

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

13TH SEPTEMBER 2021
VERSION 3.3



**NORTH
NORFOLK
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Foreword

This customer service strategy has been designed to shape the nature of Customer Service across all of the Council's Services.

It is designed to provide a framework for the development of a council-wide Customer Service Improvement programme that will build on the existing commitment to the highest standards of customer service for all our residents, businesses and visitors.

It is influenced and informed by experiences and learning gained during the Council's changed service delivery model which was developed as a part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It aspires to harness the best features of emerging technologies to deliver as wide a range of methods to access the Council's services as possible without removing any of the existing ways of communicating with the Council

The strategy covers the medium and long term approach to delivering the highest quality customer service in a way that meets the needs of everyone the Council serves. It also incorporates a set of Customer Service Standards by which service delivery can be objectively measured and compared. These standards will be regularly reviewed and revised to ensure that the Council continually strives to improve the service it offers.

Signed

Name

Officer role

North Norfolk District Council

Cllr Name

Member role

North Norfolk District Council

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Executive Summary

The North Norfolk district covers an area of 360 square miles and has a population of over 100,000 people living in 121 distinct communities and settlements. Our main office is centrally located in Cromer and we have a small office in Fakenham. The public transport across the district is limited and many of our residents and customers find accessing the Council offices difficult. Our customers are also not a single group of people with singular interests in common – we provide a diverse range of services, both directly and through contractors and partner organisations, and our customers and service users are not only local residents, but also visitors and local businesses.

The Customer Service Strategy explains how we will continue transforming the services we provide to the residents, visitors and businesses of North Norfolk. It outlines our aspirations for the service quality and user experience we want for all of our customers.

This strategy provides a vision and direction to show how the Council can take advantage of new technology and new ways of working to deliver;

- Services of high quality,
- Improved access to our services and positive customer experiences, and
- Customers' needs.

1. Services of high quality

At the heart of our customer charter will be our commitment to improving the quality of service delivery to our customers and responding to their needs.

We will communicate better, consistent and high quality service standards across all of our teams.

We will provide good quality, responsive services.

2. Improved access to our services

We will make the Council's services as simple and easy to access as possible and will use a variety of channels to facilitate this – including self-service via the Council's website, and also for customers making personal visits to the Council's offices, or communicating with us by letter, telephone, web chat and online.

We will ensure that we have contact points which enable access to services by all.

3. Customers' needs

We will place customers at the heart of what we do and embed that focus in our service delivery.

We will work to understand our customer's needs.

We will establish strong mechanisms to encourage customer feedback and use that information to improve service delivery.

This Customer Service Strategy will, once fully implemented, allow the Council to provide a consistent 'one front door' customer experience across a variety of channels, meeting people's service expectations while delivering value for money.

This strategy details our vision for services to our customers, how the vision will be delivered through a range of investment and change, and how we will listen to our customers and improve.

Scope

This Strategy applies all aspects of customer service and customer contact throughout the Council.

1 Introduction

The Council is the only place to get local car park season tickets, hire beach huts, to organise essential financial support such as housing benefit, to register so that you can vote and ensure your waste is collected regularly. Our customers also come to the Council seeking help, advice and guidance often at the most critical and emotional points in their lives such as following the death of a close family member or when facing eviction or financial difficulties.

It is the place where elected councillors organise local resources to make sure they work for the people who live, work and visit here through services such as planning, housing, environmental services, parking, economic growth, coastal management and many others.

We want contacting the Council to be easy, helpful and friendly. We have all experienced bad customer service: being on hold for what feels like hours waiting for the call to be answered; having to speak to several different people for a simple query or request; receiving letters that don't clearly tell you what you need to know or do; completing lengthy and unclear online forms only to find you have to call or visit with additional information; having to chase someone repeatedly to do something they said they would do; or simply dealing with someone who was clearly not genuinely interested in your circumstances. These are not the experiences we want for our customers.

Customer service across the Council must recognise in its design and how it is delivered that it is about helping people and that it is our duty to do this in the best way possible and accepting that one size does not fit all.

2 Customer Vision

Through this strategy our aim is to make sure each customer's experience of contacting the Council is a positive one.

We want our customers to:

- Find it easy to get whatever service they need from the Council
- Feel reassured and confident that their needs have been understood, that action will be taken promptly and that their time has been well spent
- Find it easy to submit an online form or application

- The council believes when our customers contact us they want to:
- Feel they are treated as an individual, for their opinion to be heard and their Input and response appreciated
- Receive respect and kindness in all their interactions with the Council
- Feel their contact with the Council is a positive and compassionate experience
- Receive information that is clear and understandable and free from professional expertise, however well intended, that may lead to customers feeling talked down to
- Recognise their wider needs and circumstances are understood and taken into consideration
- Trust that action will be taken in a timely manner
- Have access to services online at all times
- Have access by phone and face-to-face Monday to Friday
- Have access to Emergency out-of-hours services
- View the progress and outcome of their requests
- Trust that information provided is correct, relevant, easily found, and accessible
- Feel social media is responsive, open and a two-way communication channel
- Have their issue resolved at the first point of contact – handoffs only where the issue is complex and the customer can be better helped by an officer from the back office
- Receive contact details of other agencies where the Council can't provide what's needed

The Customer Service Strategy explains how we will continue transforming the services we provide to the people of North Norfolk. It outlines our aspirations for the quality and experience we want for our customers.

This strategy provides a vision and direction to show how the Council can take advantage of new technology and new ways of working to communicate better and deliver improved services to our customers, alongside consistent, high quality service standards across all our teams.

In achieving this, there is no compromise in our commitment to understanding our customers and their needs. We aim to increase our customers' control over their experience with us while utilising digital channels as a way of delivering services in the most efficient way.

We will encourage those customers who are able to self-serve through online services to do so. This will enable staff to provide more support and help to those who are less confident, have multiple or complex needs or do not have access to technology.

The digital by design principles embedded in the strategy will move more of the simple transactional processes to our website and into our Customer Services Team.

The ability to do straightforward tasks online such as renew a parking permit, claim benefits or grants, notify us of change of circumstance, book an appointment or make an application for a licence are basic expectations and the most convenient way for most people to get what they need. We all do this in other aspects of our lives and people expect the same from the Council.

People also contact the Council about extremely personal and sometimes sensitive arrangements that are much more than transactional. At such times, when customers really need a conversation with the Council, this exchange should not add to the challenges they are facing but provide relief from them. It is essential that they can speak to someone who understands their circumstances and can organise the right support quickly, but also with genuine care and consideration.

We will dedicate time and resources into these conversations by improving our systems and delivering training to our staff to make sure everyone gets the service they need and can rightly expect.

We will ensure that wherever feasible services can be accessed online. The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that the ability to access and use technology

will play a central role in how well we can assist our customers to live safely and well during this crisis and beyond.

To deliver these improvements and to ensure customers can experience seamless consistent services we will move even more of our customer interactions to our Customer Services Team. This will also free up time for staff in the back-office to focus on tasks that often require a different set of skills.

Wherever possible we will design our systems and business processes to ensure that customers' needs can be resolved during their first contact with the Council. If we are unable to resolve the enquiry at the first point of contact staff handling the contact will be responsible to ensure the customer case is transferred seamlessly to a Council team who can provide the assistance they need. If their needs are better met by another agency the Council will ensure that they are provided with full information and it is made clear how they can resolve their enquiry from an alternative source of support.

We will continue to encourage our customers to share their feedback about their experiences with us and we will actively use their feedback to make real improvements to our services. We want our services to be valued by those who use them. Customers will be at the heart of what we do.

We want improved processes, buildings and staff that are focused on meeting our customers' expectations on every occasion we are able to. Key to this is the continued development of three key concepts:

- One Front Door
- Customer Experience
- Digital by Design

2.1 One Front Door

The One Front Door encompasses all channels that customers choose to access our services. It includes face-to-face, telephone, email/letter, automated phone, mobile, online, social media and other digital routes.

We will deliver online customer registration, so that we will be able to proactively communicate with customers about any service the Council delivers. This will enable customers to receive tailored information that is relevant and important to them.

We will welcome feedback from our customers and continue to improve how our customers can access and manage what they want online and will expand live chat so we can text talk to people as they are looking at our services online.

We will continue to simplify access to our services such as introducing a Customer App for reporting issues and accessing services.

