



The Highland  
Council  
Comhairle na  
Gàidhealtachd

# Customer Experience Strategy

## Ro-innleachd Eòlas Luchd-cleachdaidh

2024 -2027



## Foreword | Facal-tòiseachaidh

The Highland Council is committed to being ambitious, sustainable, and connected. Being Connected, our work on this Customer Experience Strategy is informed by the Highland Council Programme (2022 – 2027) and the Highland Council Delivery Plan (2024 – 2027).

We know we need to continue building on our current standards to customer contact to continue to further develop the great work we have achieved already. Worldwide changes in technology mean the expectations of customers have changed. We all expect personalised interactions, and connected experiences across all ways of contacting organisations.

Being connected and placing our customers at the heart of our changes, we have spent time listening to what our communities need us to change.

**By listening to our customers**, we know we are doing lots of things right. Customers told us about examples of excellent customer service. We also know that we need to be ambitious in changing the way customers interact with the Council and focus on improving the overall experience of interacting with us.

By listening to our communities and staff we know we need to design services that can be adapted to the changing needs of our customers in the future. To do this, we know we need to work with our partners to meet community needs, provide value for money and adapt services more efficiently and effectively.

We are committed to using data and the views of our customers to inform, anticipate and stay ahead of our customers' needs.

This evidence-based, and customer-centered, Customer Experience Strategy will build upon our current foundations and create a future where all customers feel valued and informed of the next steps every time they contact us.

This Customer Experience Strategy sets out our vision to make it easy to contact us in the future and the practical steps we will take to achieve that.

*Allan Gunn*

**Assistant Chief Executive**

# Executive Summary

## Geàrr-chunntas Gnìomhach

Customer Experience describes all different types of contact a customer has with the Highland Council.

Our Vision is to put the customer at the centre of what we do, make it easy for customers to contact us, and to keep them updated as their enquiries progress.

Our customers are defined as anyone who lives, works in, or visits the Highlands. This includes our internal customer interactions.

We have listened to the views of our customers to develop our vision and our change framework to enable us to make changes in the future: **Our Framework for Success**.

Our Framework for Success will enable the following Council wide changes in the future:

- ▶ **DNA** – We will grow a customer service culture, so that all employees keep a customer focused approach so that customers are always considered.
- ▶ **Design** – We will design our services in alignment with this strategy and using the ‘Scottish Approach to Service Design’ framework so that customer needs are always considered.
- ▶ **Deliver** – We will deliver a positive customer experience across all ways of contacting us. We will ensure that every method of contact enables customers to feel valued and informed of the next steps.

“I really tried to find the right person to contact but despite chasing I had no response”.

Community Group member



“I just want to know that my issue is being dealt with, and when I should expect a response.”

