

# Citizen First Policy

2012 - 2015



# Citizen First Policy

## 2012 - 2015

### Foreword

Putting the citizens of Nottingham at the very heart of our organisation is my number one priority. A key part of this is ensuring that we deliver high standards of customer care and this policy is intended to set out the steps that we're taking to make your experience of dealing with Nottingham City Council a good one. It gives us aims to work towards and lets you know what you can expect from us over the coming years.

When I meet colleagues across the Council, their commitment to delivering the highest quality of service to the people of Nottingham, as well as the people who work, study, visit and invest here, is clear. The results of our Citizen's Survey tell us that we're getting it right most of the time. But there is still room for improvement - most of the time should be every time.

This is not just about dealing with complaints, although that is part of it. It's about the way that we treat everybody that we come into contact with, how people access our services and the ways in which we provide them. New technologies, new ways of working and, inevitably, reducing budgets, mean that we need to take a look at how we can do things better.

Some of the aims in this policy are ambitious and can't happen overnight, but we want you to know what we're working towards and the differences you'll be able to see when you come into contact with the Council. Let us know what you think of the changes and the service you have received so that we can continue to improve and better meet your needs. Details of how you can do this are on the back of this document.

Please have a read of the policy. I hope you agree that we are moving in the right direction.

Ian Curryer  
Chief Executive, Nottingham City Council

### Foreword

At the last election, we made a manifesto commitment to make Nottingham the most citizen-friendly Council in the country. To achieve this we set ambitious targets on satisfaction of our citizens with the way they are treated. This Policy sets out some of the things we plan to do to fulfil this commitment.

The actions we are taking are based upon what citizens have told us. This includes getting our basic customer care right across all Council services. As a citizen of the city and a councillor, I've seen many examples of good customer care provided by the Council. Citizens tell us that we do a lot of things well and we want this to be the normal experience.

We will also make it easier for you to get information and access services. Whether citizens contact us online, by telephone, or in person, we will make sure the way citizens can do this better meets their needs in the future. A focus on citizens is and will be at the heart of what we do.

Councillor Sally Longford

### Summary

The Citizen First Policy will provide new and cost effective ways for citizens to access Nottingham City Council services and improve those already in place. It aims to ensure that Nottingham City Council and partner organisations deliver consistently a good quality customer service and great customer care.

**Overall, this will result in higher levels of citizen satisfaction for the way in which citizens are treated through having:**

- Well trained colleagues who have customer care at the forefront of their approach
- Improved timeliness and resolution for citizens who contact the council over the telephone, in writing or email
- More services available online and at a time that is convenient to the citizen
- This will also bring efficiency savings: which will be determined through a number of projects that the Council will deliver change through.

## Vision

In line with priorities set out in the Council Plan, the Citizen First Policy aims to ensure that by 2015 “services are flexible, cost-effective and meet our Citizens’ needs”.

The aims of the ‘Citizen First’ policy can be broken down into 5 key elements which are:

- To work with our partners to establish a single standard for service delivery.
- To improve the range and quality of access citizens have to services and information.
- To ensure that we deal with citizen queries more quickly, clearly and effectively.
- To engage with citizens better and use their feedback to continually improve our standard of service.
- To find better ways of working.

## Why we have developed a citizen first policy

In recent years the City Council has identified values and aims that strive to deliver and improve services in partnership with other public sector organisations. This has resulted in customer care improvements in some areas. The Citizen First Policy looks to deliver consistency and sustainable improvements in customer care, based upon citizen experience and need.

The way that citizens need to access services has also changed. We have many examples of good practice of how the delivery of services has better reflected citizen preferences (including examples contained in this policy) and we see the scope for taking these changes further.

The Council has recently faced significant financial challenges and will continue to do so over future years. Whilst we would have undertaken activity to develop a more consistent approach of customer care improvements, the financial challenges make it even more of an imperative that we get better value for money through what we do. This means meeting citizen needs more effectively with fewer resources. The Citizen First Policy is one of the programmes of activity the Council is undertaking to achieve this.



## Nottingham context

Recent population growth has been rapid. The population is expected to continue to grow, but at a slower rate than in recent years. The City population has a higher than average proportion of young adults; just under one third are aged 15 to 29 compared to one fifth in England. This reflects the presence of two universities and recent international migration, which have contributed to population turnover of 8% per annum.

Nottingham’s population is much more ethnically diverse than the England average, and continues to be more ethnically diverse. The City’s population from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups is 34.6% compared to 20% in England. The younger population is particularly diverse. Four in ten City pupils are from BME groups and nearly a quarter have a first language other than English. The number of people aged 85 and over is projected to rise by 600 (12%) between 2011 and 2021. More than 72,600 people in the City (25% of the population) live in areas which are ranked amongst 10% of the most deprived in England.

More details about Nottingham’s population can be found through the following link <http://www.nottinghaminsight.org.uk/insight/key-datasets/census-2011.aspx>

**What this means for our Citizen First Policy:** The Council will need to be clear on what its ‘service offer’ is for those citizens who need help in understanding information e.g. where English is not their first language. We have a lot of citizens moving into, around, and out of the City. This means we need to ensure that we provide information that is easy to find about our services and what citizens need to do when they move. Our younger age profile means we have to be clear in how we offer citizens access to services which may not necessarily be delivered in a traditional way. We will deliver these improvements under our activity ‘to improve the range and quality of access citizens have to services and information’.



