



Fermanagh & Omagh
District Council
Comhairle Ceantair
Fhear Manach agus na hÓmaí

Customer Service Strategy

15 June 2016

Introduction

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's (The Council) Customer Service Strategy has been developed to be both a policy document and a practical resource. As a policy document it sets out the Council's commitment to its customers and its understanding of what quality customer service means both to our citizens and the Council. As a practical resource it provides a clear definition of customer service and the specific set of standards for high quality customer service that must be adhered to across all the Council's functions and services.

As a policy document and practical resource, the Customer Service Strategy will help the Council achieve its mission and vision, live up to its values and achieve its objectives over the life of the Corporate Plan.

Our Customer Service Strategy is integrally linked to the Corporate Plan and in time to the Community Plan, ensuring that everything the Council does is linked to serving and meeting the community's needs.

2. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's Corporate Plan

Our vision, mission, values and corporate themes all come from and are reflective of the Council's commitment to the people it serves.

Our Vision:

'Fermanagh & Omagh, the place of choice – where people, communities and businesses prosper'

Our Mission:

'Leading and serving our community, working with others to promote quality of life, quality places and quality services for all'

Our Values:

- **Responsive , accountable civic leadership**
- **Transparent and open**
- **People and community focused**
- **Fair and inclusive**
- **Excellence in performance**
- **Committed to sustainable improvement and innovation**

Themes:

- (1) People and Community – Quality of Life**
- (2) Place and Environment – Protecting and Creating Quality Places**
- (3) The Council itself – Delivering Quality Services**

3. Context

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council was established on 1 April 2015, one of 11 new Councils established as a result of the Local Government Reform Programme.

The Council's Corporate Plan 2015-19 was developed and agreed as a guide to help implement our vision, mission and service delivery actions for the four years up to 2019. Currently, work is well underway to develop our first Community Plan for the district, which when agreed will become the overarching long-term strategic plan.

The Corporate Plan sets out our commitment to the people of the district to deliver high quality services, to plan for the future, to engage with communities and to place the needs of the people the Council represents at the forefront of all we do, ensuring we have a 'Customer First' focus.

The new Council area is home to some 114,365 people and 7,340 businesses. The Fermanagh and Omagh district is the largest region in terms of land mass – approximately 3,000km² (20% of NI) and the smallest in terms of population. As a result the population density is the sparsest in NI which in itself poses challenges to service delivery.

Our demographics and customer profile are diverse – residents, visitors, business owners and government/statutory bodies located across the district. This Council has the smallest population of all eleven Councils, many of whom live in dispersed rural communities. As a Council we must be continually aware of our population base and their needs, to help inform us as to how best we can deliver services.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council is committed to meeting our customers' needs through the delivery of high quality, cost-effective services which are convenient and accessible to our customers. One of the specific actions committed to in our Corporate Plan is to put in place a **Customer Service Strategy "which ensures services are delivered around customer needs and are accessible across the wider district."**

This Customer Service Strategy sets out our commitment to deliver high quality customer service standards. It outlines how we will seek to build a Council-wide customer service culture, driven through our Corporate Plan, our performance improvement priorities and in time our Community Plan. It will assist the Council in becoming more 'Customer First' oriented, helping us to identify what matters to our customers and what is important to us as a Council in delivering services for our customers.

4. Linkage to other Council Strategies and Plans

Our Customer Service Strategy will become part of the Council's Constitution, it will complement other Council Strategies and action plans, and it will closely align to the Council's:

- Standing Orders;
- Communications Strategy and Action Plan;
- Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy;
- Corporate Plan 2015-19;
- Equality Scheme;

- Good Relations Strategy;
- Annual Performance Improvement Plan;
- ICT Strategy;
- Fermanagh and Omagh District's Community Plan; and
- Linguistic Diversity Policy.

5. Customer Service Strategy

The Customer Service Strategy outlines how we will put the citizens at the centre of service delivery, it will assist us to improve and increase customer choice in when and where they access our services. It will also ensure that we provide consistent, professional and co-ordinated services and as far as possible at the first point of contact.

6. Aims and Objectives of the Customer Service Strategy

The aim of the Strategy is to provide continuously improving services which are delivered fairly, professionally and responsively, whilst also recognising the Council's statutory requirements.

