

Customer Experience strategy 2022 – 2026

Foreword by Peter Taylor, Elected Mayor of Watford

Every interaction will be a positive experience: better, faster, simpler

I'm delighted to introduce our new Customer Experience Strategy 2022-26. At its heart, the strategy is about making sure everyone who interacts with the council feels listened to and understood. We know this is ambitious but we are a council that strives to deliver the best for our vibrant and diverse community, whether you are a resident, business or visitor to our wonderful town.

Through this strategy, we are setting out a promise to all our customers. We are committed to much more than just making it faster and simpler for people to connect with us at the time and place they choose – important as this is. Outstanding customer experience is about getting our attitude and approach right so people are the driving force behind everything we do, from how we design services to how we respond to your feedback.

We don't have a 'one size fits all' for our customers. Our strategy reflects how we will adapt to your needs, not limiting how people interact with us but finding the best way that works for you. Delivering the strategy means getting things right first time, every time when you get in touch with the council. At Watford, we see this as everyone's job.

Peter Taylor

What does 'customer experience' mean?

Each time a customer uses one of our services, it contributes to how they feel about us as a service provider. But it's not just the interaction itself that leaves an impression on our customers; their experience before and after contact with the council can also contribute to their overall customer experience.

One negative interaction with a customer can have an impact on their overall impression of the council. Identifying these incidents and targeting improvements is key to enhancing our services and overall customer experience.

Our commitment is to work continuously to understand the experiences of our customers, in order to help us to identify how we can improve the services we provide.

Who are our customers?

For the purpose of this strategy customers are defined as anyone who lives, works or visits the Watford Borough Council area, internal staff and councillors.

People are at the heart of everything we do

Watford Borough Council provides over 400 different services to our residents, businesses and visitors. It's important to us to deliver these services in the way our customers need, and to the standards they expect, and the standards we expect of ourselves. People are at the heart of everything we do: every policy we write, every action plan we put forward, and every service we introduce, is designed and delivered to improve life in Watford.

Our aim is to make our services as simple, convenient and responsive as possible. Where we can, and if appropriate, we will make the best use of new technology to help us deliver more efficient and cost-effective solutions, allowing us to focus even more on people with complex needs who may need our additional time and support.

To ensure that we are delivering services that meet everyone's expectations, we will continually evaluate our performance across all our customer-facing teams and listen to customer and staff feedback to improve our services.

This strategy sets out our vision of how we will:

- Provide the best-possible customer experience for the people who live and work in Watford, and for those we welcome to our town.
- Design and deliver services that meet our customers' needs and make best use of technology to deliver our services as efficiently and cost effectively as possible.
- Use customer insight and data to identify and deliver ongoing improvements to our services.
- Enable and empower staff to provide excellent customer service.

The strategy is aligned with our overall Council Plan 2022-26, an ambitious roadmap for our future that sets out the priorities and ambitions for the council over the next four years, it details the ambitions of the council to deliver excellent customer experiences to our residents, businesses and visitors alike.

Our Council Plan 2022-26 focuses on four key themes:



To underpin the delivery of our Council Plan, the associated Delivery Plan sets out our priority areas for the next two years.

The ones that relate to customer experience are:

1. Provide an excellent customer experience for everyone who engages with the council

We will prepare and deliver a new Customer Experience Strategy to transform how we engage with our customers over the next four years, delivering a real step change across all our services, embracing innovation and embedding a first class experience our customers will value.

2. Tackle digital isolation so residents can effectively engage using new technology

We will work with our partners, volunteers and community groups to support residents who do not have access to technology, or do not currently have the skills to use IT, so that they have the same opportunities as others in our town.

Our aims

Our Strategy is focused around four key aims.



1. Services designed with people at the heart of everything we do

We will design and deliver services with our customers in mind, using customer insight and feedback to design and improve our services. We will develop our digital channels to allow customers more flexible access to our services, and ensure they are simple and easy to use.