Housing Tenant



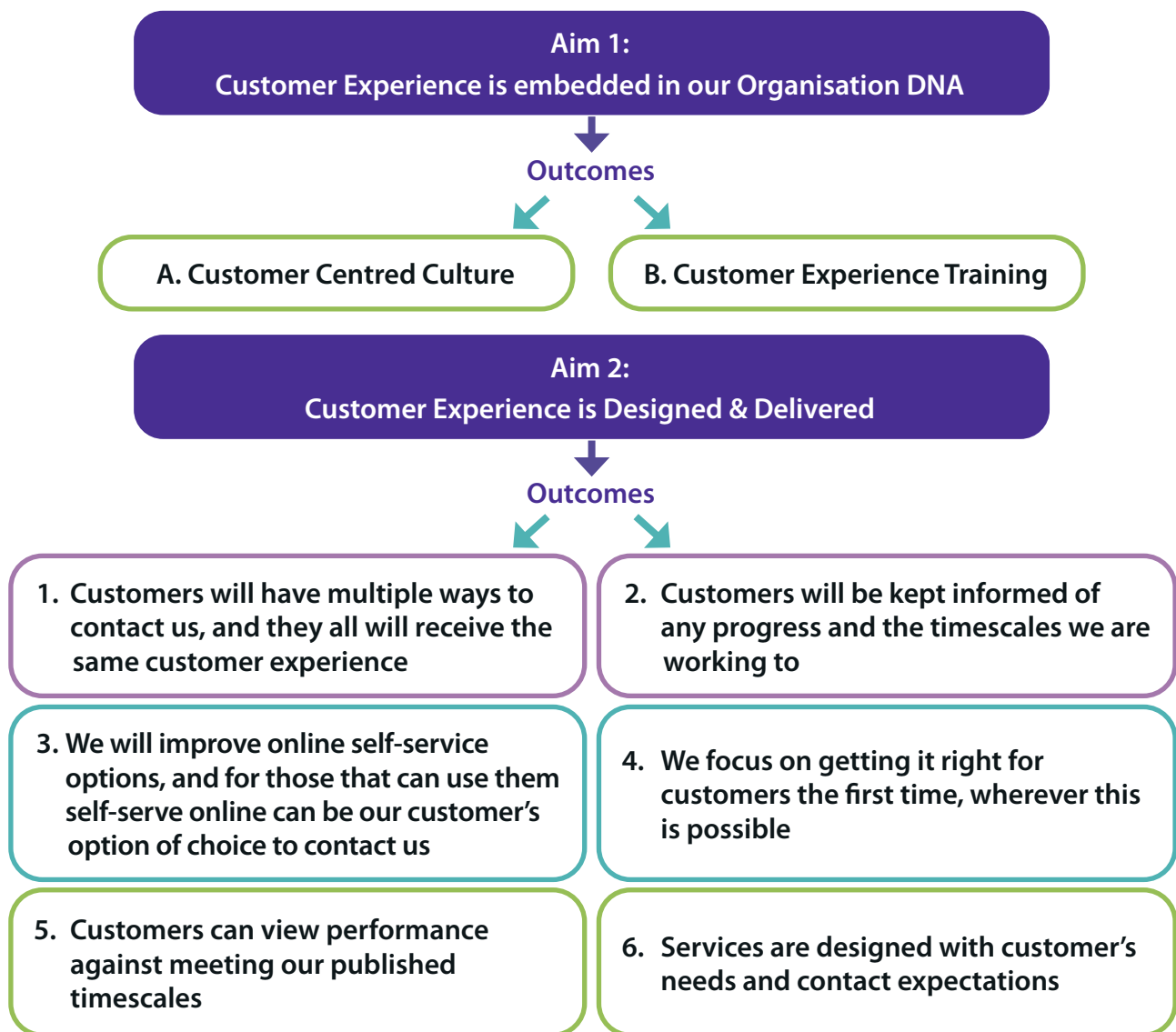
# Our Change Framework

## Agus Frèam-obrach Atharrachaidh

### Making Successful Future Changes

Our **Framework for Success** has been designed and produced with our customers views.

Our Framework will ensure changes to Highland Council customer experience are delivered. Our Framework for Success has two Strategic Aims and eight outcomes.



# Introduction

## Ro-ràdh

### What is Customer Experience?

'Customer Experience' describes all the contact that a customer has with the Highland Council; from initial contact through to solution of the request. This includes all reasons for contacting us, and all the ways of contacting us. For example, online, on the telephone or in person.

The Highland Council has listened to our customers to develop how we can change.

We listened to views from over 1,600 of our customers and communities and used these to design our Customer Experience Strategy and framework. This was developed using the Scottish approach to Service Design method.

- ▶ **Discover:** Our Customer Data, Survey and Focus Groups
- ▶ **Define:** Our Vision
- ▶ **Develop:** Test & Learn
- ▶ **Deliver** – Framework for Success



# Discover: Our Customers

## Lorg: An Luchd-cleachdaidh Againn

### Our Highland

The area covered by Highland Council is a third of the land area of Scotland. This includes some of the most rural and sparsely populated parts of the United Kingdom. The population of the Highlands is 7th highest out of 32 Scottish regional Councils.

Shown below are statistics which give some insights into our region. The Highlands has a population of nearly 240,000 and over 122,000 Council tax properties.

Each year in the Highland Council region there are over 2.2 million visits to libraries, over 340,000 visits to museums and we have over 20 languages spoken.