By working in accordance with the Strategy, we intend:

- To support the Council's political and management objectives;
- To set out customer service standards and monitoring arrangements;
- To provide guidance on how to deal with Customers comments, compliments and complaints;
- To provide a guidance framework for Staff, Elected Members, Customers and Partners of the Council including who our customers are and how we will respond to the diverse and changing needs of our customers;
- To ensure that a consistently high standard of service is delivered by and across all sections of the Council;
- To monitor performance so as to recognise strengths and take action to address any problems; and
- To identify roles and responsibilities for Staff and Elected Members.

To do this, the Council through its corporate performance improvement plan will identify and develop opportunities to enhance front line customer service.

We will:

- Develop our Public (Customer) Services Centres (Omagh and Enniskillen) to ensure more convenient, easier and quicker access for citizens to our services;
- Review our structures, processes, systems and technologies to ensure they enable and underpin service delivery in the most effective and innovative ways possible;
- Introduce where practicable more online facilities and self-service options, allowing customers the opportunity to carry out routine tasks independently;
- Invest in learning and development for staff to ensure they have the skills to deliver excellent customer service;
- Build and develop our Partnerships, particularly through Community Planning, to deliver improved and more joined up access to public services;

- Consult and engage with and actively listen to our customers to seek their views to help inform decisions that affect them; and
- Commit to ongoing investment and modernisation in service delivery.

7. Customer focussed Principles and Council Priorities

There are a number of key principles which will guide customer service developments and improvements within the Council. These are in keeping with guidance developed through the Local Government Reform Programme, 'Developing a Customer Focussed Approach to Service Delivery – A Resource for Councils'.

Local Government Reform Programme Guidance	Council Customer Service Priorities The Council will provide services that are:
Citizen focussed local government – providing public sector services in a way that is relevant to customers including working with partners to explore providing joined up customer services	Customer centred, involving listening to customers and taking on-board their comments, compliments and complaints
Accessible services – striving to make services available to customers when they are needed, in a location that provides ease of access and through a variety of means for e.g., internet, face to face, telephone, by post and digitally	Designed to meet the needs of all the people and diverse communities we serve
Equality and Social Inclusion – developing and delivering services in a manner that promotes equality and social inclusion	In line with statutory requirements
Better use of information – enhancing service delivery through the improved use of management information to inform policy making and give greater efficiency	Effectively and efficiently managed Capable of adapting to change and innovative
Increased accountability and better value for money – improved public accountability through performance reporting and ensuring resources are deployed efficiently and effectively	Good Quality In line with Council resources Value for money

8. Customer Profile

Our customers are all those to whom we deliver services and are drawn from a wide range of individuals and organisations including:

- Residents;
- Visitors;
- Tourists;
- Businesses;
- Other public sector organisations;

- Voluntary sector organisations;
- Community sector organisations;
- Elected Representatives;
- Staff; and
- Other partnership organisations.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

Every Officer and Elected Member of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council can influence the quality of service which a customer receives and consequently their perception of the Council. It is not just the responsibility of front line Officers – everyone can and must play their part in quality customer service.

Elected Members will:

- Be committed to the implementation of the Customer Service Strategy;
- Adopt the corporate principles and priorities of the Strategy; and
- Monitor performance against our customer service standards through P&R Committee.

Senior Management will:

- Adopt the corporate principles and priorities of the Strategy;
- Ensure staff are aware of the Strategy;
- Monitor customer care performance in their service area and its implementation by their Staff;
- Review our structures, processes, systems and technologies to ensure they enable and underpin service delivery in the most effective and innovative ways possible;
- Consider customer feedback to maintain effectiveness of the Strategy; and
- Review, evaluate, and recommend change to the Strategy where necessary.

Head of Democratic and Customer Services will:

- Oversee the development and updating of the Customer Service Strategy and Action Plan;
- Oversee the corporate implementation of the Customer Service Strategy and Action Plan;
- Monitor and review Council delivery of customer focussed services to ensure continuous improvement;
- Prepare update reports for Council on customer service performance; and
- Co-ordinate/deliver corporate training on implementation of Customer Service Strategy and Action Plan.

