

Babergh & Mid Suffolk

District Councils

# CUSTOMER STRATEGY



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Principles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Customer Strategy Aims</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Customer Insight &amp; Understanding</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Customer Access</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Customer Experience</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Our Customer Culture</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Digital Requirements</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>17</b>

# Introduction

The Councils Joint Strategic Plan (2016 – 2020) sets out how the Council’s aim to deliver enduring and positive changes for our many and diverse communities and businesses.

The plan reshapes our role ensuring we deliver good quality services but also encourages and empowers communities, making it easier for them to do more for themselves.

In order to deliver our strategic outcomes we need an enabled and efficient organisation – the right people, doing the right things, in the right way, at the right time, for the right reasons.

In 2016 we set out in a Council report titled “Future Model for public access including accommodation”, a public access strategy that took a whole system approach. The basis for the report still holds firm in the aim; to support collaborative work with partners and communities to do more where they can and wish to, so we can focus on our more vulnerable customers or those with more complex needs. Coupled with transforming services to be more efficient and reduce cost, the report specifically sought agreement on this approach as well as recommending accommodation options. The paper focused on five key access channels, face to face, telephone, email, online digital services, webchat/SMS, and stated the intent to work more collaboratively in place based teams to support our most vulnerable customers.

Having now moved into our new HQ location, opened two customer access points (one in each district), implemented a new call centre telephony system and website, now is an opportune moment to update and refresh our customer access strategy.

The focus and underlying aim is to put the customer at the heart of our organisation. By doing so, we will better understand and be able to deliver their needs. This refreshed Customer Strategy will outline our direction over the next 3 years across 4 main themes supported by some underlying principles. We will state where we will improve and transform our services, ensuring our customers can gain information and access to our services through a variety of channels, and how we will embed in our organisational culture a customer centred approach.



**Cllr Derek Davis**

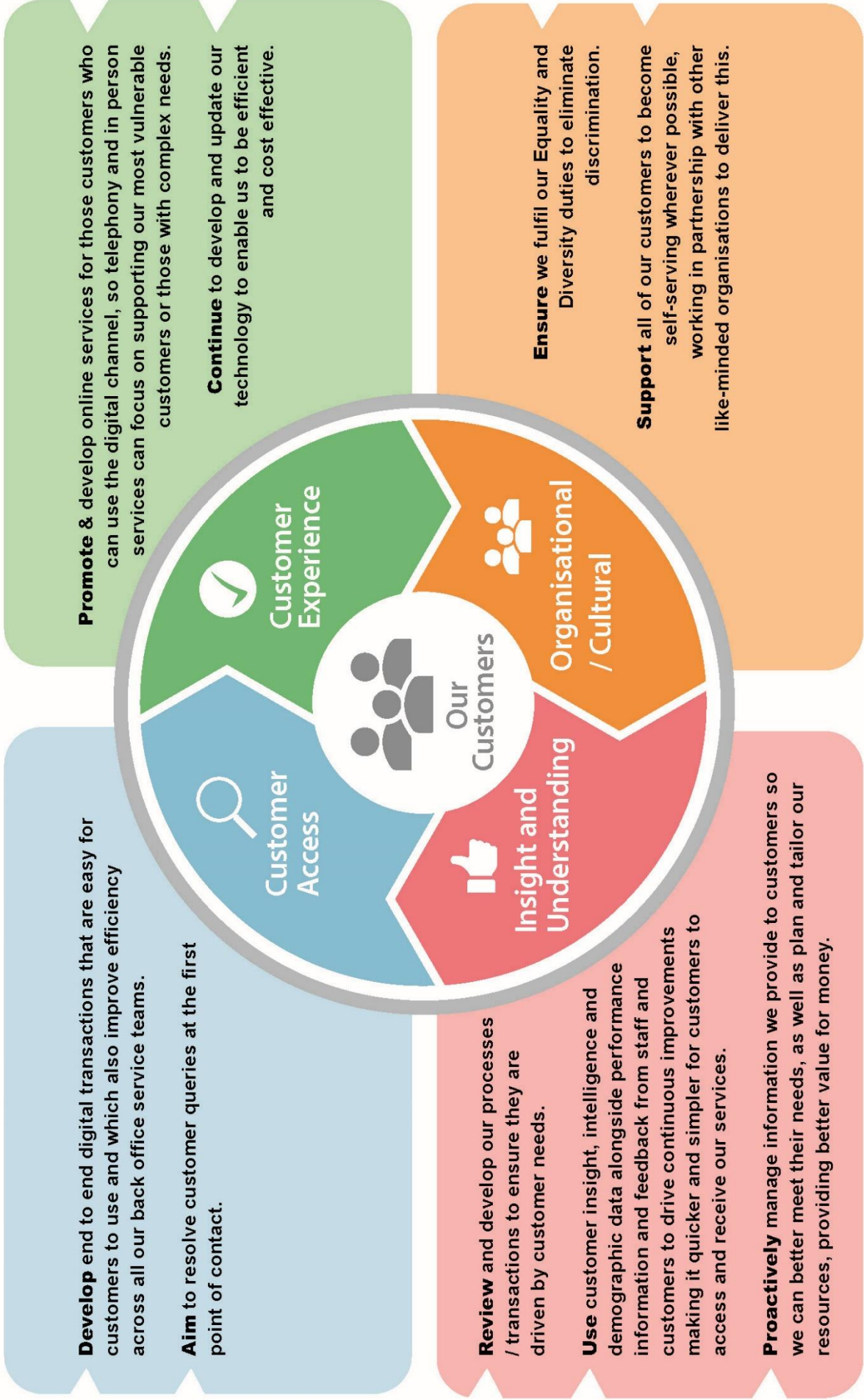
Cabinet Member for  
Organisational Delivery  
Babergh District Council



