

CUSTOMER STRATEGY

2023–28

Delivering services to residents, tenants, businesses, visitors, partners, community groups, council staff and services.



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Introduction

Welcome to East Lothian Council's Customer Strategy.

I am delighted to introduce our new Customer Strategy, which sets out a commitment to deliver the best services we can to all our customers. It highlights the importance of continuing to ensure customers and the people we work with are at the heart of everything we do as a council. This means ensuring services remain fit for purpose and accessible to all who need them, while being designed in such a way as to tackle inequalities, adversity and trauma in all of their forms.

In developing the strategy, we carried out a survey to help understand how customers want to contact us – now and in the future. The strategy responds to the requirements of our customers and the people we work with, recognising the importance of being able to access services easily in a way and at a time that suits.

In recent years there have been changes in the way we interact with each other and the services we access, partly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There has been a shift towards online communication and the Council has embraced this change. Our Digital Strategy 2022-27 highlights the role technology plays in improving how we engage with our customers and deliver services, at a time when demand for services is increasing and councils face severe financial pressures. That's why the new Customer Strategy reinforces our commitment to use digital innovation to best effect so that we can deploy resources as efficiently in possible and in support of the priorities set out in our Council Plan.

At the same time, there is a recognition that we must continue to deliver services sustainably while reducing our carbon footprint and working towards achieving net zero.

This is particularly important given that East Lothian's working age population is projected to increase by 8.6% by 2028, while our pensionable age population is expected to increase by 10.9% and the number of school aged children is expected to increase by 17.1%.

We also know that many customers are facing pressures. The cost of living is increasing and prices are rising at rates not seen since the 1970s including energy bills, food, fuel and more. Customer needs are changing and expectations are increasing. That's why we have developed this Customer Strategy. It is underpinned by our East Lothian Council values – Enabling, Leading and Caring. In doing so, the strategy sets out our commitment to enabling improvement, leading with innovation and caring for our customers. It also shows how we will involve you – our customers – in the design of our processes and services so that we continue to work together to deliver our priorities.

Monica Patterson

East Lothian Council Chief Executive

Our county, our customers

Our customers and the people we work with includes anyone who needs or chooses to interact with us. This includes our residents, tenants, businesses, visitors, partners, community groups and our own staff and services. This is a snapshot of our services, our customers and how we met some of their needs in 2022/23.



109,580 population



1,073 km of roads
maintained



2,567 blue badges
issued



202 pitches and
play areas



15,092 children in
42 schools



32,289 visits to
museums



24,493 online
transactions



20,600 care at
home hours per
week



1,016 planning
applications
determined



723 employability
programme
participants



9,107 Council
tenancies



1,558 businesses
supported



2.7 million kerbside
recycling
collections



2,053 births and
deaths registered



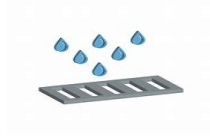
264,698 calls
handled by the
Contact Centre



2,279 referrals to
children's social
work



93 Council buildings cleaned and maintained



1,880 road gullies maintained



2,141 licences granted



51 community groups awarded grants



20,541 street lights maintained (95% LED)



