



Customer Services Strategy 2025 - 2030



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

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Introduction

Delivering excellent services to our customers is at the heart of our work. Whether you're applying for a parking permit, registering a birth, visiting our waste recycling centre, accessing social care, or using any other of our wide range of services, we want to provide you with the best possible experience.

We have a clear approach to make every interaction with our customers, whether big or small, a positive and valuable experience. This will provide us with the opportunity to deliver support, build trust, foster collaboration, and drive positive and lasting change.

The development of this strategy reflects our commitment to listen, learn and respond to the needs of our diverse communities. Our ongoing work as part of this strategy will give us a detailed picture of the changing needs and expectations of our customers and how we can work together to make a real difference.



Councillor Mandy Porter
Cabinet Member for Resources

Our vision

We want to deliver excellent customer services that are easy to use and provide value for money to all our residents.

We will expect customers who can use digital services to do so, and will focus our resources on supporting the people who need our help the most.

We will put the customer at the heart of everything we do.

Our aims

We will provide excellent customer services

- We will provide excellent customer services through face to face, telephone and digital channels.
- We will minimise waiting times and ensure customers are connected to the right member of staff who can resolve their enquiry at the first point of contact.
- Our focus will be on quality - ensuring we get things right first time will reduce the need for customers to repeatedly make contact to resolve enquiries.
- We will deliver all our services to our customer standards and publish how we perform against these.
- We will be helpful, compassionate and responsive to customers' needs by putting the customer at the heart of everything we do and ensuring a consistent and positive customer experience.

We will make it clear how customers can contact us

- Information on how to contact us will be available on our website and in the One Darlington magazine. Where available, digital channels will always be the first choice, however, clear information on how customers can speak to staff will also be provided.
- We will make all our written communications easy to understand and will be clear on how customers can contact us.
- We will provide information in ways to suit our customers and will make use of assistive technologies to improve access for people with disabilities.
- We will provide telephone and face-to-face services for those who need them and ensure appointments are available.

We will make it clear what we can and can't help customers with

- We will ensure all information about council services is available on our website.
- We will be clear from the start about what services we charge for and those that we provide for free.
- We will explain how long we will take to answer telephone calls and deal with requests - we will keep customers updated with progress, where we can.
- We will expect customers who can use digital services to do so.
- We will be clear about what help and support we can provide to those customers who cannot use digital services.

- We will ensure staff are available in our customer services centre, to provide support for our customers to access digital services.

We will provide support for those customers who are digitally excluded

- Whilst we will promote the shift to digital channels for service delivery and communication with residents, we will ensure that people who are digitally excluded are not left behind.
- We aim to get more people on-line and connected to the council's digital services, where we can.
- We will provide the right level of support for people who can use digital services.
- We will provide full support for people who cannot use digital services.
- A member of staff will always assist customers who cannot access the council's digital services for whatever reason.
- Scan stations and computers with access to online council services will be available to use for free in our customer service centre for people who do not have internet access or the financial means to go online.

We will deliver value for money

- We will use customer data to improve services for our customers and make them more efficient and accessible.
- Our main focus will be to ensure our staff resources are available to help those people who need the most support.
- We will use new technology to make processes more efficient and ensure a joined-up approach from service request to service delivery, in line with our Digital Darlington Strategy to be provided by the requester.
- We will reduce the amount of paper we use, which will also help to reduce our carbon footprint.
- We will invest any savings from digital efficiencies into providing extra support for our customers to use our digital services.



We will listen to our customers and use this to improve services

- We will listen to our customers and use their feedback to improve services.
- We will ask our customers about the service they have received and what we could do to improve.
- We will use customer data to better understand what our customers need and whether our services meet those expectations.
- We will use complaints about our services to understand what has gone wrong and what we need to do to put things right.
- We will provide information on what we have done to improve services because of customer feedback.

We will invest in our people

- We will provide our staff with the right equipment and training to do their jobs efficiently and help our customers.
- We will ensure all front-line staff receive regular customer focussed training.
- We will be clear about our expectations for staff and recognise when they go the extra mile to help our customers.
- We will regularly ask our staff about how we can improve our services.
- We will keep our front-line staff safe and make this our first priority. We will make it clear to customers what behaviours are unacceptable and take action against those who verbally or physically abuse our staff.
- We will take reasonable measures to preserve the mental health and wellbeing of our staff whilst they are at work.

How will we know if we have got it right?