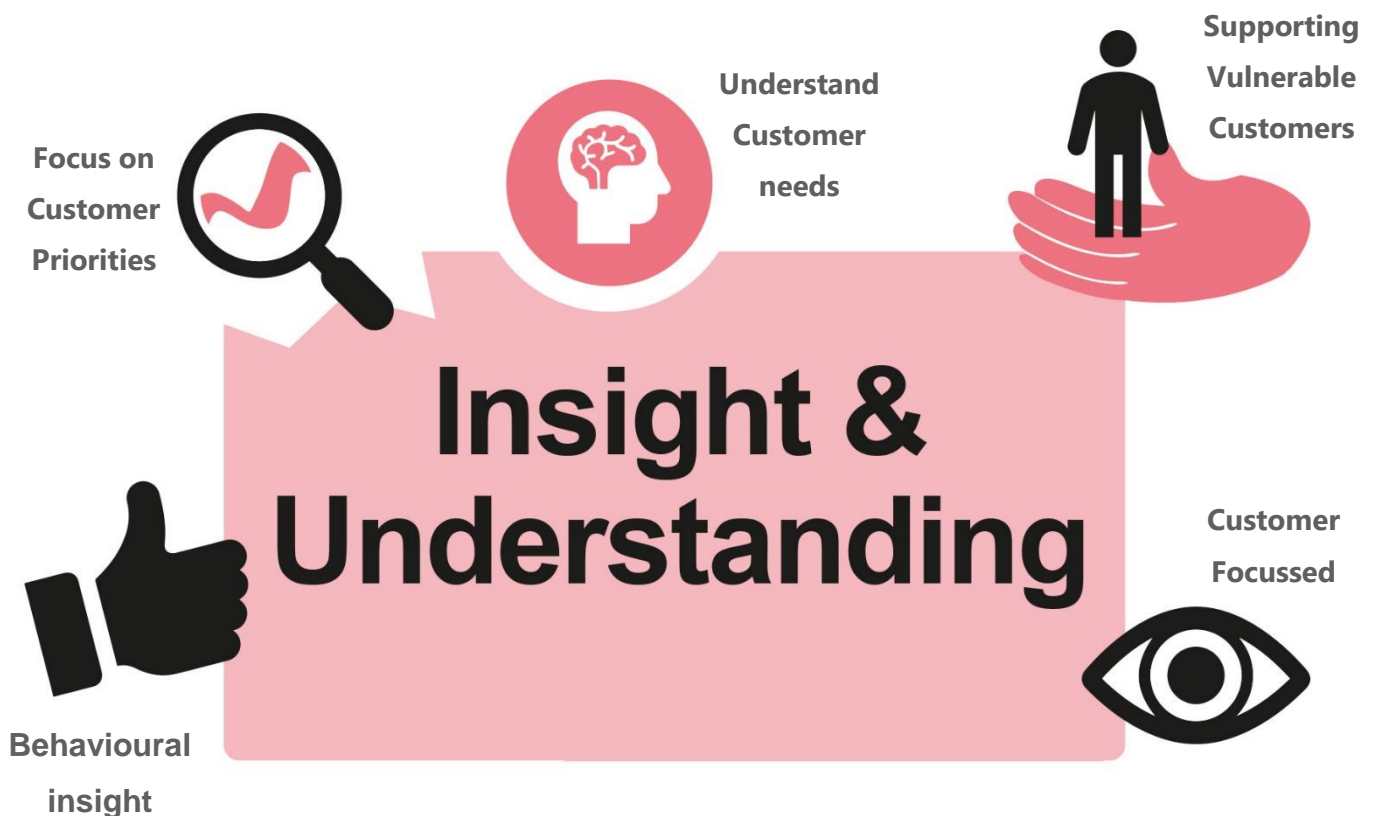
**Cllr Suzie Morley**

Lead Member for  
Customer Services  
Mid Suffolk District Council

# Principles of the strategy:



## Our Customer Strategy Aims:



### Insight and Understanding

- **Understand the needs of our customers**

Our Councils have a wide variety and breadth of customers, including residents, businesses, and visitors.

We therefore need to ensure we use customer insight and evidence to inform our decision making when providing customer focused solutions. External data sources can help us understand our customers in more depth, helping us communicate in a relevant way and understanding the channels they are most likely to use, which in turn will help us understand their barriers to going online and what changes we can make to support them.



We also hold a plethora of rich information from our own data sources such as compliments and complaints data; we will record this in a way which is easy to interrogate to provide insight and trends which can form a continual cycle of feedback and improvement.

- **Understand the needs of our more vulnerable customers**

Some of our customers have more complex needs; we need to be able to understand the barriers they experience trying to access our services. We can then tailor how we provide services through the most appropriate channels to support our more vulnerable customers. Our more traditional telephony and in person service provision needs to be equipped to particularly support them.

- **Focus on customer priorities**

Fundamentally we need to improve our understanding of what our customers need, and allocate our resources and effort accordingly. We will use data routinely (e.g. web analytics, telephony and in person visitor information) to understand our customer queries, and use this to plan process reviews and improvements. We will also seek more direct feedback through the use of customer forums/focus groups, and user testing.