1.3 million non-recycling collections



235,064 calls handled from 6,500 community alarms



30 countryside sites managed



345 school pupils engaged in employability programmes



426,674 visits to libraries



340 km of core paths maintained



2,406 potholes filled



52,152 properties registered for Council Tax



41,262 face to face visits for Customer Service enquiries



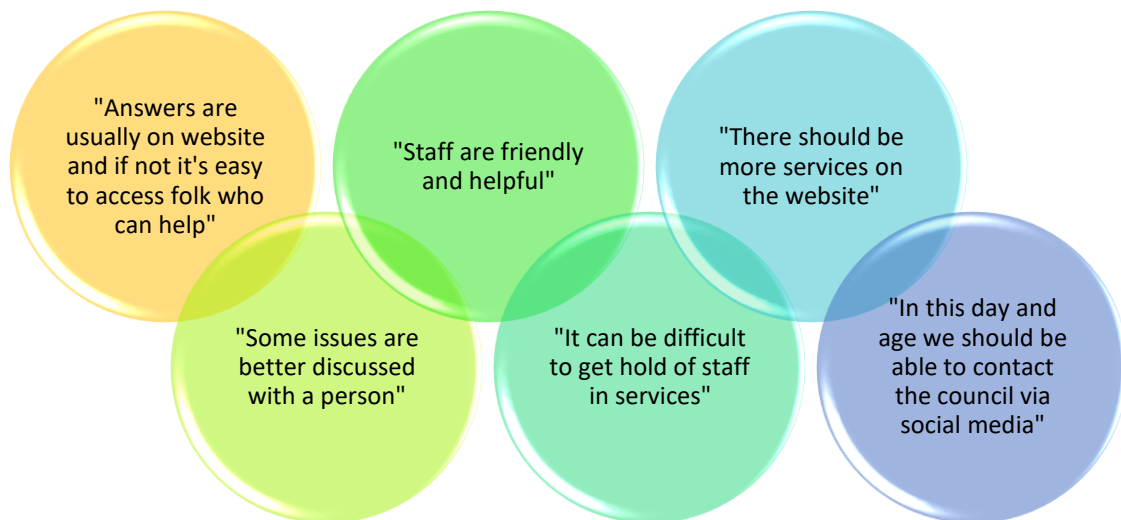
17,462 housing benefit and council tax reduction claims processed



2,869 cash payments and 270,572 online payments made

Our engagement with you

In March and April 2023 we ran a survey to help us understand how you want to contact us now and in the future. The survey was available online and paper copies were available in our libraries, museums, area offices, community centres and Enjoy Leisure centres. We have used your feedback to shape our strategy.



You told us that you usually go online to contact us (52% use website and email) followed by phone contact at 33%. Less than 15% usually visit us in person. You prefer to have a range of ways to contact us.

Over 80% feel the service you receive is 'OK' or better, and the things that really matter to you are a friendly face or voice, making things easy and responding quickly. These are the things we need to focus on to make sure you have a good experience when you contact us.

71% feel you can access Council services when you need to. The website or email is the most popular choice for simple services like finding information, making payments and reporting things but for anything personal or more complicated phone is the first choice. For updates, complaints and compliments email is the preferred route with phone/web second choice.

Over 82% of you are confident using the website and have used it in the last 12 months, and 62% find it easy to use. The themes of making things easy and responding quickly are just as important for the website as all other ways of contacting us, as is making sure information is kept up to date. Some of you mentioned that you would like a 'live chat' option on the website.

Those who attend offices often do so because you feel you get a better service face to face, although a number of you noted that staff are not always available in offices when you drop in.

Our Vision

We want to make sure the services we provide deliver what you need when you need it, while continuing to target our resources where they are needed most.

Our strategy is customer focussed, community led, digital first and sustainable. It will ensure more services are available online and will make sure it is quick and easy to access them. It will take a targeted approach to face to face service delivery in each area for those who need it, bringing services and partners together to meet customer needs as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Technology has changed the way people interact both socially and when requesting goods and services. We know that more and more of our customers want to interact with us online – in 2022 there were over 9.2 million views of our website, mostly using mobile devices. Over the next five years we will provide more services online, so that you can access them when it suits you to do so, and we will ensure the processes we use to deliver these services are efficient and effective. We will offer you advice and support to get online if you need it, and we will make sure our staff have the confidence and skills to use our systems effectively.

However we know technology is not suitable for everyone or for every situation. By providing high quality, easy to use online services for those who can use them, we will increase capacity and resources to support those customers and people we work with for whom a phone call or a face to face service is more suitable.

We will put customers at the heart of everything we do. We will ensure our services are fit for purpose and accessible to all who need them, regardless of how you choose to contact us, and are designed in such a way as to tackle inequalities, adversity and trauma in all of their forms. We will continue to invest in our staff to enable them to support all of our customers and deliver high quality services. Our approach meets the requirements of the [Equality Act 2010](#). It is person-centred, [trauma informed](#) and is designed to meet the needs of children as set out in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and [The Promise](#).

By working in this way we will improve the customer experience – increasing the services we can deliver in one step, reducing the need for you to chase us for information and therefore ensuring we can deliver services more efficiently and effectively.

Our Customer Principles

Our Customer Principles explain how we will deliver our Vision.