2.2 Customer Experience

This is the experience a customer has with us when accessing a service. It includes how many contacts they have with us, be it online, over the phone or face-to-face with staff, across all parts of the organisation, and what their experience was along the way. It includes the technology used, the systems, processes and procedures adopted by the Council and the quality of staff that are involved throughout the process.

Our customers are increasingly meeting their non-council needs online, such as banking, utilities, benefits and shopping. Their expectations of customer service are now shaped by their day-to-day experiences to expect simple, intuitive, fast and efficient solutions when accessing council services. The Council recognises the need to meet our customers' expectations by providing easy to use, digitally accessible services at a time and place that is convenient to them using PC, smartphone, or tablet.

The ongoing development of our self-service channels will enable our customers to have greater control of the services they use. This will allow us to focus our most expensive telephone and face-to-face support on those who need it most.

We will ensure that the customer experience is central to our decision making when we look at how our services are designed in the future. This will be led by every senior manager driving the delivery of this strategy as a core function in every service area.

The Assistant Direct for Organisational Resources will work with service areas on the planning, customer journey mapping, transforming and embedding of new and improved processes.

Design and development of customer focussed processes will include efficient service hand over points for when a customer needs to be assisted by more than one service. It will also ensure effective customer feedback and performance monitoring data are built into the systems used to interact with customers and the data that is generated will be made available to service managers to allow them to manage their service provision in accordance with the agreed Customer Charter standards.

Managers will be responsible for ensuring appropriate learning and training for all their staff which includes understanding and developing core customer service skills. This will help them to recognise customer service is a key skill to all roles in the Council and excellent customer service is a requirement of all job roles in the Council.

Communications will be essential to implementing the changes required by this strategy so that the benefits to our residents, visitors and businesses we aspire to are successfully implemented.

Alongside the changes in process and technology we will deliver an ongoing communications campaign designed to promote the uptake in digital service delivery and to generate effective engagement with customers to help shape the ongoing digital service improvements.

2.3 Digital by Design

To assist with the delivery of the One Front Door and Customer Experience improvements Digital by Design principles will be applied throughout the programme. These principles were designed by central government to help implement change to focus on the needs of the customer.

The 10 principles are;

1. Start with user needs

Service design starts with identifying user needs.

2. Do less

If there is a way of doing something that works, it should be reused and shared instead of reinventing the wheel every time.

3. Design with data

Learn from real world behaviour, look at how existing services are used, to inform decision-making, not hunches or guesswork.

4. Do the hard work to make it simple

It's usually more and harder work to make things simple, but it's the right thing to do. Don't take "It's always been that way" for an answer.

5. Iterate. Then iterate again

The best way to build good services is to start small and iterate widely.

6. This is for everyone

Everything we build should be as inclusive, legible and readable as possible. We're building for real long-term user needs, not to follow short term trends.

7. Understand context

We're not designing for a screen; we're designing for people.

8. Build digital services, not websites

A service is something that helps people to do something. Our job is to uncover user needs, and build the service that meets those needs. The digital world has to connect to the real world, so we have to think about all aspects of a service, and make sure they add up to something that meets user needs.

9. Be consistent, not uniform

We should use the same language and the same design patterns wherever possible. This helps people get familiar with our services, but when this isn't possible we should make sure our approach is consistent.

10. Make things open: it makes things better

We should share what we're doing whenever we can. The more eyes there are on a service the better it gets.

Through the application of the Digital by Design principles the Council will be able to create the tools to support staff to successfully develop the change in outcomes the Council is aspiring to achieve. New digital technologies and business processes will not only enable the majority of council services to be accessed online, but in a way that provides better outcomes for customers and the Council.

2.4 Summary

We are committed to providing services that are:

- **Easily accessible**
- **Simple to use**
- **Streamlined**
- **Convenient**
- **Consistent**
- **Cost effective**
- **Reliable**

Our aim is to provide customer focus by committing to the principle of the One Front Door for customer access, supported by services designed on delivering the best possible Customer Experience through the application of Digital by Design.

The future of retaining customer focus will be an iterative process of simplifying the way customers access our services, understanding their journey with us, giving them control over the services they use, and listening and responding to their feedback when implementing change.

Services which can be delivered digitally must be, allowing valuable resources to be focused on those services which cannot be delivered digitally and made accessible to our most vulnerable customers.

Both the One Front Door and understanding the Customer Experience will be critical to getting this right.

We recognise that some customers do not have the skills, knowledge or confidence to use online services or access to equipment and the internet to make this possible. We will need to plan how they are supported to build their skills and confidence and will seek to influence better digital connectivity across the district. At the same time, we recognise that we will need to provide direct help for other customers via the telephone or face-to-face.

We are confident the work we have started and our plan for the future will enable us to improve customer access and experience to our services, whilst at the same time reducing our costs.

3 Delivering the Vision

We will deliver our customer vision and improve our customers' experience by:

- Ensuring consistency in customer experience through our One Front Door, moving more tasks to our Customer Services Team, so that, wherever possible, their enquiry is resolved at the first point of contact
- Using customer insight data so we understand better what customers want and need
- Ensuring the customer has easy access 24 hours a day 7 days a week (24/7) to services, advice and information at times and in places that are right for them
- Listening and responding to customer feedback on all of our services
- Enabling customers to access services flexibly through digital channels, freeing up resources to directly support those customers who need it most
- Offering support to help people to access online services and working with our partners to improve local access to services

4 Consistency

A 'One Front Door' approach is where we ensure customers receive consistent advice, information and access to services irrespective of which channel they choose to use to contact us. We recognise that currently customers do not always receive consistent service when contacting different services, often resulting in confusion for our customers and a poor customer experience.

We will make it easier for customers to contact us, ensuring they get to the right service the first time. Through the principles of digital by design customers can have access to most of our services 24/7 where and when it is convenient to them. We will continue to provide access to services via the telephone or face-to-face for customers unable or unwilling to self-serve online and we will provide a consistent standard of service across all contact channels.

Our One Front Door approach streamlines service access enabling customers to resolve a number of service requests in one place and we will increase this over time. Our staff will need the right skills and competencies to support our vision, so we will develop them to ensure they are equipped to support digital services.

Ensuring the consistency of customer experience through One Front Door requires us to have accurate, up-to-date and relevant advice and information held across all

services and accessible to the frontline Customer Services team. This will be achieved through an improved Customer Relationship Management system.

This will provide the staff with the knowledge, skills and tools accessible to help all customers through the One Front Door and give a consistent seamless positive experience, enabling them to access 24/7 the right services, through a single point of contact.

Only in the most complicated of cases, where detailed assessments are required to enable the service to be delivered or where it is in the best interests of the customer, will they be passed to a back office colleague.

5 Getting it right

We will improve the way we collect, collate and use information on customer contacts and satisfaction to understand our customers and their behaviours better, to help inform the changes we will be making to our services.

Through the delivery of all our services we collect data about our customers, from where they live, what services they use, and how they use them through to which services people use the most or the least.

We will use the information to shape the future delivery of our services, which services we deliver and how they are accessed through our One Front Door.

The information will help us design services and how they are accessed to give priority to the people who use our services over convenient organisational practice. We will develop our systems and processes so that customers do not need to speak to several different teams or officers to have straightforward queries or service requests resolved. We want to improve customers' access to services and make it easy for them to track progress on existing requests and get information without having to repeatedly contact us unnecessarily.

6 Customer choice

We will continuously analyse how customers can access our information and services, aiming to develop increased accessibility and functionality for the customer.

Through the development of customer self-service, we will ensure we have intuitive systems that are clear, simple and consistent, so the customer is confident of the outcome of their service request.

Research has identified that customers are looking for the following outcomes:

Accessibility / Intuitive – It's easy to access services, complete transactions and find information

Availability – I can deal with the council 24/7 in the way that suits me best

Responsive / Proactive – Services are responsive and I am kept up to date with progress

Personalisation / Needs based – Information is personalised and meets my needs

Right first time / Accountable – I only have to make a request or tell my story once and the job is done

Clear and simple – Explanations are clear and I know what to expect

We will introduce digital services to monitor all contacts on a consistent basis across all contact channels. This will help to enable customers to choose the contact channel that best suits them without disadvantage.

The customer will be encouraged to interact digitally with the Council so that we can then send them information or advice that relates to their ongoing service needs in the future. This means we can be proactive in dealing with the subjects our customers are interested in, ensuring they get timely and relevant information.