**238,060**  
population



**122,731**  
council tax properties



**Over 15,000**  
council houses



**31,000**  
school children  
(203 school settings)



**8,058**  
FTE council



**Over 2.2m**  
visits to libraries  
(2020/21)



**Over 340,000**  
visits to museums  
(2020/21)



**324**  
active equipped  
play areas



**Over 20**  
languages requesting  
interpretation



**20,492**  
non-domestic  
properties



**64,837**  
housing benefit & council  
tax reduction - change in  
circ (2021/22)



**4,275**  
housing benefit & CT  
reduction new claims  
(2021/22)

# Discover: Our Customers

## Lorg: An Luchd-cleachdaidh Againn

### Our Customer Contact

Our customer data shows us that customers contact us using a variety of methods. The largest volume of interaction is the website, with a combined total of approximately 10 million visits to pages each year. . We know from speaking to customers that online does not suit everyone and that a range of options for contacting us are needed.



### Who are our customers?

Our customers are defined as anyone who lives, works, or visits the Highland area and connects with the Council. Our customers fall into five main categories: residents, businesses, tourists, partners and Highland Council staff, Elected Members, and contractors.





# Discover: Our Customers

## Lorg: An Luchd-cleachdaidh Againn

Listening to our customers – Understanding where we are now

We listened to the views of over 1600 customers.

Who did we speak to?



## What our customers told us

In focus groups customers told us that they liked using our website, and that they would like to be able to use it for more things at a time that suits their needs.

Customers also told us that they did not like having to chase us for updates but that they did not want us to move to a completely digital (website) offering as this does not suit all.

43% of customers surveyed on our website achieved what they wanted to online, however 45% did not achieve what they wanted to online.

Of customers who report being dissatisfied with our website and did not achieve what they wanted online; 22% were looking for a way to contact the Highland Council. In addition, a further 10% explained their online experience was not user-friendly.

**"I want to actually speak to someone instead of everything being online."**

Online survey participant



# Discover: Our Customers

## Lorg: An Luchd-cleachdaidh Againn

In focus groups, common themes emerged. Customers told us:

- ▶ That they need to be able to **contact the correct person first time**
- ▶ That they need to have **clear expectations set**; and
- ▶ That we need to **communicate and provide updates through to resolution**



“My mum tried to contact by phone, email and in-person before it was sorted.”

Young Person, age 13



“I like having someone to speak to, I find going online difficult.”

ICT Skills Group member



# Define: Our Vision

## Mìnich: An Lèirsinn Againn

### Our customer-centered vision

Considering everything that we heard from our customers, it was clear that our vision for the Highland Council in its simplest terms needed to be:

“To put the customer at the centre of what we do, make it easy for customers to contact us and to keep them updated as their enquiries progress”

# Define: Our Aims and Objectives

## Mìnich: Na h-Amasan is Mion-amasan Againn

Recognising the different needs of our customers, and listening to customers, the aims and objectives of our vision includes:

- ▶ We will offer an inclusive **customer-focused journey**, ensuring that the customer is at the heart of what we deliver.
- ▶ We commit to ensuring **all our customers can access the services and information they need** through the route that best suits their needs.
- ▶ We will empower customers who can to **self-serve online to do so**
- ▶ By improving our online offering we will free up staff time to **support customers with more complex needs and those unable to self-serve**
- ▶ We will provide **a range of contact methods**, understanding that not all customers are able to use our website
- ▶ Regardless of the contact method used, we will keep **all customers informed** of the status of their enquiry or request through to resolution
- ▶ Customer experience will be the same regardless of how people choose to contact us
- ▶ We will take a **customer-focused approach to how we design, deliver and operate services**, passionate about making a difference to how we connect with customers and how customers connect with the Highland Council.

**“Email is better for me, as I find talking on the phone difficult.”**

Young Person, age 15



The aims and objectives were tested and refined whilst building the Customer Charter and during a review of the Housing Repairs Process.

# Develop: Test & Learn Leasaich: Feuch & Ionnsaich

## Testing our Vision and Aims

Throughout 2023-2024, we tested out the aims of our vision in focus groups and an extensive process review. This has shaped the aims and objectives for how we will operate and our approach to customer contact.

