Newport City Council Customer Services Strategy Version 1.10

2012-17

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1. Foreword

I welcome the publication of Newport City Council's Customer Services Strategy 2012-17. The delivery of excellent customer services, tailored to the needs of Newport residents is of the utmost importance to Council. The implementation of the Corporate Contact Centre in 2003, followed by the opening of Information Station earlier this year shows this Council's continued commitment to the development and improvement of customer services.

As technology develops and more and more homes gain access to broadband the expectation of customer services from the Council will change. The demand for Council services to be available online and accessible 24/7 will increase as people choose to move away from more traditional contact channels.

This important document outlines the Council's plans for customer services and how this will be developed to ensure fairness and to meet the demands of a more digital age. The document will not just act an overarching strategy; it will also contain a deliverable action plan, with key objectives, targets and timescales.

I look forward to seeing this strategy being implemented over the next 5 years and the positive results this will have for all Newport residents.

Bob Bright

Council Leader

August 2012

2. Introduction

The Council's Corporate Plan 2012 sets out the Council's strategic direction for the next five years, with a core delivery aim of 'thinking customer' and making a real difference to people's lives. The Improvement Plan 2012-2013 *'Delivering a Better Newport'* establishes the Customer Services strategy as the delivery mechanism for improving the customer experience, including customer "insight" (finding out what the customer thinks) and channel shift – helping
users to access and use the most convenient and effective method for interacting with the Council).

As part of the Council's transformation programme, this strategy document aims to ensure that the Council puts delivering high value customer service at the heart of everything it does. Outlined within this document is a clear vision of how we aim to make it clear that the delivery of local government services in Newport are built around the needs of customers.

Our customer services aspirations

The **customer services delivery model** within this strategy outlines how each aspect of customer services links together and how they will be developed in the coming five years. The outcomes for our customers will be:

- Improved and more convenient services for the customer

- Increased uptake of services by all sectors of the community

- More effective use of resources by directing customers to the most efficient ways of accessing services

Our **customer charter** seeks to clearly demonstrate that Newport City Council is transparent, honest and accountable. It sets out the standards that residents can expect from their council, in a series of specific promises, easily understood by all. This charter will be accessible and well publicised, ensuring that if a resident feels that we have not delivered against the charter, that they can hold us to account.

The **customer insight** element of the strategy sets out how Newport City Council will base its decisions, actions, services and future developments around the needs and wishes of customers. It describes how the Council will better understand our customers, their requirements and priorities.

Lastly the strategy will demonstrate key linkages with other council strategies, including the delivery of the **corporate plan** and meeting channel strategy objectives.

The channel strategy document details the Council's plans for influencing how customers access Council Services, and how services can be made more accessible to Newport residents, whilst also delivering maximum value for the tax payer. As outlined in the Improvement Plan, the impact of increased demand at a time of reduced public sector funding would mean that without targeted activity, satisfaction rates would decline, therefore making the implementation of an effective strategy both important and timely.

In order for the channel strategy to be a success it must clearly link with a customer services strategy that outlines the level of service that customers can expect, whichever channel they choose to use.

3. Our Customer Charter

3.1 Why do we need a Customer Charter?

The customer charter underpins the customer services strategy and describes the basic standards of service that customers can expect from the Council. All of the measures and key performance indicators contained within the charter are already in existence within the Authority. However, for the first time they have all been brought together into one document and outlined in simple customer friendly terms.

3.2 Who are our Customers?

Within the charter the term "customer" relates to all residents and visitors who use the services we provide and includes the pupils, parents and carers served by our schools.

3.3 Customer Charter Pledges

- **Telephone standards**

  When calling the contact centre customers can expect calls to be answered as quickly as possible; generally within six rings. This is linked to our corporate standard of answering 80% of all calls within 20 seconds. Like every contact centre we will have busy times, when we cannot answer all calls this quickly. However, this will be the exception to the rule. We will deliver this promise by ensuring that we are staffed to meet customer demand and that staff are well trained, so they can resolve calls quickly

- **Written Standards**

  Upon receipt of a customer letter or email the Council will ensure that a reply is sent within five working days. If the query is complex and will take some time to answer, we will acknowledge receipt of the correspondence within five working days and provide with the customer with timescales for a full response.