- Our customers will be able to tell us about their experiences.
- We will meet our customer standards.
- Customer satisfaction will improve.
- Our customers will find it quick and easy to access council services.
- Our data will show more customers are accessing services in the ways they wanted to.
- Our data will show that more customers are using our digital services.
- Our data will show that more customers will be using the computers and scan stations in our customer services centre to access council services.
- Our data will show that we are delivering excellent customer services at good value.
- Our Digital Darlington Strategy will demonstrate how we are using new technology to make our services more efficient.
- Our staff will tell us about how we can help them deliver excellent customer services.
- Our customers will say that our staff are delivering an excellent customer experience and that that they listen to them.
- We will receive fewer complaints about customer experience.
- Our data and reports will show evidence of learning from customer complaints.

Customer standards

Our commitment

We are committed to delivering excellent customer service across all council services and to ensure you receive a consistent standard of service. We put our customers at the heart of everything we do.

Our customer standards set out the timescales and standards you can expect from all council services when you contact us. These standards apply however you contact us.

Respect

We will be respectful to our communities, residents, colleagues, service users, stakeholders, and wider partners.

Innovative

We will be innovative in everything we do and continually look for improvements to ensure we offer quality services.

Collaborate

We will act collaboratively and ensure our successful journey of partnership working continues to ensure we maximise opportunities to achieve success.

Deliver

We will aim to deliver quality services to all and strive to always deliver the best we can with the resources available.

Access to our services

We offer a variety of ways for you to contact us. We're available:

- online
- via email
- in person at the Town Hall via appointment
- by phone.

*An emergency service is available 365 days each year by phone.

Our standards

General standards

We will:

- treat everyone fairly and respectfully, always showing courtesy and sensitivity
- be polite, helpful, open, and honest
- listen to you and explain decisions and outcomes clearly to you
- respect your rights to privacy and confidentiality and provide private areas for confidential enquiries
- ensure our information is easily accessible and in plain English
- aim to solve as many queries as we can at the first point of contact
- avoid using jargon or technical terms when we explain things to you
- display our photo identification and provide you with our name and work contact details, if requested
- encourage feedback and use this to improve services
- provide interpreters on request.

Online standards

We will:

- make it easy for you to find what you want online
- enable you to report issues, and make applications, payments, requests, submissions and bookings safely and securely
- allow you to register for customer accounts, which can offer personalised information
- provide access to council news, information and consultations
- ensure appropriate support is available to you to access and use the self-serve elements of our website.

Telephone standards

We will:

- provide all callers with a standard greeting, including the section name and the name of the person answering the phone
- give your details and the nature of your query, to colleagues we may pass you onto so you don't have to repeat it
- Provide you with a reference number where appropriate, should you need to contact us again.

Correspondence standards

We will:

- treat emails and letters in the same way
- ensure all emails and letters provide you with the contact details of the service responding
- ensure we use a standard out of office message and auto signature for consistency.

Face-to-face standards

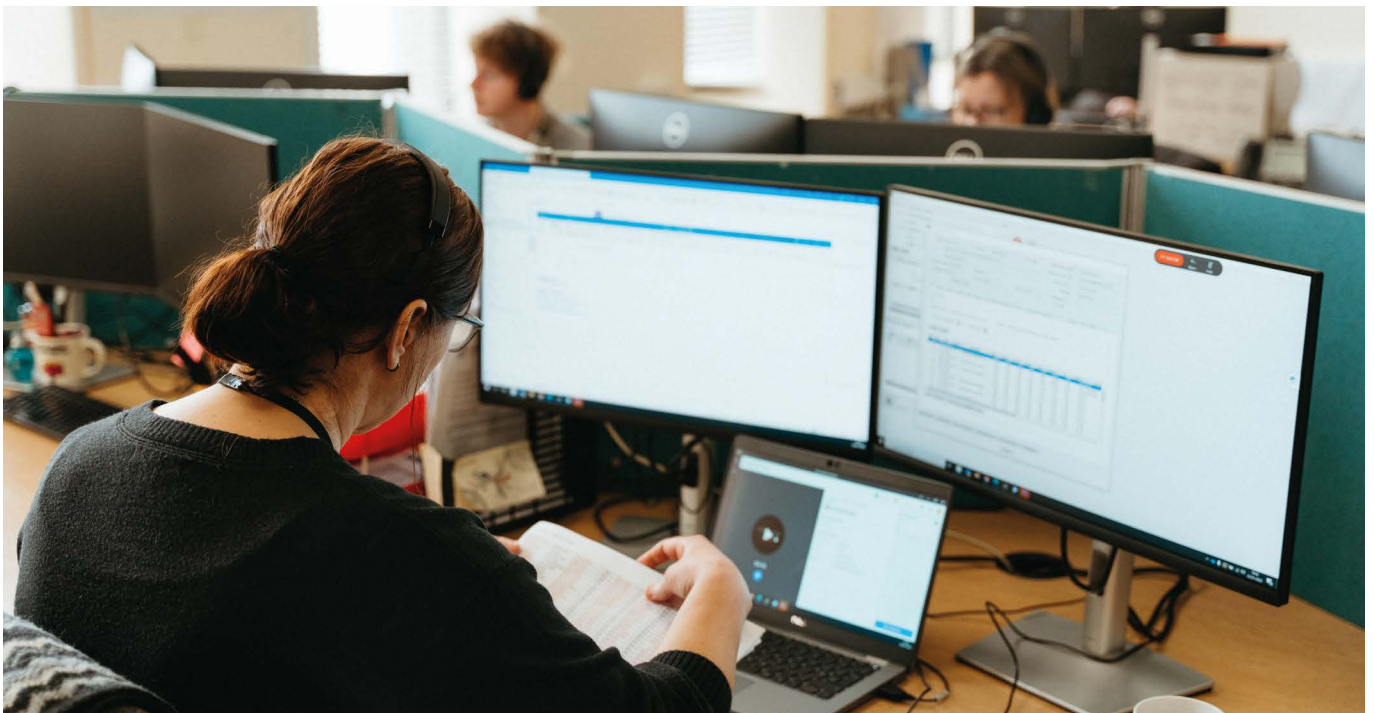
We will:

- offer all visitors to the Town Hall a specific timed appointment
- aim to attend to you at your appointment time
- ensure we have appropriate levels of staffing to assist you as quickly as possible.

Performance standards

We will:

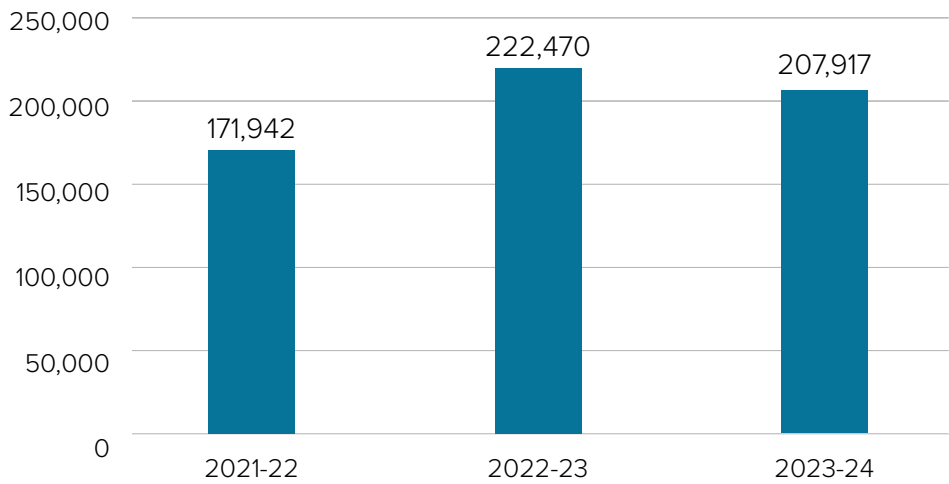
- measure our performance through customer feedback, complaints and comments
- provide this information annually, so you can see how we are doing and what we are doing to ensure we achieve our targets
- encourage customers to give us feedback on our performance either online, in person, by telephone or in writing and use this to improve our services
- provide annual reports on complaints, compliments and comments received
- aim to answer all internal and external calls through our telephone system within an average of five minutes
- respond to all letters and emails within seven working days of receiving them, if we cannot provide a full response to you in that timescale, we will contact you to agree a response time.