7 Improving what we do (Customer and Internal Feedback)

Customer feedback helps us know what customers think we are doing well, identify customers who aren't happy with our services, stop recurring problems and helping us increase our overall customer satisfaction.

We will make it easy for customers to give us feedback on our services and we will listen to what customers say. We will use customer surveys across all contact channels and will make these simple, focused and quick, the results will be used to make improvements.

We will improve the way in which we deal with customer complaints, recognising that failure demand is a real drain on our resources and that complaints often provide us with a chance to improve.

Continue to work with disabled and older people and residents from other groups to find ways to overcome barriers to physical and digital access and ensure that everyone in North Norfolk can easily access North Norfolk District Council information and services.

8 Offering flexibility (Digital channels)

We will use digital channels to enable customers to have 24/7 access to most services at times and places that work for them. More staff time can be given to those who need it most who are unable to access digital services or self-serve online.

When redesigning services, the principles of digital by design will be applied, so that customer service transactions are consistently delivered whether through self-service or assisted service.

We will seek to ensure that all services delivered online are computer, tablet and smartphone friendly allowing access from all digital devices and providing a consistent customer experience.

To make this as effective as possible for customers, we will make sure that online customer transactions automatically integrate with the back office systems, creating a smooth and seamless service to our customers.

9 Digital by Design - Journey

9.1 Current situation

The Council has incrementally increased digital services for customers to self-serve and the restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic has increased this pace, driven by the need to ensure the safety of customers and staff.

We recognise our website is information based and is not a place where customers can consistently transact easily. We want our website to be designed to give priority to the people who use our services over convenient organisational practice or professional bias.

9.2 Overall Desired solution

This is very much a refocusing of a journey that has already begun as we overhaul our services to enable digital end-to-end transactions by our customers, while at the same time recognising the principles of not excluding any customer who may not be able to easily access online services because of poor signal or broadband speed or is unable or does not wish to.

We want to encourage as many customers who are able to use our online services whenever they wish 24/7. In order to achieve this, we will consider how our processes can be streamlined, automated and offered online. The principles of Digital by Design will be utilised which will be an iterative process delivering customer service improvements that reflect the changing expectations of our customers.

The principles of digital by design require each of our processes to be reviewed in detail and where necessary remodelled to support digital interactions in the future. This work will be programmed focusing on the areas that bring the highest volume of queries to our Customer Services Team such as council tax, benefits, licensing, housing options, waste and electoral services.

Once a service has been remodelled the customer will remain able to contact us by phone or face-to-face. However, the onward journey for their transaction will utilise the new improved processes.

9.3 Technology

Customers increasingly expect access to services through a wide range of options. We will consider the appropriate application of modern technologies to support their interactions, whether that be through artificial intelligence, intelligent websites, social media, online accounts, web chat, chatbots and apps.

The Customer Service Strategy will need to dovetail with our ICT Strategy so that the tools required can be implemented using the best technologies to simplify our processes to better serve our customers. This will include;

- Implementing and extending new digital engagement /CRM platforms as technology evolves.
- Implement as far as practically possible a single 'My Account' functionality, which allows customers to manage their digital engagement in a single secure way.
- Develop a Customer Mobile App, and integrate it with the CRM to ensure seamless issue handling and resolution.
- Evaluate emerging technologies to identify those that will add value to the Customer Experience.
- Implement service and appointment booking solutions, to allow Customers as much choice as possible when accessing council services.
- Implement customer satisfaction surveys across all digital platforms.
- Commission a new customer focused Council website supported by clear operational responsibilities throughout the Council.

10 Supporting online services for those who need it (Digital Inclusion)

The increased use of our online services during the covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the ability and appetite of customers to access help and support online including those who are isolated and/ or vulnerable. Customers are learning the skills and increasing in confidence as they daily use online services to order groceries, prescriptions, book medical appointments, holidays, claim benefits and grants, set up utility accounts, pay bills and manage their bank accounts. Online digital delivery is becoming the way most organisations prefer to deliver their services.

As we develop our digital services those who use them will have greater choice, control and access to our services and the information they would like to receive.

We recognise that not everyone has the skills, access to the online services or equipment to take advantage of this or the knowledge of what online services can offer. We also understand that some people simply do not wish to access services in this way.

For those customers who are unable or unwilling to make use of self-service digital access our staff will be trained to support those customers by offering Assisted Digital access to our services.

We understand that we need to work with our customers and other agencies so we can increase the confidence of those who are digitally excluded and increase their ability to use online services. Information on what can be done online and the benefits of doing this will be made as widely available as possible raising customers' awareness of what they can do online as and when they want to.

Ensure that our digital web content is accessible regardless of people's ability, disability or literacy skills or whether English is their first language.

Strategy Statement

This strategy will take effect from the 1st of January 2022

The master copy of this document, a record of review and decision making processes will be held in the corporate online Records Centre and made available for public viewing on the Council's website. All documentation will be available for audit as necessary.

Equality Impact Analysis

In Appendix One we have included the Equality Impact Assessment which will influence and inform the action plan to enable the Customer Services Strategy to deliver on outcomes in support of all residents, visitors and businesses within North Norfolk.

Review Process

Customer outcomes across all contact channels will be regularly monitored and will be reviewed annually.

We will know we have been successful in placing the customer at the heart of our service delivery when the customer:

- Finds it easy to access our services and information
- Gets the service delivered or issue resolved first time
- Has a high level of satisfaction with the service/information they received
- Has a high level of satisfaction with the attitude, skills, knowledge and professionalism of our staff
- Is offered complementary services by us without them having to work it out for themselves

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

Published separately.

Appendix 2 – Customer Standards Charter

Published separately.

Document Information and Version Control

Document Name	CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY
Document Description	The corporately approved Strategy which guides the approach to ensuring the delivery of consistently high quality customer service across all of the Council's services.
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Lead Officer	STUART HARBER, CUSTOMER SERVICES MANAGER
Sponsor	CLLR LUCY SHIRES
Produced by (service name)	CUSTOMER SERVICES
Relevant to the services listed or all NNDC	ALL NNDC
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Equality Impact Assessment details	APPENDIX 1
Review interval	3 Years
Next review date	June 2024

Version	Originator	Description including reason for changes	Date
0.01			

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS JULY 2021

This assessment helps you to consider the impact of strategy on people with protected characteristics. You can update this assessment at any time to inform service planning and commissioning.



**NORTH
NORFOLK
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Introduction

1. This equality impact assessment has been developed to inform North Norfolk District Council's Customer Service Strategy.

About the Customer Service Strategy

2. The Council's Customer Service Strategy is a key strategy document explaining how the authority will continue transforming services to residents, visitors and businesses of North Norfolk. The Strategy sets out a vision and direction to deliver improved services accessible for all.
3. The Strategy is available as a separate document, and the full details, which include the scope, customer vision and core principles, are not repeated here.

Who is impacted by the Customer Service Strategy?

4. All residents, visitors and businesses of North Norfolk are impacted by the Customer Service Strategy. This includes people with the following protected characteristics:

Characteristic	Customer Service Strategy impact
<p>Age</p> <p>Adults and children, specific age groups</p>	<p>North Norfolk has the highest number of older people in Norfolk – more than the regional and UK average. Age remains a factor in propensity and capability to access digital information and advice, and self-serve online.</p> <p>In recognition of this the Customer Service Strategy adopts a 'digital by design' and not 'digital by default' approach to customer service transformation and outlines North Norfolk District Council's plan to continue to operate a multi-channel access model.</p>
<p>Disability</p> <p>A disability is an impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on someone's ability to carry out day-to-day activities. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with restricted mobility (e.g. wheelchair or cane users) • Blind and partially sighted people • People who are D/deaf or hearing impaired • People with learning disabilities • People who have mental health issues 	<p>A significant proportion of the North Norfolk population has a disability or long-term health condition – 20%+. Some disabled people – particularly people who are blind or partially sighted; D/deaf or hearing impaired; who have learning disabilities or who have limited mobility face significant barriers to physical and digital services.</p> <p>In recognition of this the Customer Service Strategy adopts a 'digital by design' and not 'digital by default' approach to customer service transformation and outlines North Norfolk District Council's plan to continue to operate a multi-channel access model. All venues will be accessible for disabled people and meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.</p>