## Developing a Customer Charter (Attached in Appendix 1)

A draft Customer Charter was produced in August 2023. Best practice examples were used as the basis for the creation of the draft, along with the aims of our vision. Fourteen focus groups (205 participants) were held during August 2023 to May 2024

## Key Learning

The findings from the focus groups shaped the Customer Charter. Key learning on the Customer Charter from the focus groups included that our internal customers (staff, Elected Members) and external customers (public) agreed on the key changes required. Communication on what is happening and by when was the clear request, and this has been built into our framework that will help us make changes in the future.

## Review of Housing Repairs

A review of Housing Repairs was conducted because our customer data told us that the Housing Repairs line received a large volume of calls, with a large proportion chasing updates.

## Key Learning

The review identified the need for service redesign across several key areas, including getting it right first time, communication and reviewing communication points. Customer focused changes to the process were implemented, resulting in a significant reduction in customers missing appointments. Contractor time lost to missed appointments reduced from 102 hours (about 4 and a half days) per month to 13 hours per month. Key learning included getting it right first time where possible which has been built into our framework that will help us make changes in the future.



# Deliver: Our Framework for Success

## Lìbhrig: Am Frèam-obrach Againn airson Soirbheas

### Developing our Change Framework

Working with staff and customers we have developed a framework that will help us change to deliver on our vision to be more customer focused, make it easy for customers to contact us and to keep customers updated regarding their enquires.

The 'Framework for Success' puts our customer needs directly at the heart of our changes and ensures that we make changes at every point of the customer interaction.

### Highland Council Wide Change Framework

The Framework of Success is to be applied universally across the Highland Council, enabling all customers to receive the same standard of customer experience when they contact us.

When services are reviewed or developed, this will be done in line with the vision, aims and objectives of this strategy and in line with the Framework for Success.