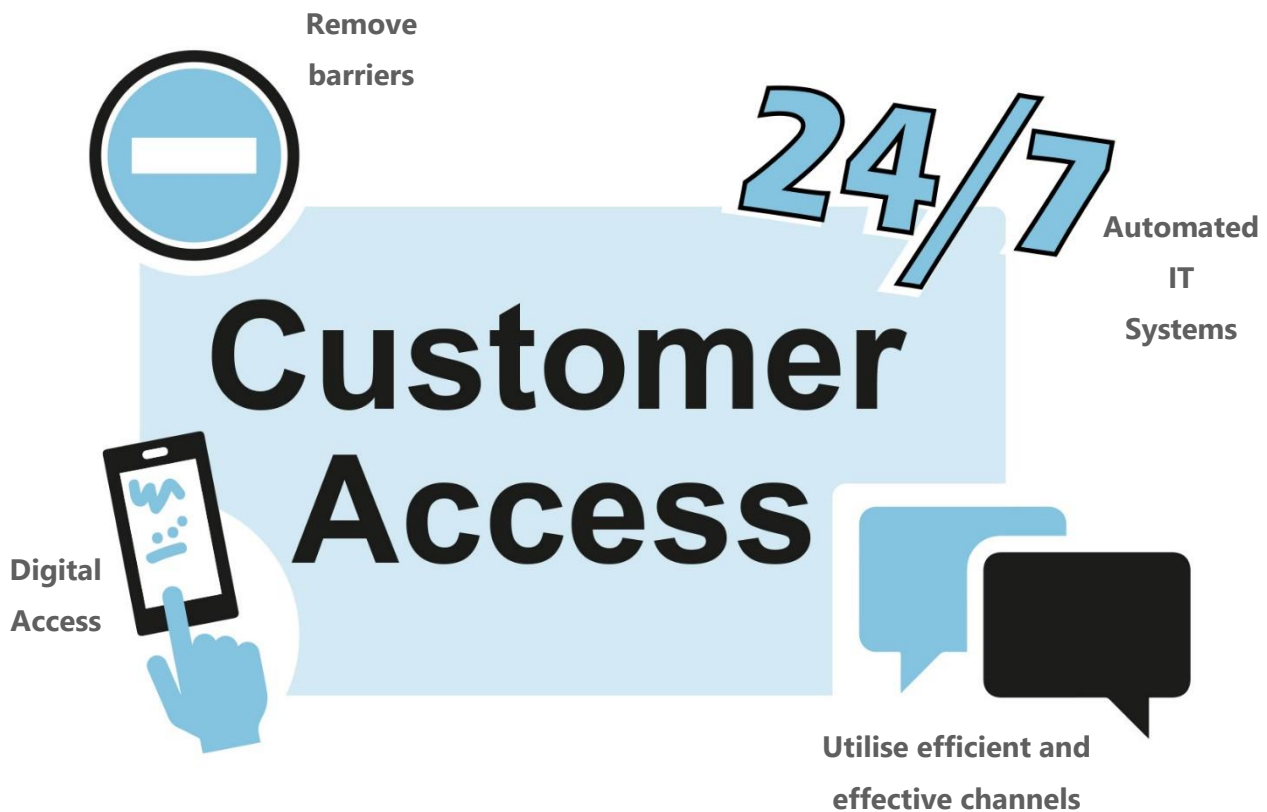
- **Review processes from customers perspective**

When fundamentally reviewing our processes, we need to ensure this is from a customer first perspective, and applying the principles outlined above. Our customer service team often operates with little connection to all other service teams, and can feel disparate and isolated. We will change these relationships so all teams understand the value of proactively working with our customer service team to improve processes, which in turn will support customer services provide support to our most vulnerable customers.

- **Using behavioural insights**

There are a variety of ways in which customers behaviours can be influenced; ranging from the more subtle strategies of encouraging and incentivising by providing a 'guiding hand', through to more direct approaches by restricting choice. As part of any changes we make to service processes we will support and encourage service teams to consider different approaches, such as behaviour change or nudge theory approach. These approaches are not about imposing penalties, but encouraging people to make small changes, which will enable customers to make better choices for themselves and help us provide cost-effective services.





## Customer Access

- **Utilise most efficient and effective channels**

Since 2016 we have seen fundamental changes to our core access channels; including a dedicated customer service telephony number, provided by a new telephony system, a single rationalised website, and in-person services provided from one location in each district. Technology is changing rapidly, and what was 'emerging' is now becoming common place. For example web chat has developed significantly with the introduction of a more automated response in the form of chat bots, which can provide instant answers to questions on websites as well as in our homes. We will focus on emerging technologies and move away from inefficient channels such as email, which is difficult to automate, causes duplication and provides inconsistent data.

We will also explore opportunities to work in partnership with existing organisations to provide self-service facilities including the provision of scanning information. Initial discussions have been held with Suffolk Libraries



to pilot an approach whereby self service facilities could be provided from Library locations where a customer need has been identified. In tandem with the provision of self service facilities we would also provide a form of assisted support to work with customers and organisations across our communities to improve our customer's access to digital skills.