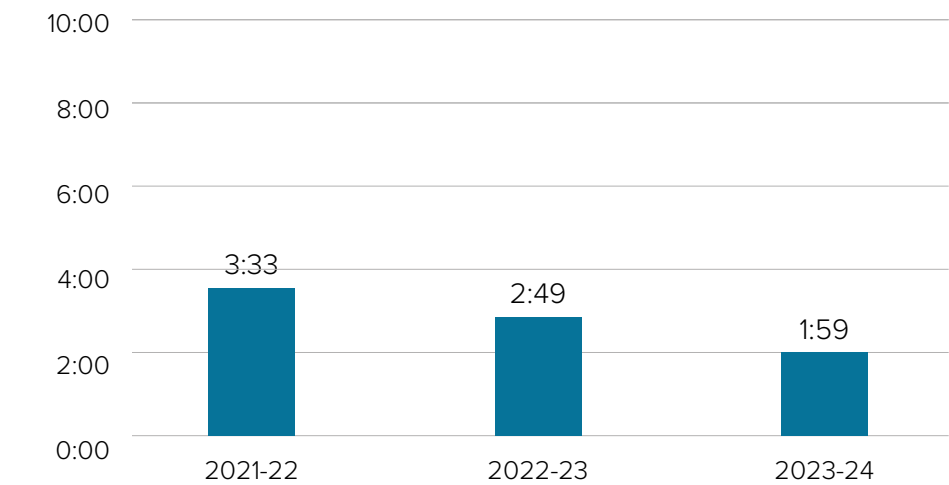
How we are performing

Telephones

Telephone calls received

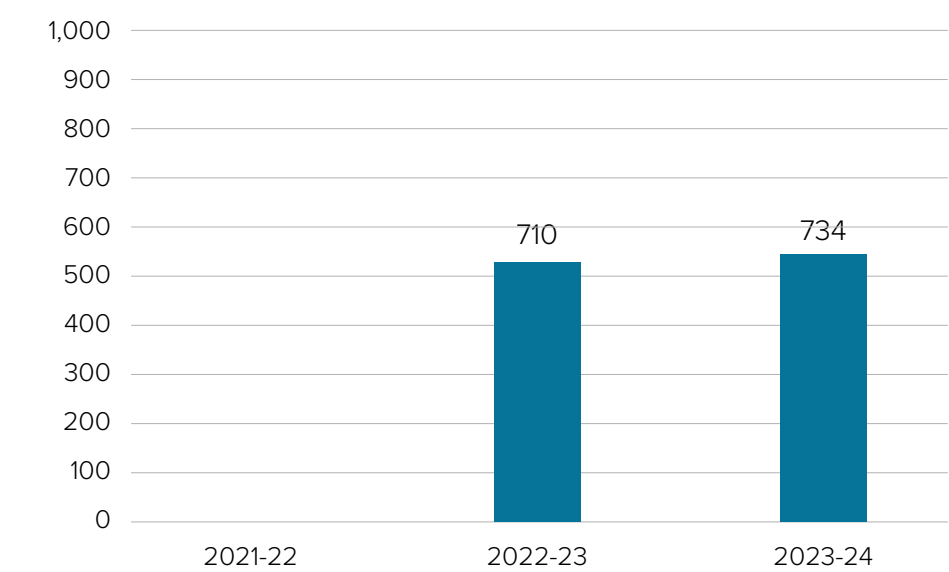


Average time to answer telephones



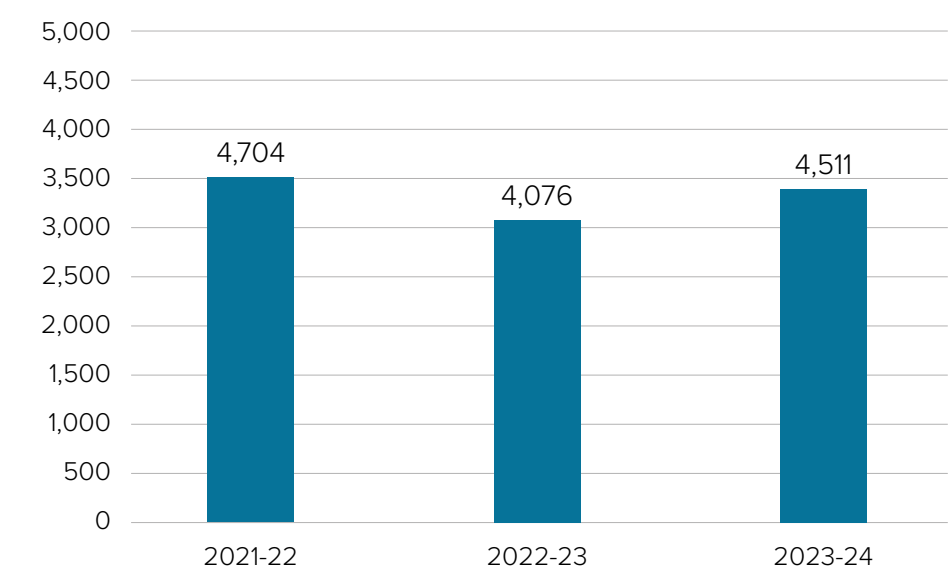
Digital access

Computers used in the customer services centre



No data held for 2021-22

Scan stations used in the customer services centre





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Borough Council