Heads of Service will:

- Review and monitor customer care in their service area(s);
- Review and develop service delivery improvements within their areas of responsibility that are practical, within resources and meet customers' needs and corporate objectives;
- Embed improvements to customer service as an objective in annual business planning; and
- Include customer service as an agenda item at staff meetings and involve staff in the decision making process around service delivery improvements.

All Staff will:

- Take due care to ensure that they comply with, implement and promote the Customer Service Strategy.

Customer Service Working Group will:

- Represent their Department's views on customer service and report back to Head of Democratic and Customer Services;
- Ensure customer service is an agenda item for departmental staff meetings and act as the communications link between Department and Customer Service Working Group; and
- Co-ordinate and analyse the implementation of actions within the corporate Customer Service Action Plan for e.g. satisfaction surveys and communications on results/improvements.

10. Customer Service Standards

The Council is committed to delivering standards of service that Customers can expect when engaging with Council staff and when visiting Council offices or facilities.

Fermanagh & Omagh District Council is committed to delivering high quality services in an efficient, effective and professional manner while providing easy access to information.

Fermanagh & Omagh District Council Staff will:

- Be prompt, approachable, professional and helpful;
- Treat you fairly and with respect;
- Respect your privacy;
- Be open and accountable; and
- Provide straightforward information and respond quickly and efficiently to requests for Council services.

In line with our commitment to you, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council will:

- Work to ensure that our services are accessible;
- Consult customers about our services and welcome feedback;
- Deal with feedback quickly and positively;
- Try to resolve complaints about our service provision to you promptly and satisfactorily;
- Make information available on request in accessible formats for e.g. large print;
- Facilitate language interpretation and/or other support where required (an appointment may be necessary);
- Make every effort to ensure the website is accessible and easy to use for everyone no matter what browser you chose to use and whether or not you have a disability;
- Ensure that our services are provided by staff who have the appropriate knowledge, skills and training to do their job efficiently;
- Ensure any Council Officer who has to visit your home, will show an official identity card without being prompted. (If you have any doubt about the identity of a particular Officer, you can contact the Council for verification);

- Try to resolve enquiries as soon as possible and actively encourage customers to raise concerns. If your complaint cannot be resolved informally, we have a formal complaints procedure;
- Monitor our customer service against the standards we have set in our Customer Charter in order to improve our service delivered to you; and
- Aim to answer queries at first point of contact or connect you as quickly as possible to the relevant department or Officer.

What we ask of you:

- Treat our staff courteously and with respect;
- Quote any reference number on correspondence you have received;
- Tell us if you have communication difficulties so that we can facilitate a more suitable way to communicate effectively with you; and
- Provide further information if requested.

When you contact us:

Fermanagh & Omagh District Council strives to provide excellent customer service and is committed to meeting the needs of our customers in a professional manner. You can expect the following standards when contacting us.

When you visit any Fermanagh & Omagh District Council offices or facilities:

- We will provide appropriate access for all visitors to our facilities;
- Venues will be clean and welcoming with up-to-date information about Fermanagh & Omagh District Council facilities and services;
- Staff will acknowledge you on arrival and aim to deal with your enquiry as quickly as possible;
- If an officer from the relevant department is available you can expect to be seen within 10 minutes;
- If your appointment is delayed by more than 5 minutes we will give you an explanation; and
- If an officer is not available we will make an appointment or arrange for an appropriate officer to contact you.

When you telephone any Fermanagh & Omagh District Council offices or facilities staff will:

- State the Council's name when answering the switchboard and when answering the telephones will state their name and department.
- Aim to answer all calls within 5 rings.
- Where possible when someone is not available, take a message, offer voicemail facility or arrange for someone to ring you back. and
- Respond to voicemails by next working day of receipt.

When you contact Fermanagh & Omagh District Council in writing staff will:

- Acknowledge all correspondence within 5 working days and respond within 20 working days;
- Acknowledge receipt of formal complaints immediately on receipt and respond in accordance with the Complaints Procedure; and
- Respond to Access to Information requests in accordance with the legislation. If this is not achievable, we will let you know why and give you a new date when you can expect to receive the information requested.

11. How to Contact Fermanagh & Omagh District Council

By Telephone:

The main offices are open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Tel: 0300 303 1777

The Grange, Omagh.

The Townhall, Fermanagh.

Public Services Centre, Omagh.