APPENDIX 1

Characteristic	Customer Service Strategy impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who identify as neurodiverse (neurological differences such as dyspraxia, dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, the autistic spectrum and others). • People with long-term health conditions. 	
<p>Gender reassignment</p> <p>People who identify as transgender (defined as someone who is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process or part of a process to reassign their sex. It is not necessary for the person to be under medical supervision or undergoing surgery).</p> <p>You should also consider the needs of people who identify as non-binary (a spectrum of gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine).</p>	<p>We will ensure that our venues are welcoming, and our staff trained to be confident to engage positively with people from diverse backgrounds. We do not envisage an impact on this protected group. We will ensure published content and materials illustrate diversity in a positive way and promote participation across all groups and access to services.</p>
<p>Marriage/civil partnerships</p> <p>People who are married or in a civil partnership. They may be of the opposite or same sex.</p>	<p>We will ensure that our venues are welcoming, and our staff trained to be confident to engage positively with people from diverse backgrounds. We do not envisage an impact on this protected group. We will ensure published content and materials illustrate diversity in a positive way and promote participation across all groups and access to services.</p>
<p>Pregnancy & Maternity</p> <p>Maternity refers to the period after birth and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.</p>	<p>We will ensure that our venues are welcoming, family friendly, supportive of breast-feeding and our staff trained to be confident to engage positively with families and children. We will ensure published content and materials illustrate diversity in a positive way and promote participation across all groups and access to services.</p>
<p>Race</p> <p>Race refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, or</p>	<p>We will ensure that our venues are welcoming, and our staff trained to be confident to engage positively with people from diverse backgrounds</p>

APPENDIX 1

Characteristic	Customer Service Strategy impact
<p>nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.</p> <p>A racial group can be made up of two or more distinct racial groups, for example a person may identify as Black British, British Asian, British Sikh, British Jew, Romany Gypsy or Irish Traveller.</p>	<p>and people who may not speak or write confidently in English. We will ensure that published content and materials illustrate diversity in a positive way and promote participation across all ethnic groups, and access to services. This would include the use of translation services and provision of printed materials in other languages where this is required and appropriate.</p>
<p>Religion/belief Belief means any religious or philosophical belief or no belief. To be protected, a belief must satisfy various criteria, including that it is a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour. Denominations or sects within a religion can be considered a protected religion or religious belief.</p>	<p>We will ensure that our venues are welcoming, and our staff trained to be confident to engage positively with people from diverse backgrounds. We do not envisage an impact on this protected group. We will ensure published content and materials illustrate diversity in a positive way and promote participation across all groups and access to services.</p>
<p>Sex</p> <p>This covers men and women. You should also consider the needs of people who identify as intersex (people who have variations in sex characteristics) and people who identify as non-binary (a spectrum of gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine).</p>	<p>We will ensure that our venues are welcoming, and our staff trained to be confident to engage positively with people from diverse backgrounds. We do not envisage an impact on this protected group. We will ensure published content and materials illustrate diversity in a positive way and promote participation across all groups and access to services, including people who identify as non-binary.</p>
<p>Sexual orientation People who identify as straight/heterosexual/lesbian, gay or bisexual.</p>	<p>We will ensure that our venues are welcoming, and our staff trained to be confident to engage positively with people from diverse backgrounds. We do not envisage an impact on this protected group. We will ensure published content and materials illustrate diversity in a positive way and promote participation across all groups and access to services.</p>

Potential impact - conclusion

The Customer Service Strategy should impact positively on people in North Norfolk with protected characteristics.

- This is because the Strategy specifically aims to provide access to customer services for everyone in North Norfolk – and this includes people with protected characteristics, as set out above.

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6. Some people with protected characteristics – particularly people who are blind or partially sighted; D/deaf or hearing impaired; who have learning disabilities or who have limited mobility face significant barriers to physical and digital services. North Norfolk has a higher than average number of disabled and older residents, so it is particularly important that access for these groups is taken into account.
7. In addition, some other people also experience barriers to services, due to low literacy skills – including Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, and people whose first language is not English.
8. The Strategy is ambitious to work with disabled people and people from other groups, to find ways to overcome barriers and ensure that everyone in North Norfolk can easily access North Norfolk District Council information and services.

The Strategy sets out a specific aim of ‘digital by design’. Disabled people in particular – and people from other groups – face barriers to getting online and accessing digital information and virtual environments. A comprehensive analysis of this must be considered alongside the Customer Service Strategy and is set out in Annex 1.

Recommended actions

	Action	Lead	Date
1.	Continue to work with disabled and older people and residents from other groups, to find ways to overcome barriers to physical and digital access and ensure that everyone in North Norfolk can easily access North Norfolk District Council information and services.	Assistant Director People Services	Ongoing
2.	Ensure that our digital technologies – such as our computer hardware, software, apps, business systems and business equipment such as smart phones - are accessible for disabled staff and service users: All new projects to comply with minimum accessibility standards. Any manager commissioning technology will be required to meet these standards.	Assistant Director Organisational Resources	Ongoing
3.	Ensure that our digital web content is accessible regardless of people’s ability, disability or literacy skills or whether English is their first language.	Web Manager	Ongoing
4.	We will explore delivery of an internal media/ communications campaign to ensure that managers and staff understand their responsibilities to provide accessible technology, digital and web content. This will reinforce key information, such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. When creating website content, managers are responsible for ensuring it meets accessibility requirements. b. Present content in the most accessible format (e.g. only creating downloadable documents if there is a good case not to use web page content) c. Ensure downloadable documents are in the 	Customer Services Manager	31/03/2022

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	Action	Lead	Date
	<p>most appropriate file format and are formatted to meet accessibility requirements, including Easy Read documents</p> <p>d. Ensure video content meets accessibility requirements (e.g. by producing accurate closed captions, text transcripts etc. where required)</p> <p>e. Ensure that all new software/apps introduced by the Council are accompanied by instructions to managers about how to ensure accessibility.</p>		
5.	Guidance to be developed for managers about how to ensure accessibility and inclusion when interacting digitally with customers and colleagues (e.g. how to facilitate an accessible Teams meeting, with blind and D/deaf participants).	Assistant Director People Services	31/03/2022

The common barriers that disabled people and people with other protected characteristics face when getting online and accessing digital information and virtual environments

Overview

1. This assessment sets out the barriers that disabled people and people with other 'protected characteristics' face when getting online and accessing digital information and virtual environments.
2. The assessment has been developed to inform ongoing implementation of North Norfolk District Council's Customer Service Strategy.

Background

3. North Norfolk District Council is making greater use of digital technology and virtual environments to deliver services and engage with residents, service users and staff in the most accessible, safest and cost-effective ways possible.
4. This means that digital inclusion is an increasingly important factor in the ability of people to live and work independently in North Norfolk.
5. In the long term, the use of technology, particularly virtual working, offers the potential to enhance equality and inclusion for people with protected characteristics – for a range of reasons, set out in this document.
6. Inevitably however, some people, particularly disabled people, people with low literacy skills and people with limited resources, face barriers to getting online.
7. This assessment summarises the key barriers that people with protected characteristics commonly face to digital accessibility. It recommends actions for addressing these barriers.

Legislation for accessible digital information

8. Three pieces of legislation set the context for the provision of accessible digital information:

(a) The Public Sector Equality Duty

9. Public authorities are required by the Equality Act 2010 to give due regard to equality when exercising public functions, and to ensure that services and information are accessible.
10. They are also required to make reasonable adjustments to information for disabled

people, for example, providing [information in an alternative format](#), like large print or an audio recording.

(b) The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018

11. Public bodies like North Norfolk District Council must comply with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018:
 - New public sector intranets and extranets must meet level AA of the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG 2.1\)](#) as a minimum.
 - Older intranets and extranets (published before 23 September 2019) must be made accessible when they are updated.
 - Mobile applications must be accessible by 23 June 2021.
 - Public bodies must systematically and routinely test web, digital and virtual interfaces with commonly used [assistive technologies](#). This is to ensure that everyone can use the software they rely on to access the Council, such as screen readers, screen magnifiers and speech recognition software.
 - Websites and applications owned by public sector bodies must have an [accessibility statement](#) that explains how accessible the service (including mobile apps) is. Note that there may be a number of websites owned, commissioned or managed by North Norfolk District Council, not all of which may be compliant with the regulations.
 - Disabled and older people must be engaged in [user research](#).
12. Further details about the regulations are set out in the [latest guidance](#).
13. Some organisations which are not exempt from the regulations may not need to fully meet the regulations. This is the case if the impact of fully meeting the requirements is too much for an organisation to reasonably cope with. The accessibility regulations call this a 'disproportionate burden'⁵. Interpreting what constitutes a 'disproportionate burden' is complex, and many factors must be taken into account.