We will:

- Engage with the community for feedback, and use these insights to shape how we design and improve our services.
- Design our services from end-to-end, to be as efficient as possible, working on a 'right-first-time' principle and keeping customers informed on the progress of their enquiries.
- Ensure all our services are accessible and take into account customers' diverse needs.
- Work with our partners across Watford and Hertfordshire to help individuals and families within Watford impacted by digital isolation
- Increase and improve our digital offering for customers and encourage customers to use digital channels in the first instance.
- Promote the uptake of paper-free initiatives, such as e-billing and resident parking permits, to reduce our impact on the environment.

2. Our people

We will make sure that everyone working for the council, our partners and suppliers, understand their role at every stage of the customer journey and how their behaviours and actions are key to creating a positive or negative customer experience.

We will:

- Ensure all our people have the skills and knowledge to deliver an excellent customer experience.
- Ensure our people are engaged and feel valued, so that they in turn can deliver an excellent customer experience.
- Embed the council's shared values and behaviours that set out how our people can deliver great customer experiences.
- Lead from the top – model behaviours that create a customer focussed corporate culture.
- Ensure our people are informed and engaged in the design and improvements of our services and the standard of service delivered to our customers.

- Encourage cross-departmental working and no internal silos, to ensure customer experiences are integrated throughout the organisation.

3. Technology

We will make the most of new technology to help deliver simple and convenient services, whilst being mindful of those who may require a more personal approach. We will work with our partners, volunteers and community groups to support residents who do not have access to technology, or who lack digital confidence, to help equalise opportunities in our town.

We will:

- Continue to improve how customers can engage with us through a single point of contact online via the MyWatford portal, including expanding our online reporting / service delivery and online mapping capability.
- Continue to deliver improvements our website, with a focus on improved usability, better content and improved accessibility.
- Increase our ability to engage and communicate with us through digital channels, such as our website, mobile apps, online forms and social media.
- Investigate the potential for new service channels to support our customers, such as web chat.

4. Insight

We will use data to understand how customers use our services and how they feel about them. We will act on this information to continuously improve our services and approach. We know our customers' needs change, so we will continually review our services, to ensure we are planning and developing our services, based on their needs.

We will:

- Using customer journey data and feedback to continually review and improve our services.
- Respond to changes in demand for existing and new service channels, based on customer expectations and use.
- Be open with customers about when and why we collect their personal information, including where we use personal information to improve our services and communication.
- Have all appropriate and proactive steps in place to maintain data integrity, meaning customers can be confident that their personal information is safe and protected from cyber security threats or data breaches.
- Make non-personal data sets publicly available where appropriate so we are open and transparent and ensure information is easy to obtain where necessary.

How are we going to achieve this?

To deliver on the aims of this strategy we have developed a detailed action plan. We will actively manage this plan and monitor our progress to evaluate how well we are doing.

Links to other council strategies and plans

This strategy is linked to the following council strategies and plans:

- Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022-24
- The council's culture / values and behaviours
- Procurement Strategy
- Business Intelligence Strategy
- ICT strategy
- Organisational Development Strategy

Watford in numbers 2021

Metric	Time period	Volumes
Population	2022 By 2035	102,300 110,000 (increase 14.6%)
Number of customer accounts	Total sign-ups	32,720 (2022) 22,958 (2020) 8,268 (2019) Up 75%
Total visits to our website	Annual	1.4 million 1.2 million(2020) 0.95 million (2019) Up 32%
Calls to our customer service team	Annual	86,784 (2021) 82,500 (2020) 79,054 (2019) Up 9%
Visitors to Cassiobury Park	Annual	2.1 million
Number of visitors to our gyms and leisure centres	Annual	1.2 million
Number of bins emptied	Weekly	100,000
Tonnes of recycling	Annual	8,078 tonnes
Green waste sign-ups	Total sign-ups	16,855
Miles of roads cleaned	Weekly	172,218
Number of business licences	Total	325
Tonnes of dumped rubbish / litter removed from streets	Annual	925 tonnes
COVID support grant applications processed	Total	5295
Customer satisfaction across all channels – rated good or average	Annual	Phone – 98% Web – 75%
Digital forms completed	Annual	27,497 (2021) 28,545 (2020) 1,928 (2019) Up 93%