[Image description for visually impaired customers: The image shows the five principles of our customer strategy. In the centre is a heart shape saying 'Customer at our Heart'. Surrounding the heart are four linked circles that say 'Consistently high quality', 'Joined up', 'Digital first' and 'Delivering better services'.]



- We will put you, our customers and the people we work with, at the heart of everything we do, using feedback to continuously improve services.
- We will ensure all customers are treated fairly and with respect.
- The ways in which you contact us will be fully accessible for you.
- It will become more convenient, easier and quicker for you to interact with us.
- We will design flexible services which adapt to the changing needs and lived experiences of our customers now and in the future.
- We will keep you updated if service requests can't be dealt with 'one-stop' – at the first point of contact - until the service is delivered.
- We will involve you as we design more services, whether online, face to face, or by other means, to ensure our services are designed around your needs.
- Some of our services are delivered jointly with our partners, and we will work together to ensure the best possible experience when you interact with us.



- We will provide a consistently high quality service by applying a defined set of values and behaviours called the '[East Lothian Way](#)' that are person-centred, proactive, caring and inclusive, regardless of how you choose to contact us.
- We will have a consistent approach to communication for example voicemails, email signatures, auto-responses on mailboxes.
- We will set clear expectations of when you will hear from us.
- We will invest in our staff to provide the best possible service and experience to our customers and the people we work with, supporting them to get it right first time.
- We will regularly ask for your views about the quality of our interactions with you.



- Our Contact Centre will be the main route for phone calls to the Council.
- We will make it simpler for you to know how to contact us for different services.
- We will offer appointments for face to face services for those who need them, to help you get to the right service quickly.
- Our staff will be available across a variety of locations, appropriate for each area and we will bring services together to make them easier to access.



- We will continue to promote and support a digital first/self-service approach wherever possible.
- We will increase the number of ways you can contact us online, for example live chat.
- We will introduce more online facilities and self-service opportunities so you can decide when, where and how to get in touch with us.
- All of our services will make use of the technology available, automating where we can.
- Our online services will be user friendly to meet your needs and those of our services and partners.
- Staff will be trained in our systems and we will offer support to you to access our services online.

These commitments are reflected in our [Digital Strategy 2022 - 2027](#).



- We will continue to deliver best value in the services we provide. Moving more services online will enable us to increase staff availability to support customers and people we work with who can't access digital services or who have more complex service requests.
- We will increase the number of services that are delivered at the first point of contact and keep you updated if it takes longer.
- We will improve our response times by improving and automating processes.
- When things go wrong we will listen to you and keep you informed of our actions and the improvements that can be made.
- We will review our Customer Feedback processes to make it as easy as possible for you to give feedback.
- We will use your feedback and analyse our data to improve how we do things, understand who is and isn't using our services and target service delivery to those who need it most.

Delivering our Customer Strategy

We have created an action plan that will help us deliver this strategy within available resources. The actions are phased across the life of the strategy and cover all of the commitments we have made. This means that, as a customer, you will see continuous improvements in how we deliver the services we provide.

Each action has been allocated an 'owner' – that is the service who will take the lead on ensuring the action is delivered. Each action has also been allocated a date by which we expect it to be completed.

The delivery of the customer strategy will be monitored by the Service Manager – Customer Services and will be reported annually to the Council's Management Team.

This reporting will include outcome measures linked to the action plan which will monitor, track and measure continuous improvement.

Appendix 1: Connections to other policies and strategies

ELC Customer
Strategy

Local policies and strategies

Council Plan

Digital Strategy

Communication
Strategy

Equality Plan

Recovery &
Renewal Plan

Climate Change
Strategy

Financial Strategy

Poverty Plan

Local
Development Plan
2

Children's Services
Plan

Integration Joint
Board Strategic
Plan

National and international policies and strategies

Scottish Digital
Strategy

The Promise

UN Convention on
the Rights of the
Child

National
Performance
Framework

Equality Act

Place Standard



Versions of this leaflet can be supplied in Braille, large print, audiotape or in your own language. Please phone Customer Services if you require assistance on 01620 827199

East Lothian Council
John Muir House
Brewery Park
Haddington
East Lothian
EH41 3HA

www.eastlothian.gov.uk
Call Centre **01620 827 827**