(c) The Accessible Information Standard

14. The [Accessible Information Standard](#) is a legal requirement for organisations that provide publicly-funded adult social care. North Norfolk District Council may on occasions be commissioned to provide social care related services on behalf of other organisations. The Standard sets out a specific, consistent approach to identifying, recording, flagging, sharing and meeting the information and communication support needs of patients, service users, carers and parents with a disability, impairment or sensory loss.

What is 'digital exclusion'?

15. The definition of digital exclusion is 'people who are unable to get online or who lack basic digital literacy skills to make the best use of the opportunities of being online'.
16. Digital exclusion is often described in these terms:

- **Digital literacy and skills** – being able to use computers, the internet and mobile technology such as smart phones.
- **Accessibility** – Ranging from broadband connectivity and assistive technology for disabled people to the design and provision of physical infrastructure, services and information to meet all users' needs.
- **Affordability** - affordable access to the internet and digital devices is still an issue for many people.
- **Culture and attitudes** – some people may believe 'it's not for me' or have fears or anxieties about appearing incompetent. Or, they may have found that although they can access landing pages, they cannot get much further. Some people may have had negative experiences through hate-related bullying or harassment on social media.

Who is at risk of digital exclusion?

17. People with protected characteristics are at particular risk of digital exclusion.
18. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the cohort most affected by digital exclusion was people over 65 on low incomes, disabled people and people with low literacy skills. In addition, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) young people have historically faced considerable digital exclusion, which is likely one of many factors in GRT young people's reduced outcomes in education.
19. Of this cohort, the most digitally excluded tend to be D/deaf people, people with learning disabilities and people with dual sensory loss – despite the protections of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018.
20. This is because all public bodies must meet WCAG 2.1 AA compliance under the Regulations. However, it is recognised that some elements of this such as video content, alternative information formats and some colour and contrast criteria falls under WCAG 2.1 AAA compliance. This has the potential to put some groups of disabled people at a significant disadvantage compared to others when accessing digital information. For instance, many people within the Deaf community rely on BSL video; many people with learning disabilities rely on alternative formats such as Easy Read; and many people with dyslexia rely on colour and text options to enable reading to be easier.

Emerging issues, triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic

21. The pandemic required employers, service providers, service users and staff in North Norfolk to rapidly adopt new technologies and virtual working arrangements. Through this, emerged a 'digital divide' – the gap between people who were able to benefit from the internet and those who were not.
22. For example, some people were able to readily adjust to life online – because they had sufficient space, equipment, resources, quiet, literacy skills and the personal

resilience to work and socialise digitally (and if necessary support children to engage in remote learning). Others, who did not have these physical and psychological resources, faced many barriers.

23. People who already experienced digital exclusion faced even greater barriers - particularly D/deaf and blind people, people with learning disabilities, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and people new to North Norfolk from abroad who have limited resources and low literacy skills.

Inaccessible digital technologies – computer hardware, software, apps, business systems and equipment

24. Another significant issue is that ongoing innovation to support digital working has led to a huge increase in the number of hardware, software and apps being launched across the public sector. However, the vast majority of these are not fully accessible. Sometimes it is not always possible for North Norfolk District Council to test apps prior to launch as there may be additional features which are added to system updates and there is limited notice or no opportunity to turn them on/off.
25. One example of this is the Whiteboard app - remembering that this is just one example of 'small apps' and features introduced in a given time:
- The app cannot be designed to work with screen readers and is unlikely to be accessible for people who are blind or partially sighted
 - The screen is mouse driven, so people who navigate via keyboard/voice cannot use it
 - There is no spell check within the 'post-it' note function - so someone who has systems in place to manage dyslexia or a learning difference is placed at a disadvantage
 - Use of an interpreter for Deaf people would be problematic as trying to identify what to interpret would be challenging.
26. As with most technology, there are solutions to these issues, but this requires an agreed approach to resolve – for example, routinely testing all apps before implementation, and instructing presenters, team managers, colleagues etc. to be aware of how to make this kind of activity accessible.
27. Another issue is that there may be a significant number of IT developments that go straight to third party procurement. Often no accessibility requirements are worked into these proposals.
28. Looking forward, online virtual interactions, transactions and meetings may be the 'norm'. This raises a number of issues that need to be resolved, e.g. how an individual's accessibility software such as screen readers and dictation software will work in this environment.

Inaccessible web content and digital information

29. North Norfolk District Council is embedding a process for monitoring of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 and requirements to ensure the Council's digital offer adequately supports the needs of disabled people.

30. Work has been undertaken by North Norfolk District Council to meet the regulations WCAG 2.1 AA level – to include examining how alternative format information such as video, easy read and BSL can be better used as part of our online offer and engagement with disability groups. There is a commitment to continue to develop and respond to the requirements.
31. Work is planned by the Council to continue to explore opportunities to enhance the accessibility of the online customer journey and content of websites, moving towards AAA standards wherever possible. However, there is work to be done in understanding what this will look like and how to incorporate alternative mechanisms such as video.
32. A particular priority to achieving online web accessibility and digital content is ensuring that managers and staff understand their responsibilities to upload accessible digital and web content to the internet. For example, many managers do not understand why their digital assets need to be accessible and it is not always understood that it is each manager's responsibility.
33. To address this, more work is required to ensure that North Norfolk District Council has the right policies and training in place to support staff.

Current barriers to web accessibility in the UK and North Norfolk

34. Many online public services, web content and apps are still not accessible to all users.
35. In 2018, independent testing by Socitm found that 40% of UK local authority websites were not accessible to disabled people.
36. Since this period, Socitm has changed the format of testing and now partner with Silktide. Currently, Silktide gives North Norfolk District Council a rating of around 95.8%.

Opportunities ahead

37. In the longer term, digital technology offers the potential to enhance accessibility and inclusion for people with protected characteristics – including older and disabled people, parents and carers. This is for several key reasons:
 - In some (but not all) respects, the virtual working environment is more egalitarian than the physical world and provides more opportunities for people to be judged on their merit, rather than their physical attributes or abilities.
 - Lockdown required employers to rapidly enhance digital working opportunities. This enabled creative solutions to be explored and successfully implemented. It has also changed the balance from employers playing catch-up to technology, to a situation where aspirations to provide an accessible virtual working environment are being held back by digital solutions not being available. This is now starting to level out.

- For example, there was a swift move to offering BSL interpreters virtually rather than in person for customers and staff. This is heavily reliant on technology to work in a certain way, and it has taken considerable time for the technology to be available.
 - The virtual environment minimises the need for travel and constant transfer from venue to venue (travel and hot desking is often disproportionately difficult and costly for disabled people, and office environments can be disabling). Travel also takes time and logistics planning, and people who have child care or caring responsibilities often find that virtual working saves them valuable time, and better enables them to balance caring responsibilities (assuming that they have the relevant conditions in place at home to make remote working feasible).
 - Depending on an individual's personal circumstances (remembering that some people may not have the resources to work effectively from home), virtual environments enable people to set up and control their working environments in the best way for them, in terms of neurodiversity, accessibility, temperature, noise levels, etc.
 - It enables greater flexibility to manage health conditions e.g. if someone has to take medication, empty a stoma bag or work in short bursts and then rest.
 - It enables women who are expressing or breastfeeding following a return from maternity leave to manage this more effectively.
 - It enables people to limit physical contact with others, if, for reasons of mental health, someone wishes to do so (for example, when experiencing an episode, which makes engaging with others in the physical world challenging).
38. It is important to note that these advantages do not benefit all people with all protected characteristics, but they are important considerations.

Conclusion

39. During the pandemic there has been a need to develop and improvise virtual and remote working. This has often been a case of trial and error, and North Norfolk District Council's IT services, the web content team and service managers have worked 24/7 to identify solutions to barriers as and when they have occurred.
40. During this time there has been a great deal of knowledge and innovation developed, regarding how service users and staff can be supported to work and engage digitally. Inevitably, there continue to be a range of barriers to overcome and adjustments to make, and this may take some time, but the end result should achieve greater inclusion for all.
41. There will always be people who cannot access digital or virtual platforms, for the reasons set out in Annex 2, and provision will need to be made for these groups. Some services will need to offer an adaptable environment to ensure services can still be offered to people who cannot access digital services.