- **Digital Services**

There is much debate surrounding the meaning of the terms 'digital by default' and 'digital by design'. Neither mean simply replacing traditional channels with just digital ones at the exclusion of certain customer groups. Irrespective of the terminology used we will; seek to understand which customers are not online and the barriers to accessing our services, improve online services so the customer has a reason to want to interact with us in a digital way, and to also improve our staffs digital knowledge and skills, so they can truly be ambassadors for our digital services.

- **Aim to resolve at first point of contact**

Customers do not want to be handed off from one officer to another in order for their enquiry to be resolved. Our ethos throughout the organisation will be to avoid duplicate handling and to develop processes that are so simple, that irrespective of whether the customer is online, on the phone or visiting in person, it is the same process accessed, primarily digitally through our website.



We will review, and develop new processes, focused on reducing wasteful activities whilst improving customer satisfaction and providing solutions that are cost effective. Our processes will also make best use of technology and our data, enabling us to answer our customer enquiries at the earliest opportunity. We will build a business case to identify associated costs and benefits of using an 'enterprise' system. An 'enterprise' system could form the foundation of a customer record management database, but provides the

potential to expand and improve; our document and information workflows, our reporting and data analytics information, facilitate cross organisational working and improve communication and collaboration across different teams,

We will also improve the skills and knowledge of our customer service staff, so that they can resolve and add value when a customer contacts us, rather than simply pushing information from one team to another. By developing these areas we will improve customer satisfaction levels as well as create efficiencies.

- **Automate as much as possible to provide 24/7 services**

There are a whole host of different IT systems used across the Councils to deliver the wide variety of services we offer. Single customer transactions can touch on multiple IT systems; we must ensure that where possible these are joined up, and information is passed seamlessly between them to avoid re-keying of data. We will also look at opportunities as IT contracts expire, to review our system requirements in line with our customer's needs, and rationalise IT systems where possible.



## Customer Experience

- **Best Practice**

We will look to develop our customer services in line with best practice, not just benchmarking against Local Authorities but also across the private sector. We will work in partnership particularly with other Suffolk authorities to share knowledge and explore opportunities to work more closely together for the benefit of all our customers.



- **Business Process Improvement**

We will take a systematic approach to cataloguing our business processes and to review them in line with the principles and aims of this strategy. This will enable us to focus on our customer priorities and report and manage performance transparently.

- **Organisational Values**

The Senior Leadership Team has empowered a team of colleagues to start work on developing our organisational values. We will ensure that we tie together any emerging customer focussed values with our Customer Strategy. Following this work we will produce a customer commitment or charter which will clearly set out for customers what they can expect from us as an organisation when they need to contact or access our services.

Where customers come into contact with our dedicated Customer Service team we will look to introduce a simple measure of satisfaction, which in line with other corporate measures of satisfaction and engagement will help us identify areas to improve upon.

- **Complaints**

We will be improving our process to make it much easier to analyse the type and frequency of complaints as well as to capture lessons learned which can be more easily shared across the organisation.



## Organisational / Cultural

- **People development – customer focussed and digitally enabled**

Our people are the Councils most valuable asset. In order for our people to think customer first we will embed a culture of listening and engagement using a range of communication and engagement tools including social media. Our ethos of resolution at first point of contact will empower everyone to care and take an active interest in developing ideas and solutions that will make a positive difference to our customers and us.

To be truly customer focussed we must invest in our people from the inception of any recruitment, and throughout their time working for us. Our expectations, to provide high quality customer service skills including being able to promote and use digital services will be reflected in the training and development we provide as well as coaching and objective settings.

- **Partnership Working**

We will work closer with both internal and external teams and organisations to make the best use of our resources to further our strategic aims. We will continue to develop the links we have with our Suffolk, County, District and Town and Parish Councils. We will work with service teams to understand their specific customer service requirements where they are not currently part of the corporate customer service team, so we can bring about a consistent approach to customer service across the organisation. We will also take a collaborative approach to increase our districts digital skills, by taking advantage of existing digital partnerships as well as actively seeking new ones.