- **Face to Face Standards**

  Customers visiting the Information Station can expect to be seen by an appropriate member of staff; usually within twenty minutes. Like our contact centre we will have busy times, but we will try to ensure that on most occasions we are staffed to deal with demand and appropriately trained to resolve queries in an efficient manner.

- **Customer choice in accessing services**

  As a Council we will provide services through the quickest and most efficient access channel for the customer, whether that is over the phone, online, face to face or via letter. We recognise that quick, simple and straightforward transactions are easily completed online or via the phone and therefore we are committed to making this possible for all of these services. We recognise that for more in depth and complex issues customers may need to speak with us face to face. We are already committed to providing this in the Information Station and will be considering providing a range of face to face services from community based locations.

  We aim to provide a consistently high level of customer service. Whether customers are calling our contact centre or speaking to one of our employees on the street. In order to achieve this consistency we provide all our frontline staff with specially designed customer service training.

- **Resolving customer enquiries promptly and conveniently**

  We want to resolve Customer queries as quickly as we can. Therefore if we can resolve it during the first contact we will. In order to achieve this we are committed to providing comprehensive training to all frontline staff and empowering them to make decisions that will speed up the process for

customers.

- **Clear communication**
  When customers contact the Council we promise to listen. If it takes longer than expected to resolve the matter we will keep them informed, explaining the reasons why. We will also be clear with our communication and avoid the use of jargon.

- **We will be courteous and welcoming**
  When customers visit Council buildings they can expect a welcoming environment. We will be polite and courteous and will ensure that we treat everyone equally.

- **Equality in accessing Council services**
  Accessibility and fairness is a key priority for us. When visiting the Information Station customers can access services in languages other than English. We also have sign language facilities, hearing loops and staff specially trained to recognise and help those who have accessibility requirements. Our website has also been designed to make it accessible to all, providing a range of facilities to help customers access the services they need. We aim to continuously improve in order to ensure that we provide access to services in a fair way.

- **Putting things right**
  If customers are unhappy with a service they have received from the Council or they want to tell us about something we have done well, we want to know. To make this as easy as possible we have a very clear and consistent complaints and compliments policy. Complaints should be acknowledged within five working days and a full response should be given within twenty working days.