Evidence used to inform this assessment

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- Demographic factors for North Norfolk set out in [Norfolk's Story 2021 published - Norfolk Insight](#)
- Business intelligence and management data, as quoted in this report
- Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty codes of practice

Further information

For further information about this equality impact assessment please contact:
Digital Mailroom Team Leader on 01263 516096



If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact Digital Mailroom Team Leader 01263 516096(Text relay).

This is called the 'Public Sector Equality Duty'. The purpose of an equality impact assessment is to consider the potential impact of a proposal on people with protected characteristics. If the assessment identifies any detrimental impact, this enables mitigating actions to be developed. The Act states that public bodies must pay due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic¹ and people who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

The full Act is available [here](#).

It is not always possible to adopt the course of action that will best promote the interests of people with protected characteristics. However, equality assessments enable informed decisions to be made that take every opportunity to minimise disadvantage.

When you may be exempt from accessibility regulations

All UK service providers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 or the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (in Northern Ireland).

The following organisations are exempt from the accessibility regulations:

- Non-government organisations like charities - unless they are mostly financed by public funding, provide services that are essential to the public or aimed at disabled people
- public sector broadcasters and their subsidiaries

The following organisations are partially exempt from the accessibility regulations:

- primary and secondary schools or nurseries - except for the content people need in order to use their services, for example a form that lets you outline school meal preferences

Partially exempt organisations would need to publish an accessibility statement on their website.

If you created a new public sector website on or after 23 September 2018, you need to meet accessibility standards and should have published an accessibility statement by 23 September 2019. You need to review and update your statement regularly.

Existing websites

You need to meet accessibility standards and publish an accessibility statement. You need to review and update your statement regularly.

Intranets and extranets need to comply from when there are significant changes to them.

You may not have to meet the requirements for your whole website or app if doing so would be a disproportionate burden - for example, if it's very expensive to make even simple changes and those changes would bring very limited benefits to disabled people.

You do not need to fix the following types of content because they're exempt from the accessibility regulations:

- pre-recorded audio and video published before 23 September 2020
- live audio and video
- heritage collections like scanned manuscripts
- PDFs or other documents published before 23 September 2018 - unless users need them to use a service, for example a form that lets you request school meal preferences
- maps - but you'll need to provide essential information in an accessible format like an address
- third party content that's under someone else's control if you did not pay for it or develop it yourself - for example, social media 'like' buttons
- content on intranets or extranets published before 23 September 2019 (unless you make a major revision after that date)
- archived websites if they're not needed for services your organisation provides and they are not updated

You'll need to explain in your accessibility statement that you've not made things like this accessible because they are exempt.

Annex

Summary of key barriers to digital inclusion faced by people with protected characteristics

Protected characteristic	Disability and long-term health conditions
Barriers to digital literacy	Yes
Barriers to accessibility	Yes
Barriers to affordability	Yes
Cultural barriers	Yes
Reasons for barriers	<p data-bbox="696 505 1529 539">Some barriers affect many disabled people. These include:</p> <p data-bbox="757 560 2056 810">Web sites and content that is not compatible with assistive technology: websites may not be coded to incorporate built-in accessibility, relying instead on users having expensive software. Or, a user's assistive technology may be incompatible with other assistive technologies, which makes it difficult or impossible for people using solutions like text-to-speech screen readers or magnification software to access web information and self-service. Even the most sophisticated screen reading software cannot help users make sense of what they are using when content is unstructured or unlabelled.</p> <p data-bbox="757 887 2047 1102">Cost of assistive technology: assistive technologies such as text-to-speech screen readers, dictation systems, voice activated software, screen readers or magnification software come at a cost. For example, JAWS is the industry standard assistive software for blind people, but costs £840+ and version updates can be over £200. It would also require hardware with an adequate processing speed, a larger monitor and a specialist keyboard to be used effectively. Routine upgrades are also costly.</p> <p data-bbox="757 1179 2056 1532">The complexity of web content: People who have learning disabilities or differences, are D/deaf, neuro-diverse, have poor memory, concentration or low literacy or language skills find the relative complexity of web information and the need for strong literacy skills a challenge. Web pages are text heavy, and content may be written in a way that is hard to understand, navigate or use. Use of Easy Read and British Sign Language (BSL) videos can assist, but these tend to be used sporadically which is confusing for users because it means that while some pages may be accessible, other pages linked to them are not. Short clips giving an overview of a subject can often significantly improve access – but only if they are used on every page. Processes (such as form filling) can often take a long time to complete, with 'time out' shutdown or no save functions. This causes barriers for people who</p>

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	<p>can only use the internet for short periods of time, who find it difficult to remember information or concentrate for periods of time.</p> <p>Location/travel: the nature of a person’s disability and the high cost and effort of accessible travel, coupled with the need for assistive technology and/or an adapted working space, means it may be unrealistic for some disabled people to access the internet at public locations. Some public locations may present other barriers, for example public computers in settings that are in busy, noisy, brightly lit public spaces may not be inclusive of people who are neuro-diverse.</p> <p>Some staff who rely on Access to Work may need different adjustments, such as access to live captioning instead of BSL interpreters.</p> <p>There are additional barriers for specific user groups of disabled people.</p> <p>A summary is provided in Annex 3 of the additional barriers that specific disabled user groups commonly experience when accessing web or digital information.</p>
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Protected characteristic	Race
Barriers to digital literacy	Yes
Barriers to accessibility	No
Barriers to affordability	Yes
Cultural barriers	Yes
Reasons for barriers	<p>People newly arrived to North Norfolk from abroad</p> <p>Some people newly arrived from abroad may not have the resources (including accommodation or credit rating) necessary to access the internet.</p> <p>They may not have the literacy skills necessary to navigate online information, even if they do have access to the internet.</p> <p>People who are not fluent in English may be anxious about using online services because they are worried about making errors and do not want to submit wrong</p>

information. Google Translate offers a partial solution.

An example is someone who does not speak or write English confidently, who works in the gig economy and who is paid weekly. COVID triggered a swift move by employers to online working. Many employers began to issue payslips online, rather than in document form. This created a significant problem for people on low incomes, who needed to know week to week exactly what their income was, but who could not access payslips because they could not get online.

Gypsy, Roma & Traveller people

Many Gypsy, Roma & Traveller (GRT) adults and children living on sites or encampments in North Norfolk experience barriers to digital inclusion: Some sites and many encampments may not have good access to the internet

The transient nature of some families means access to broadband and wifi especially in rural parts of North Norfolk may be limited. Internet access via 3G or 4G is costly and may depend on a person having a smartphone contract.

A large majority of GRT people have low literacy levels, so many people find navigating web information challenging. Culturally, they may be reluctant to ask for help.

Mobile homes and caravans are small, often with many family members living in a small concentrated area, so there is limited ability to focus in a quiet space

This is a significant issue for young GRT people, as school curriculums and processes are increasingly technologically-based.

GRT young people already experience some of the worst outcomes of any ethnic or social group in the country, including below average educational attendance and attainment, low literacy levels, and higher levels of special educational needs and disability.

People from Black and Asian backgrounds

Evidence indicates that some Black or Asian people may be in lower income groups, so

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	affordability may be an issue. National data shows that White and Bangladeshi residents are less likely to use the internet.
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Protected characteristic	Gender reassignment
Barriers to digital literacy	No
Barriers to accessibility	No
Barriers to affordability	No
Cultural barriers	Yes
Reasons for barriers	<p>Some information systems do not enable people to state their preferred title (e.g. Ms, Mx, as opposed to Miss or Mr).</p> <p>Technology presents opportunities to enable people to state their preferred gender pronouns without having to constantly correct people or ‘come out’ – e.g. in phone/contact directories, Teams/Zoom profiles, or email signatures.</p> <p>State whether North Norfolk District Council supports staff to state their preferred pronouns on their email signature if they wish. It would be advantageous if there was a facility within Microsoft Teams and the contact directory for staff to state their pronouns.</p>

Protected characteristic	Marriage/civil partnerships
Barriers to digital literacy	No
Barriers to accessibility	No
Barriers to affordability	No
Cultural barriers	Yes
Reasons for barriers	In some relationships, domestic abuse such as coercive behaviours could mean that some people restrict their partner’s use of the internet – e.g. a perpetrator of domestic abuse may not wish their partner to access support or to communicate with others.