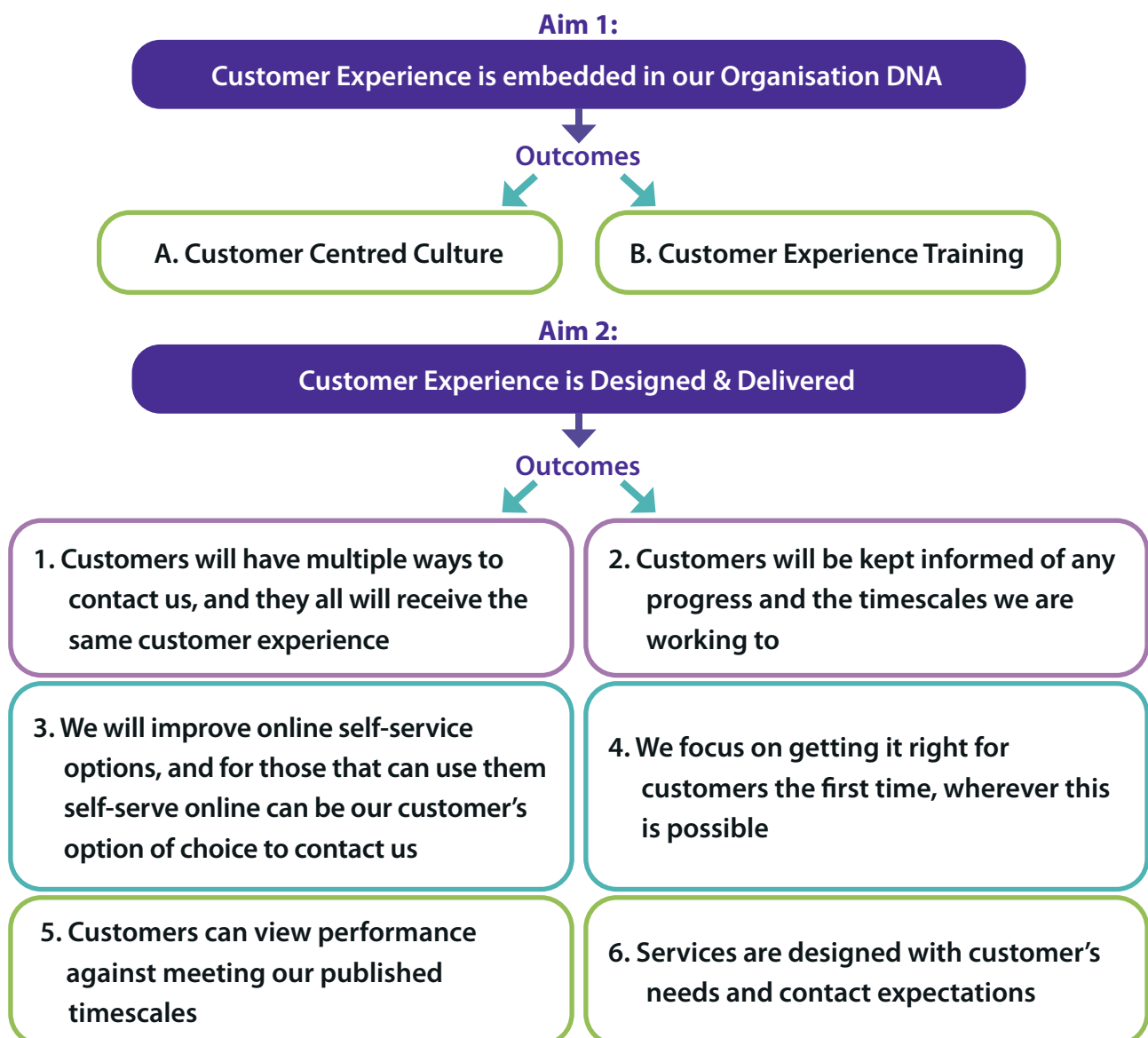
# Deliver: Our Framework for Success

## Lìbhrig: Am Frèam-obrach Againn airson Soirbheas

### Our Framework for Success

Our corporate change framework will ensure changes to Highland Council customer experience are delivered. Produced along with customers, our Framework for Success has been designed with the customer at the heart.

The following pages set out the aims, outcomes and the key actions required.



# Deliver: Our Framework for Success

## Lìbhrig: Am Frèam-obrach Againn airson Soirbheas

### Aim 1:

Customer Experience is embedded in our Organisation DNA

Delivering the Vision will require Customer Experience to be part of the 'DNA' of the Highland Council. This will apply to how we deliver services, design services and processes and respond to customers. For each outcome, key actions outline how this will be delivered.

#### A. Customer Centred Culture

##### Key Actions

- ▶ We will foster a culture where the needs of customers are placed at the heart of our services where staff are empowered to continuously improve the customer experience. We will achieve this by designing and delivering services that meet the aims and outcomes of this Strategy, and where there is clear ownership of the customer experience across the organisation.
- ▶ We will ensure that our Customer Culture will apply to all staff, Elected Members and contractors.
- ▶ We will implement our Customer Charter, which sets out our commitment and responsibilities so that we can provide the best customer experience.
- ▶ We will provide access to services in different ways in order to meet our customers' needs.
- ▶ We will publish clear information which informs staff and customers of our service standards and set out clear expectations.
- ▶ We will welcome and encourage feedback, be willing to admit our mistakes and make a commitment to learn from them.

#### B: Customer Experience Training

##### Key Actions

- ▶ We will develop and train our staff and give them the knowledge, skills, and tools to deliver high quality customer service.
- ▶ We will train staff on our Framework for Success; Strategic Aims and Outcomes
- ▶ We will train staff on the Customer Charter
- ▶ We will review the training we provide to all staff, embedding the framework and Customer Charter contained within our Customer Experience Strategy.

# Deliver: Our Framework for Success

## Lìbhrig: Am Frèam-obrach Againn airson Soirbheas

### Aim 2:

#### Customer Experience is Designed & Delivered

By listening to customers we know we need to make operational and process improvements to deliver on our Vision for Customer Experience. The following Outcomes have been designed to make changes at every point of customer contact. For each outcome, key actions outline how this will be delivered.