4. Customer Services Delivery Model
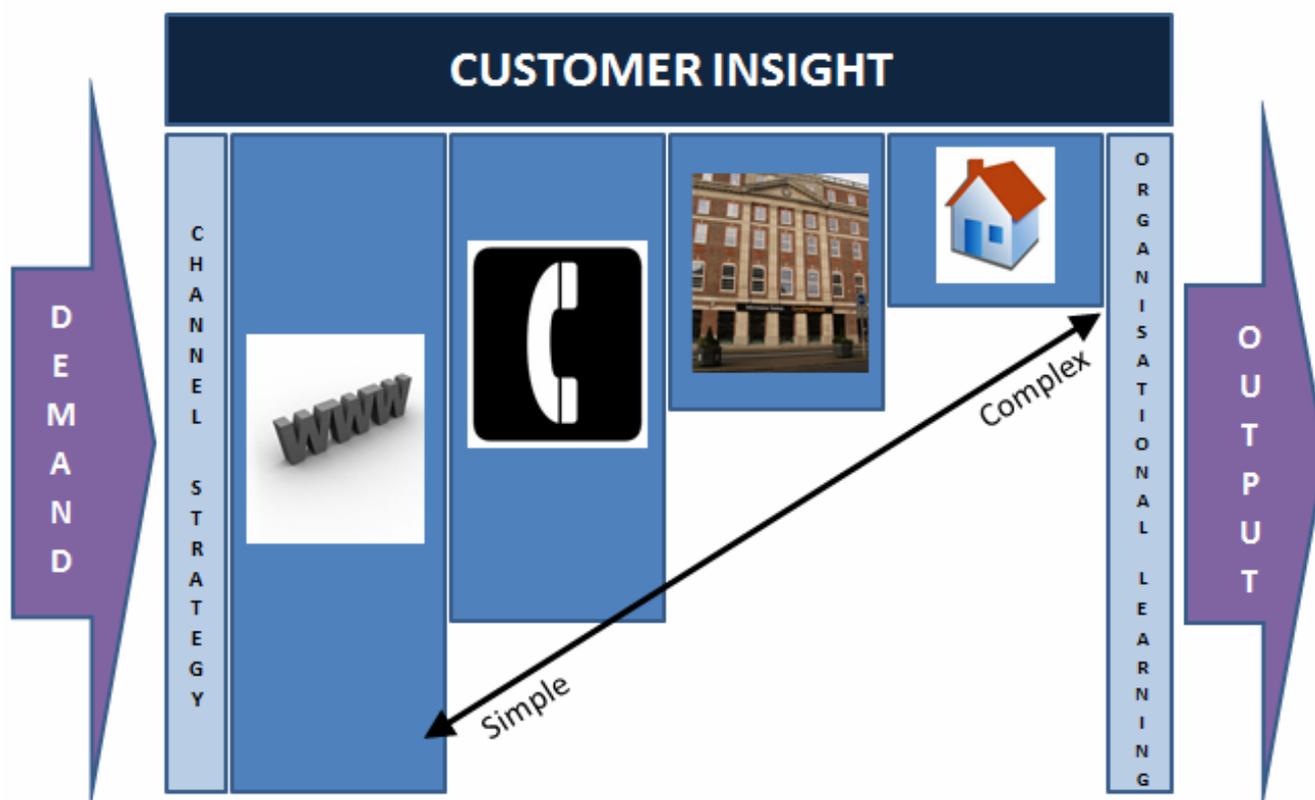
4.1 The Delivery Model explained

This delivery model shows how Newport City Council plans to deliver improved services for its customers. The **demand** element of the graphic illustrates customer contact. A channel is the name given to the various ways in which customers can access the Council's services e.g. by telephone, face to face, through the website. The Council's **channel strategy** aims to encourage customers to use the most efficient and appropriate channel to access the service they require. This can be achieved in a number of ways:

- Marketing a range of access channels.

- Letting the customer know about other ways of accessing services e.g. when a customer calls the contact centre they are made aware that the service they have requested is available online so that they could choose to use the web site in the future.

- By making sure that services are available on appropriate, efficient and easy to use access channels.

- By ensuring that customers have confidence that the same level of service is available through each channel and that requests are dealt with consistently.

- By ensuring that customers receive appropriate and timely feedback and confirmation that their request has been received. This is particularly important with self –service channels e.g. in online transactions.

For the majority of customer transactions the most efficient and appropriate channel will be the Council's **website**. As the transactions become increasingly complex they will be more suited to the **telephone,** then **face to** **face** at the Information Station (or other face to face facilities across the city) and finally in a resident's home. Underpinning this delivery model is **Customer Insight**, which informs all elements of the process. It has the potential to improve customer satisfaction by tailoring services to customer need and also helps to determine which customers will have the ability to move to more efficient channels.

It is essential that the organisation learns from the data and intelligence gathered from customer contact. It provides information such as how many customers are accessing each channel, which channel they use most for particular transactions and how this changes over time. The output from this process will provide information vital to develop improved services that are easily accessible across communities, by all age groups and including groups that are difficult to reach.