Protected characteristic	Pregnancy and maternity
Barriers to digital literacy	No
Barriers to accessibility	No

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Barriers to affordability	No
Cultural barriers	No
Reasons for barriers	None identified.

Protected characteristic	Religion and belief
Barriers to digital literacy	No
Barriers to accessibility	No
Barriers to affordability	No
Cultural barriers	Yes
Reasons for barriers	Cultural and social mores and values in some faith communities may mean that some people may discourage or restrict others from accessing the internet, if they consider that exposure could in some ways undermine the values of the faith – e.g. strong patriarchal values could mean that some men may limit the internet access of women or younger people.

Protected characteristic	Sex
Barriers to digital literacy	No
Barriers to accessibility	No
Barriers to affordability	No
Cultural barriers	Yes
Reasons for barriers	<p>See issues highlighted for gender reassignment. Also:</p> <p>Use of language – ensure that gender inclusive language is routinely practised in digital web information– e.g. routinely state ‘he/she/they’ instead of just ‘he/she’. Avoid restrictive gender terminology, e.g. ‘ladies and gentlemen’.</p> <p>There is no significant difference in internet use between women and men under the age of 65. Gender difference is evident among older age groups. However, internet use among women aged 75 and over has almost trebled since 2011.</p> <p>In some relationships, strong gender norms or domestic abuse such as coercive behaviours could mean that some people restrict their partner’s use of the internet – e.g. a perpetrator of domestic abuse may not wish their partner to access support or to</p>

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communicate with others.

Protected characteristic	Sexual orientation
Barriers to digital literacy	No
Barriers to accessibility	No
Barriers to affordability	No
Cultural barriers	Yes
Reasons for barriers	<p>Use of language – ensure that inclusive language is routinely practiced in digital web information– e.g. do not assume that all relationships are heterosexual or fit particular norms or stereotypes.</p> <p>In data collection forms, enable people to state their sexual orientation and offer appropriate options.</p>

Annex 3 – Barriers for specific user groups of disabled people

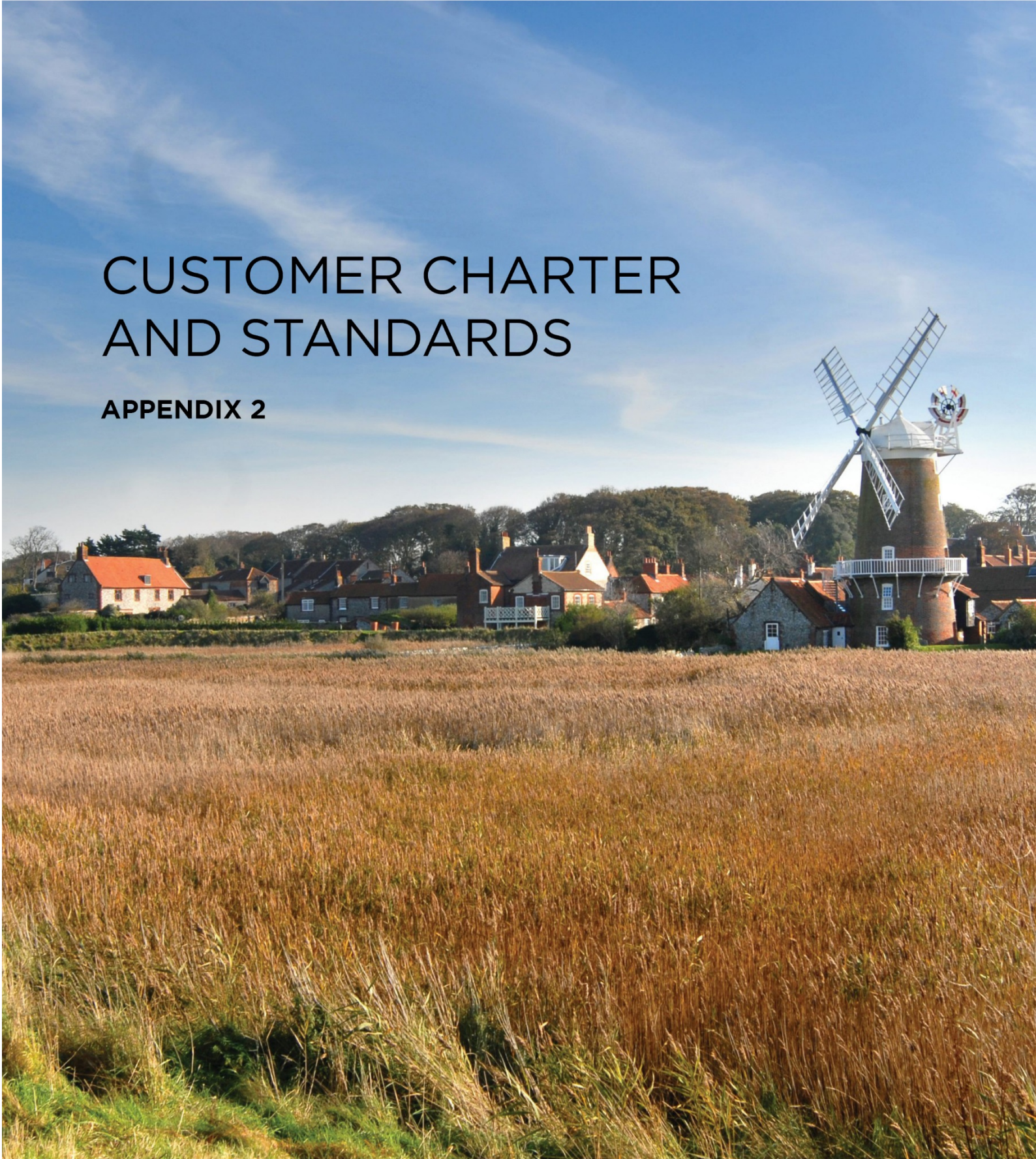
A summary is provided below about the barriers that specific disabled user groups commonly experience when accessing web or digital information:

User	What this may mean	Potential mitigations
People with mobility impairments or health conditions that restrict motor ability, cause pain, fatigue, poor concentration or memory	This can make it difficult to use a mouse, keyboard or touchscreen, sit at a computer, remember information, or have sufficient energy/comfort levels to work through lots of different windows/forms in succession.	Do not assume that people can get online or stay online. Keep information as simple and concise as possible. Where forms need to be completed, enable the user to save their progress and return to it at a later date.
Blind and partially sighted people	<p>Many blind and partially sighted people cannot access web information, because websites are incompatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers.</p> <p>These users may find that although a website's landing page is accessible with screen reader technology, subsequent pages are not – which is frustrating.</p> <p>PDF documents are not accessible unless you use Adobe Pro.</p>	<p>If you do not have Adobe Pro, you can increase the accessibility in some (but not all) versions of Adobe by doing the following: click Edit > Accessibility > Set up Assistant to add some accessibility options in the document. Note though that even if you do this, the PDF will still not be fully accessible for people using screen readers.</p> <p>Some basic tips to check that web information is accessible:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use clear, formatted headings, to help screen reader users navigate your document or webpage. 2. Do not use images of text to convey information as they cannot be read by screen readers. 3. Ensure text can be resized and background and text colours can be modified to suit the reading preferences of users. 4. Make sure links are written to describe the document or resource they send the user to. 5. Make sure information or explainer videos convey the same information in the audio voiceover as the images on screen. 6. Use image descriptions to share the information given in an image or photograph. 7. Ensure downloadable content (Word or PDF) is accessible.
D/deaf and hearing-impaired people	This can make it difficult to hear audio. Also, many D/deaf and hearing-impaired people have lower literacy levels, so may struggle to understand subtitles or navigate web content.	<p>Provide key information in a variety of formats, e.g. British Sign Language (BSL) video, email, SMS text, letter writing and provision of stamps.</p> <p>Ensure call centres have access to, and know how to use, telephone language and interpreting services.</p> <p>During the pandemic, interpreter services have been a combination of face-to-face and online interpreting. Although face-to-face interpreting will always be needed in some situations, being able to offer online interpreting has proven a positive step forward and should be considered part of any new service offer.</p>
People with learning disabilities	<p>This can make it difficult to understand or navigate web content.</p> <p>Some websites provide 'easy read' alternatives on some pages, but there is often no logic to this, in that only some pages have an easy read alternative and others do not. This is</p>	<p>Where possible, provide information in easy read format, or convey simple information in videos.</p> <p>Use plain English in all communications.</p>