#### Outcome 1:

Customers will have multiple ways to contact us, and they all will provide the same customer experience

This outcome will ensure that (for those who can use online) we deliver an improved self-service online experience making this the customer's default option of choice.

#### Key Actions

- ▶ We will improve our digital offering so that customers can conduct transactions, access the services and information they need quickly and at a time that suits their needs
- ▶ We will improve our digital offering enabling access to our services easily through our website.
- ▶ We will review all information on the website to ensure it is up to date and it best suits customer's needs.
- ▶ We will promote digital as the channel of choice where possible.
- ▶ Using customer feedback and data to design demand-based service delivery.
- ▶ We will work with partners to maximise service offerings and skills available.

#### Outcome 2:

Customers will be kept informed of any progress and the timescales we are working to.

This outcome will ensure that customers are given expected timescales and are kept informed about the progress of their enquiry.

#### Key Actions

- ▶ Develop and implement a process/system to allow our customers to be kept updated on their request and queries
- ▶ We will listen to the experience of our customers, learn from this and use this to improve what we do.
- ▶ Improve the customer journey – to enable timely updates and feedback on requests for both the customer, members, and staff using a tested method of review and implement improvements through applying our target operating model.
- ▶ We will implement a self-service portal allowing access to view the status of requests.
- ▶ Communication and updates will be visible to all involved in the progressing of the query.



# Deliver: Our Framework for Success

## Lìbhrig: Am Frèam-obrach Againn airson Soirbheas

### Outcome 3:

We will improve online self-service options, and for those that can use them self-serve online can be our customer's option of choice to contact us.

This outcome will ensure that online is not our only contact method, and that regardless of the contact method used, the same standard of customer experience is received.

#### Key Actions

- ▶ A range of customer-centred methods will be available for contacting The Highland Council so we are accessible for everyone.
- ▶ We will continually review and respond to demand operating a sustainable and affordable approach.
- ▶ We will ensure our contact methods are simple and clear to enable customers to get the service they require through the best route for them.
- ▶ We will utilise new technology to implement smarter call management processes and protocols.
- ▶ We will use feedback to inform our ICT and Digital strategies to progress modern methods of contact to meet future needs.
- ▶ We will use improved telephony technology to support our contact channels.

### Outcome 4:

We focus on getting it right for customers the first time, wherever this is possible.

This outcome will ensure that where possible we are committed to improving processes to ensure customers enquires can be resolved at the first contact.

#### Key Actions

- ▶ We will be clear in explaining what we can't do and why we can't do it.
- ▶ Our customers will receive a complete service from point of request to service response.
- ▶ Our staff will be approachable, responsive and customer focused. We will create a training programme to embed our ethos that customer service is a mindset NOT a department.
- ▶ We will review routes into the organisation to provide a more efficient and streamlined offering to customers.
- ▶ We will deploy innovative technologies to improve the customer experience, increase efficiencies and give value for money.

# Deliver: Our Framework for Success

## Lìbhrig: Am Frèam-obrach Againn airson Soirbheas

### Outcome 5:

Customers can view our performance against meeting our published timescales.

This outcome will ensure we are transparent about our performance against our Customer Contact Standards.

#### Key Actions

- ▶ We will develop clear service standards to ensure that all customers know what they can expect when they request a service or information from the Council
- ▶ We will report performance against our customer contact standards and use this to improve what we do
- ▶ Manage customer expectations – by developing key service standards across various service offerings
- ▶ We will publish how Services are performing against our Customer Contact Service Standards.

### Outcome 6:

Services are designed with customer's needs and contact expectations

This outcome will ensure that all services will be designed with our customer needs at the center.