4.2 Background to the Delivery Model

In 2003 the Council established a corporate contact centre. This provided a single number for customer contact and over time all published telephone numbers across the Council were transferred to this single number. The contact centre developed, increased the level of first contact resolution it achieved and won several awards. In 2009 a decision was taken to establish a corporate face to face centre, using a similar model to that of the contact centre. Planning started for this project and the Information Station was opened in early 2012. In 2010 the Council appointed a customer services manager and created a corporate customer services function to develop a number of further initiatives to improve the services we provide to customers.

A revised complaints policy was implemented in April of 2011 which introduced the centralised recording of all complaints and compliments received. In December of 2011 the Council approved a channel strategy document which demonstrated how each of the Council's customer contact channels would be developed and how

customers would be encouraged to use the most efficient and appropriate channel for their transactions, queries and other forms of contact with the Council.

4.3 How the delivery model aims to change customer demand in the future

Through the implementation and further development of the delivery model, the council anticipates a shift in customer demand from mediated, to non-mediated channels. Mediated channels require a level of staff intervention and include the contact centre, face to face contact or letter. Non-mediated channels are generally self-service by the customer and include the website, the automated phone line and self-service payments machines. Currently the demand levels of customer contact is split, with 75% of transactions completed via a mediated channel, while just over 80% of information requests are completed via non-mediated methods (self-service). The diagram below shows that through the further development of the delivery model we expect to see a further shift between mediated and non-mediated channels over the next 5 years, resulting in 45% of transactions being completed via self-service or a non-mediated channel, along with 90% of information requests.

Transactions
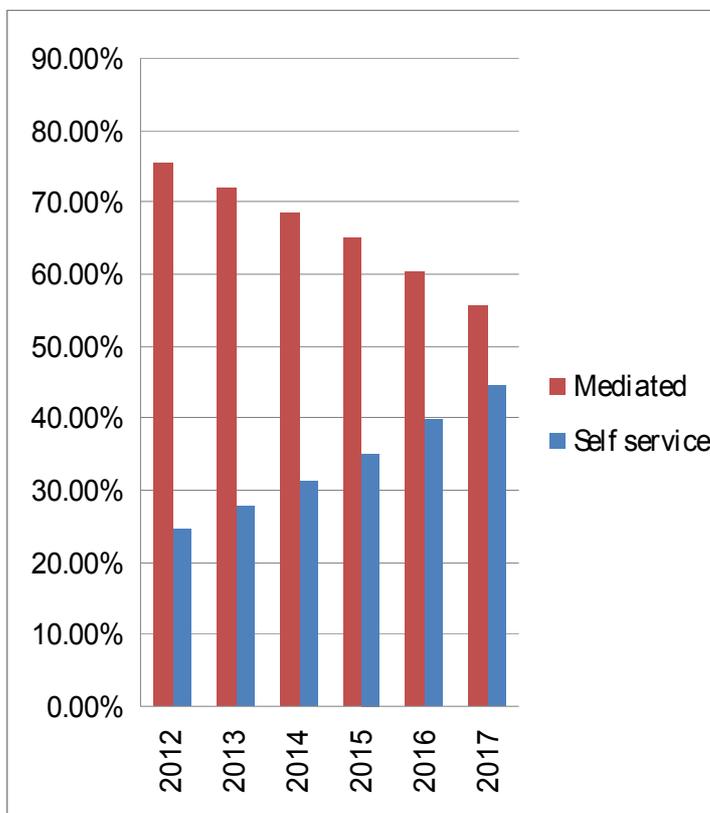
Information Requests
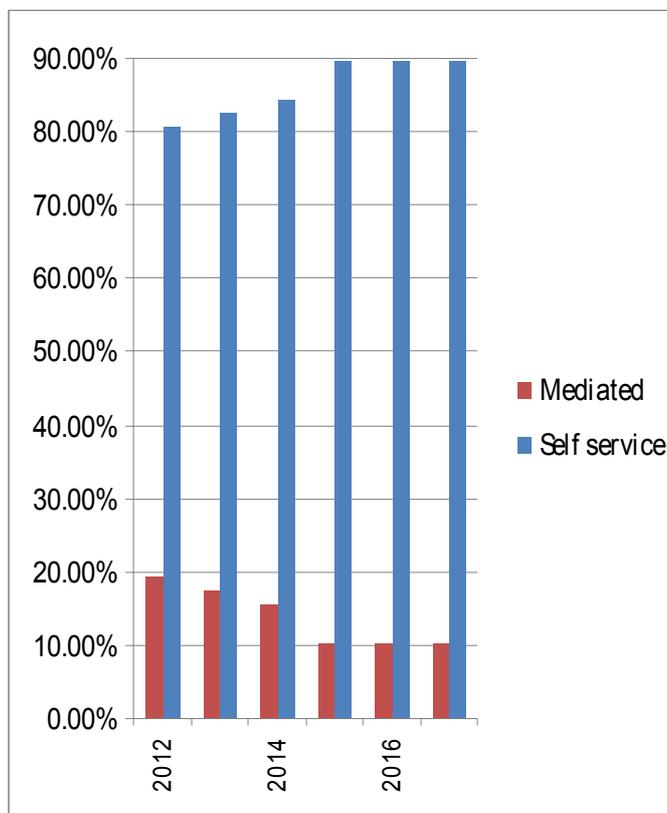
This will provide significant benefits to the customer and the Council. In the majority of cases the customer will be accessing services in a way that best suits their needs, saving them time and money (reduction in phone bills and travel costs). It will also save the Council money, as self-service channels are significantly cheaper than the mediated equivalent, as highlighted below:

*Touchtone is an automated payment line and Reverse ATM is a self-service payment machine.

Through the shift to more cost effective channels the Council will make significant savings. This saving is anticipated to be **£497,500** over 5 years and will be achieved as outlined below:
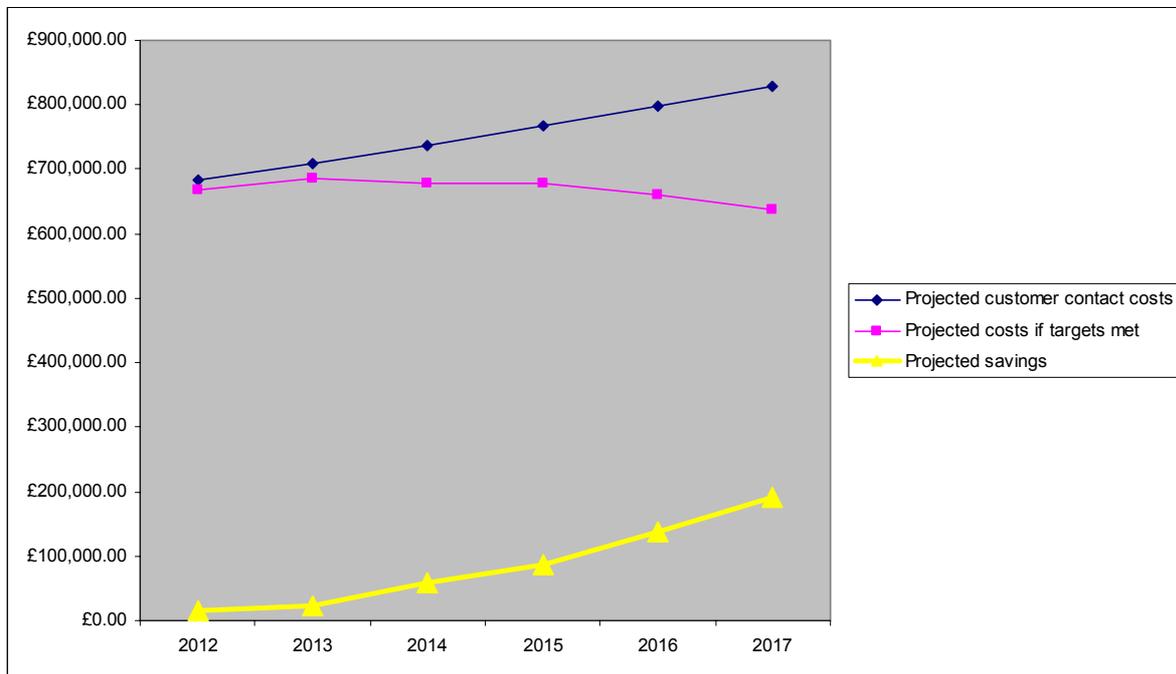
- This blue line on the graph shows the projected cost of delivering frontline customer service over the next five years in the event that customers do not change the way they access services (known as channel shift).

