IT practitioners in the public sector estimates that the cost of each contact made online is between 8p and 19p, but this varies depending on what the contact is about. So it would be much cheaper and more efficient if more of our customers contacted us online.

Our vision for the future

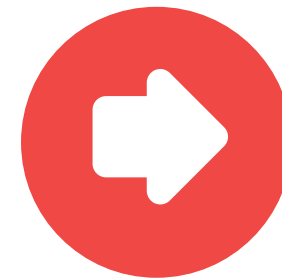
Our vision for the future of customer services in Tower Hamlets is that

We will give our customers the best customer service we can – online, by phone and face-to-face.

We will deliver our vision through being:

- **effective;**
- **efficient; and**
- **excellent.**

Our priorities



What we want to achieve

Priority 1: Be effective Make a real difference to our customers' lives

We want to make it easier for people to contact us online. Helping our residents to become confident dealing with us online helps them to become more independent financially, socially and practically. This will help them in other areas of their lives, such as getting information about jobs, or getting a better deal from their energy provider.

However, Tower Hamlets has high levels of deprivation, and many of our residents may not have the skills or confidence to go online.

- **We are the 10th most deprived local authority in England.**
- **4 in 10 households live below the UK poverty line and 15% of households have a person under 18 who is in work.**
- **Around one in five residents earn below the London Living Wage.**

The borough's resources are increasingly stretched and we want to encourage our residents to become more able to help themselves. Our approach to customer service will take account of our residents' needs. People will be supported in different ways. For example, for those who lack confidence or need help going online, assisted self-service will be available in our Idea Stores.

We will support more vulnerable residents through early action to make sure that services and resources are provided where they are most needed and prevent problems becoming bigger and more costly over time.

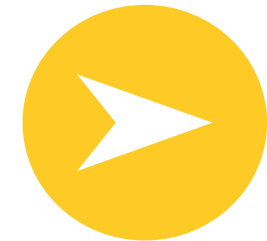
This will include helping:

- **vulnerable children and families (through our Early Help hub);**
- **households at risk of becoming homeless (through our homelessness prevention services);**
- **older people (through identifying support needs early on); and**
- **people identified as being at**

risk of falling into debt (through our Tackling Poverty service).

What will have changed in four years' time

- **Our customers are more independent.**
- **Our customers are confident dealing with us online.**
- **Our approach to customer service has improved the lives of those customers who need us the most.**



Priority 2: Be efficient Provide easy ways to get things done

Online services will become the main way for our customers to contact and deal with us. By making it easy for customers to get access to and pay for services online, and for those services to respond quickly, we will reduce the need for face-to-face contact for simple enquiries.

We believe that by making these services easier and more convenient to use, the majority of customers will want to use online options instead of other methods of contact. This will account for around 80% of customer contacts in future, helping to reduce our costs.

We will help our customers by providing more information online and directing them to relevant services, so reducing the need to contact us unnecessarily. Our aim is to complete enquiries in one contact. If we are unable to, we will do our best to provide our customers with regular updates of our progress.

We will provide assisted online services for those who need support (for example, people with disabilities or those whose first language is not English). This will include information in a range of formats that customers find useful, including video and webchat.

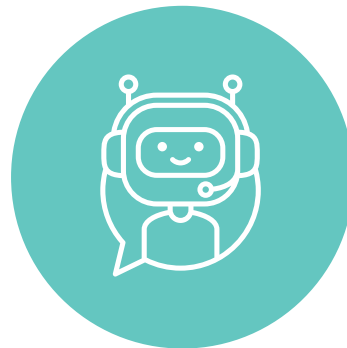
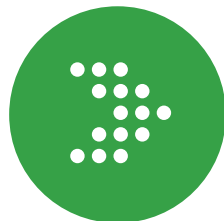
In certain areas, for example children's support services, we will look into early involvement,

as these services can prevent more serious problems arising in the future. By acting early we can help our customers to avoid becoming homeless, or having children taken into care. It will also help to reduce pressures on high-cost services.

At the heart of this new way of working will be gathering and assessing information from our systems and customers. We will monitor how things are working and review our approach to achieve the best ways of working. This will help us provide better services while also making the best use of our resources, which should result in savings of over £2 million between 2017 and 2021 whilst continuing to provide services.

What will have changed in four years' time

- **Our customers use the right contact method to meet their need and their circumstances.**
- **We manage demand based on customer feedback.**
- **We avoid unnecessary contact and reduce our costs.**



Priority 3: Be excellent Learn and improve, in partnership with our customers

Every customer should feel that they have received excellent customer service when dealing with us.

Customers should be able to easily connect with us whenever they want. In most cases we should be able to meet their needs first time around.

To do this we will need to work with our customers to get feedback, as well as analysing the information provided by people using our services.

We will have well-trained, skilled staff who can deal with most enquiries when customers first contact us, and who demonstrate our values.

We will make sure all our communications with customers are in plain English and are easy to understand.

In every case we should follow our Customer Promise to provide the most professional levels of service. Our online services will:

- be designed with users in mind;
- be legible and as easy as possible to use;
- be able to be used from mobile devices;
- provide information simply and clearly, directing customers to other services where appropriate;
- allow customers to report problems and apply for services; and
- encourage customers to contact us and apply for services quickly and easily online.

We have developed the following promises to set out what our customers can expect from us.

- We will be helpful, caring and responsive to your needs, always aiming to get it right first time.
- If things go wrong, we will take responsibility and put them right.
- We will listen to and use your feedback to improve our services.
- We will use plain English in our communications with you.
- We will respond quickly and keep you informed.
- We will provide easy and

convenient online services which you choose to use instead of other ways of contacting us.