#### Key Actions

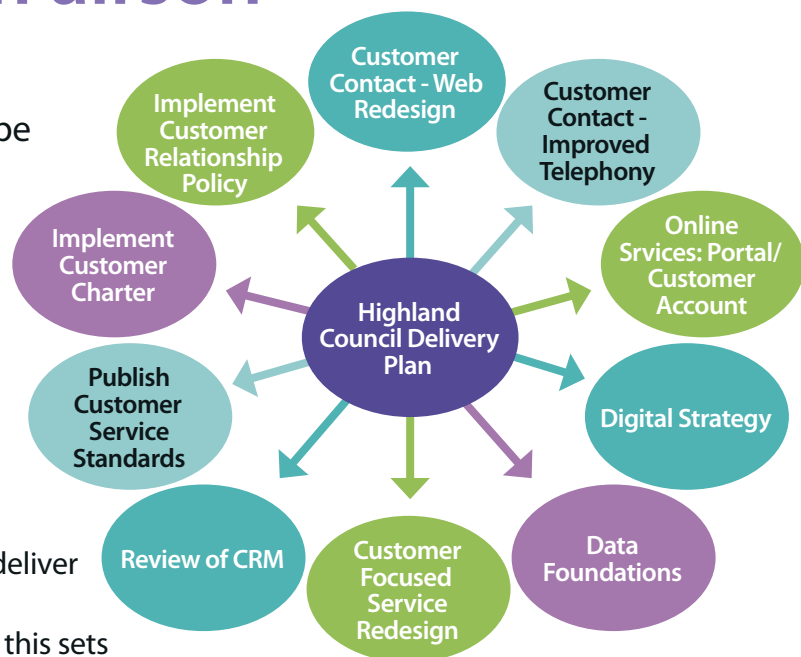
- ▶ We are committed to ensuring that people are able to access our services using a range of options. We do this actively by considering accessibility when designing the way we provide our service.
- ▶ We will provide information about how to access our services and how to request reasonable adjustments.
- ▶ We will explain clearly what we need from those engaging with our services to enable us to provide the best possible service.
- ▶ We will try to anticipate our service users' requirements and encourage all service users to inform us if they need reasonable adjustments to be made to the way we deliver our services for them.
- ▶ We will be honest and transparent about what we can do but also what we cannot
- ▶ We will align our front and back-office customer processes
- ▶ We will consider alternative digital mechanisms to support effective engagement
- ▶ We will focus our resources to deliver the more complex enquiries, and where digital may not be the most appropriate access route.

# Deliver: Delivering our Framework for Success

## Lìbhrig: A' Lìbhrigeadh an Fhrèam-obrach Againn airson Soirbheas

The Framework of Success will be delivered through the Council's Delivery Plan, Council Redesign Board and the My Council Programme. The Framework is aligned to other corporate strategies such as the Digital Strategy and the Information and Data Strategy.

**Our Roadmap** sets out how we will deliver our Framework for Success. With the Council's Delivery Plan at the Centre, this sets out the products which delivery the aims and outcomes of our Customer Experience Strategy.



The **My Council Programme** is incorporated within the Council's Delivery Plan and aims to ensure that for all customers they experience an inclusive customer-focused journey regardless of how they choose to contact us. The My Council Programme is one of the mechanisms for the delivery of our customer experience and will focus specifically on:

- ▶ Redesign on the Council's website
- ▶ Improved telephony system
- ▶ Review our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system
- ▶ Deliver an online customer portal/ account
- ▶ Implement our Customer Charter and Customer Relationship policy
- ▶ Publish Customer Service Standards

Through Council Redesign and the Council's Delivery Plan, when services are redesigned, this will take place in alignment with this Strategy and ensuring a customer focused approach. This will include:

- ▶ Focusing on self-service options as part of redesign approach
- ▶ Processes will be customer-centric
- ▶ Process will consider customer request to resolution and incorporate how to provide updates through the process
- ▶ Utilising the tools developed through the My Council Programme, including the Online Customer Portal/Account as a mechanism for delivery self service options
- ▶ Customer feedback will inform redesign processes

# Deliver: How will we know?

## Lìbhrig: Ciamar a bhios fios againn?

### Our Measures of Success

It is important that our framework is measurable. Feedback from staff was they wished to know if they were delivering for customers. Our measures of the success of our Framework will be:

Measure/Performance Indicator	Frequency Reported/ Reviewed
Number and percentage of reports and requests for services resolved	Quarterly
Number and percentage of reports and requests for services open beyond published service standards	Quarterly
Complaints by geographic and service area resolved, lessons learned and actions taken (measure under development)	Quarterly
Percentage calls that contact the right person first time (measure under development)	Quarterly
Customer Satisfaction survey - 85% report overall satisfaction	Quarterly
Choices of contact channels – report increase/decrease in usage	Quarterly
Review our Customer Experience Strategy	2027

### Reporting

The My Council Programme reports to the Council's Redesign Board and reporting on the Customer Experience Strategy will be through this on a six-monthly basis.