- The purple line shows the projected costs of delivering frontline customer service, if the targeted channel shift is achieved and customers do increase their use of self service facilities e.g. online, payment machines etc (non-mediated access channels)

- The yellow line on the graphic is the difference between the two, which is the projected saving.

- The graphic takes into account the year on year cost increase of 2% in customer contact as more services are taken on in the Contact Centre and Information Station (mediated access channels)

In addition to the financial benefits associated with the move to non-mediated contact channels, there is an additional environmental benefit. Increasing online services will reduce the amount of paper coming into the Council as well as reducing the need for customers to travel to access Council services, thus creating a 'greener' footprint.

In order for the delivery model to be work efficiently each customer access channel must be developed appropriately. Outlined below is a development plan for each key channel:

4.4 The Website

- Continue the development of the corporate website, adding further services, until all appropriate services are available online.

- Complete a full re-design of the corporate website, making it easier for customers to navigate to and access the services they need. This will be completed by moving to a "top task" based approach, which places an emphasis (and associated website space) on the most common services that our customers wish to access.

- Re-write the content of the Council's website in plain English, making it concise and simple. This will make it easier for customers to find the information they need and be achieved by ensuring that our 'content editors', receive appropriate training and guidance in their roles.

- Complete a large scale marketing campaign highlighting the services available online and targeting customers that are likely to take up the service. The scope of this campaign will be determined through the effective use of Customer Insight data.

- Provide tutorials in Council premises for customers showing them how to access online services and complete online transactions. These will be held in the Information Station, Libraries and Community Centres. Staff within each location will receive appropriate training to ensure they are confident providing the tutorials and they can recognise when it is appropriate to deliver them.
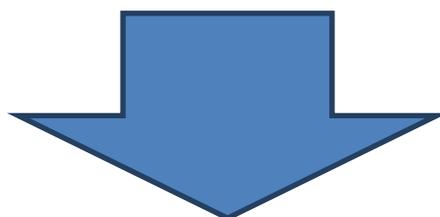
4.5 Telephone

- Continue integration of services into the City Contact Centre to maximise the amount of enquiries that are resolved for the customer during the initial phone-call without needing further calls or transfers.

  This will relieve the burden on other Council service areas and create efficiency and capacity.

- Combine face to face and contact centre operations to maximise the efficient use of staff resources and manage peak customer demand effectively.

- Further explore partnerships with other public sector contact centres. This would provide efficiency in staffing levels and also provide joined up working across the public sector, which means customers won't need to call so many separate agencies, and contributing to the idea of a 'one stop shop' for local public services. Overall this will provide value for money for the Council and customer alike.

- Telephone customers will be told about alternative methods of contacting the Council which could save them time and money. This will be completed via 'cross selling' of services e.g. if a customer calls for a transaction that is also available online or via the automated phone line, they will be made aware of this fact for the next time they wish to complete the transaction.
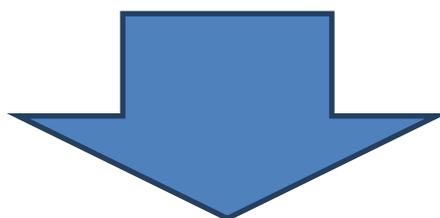

4.6 Face to Face

- Further integration of partner services into the Information Station to make it a multi-agency facility, rather than principally delivering Council services. This will encourage inter-agency working, developing a 'one stop shop', which is more efficient for the customer and the organisations involved.