- We will help you get access to our services, if you need help.
- We will protect your personal information and keep it secure.

For us to keep these promises, we need you to do the following.

- Give us the right information at the right time.
- Tell us when something goes wrong so we can put it right.
- Use our online services where possible so that we can continue to help those most in need.
- Treat us politely and with respect.

What will have changed in four years' time

- Our customers feel they have received excellent customer service.
- Our workforce has the right skills and resources to provide excellent customer service.
- We use customer feedback to learn and improve.





How we are going to get there

We have developed a new approach to customer service. This will apply to the whole council and all our customer services will follow it. We will roll this out in stages.

The new approach is based on the following principles.

- **Our services will automatically be available online.**
- **We will help our customers to use the most effective way of contacting us, according to their needs, and will encourage self-service.**
- **We will use customer feedback to design, target and build services around our customers' needs.**
- **We will make sure that online payment and services are safe to use and secure.**
- **Customer information will be secure and protected.**

Our new approach is based on the three main ways our customers contact us.



Online

Online will become the main way for our customers to contact us. We will be 'digital by default' (which means that this will generally be the main way that people contact or do business with us for straightforward matters), and this will be reflected on our website.

Online services will be used for:

- **simple enquiries or straightforward requests such as booking a service or paying for something (tier-1 services); and**
- **more complex enquiries which require some more detailed knowledge of services, or to carry out simple assessments (tier-2 services).**

Phone

The phone will still be an important way for customers to contact us. We will make it far easier to contact us by developing a contact centre with just one phone number for all enquiries.

Contact by phone will be available for both tier-1 and tier-2 services. As technology develops, contact by phone may also be available for tier-3 services (specialist services or complex assessments such as homelessness assessments, planning enquiries, and social services assessments) in the future.

Face-to-face

Tier-1 services

There will still be a need for face-to-face customer service, particularly for our more vulnerable residents, and for services that cannot be applied for or provided online. We will provide face-to-face contact right across the borough at our local Idea Stores.

Staff at our Idea Stores will provide 'assisted self-service' (helping people complete simple transactions online) and provide simple advice and information about our services and other local services.

The emphasis in Idea Stores will be on staff being there to help customers to help themselves, so increasing their independence.

Tier-3 services

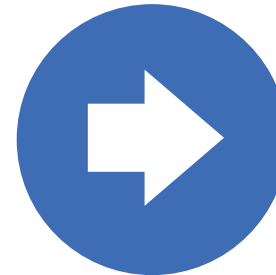
In future we will move a number of our tier-3 services into the new town hall to make them more accessible to customers, and some services can be provided on a drop-in basis at more locations across the borough.

We will also look into bringing services together under one roof, as we are doing in the new town hall, to give people the chance to get several things done in one place. This could include services provided by the police and the NHS.

How we will make sure we achieve our aims

We will do the following to make sure that we achieve what we have promised in this plan.

- **Take the important actions set out at the end of this document.**
- **Develop an implementation plan setting out more detailed steps for putting our actions into practice, including communicating our customer standards to staff and residents, and creating new ways of measuring the performance of our customer services.**
- **Regularly monitor our performance against the implementation plan.**



Important actions

The important actions necessary for us to achieve our Customer Service Transformation Plan are set out below.

Action	Who is responsible	Date completed
Develop the Target Operating Model, which will represent how we will provide more efficient and effective customer services to residents.	Divisional Director Customer Services	Autumn 2018
<p>Digitalise ways for people to 'ask', 'apply', 'report', 'tell' and 'book'. This applies to those service areas which have high levels of enquiries and are not complex (tier-1 and tier-2 services), such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parking; • benefits; • environmental; and • registrars. 	Divisional Director Customer Services	Summer 2019
<p>Digitalise end-to-end processes for those service areas which have high levels of enquiries and are very complex (tier-3 services), such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • housing and planning; • adults' services; • children's services; and • culture. 	Divisional Director Customer Services	March 2020
Digital plan: Agree the process for choosing which technologies and systems we will invest in, and where those investments will go.	Divisional Director Customer Services	February 2019
Transforming the website: Build and develop a new digital platform for tier-1 and tier-2 services, which allows residents to deal with us online from start to finish.	Divisional Director Customer Services	Summer 2019

Action	Who is responsible	Date completed
Develop our central contact centre and only have one phone number, making it easier for customers to contact us.	Divisional Director Customer Services	Spring 2019
Offer face-to-face contact and help with online services by having council staff at the five Idea Stores.	Divisional Director Customer Services	Summer 2019
Develop a staff-training programme and support our cultural change programme.	Divisional Director for Customer Services and the Divisional Director for Human Resources	Ongoing
Create a communications (gold) campaign for the Customer Service Improvement Plan and Improving Digital Services Plan. Tell residents about the changes and outcomes that will be delivered through the Customer Transformation plan.	Divisional Director Customer Services	Spring 2019
Develop a clear outcome-based performance framework to measure what difference we are making to our customers.	Divisional Director Customer Services	December 2018
Develop a customer panel to work with our residents on customer products and services.	Divisional Director Customer Services	March 2019
Plan and have conversations with customers, staff and councillors on how to improve customer services in Tower Hamlets.	Divisional Director Customer Services	Ongoing
<p>Develop a detailed plan for putting the Customer Service Transformation Plan into practice, which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying out and reviewing an equalities assessment; • communicating customer standards to staff and residents; and • creating new ways of measuring the performance of our customer services. 	Corporate Director for Human Resources and the Divisional Director for Customer Services	Spring 2019