- **Achieving excellence**

We have undertaken a programme of work to introduce a new telephony system (Genesys telephony system) as well as update our website and electronic forms package. Monitoring performance across all of our access channels is crucial to be able to assess the impact we are having, moving from our most expensive contact methods to more cost effective contact methods, for the benefit of the customer and us, commonly referred to as channel shift. We will therefore provide regular performance information which will illustrate our move from our most expensive channels to our most efficient channels, also highlighting a better understanding of our customer requirements and how we can tailor access accordingly.



- **Customer first service delivery versus silo working**

Our customers do not distinguish between service teams or officers whom work within our organisation. We are simply 'the Councils' and as such the way we work, handling customer enquiries should reflect the approach and expectations our customers have.

Our customer service officers will consistently spend time liaising, integrating and building relationships with back office service teams to break down traditional silo working barriers. This will then enable the Customer Services team to better influence and play a proactive role informing and re-designing business processes from a customer perspective in partnership with other teams

## Digital Agenda

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils operate a collaborative agreement with Suffolk County Council to provide IT that supports the needs of our users. We share a common intention to support joint public sector working as well as recognition that IT should support fundamental business transformation.

We both aspire to “become modern, information orientated organisations maximising the benefits for the people of Suffolk from the use of technology”. In order to enable IT to support our customer first approach we will continue to work in collaboration with SCC IT with respect to the following:



**Cloud:** Secure, resilient, and agile infrastructure platforms on which to run systems and applications



**Mobility:** New ways of working matched with role based work styles.  
Ability to capture data more efficiently to drive quality and productivity



**Big Data:** Ability to integrate disparate lines of business system data, into holistic information records, that provide real insight to inform intelligent and effective decision making. Ability to predictively model service demand based upon different variables



**Social:** Harnessing new collaboration and communication channels to drive social productivity and connected experiences between both colleagues internally and also with partner organisations and customers.