- Technology made available in outlying locations to deliver services in the community. This will include self-service computers and touch screen pods in existing public sector buildings such as libraries, leisure centres, community centres and GP surgeries. It will also consider face to face conferencing facilities, allowing customers to speak directly to staff based within other key buildings such as the Information Station.

- Face to face customers to be informed of the most efficient methods of contacting the Council to save them time and money. This will be completed using self-service computers and telephones within existing face to face facilities (e.g. Information Station) where customers will receive demonstrations of how web and telephone services can be accessed.

- Delivering consistent customer service training for all frontline staff in face to face facilities to ensure that however Newport residents approach the Council they receive a positive customer experience.

- Consistent performance measurement of customer services standards across all delivery locations to ensure standards are measured and maintained.
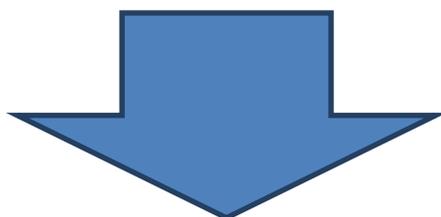
4.7 Home Visits

- We aim to provide appropriate technology for all staff that complete home visits to allow them to complete their work while on the move. Examples could include a social worker who can complete an assessment while at a resident's house, or a housing officer who can help a customer complete an online form in their property, using their Council technology.

- Through the use of route planning software optimising the routes used to undertake home visits to ensure they are completed in the most efficient way.

4.8 Other channels

Also key to the effectiveness of the Delivery Model is the development of other channels. These include: Post, Social Media, Text Message and various other E-Access channels. The development of these channels is fully outlined within the Councils Channel Strategy.

5. Customer Insight

5.1 What is customer insight?

In simple terms Customer Insight is understanding the organisation's customers based on their behaviour, experiences, beliefs, needs or desires.

5.2 Why is it important?

Councils that understand their customers are better placed to be able to meet their needs. This leads to more satisfied customers and lower costs, including 'getting it right first time' which reduces unnecessary demand because of avoidable or unnecessary repeat contact. A better understanding of our customers will also help us to remove any barriers which result in some sectors of our community being harder to reach and not being able to access services.

5.3 How do we understand what our customers want and need?

In order to fully harness the power of customer insight we must first understand the value of the data we hold. Data and information is available from a range of different sources:

1. **Predictive data**, which comes from external sources such as Experian's Mosaic database. Predictive data can analyse information to postcode and household level and can help in the targeting of services to the appropriate people. A good example of this includes indicating areas where customers are more likely to take up online services.

2. **Council data**, which is held in abundance. This comes from the Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and other back office systems and can then be layered on GIS mapping to show patterns and areas of demand.

3. **Front line staff** are a key source of customer insight. They speak to customers every day and receive feedback on the services that are accessed or those that are not available. This includes staff working on a face to face basis as well as dealing with online and telephone enquiries.

4. **Surveys and consultation** exercises with customers are a key piece of customer insight and can be tailored to achieve specific outcomes e.g. find out why customers are accessing services in a certain way. There are a number of surveys and consultations completed within the Council and it is key that a holistic and joined up approach is taken when analysing the output, ensuring that customers are only asked for information once.

5. **Customer journey mapping** is another key method of gaining Customer Insight. This can achieved through the tracking of real customers journeys, noting durations and applying costs to each stage.

6. **Complaints and Compliments** are an essential form of customer insight. They provide direct feedback that relates specifically to the delivery of council services. It is key that the Council learns from complaints and compliments when developing services for the future.

7. **Local Media coverage** is useful customer insight. Although sometimes biased with specific agendas, media coverage is usually a good indication of public opinion and perception of the Council.