Reporting on service performance against service standards will be incorporated into quarterly performance monitoring to strategic committees.

# App 1: Our Customer Charter

## Eàrr-ràdh 1: Cairt an Luchd-cleachdaidh Againn

We are committed to providing a consistently excellent customer experience by putting our customers at the centre of everything we do. Our charter sets out our commitment to you and what we aim to deliver.

**The Customer Charter applies to:** All staff, Elected Representatives, and contractors in all engagement with internal (Highland Council) and external customers (service users\*, stakeholders, advocates, and organisations).

\*Young people (when in an education setting) please see [Promoting Positive Relationships \(2021\)](#)

### We will play our part by:

- ▶ We will work on actioning and responding to your request, the first time you contact us whenever this is possible. We will work on ensuring you know what happens next and by when.
- ▶ We will offer a variety of ways to access our services that reflect how customers like to contact us.
- ▶ Providing a quicker and easier online experience.
- ▶ Taking your information and looking after it.
- ▶ Aiming to find a satisfactory solution and having a 'can-do' attitude within our available resources.
- ▶ Avoiding jargon and making things understandable.
- ▶ Responding to your contact within our published timescales\*.

- ▶ \*Timescales may be service specific, please see here for details ([link to be added once ready](#)).

### To help us, we would like you to play your part by:

- ▶ Accessing our services by the available routes or methods as published by us.
- ▶ Acknowledging we may need to pass on your request (to other Council staff or services) so we can deal with it.
- ▶ Recognising that we will not be able to meet every need.
- ▶ Being aware of our financial constraints.
- ▶ Providing us with the information that we need to help you, including answering questions and providing further information if required.
- ▶ Asking us to explain things you are not sure of.
- ▶ Keeping any appointments that you have with us and notifying us if you are unable to attend.

### We will be respectful by:

- ▶ Treating you politely, fairly, and respectfully, with equality, diversity, and your well-being central to everything we do.
- ▶ Being, helpful and open with you.

# App 1: Our Customer Charter

## Eàrr-ràdh 1: Cairt an Luchd-cleachdaidh Againn

- ▶ Listening to you and your needs.
- ▶ Explaining decisions and outcomes clearly.
- ▶ Respecting your rights to privacy and confidentiality.
- ▶ Ensuring our information is in a format that can be easily accessed and understood.

### To help us, we would like you to:

- ▶ Treat us politely, respectfully, in line with our **Customer Relationship Policy**.
- ▶ Respect that no filming/recording within council premises or of employees is permitted without appropriate permission.
- ▶ Respect that we have a zero-tolerance approach to abuse:
- ▶ The safety and well-being of our staff is a priority, and they have the right to do their jobs without being abused.
- ▶ We understand on occasion you may disagree with a decision. We also understand you may be experiencing vulnerability. However, we have a duty of care to protect our staff, and anyone present.
- ▶ If you are aggressive, abusive, or

behave violently or are perceived to be threatening harm towards a member of our staff we will decide what action to take, and this may include involving the Police.

### We will constantly try to improve by:

- ▶ Encouraging you to give feedback on our services, using the Council's website, phoneline(s), response forms, or through a member of staff.
- ▶ Putting you at the centre when we design services to make sure they meet customer needs.
- ▶ Publishing our performance to show how we're doing.
- ▶ Handling any complaints with professionalism and learning lessons if **we fall short of our standards**.

### To help us, we would like you to:

- ▶ Offer us ideas to help us improve what we do.
- ▶ Let us know if we fall short of our standards and you wish to **complain by using our complaints form**.
- ▶ Let us know if you have received outstanding service using our **compliments form**.