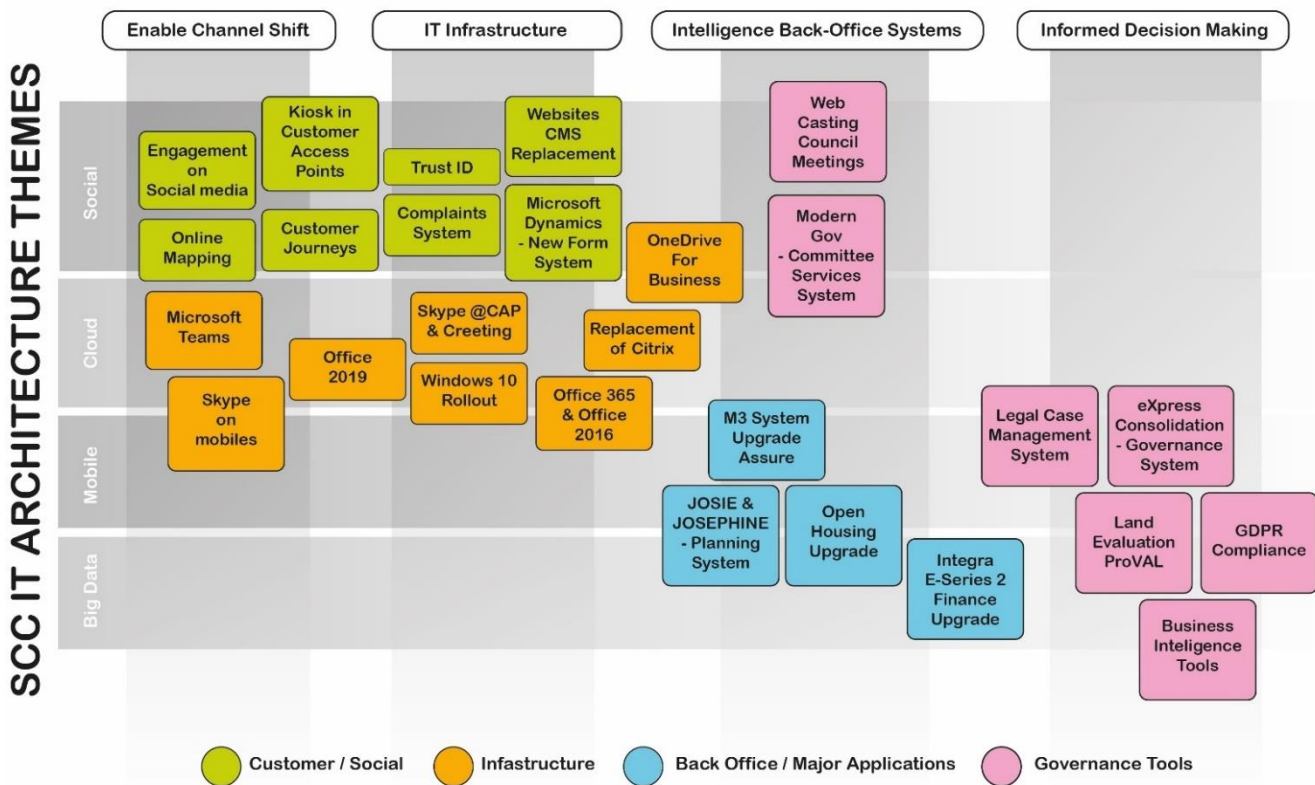


Particularly over the last 2/3 years in preparation for the All Together programme of work culminating in the move to Endeavour House and a more agile work force, we have made progress across the following areas:

- Improved and consolidated website with less pages for customers to navigate.
- Single Call Centre telephony system, able to channel customers to speak with advisors in a quicker more efficient way.
- Integrated Planning, Building Control and Enforcement system allowing for more efficient interrogation and management of data.
- Exacom system which enables our customers to view online how the Community Infrastructure Levy is spent, enabling greater transparency and engagement.
- Introduction of case management tools to our Shared Legal Services and Modern.Gov system which ensure information is stored routinely, it is more accessible and therefore promotes informed decision making.



# BMSDCs DIGITAL REQUIREMENTS



Above are some of the projects we will progress that directly link to our customers and organisations digital requirements of; enabling channel shift, providing modern and sound IT infrastructure, optimising and keeping up to date our intelligent back-office systems as well as ensuring our IT systems and frameworks support informed decision making.

In order for these projects to fundamentally improve the ways in which we work, we are introducing a new governance structure which will facilitate a more joined up approach to project management and information sharing. We have created a strategic and operational group consisting of officers across both Suffolk County IT and Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils whom will meet regularly to plan, share and monitor progress across a range of IT projects and initiatives which will engender transparency and wider benefits realisation across the organisation.