5.4 How do ensure customer insight drives the decisions and actions that we make?

In order to ensure that customer insight is used effectively to drive the future development of the Council it must be built into all decision and planning processes. Therefore customer insight should become part of all Council service plans and the impact and assessment of customer insight should be considered as part of all cabinet reports. By embedding customer insight in the processes and procedures that surround Council development we can ensure that change is driven by the needs and desires of customers and not based on assumptions and perceptions of staff.

Customer Insight is a key part of the Council's Transformation Programme as outlined in the Improvement Plan.

It is also essential that customer insight is linked with the council's equalities programme so that we are able to identify the reasons why some groups of the community are hard to reach and are underrepresented in accessing services. A stronger understanding of why this is the case will allow us to refine our services to address any imbalance and identify the factors that may cause this.

6. Links to other Plans and Strategies?

There are a number of other key strategies within   the Council which underpin the customer services strategy. These include:

6.1 The Channel Strategy

As highlighted throughout this strategy there is much overlap between the channel strategy and the customer services strategy. The channel strategy document is essential part of the delivery of the Customer Services Strategy. The movement of customers from one channel to another can only be realised as part of an overarching plan that considers the future development of each channel, the customer insight data and the customer service standards set by the Council,. For further information on the channel strategy please see below:

Newport City Council Channel Strategy

6.2 The Information and Technology Strategy

The Council's information and technology strategy reflects the importance of information and technology in supporting the transformation of Council services and the delivery of the customer services strategy is no exception. The information and technology strategy is a vital component in the development of the Council's customer contact channels. The future development of the website relies heavily on the technology that underpins the channel and the same is true of the provision of telephony and other future technologies. The customer services strategy will only be a success if it links seamlessly with the information and technology strategy. For further information on the information and technology strategy please see below:

Information and Technology Strategy

6.3   The Corporate Plan

As outlined in the introduction the Council's Corporate Plan 2012 sets out the Council's strategic direction for the next five years, with a core delivery aim of 'thinking customer'. The Improvement Plan for the current year establishes the Customer Services strategy as the delivery mechanism for improving the customer experience in the transforming and improved Council and outlines relevant performance targets.

7. Strategy Timeline and Action Plan

7.1   Customer Services Strategy Delivery Timeline

Customer Services Strategy Timeline

Complete Web Marketing Campaign	28% of customer transactions completed via self-service	32% of customer transactions completed via self-service	35% of customer transactions completed via self service	40% of customer transactions completed via self service	45% of customer transactions completed via self service

Deliver website improvement project	Publish Customer Charter	Customer Insight Imbedded in all Council decisions and projects	All Council staff to receive accredited customer services training		A new customer services strategy is written

2012	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**
2012 Savings 15k	2013 Savings 24k	2014 Savings 58k	2015 Savings 87k	2016 Savings 136k	2017 Savings 190k

← SAVINGS TIMELINE →

7.2   Timeline Action Plan

Action	Owner	Target Completion Date
Deliver website improvement project	Customer Services Manager	October 2012
Complete website marketing Campaign	Customer Services Manager	December 2012
Publish customer charter	Customer Services Manager	January 2013
28% of customer transactions completed via self service	Customer Services Manager	April 2013

Year one savings realised	Customer Services Manager	April 2013
Customer Insight embedded in Council decisions and projects as part of the Transformation Programme	Head of Customer and Information Services	June 2013
32% of customer transactions completed via self service	Customer Services Manager	April 2014
Year two savings realised	Customer Services Manager	April 2014
All Council staff to receive accredited customer services training	Customer Services Manager	August 2014
35% of customer transactions completed via self service	Customer Services Manager	April 2015
Year three savings realised	Customer Services Manager	April 2015
40% of customer transactions completed via self service	Customer Services Manager	April 2016
Year four savings realised	Customer Services Manager	April 2016
A new customer services strategy is written	Customer Services Manager	June 2016
45% of customer transactions completed via self service	Customer Services Manager	April 2017
Year five savings realised	Customer Services Manager	April 2017