	<p>frustrating for people with learning disabilities and undermines independence.</p> <p>One challenge that public agencies face in routinely providing easy read is that the fast-changing nature of web content means they do not consider it possible to consistently provide 'easy read' alternatives to all content.</p> <p>Similarly, despite the technology being available, BSL videos are not consistently used on websites. Short clips giving an overview of a subject can often significantly improve access – but only if they are used on every page. It is a source of frustration to disabled people that while some pages may be accessible, other pages linked to them are not.</p>	
<p>People who are neurodiverse (a term that describes people with neurological differences such as Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Disorders and Dyscalculia)</p>	<p>This can make it difficult to understand complex web content or use systems which present multiple choices and configurations.</p> <p>It can also make it difficult to concentrate, particularly in busy, noisy or harshly lit surroundings such as public spaces. It can make it difficult to use the internet in public spaces, due to anxiety about being around others or in unfamiliar surroundings</p> <p>People with dyslexia may struggle to read black text on white background. Very few websites offer colour tint options.</p> <p>People who have hyperactivity or attention disorders may find it difficult to concentrate or become easily distracted.</p>	<p>Make sure that information is concise, factual and clear about what is expected of people and how they can participate. Avoid nuance.</p> <p>Be consistent and avoid changing messages (or provide reasons for the change).</p> <p>Tips for making information dyslexia friendly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use Adobe Pro PDF documents with the full accessibility settings turned on. 2. Where possible avoid using black writing on white background, even -off white or grey is better. 3. Consider using alternative ways of providing information either graphically or possibly video where appropriate.
<p>People with mental health issues, which may cause poor concentration, memory, understanding or anxiety</p>	<p>This can make it difficult to understand or navigate web content, due to difficulties processing complex information, feelings of being overwhelmed or frustrated, or panic about making errors.</p> <p>Swift changes to how services were delivered from physical to digital platforms was a trigger for mental health issues, including people who find change difficult due to a disability and who had to change suddenly.</p> <p>Many people may not have an environment or workspace that supports their physical and psychological needs at home, and so experience extra strain. Many people use a range of assistive technologies, and these may only be available on their work computers, not their devices at home.</p> <p>Even if an individual does have the right equipment at home, if their organisation introduces new apps or software to all staff, the resources, training or the programme itself may not be accessible, creating a barrier for disabled employees and service users.</p> <p>An emerging issue triggered by the shift to virtual working is that managers and staff have suddenly had to find ways of managing a huge increase in emails, messages and contact from multiple sources.</p>	<p>Keep information as simple and concise as possible. Where forms need to be completed, enable the user to save their progress and return to it at a later date.</p>

CUSTOMER CHARTER AND STANDARDS

APPENDIX 2



NORTH
NORFOLK
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

We are committed to providing good quality customer-focused services to all our customers. The Customer Charter and Standards will provide a foundation for managing customer service, so that we deliver what we say we will to our customers.

Customer Charter

All employees and Members of the Council are responsible for putting our customers first, whether they are external or internal customers, and ensuring that their needs are satisfied.

We will:

- Make our customers and staff aware of the responsibilities the Customer Charter places on them.
- Produce guidelines for staff to ensure they have the support necessary to implement the Customer Charter commitments successfully.
- Enable customers to serve themselves, if they choose to, making self-service an easy and efficient option.
- Maintain a single point of contact, open at times that reflect customer need and at a cost that is suitable and acceptable to our customers.
- Provide a consistent, co-ordinated and proactive service trained to identify if the customer needs extra help or advice, and will help resolve problems and take personal responsibility for them.
- Treat our customers with respect, courtesy and friendliness, be receptive to customer feedback received through customer surveys, focus groups, feedback forms, consultations and complaints.
- Deal with customers' enquiries at the first point of contact until the enquiry has been completed; if we need to pass an enquiry to back office staff we will confirm who will be dealing with your enquiry and how long it will take to be resolved.
- Do what we say we will do.
- We will listen carefully to fully understand your circumstances and use plain English when we speak or write to you.
- Ensure all our staff are skilled and able to provide high quality customer care.
- Work with other Council departments and organisations to achieve a joined-up and seamless approach to service provision.
- Record and monitor the standards to ensure they are achieved and will then actively manage them and improve if required.
- Say sorry and put it right if we make a mistake.
- Tell you what to do next if you're not satisfied with how you've been treated.

Customer Service Standards

The Council is committed to providing good-quality, customer-focused services to its customers.

To this end we provide the following Customer Service Standards for each method of accessing our services.

These standards will be reviewed annually to ensure they remain representative of the Council's desire to continually improve the quality and consistency of customer services.

We aim to:

- a. Deliver services in an inclusive and fair manner, without discrimination, prejudice or bias.
- b. Deliver the following standards whenever and however we are contacted.
- c. Request that partners and other agencies also deliver services to a similar standard.

We will:

- Respect your right to privacy and confidentiality.

If you telephone us:

- We will aim to answer your call within 2 minutes and 30 seconds.
- We will offer a call back option so customers do not have to wait in a queue, and will provide you with a call back within 1 working day.
- We will use call messaging to better direct customers to online services and single points of resolution.
- Your call will be answered by a member of staff, who will give their name and will take responsibility to ensure that your call is dealt with efficiently.
- We will strive to resolve as much as we can for you at the first point of contact.
- If we have to pass on your call, we will explain the details of your call to whoever is receiving the call before we transfer it.
- If we cannot resolve your enquiry or transfer you to the right person straight away, we will take your details and ask someone to contact you by the end of the next working day.
- When the offices are closed we will tell you about our emergency out-of-hours service and when the offices will next be open.

If you leave us a voicemail:

- We will respond to your voicemail within 1 working day.
- Our voicemail message will be up-to-date, notifying you when we will return and leave clear details of who to contact for urgent enquiries.

If you contact us via online form, email or write to us:

- We will acknowledge receipt of your contact promptly
- We will aim to respond to your contact within 5 working days.
- If this is not possible we will acknowledge your correspondence telling you why and provide you with an expected date of resolution.
- We will respond to you in plain language.
- We will respond in large print or braille if requested.
- If you receive an 'out of office' notification to your email advising that the staff member is unavailable, the notification will include contact details for urgent enquiries and a date when the staff member will be available to reply.

If you contact us by web chat:

- We will aim to connect your chat within 3 minutes.
- We will aim to better direct customers to online services and single points of resolution where possible.
- We will strive to resolve as much as we can for you at the first point of contact.
- If we cannot resolve your enquiry straight away, we will take your details and ask someone to contact you by the end of the next working day.

Social media:

- If you post on our social media channels we will read your message. Though we may not reply, we will always listen to what you have said.
- If you wish to raise a service request our social media channels will direct you to the appropriate method of raising your request.

Our social media channels will let you know about:

- Key council meetings and decisions
- Elections and democracy
- Emergency information e.g. flood warnings
- Events
- News and services
- Public consultations

If you visit us:

- We will make sure our buildings are safe and easy to access.
- We will keep our reception areas clean and tidy.
- We will greet you when you arrive and be approachable, professional and helpful.

- If you have made an appointment, we will ensure that you are seen on time or kept informed of the reason for any delay and confirm when you will be seen.
- If you do not have an appointment we will advise you of the anticipated wait time and give you the option of an appointment on an alternative day and time.
- We will offer you a private interview room if you ask for it (this may need to be booked in advance).
- We will provide free to use public access terminals to allow you to access our and our partners' services online.

If we visit you:

- We will aim, where possible, to arrange a mutually convenient time and place.
- Plan to arrive on time – and if we are delayed, we will communicate this with you promptly.
- Wear clear identification and introduce ourselves.
- Make sure you have all the information you need at the end of the meeting and are clear on what will happen next.

If you have need to complain:

- We will deal with your complaint following our complaints procedure.
[Home | Complaints Procedure \(north-norfolk.gov.uk\)](#)

If you submit a Freedom of Information request:

- We will supply information requested within 20 working days.

If you submit a Subject Access Request:

- We will supply information requested within 1 calendar month.

Your feedback

The Council welcomes feedback on its services whether in the form of comments, compliments or complaints. This enables us to learn, improve and adapt our services.

We want to know if you are happy or unhappy with any of our services and any suggestions you have for improvement. You can give us feedback in person at our Offices, via our website form, by letter, calling us or sending us an email. Our Feedback Policy can be accessed via our website.