Speak to us in person:

The main offices are open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Write to us:

Fermanagh & Omagh District Council

The Grange

Mountjoy Road

Omagh

Co Tyrone

BT79 1BL

or

Townhall

2 Townhall Street

Enniskillen

Co Fermanagh

BT74 7BA

Email us: info@fermanaghomagh.com

Contact us online: www.fermanaghomagh.com
www.facebook.com/fermanaghomaghdistrictcouncil
www.twitter.com/fermanaghomagh

Text Phone: 028 8225 6216

12. Contacting us through a local Councillor

Contact details for Councillors are detailed on Fermanagh & Omagh District Council's website www.fermanaghomagh.com or from the Corporate Service & Governance department.

The commitments and standards will be separately published on the Council website and in written format.

13. If we meet or do not meet our Customer Service

The Council wants to continuously improve its customers experience, so if things go well or not so well, the Council needs to know in equal measure. It is not always apparent if things go wrong or indeed when things are going well unless we are told by the people who are experiencing the services first hand. The Council needs feedback from the public to ensure continuous improvement in service delivery. To this end, the Council has in place its 'Comments, Compliments and Complaints Guide' which is accessible on the website www.fermanaghomagh.com and in written format.

We want to promote this means of communications with the Council so that we get the feedback required to inform future decision-making.

14. Comments, Compliments and Complaints

Customer complaints should be viewed as a positive means of improving customer service. The guide sets out how to make a comment or compliment and the various steps to making a complaint. In brief this process is as follows:

- Comments and compliments can be made in person at any Council facility reception area, by email to info@fermanaghomagh.com in writing or by telephone or textphone;
- Complaints can also be made in person or by a representative acting on behalf of the complainant;
- Complaints can be registered in person, by letter, fax, email to the Department/ Section/facility which deals with the subject of the complaint or by contacting a Councillor;
- Complaint details should include the complainant's name and contact details, dates, times and staff names, if applicable, as well as any other information relevant to the complaint;
- Complaints should be dealt with as quickly, effectively and efficiently as possible;
- A full explanation and outcome will be forwarded to the complainant after the investigation is complete;
- The Complaints process has been categorised into four steps, which allows the complainant to express their dissatisfaction if they are not happy with the response received at any stage of the process (a Complaints Form and Guide – including time allocated to deal with a complaint – are available on the Council website); and
- Anonymous complaints will be investigated at the discretion of the Council.

On a wider scale and in keeping with meeting our corporate and continuous improvement objectives, the Council needs to have in place a mechanism for feedback in a more structured and timely manner. Through the Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy, the Council has committed to consulting with and engaging citizens, through customer satisfaction surveys, focus groups, consultation events, awareness raising initiatives etc. Reference should be made to both the Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy and the Communications Strategy in conjunction with the Customer Service Strategy.

The Council will analyse and publish satisfaction levels for its main service areas and highlight service improvements brought about as a result of the satisfaction outcomes.

15. Conclusion

To deliver our vision for customer service, there is a fundamental requirement to create a new 'customer first' culture for this new Council and to look at changing the way we work, the way services are delivered and the way we interact with the customers. Customer service will need to be core to Council service and function delivery.

To do this we need clear leadership and governance arrangements in place which will drive the strategy and provide a shared vision that everyone can work towards. We have set out the roles and responsibilities of Officers and Elected Members earlier in the Strategy, and there is a need to lead by example.

Consultation is core to developing our customer service culture so we must consult and engage regularly with both customers and staff to help improve the design of services into the future. This Customer Service Strategy and Action Plan must be read and actioned alongside the Communications and Community Consultation and Engagement Strategies. It must form part of departmental Service Delivery and Improvement Plans and feed into our Performance Management processes.

There are a number of stages in managing this process effectively:

- Consultation and engagement with the public and staff;
- Customer service commitments and standards embedded and known to the public and staff;
- Monitoring and evaluation of performance against the commitments and standards; and
- Service improvements made through informed redesign of service delivery processes and procedures.

In implementing this Customer Service Strategy, it is the Council's hope and intention that it will be recognised as a centre of excellence and best practice in customer service going forward. Within the timeframe of the current Corporate Plan, the Council will consider the benefits of achieving a recognised accreditation for customer service and excellence and

implementing a Customer Relations Management system, to further enhance and develop the customers experience with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council into the future.