Working towards a more digitally enabled workforce, we will also develop a framework for the roll out of new technological changes, so that everyone has the opportunity to learn, benefit and work in new ways from the investment we make in new and updated IT.

## Executive Summary

The overriding purpose of the refreshed Customer Strategy is to put the customer at the heart of our Councils, creating a culture and environment whereby our people feel empowered, and have the necessary skills, tools, and techniques to take responsibility for providing positive experiences for our customers.

As a Local Authority we recognise the range of diverse services we provide. Some of which are statutory services, some of which are focused on particular groups e.g. Housing Tenants, others where individuals can express a choice of whom to contract a service from e.g. Building Control. We acknowledge the debate around the use of the term 'customer' as opposed to various alternatives such as citizen or resident. An important element of this Strategy is continuing to confirm our priority, of understanding the needs of a wide range of groups and individuals, and appreciating that they will be different, depending on a range of factors including the types of services they need or would like to access.

In this sense our use of the term 'customer' helps us maintain a level of consistency and common understanding; in that irrespective of the services provided, our ethos is to provide positive experiences and relationships with high levels of satisfaction.

Our Customer Strategy principles and the four themes within it:

**Insight/Understanding, Access, Experience** and **Culture** demonstrate our commitment to appreciating the diverse needs of our customers, providing appropriate solutions, delivering high quality services based on customer needs and creating an organisation and culture that can deliver a customer-centric approach.

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