## Our current citizen profile

To better understand the needs, wants and expectation of our citizens, we bring together information to categorise our households. This information has been categorised by Experian and is known as Mosaic data. Using this kind of information gives us a general understanding of what we need to do in the design and delivery of services to better meet citizens' needs. Mosaic breaks down the population into different types of households. We will also better understand our citizens' needs, and in particular, those who need our services most.

Nottingham City is represented by a range of Mosaic groups. This helps to illustrate the diversity that exists across the City. According to Mosaic we are able to suggest a number of key features of Nottingham's City resident population. Over 70% of the City's households fall in just 5 of the 15 groups. These are

- Young educated City dwellers.
- Families in low rise social housing with high levels of benefit need.
- Lower income workers in urban terraces in often diverse areas.
- Residents with sufficient incomes in right-to-buy social housing.
- Young people renting flats in high density social housing, living on limited incomes.

More details about Nottingham's population can be found through the following link <http://www.nottinghaminsight.org.uk/insight/key-datasets/census-2011.aspx>

**What this means for our Citizen First Policy:** The three main methods of contact our households want to access our services through are face to face, internet and services through a citizen's mobile telephone. We also need to recognise that people will use different channels not just for different types of interactions, but also to suit their own convenience. We are starting to get a better understanding of how and why citizens access our services and need to do more work as part of our aim 'to find better ways of working'.



## What our citizens tell us

The development of the Citizen First Policy has been informed by feedback from citizens. We have undertaken surveys to find out what citizens currently think we do well and what we need to concentrate on getting better. In addition, we have met with citizens and colleagues of the Council to get their views on what we need to concentrate upon.

## Citizens survey

**We conducted a survey of citizens in December 2011. Some of the key findings were:**

- 64% of citizens were satisfied with the Council's handling of queries made in the last year.
- 76% feel informed about Council services and the benefits it provides. This is roughly the same as in 2010 but higher than previous surveys.
- 86% think information from the Council is easy to understand. This is an increase on the previous two years.

## Arrow survey

We also invited all citizens to provide their views through a survey we conducted through the Arrow. This was to find out how citizens rated the Council when they contacted us. Over 1,000 citizens responded to give us their views.

### Citizen Satisfaction - How you rated your last contact

% of citizens who rated this...

	Good / very good	Poor / very poor
Speed of answering the telephone	79%	21%
Speed of answering emails	70%	30%
Speed of answering letters	63%	37%
Getting through to the right person	80%	20%
Friendliness of staff	89%	11%
Knowledge of staff	83%	17%
Efficiency of staff	81%	19%
Staff doing what they said they would do	78%	22%
Speed of handling your enquiry	72%	28%

Note: figures include those citizens who expressed a view and not those who stated 'not applicable'

**Citizens rated the friendliness and knowledge of staff as the highest. The speed of answering letters and emails had comparatively lower levels of satisfaction.**

### Citizen satisfaction on how their enquiry was handled – Reason for contact

	Satisfied / very satisfied	Dissatisfied / very dissatisfied
Request a service	77.5%	15.2%
Find information	80.2%	11.4%
Complaint	44.5%	49.2%
Pay a bill	76.7%	10%

Note: figures don't equate to 100% as 'don't knows' not included

**Citizens were more satisfied when they contacted us to find information.**

### Citizen Satisfaction – Method of Contact

	Satisfied / very satisfied	Dissatisfied / very dissatisfied
Letter	60%	32.9%
Email	55.4%	33%
Online form	65.9%	23.2%
Call via switchboard	74%	18.6%
Call to service direct	73.5%	20.3%
In person	68.5%	24.2%

Note: figures don't equate to 100% as 'don't knows' not included

**Citizen satisfaction was highest when they spoke to someone on the telephone. Satisfaction was comparatively lower when the contact was by email.**

## Top priorities for us to focus on in terms of customer care

We asked citizens who completed the Arrow Survey to let us know what they saw as the things we needed focus upon as part of customer care. The top five phrases citizens used were:

- Speed.
- Helpfulness.
- Friendly.
- Communication.
- Doing as promised.

In addition, when we met with citizens and colleagues, the top things that they said we need to concentrate on:

- Taking ownership of issues.
- Learning and saying sorry when we get things wrong.
- Keeping communications simple.
- Making our website simpler and keeping it up to date.
- Letting citizens know what we did with their feedback.
- The person you are dealing with should give their name.

**What this means for our Citizen First Policy:** Citizens value the knowledge and friendliness of our staff; this is something we need to maintain, learn where we do this well and improve. This includes letting citizens know the name of the person who is dealing with their enquiry. Similarly, the speed with which we resolve citizen enquiries is an important priority and there is scope to improve how quickly we respond to correspondence. We need to improve the information about Council services and make it easy to understand. Satisfaction with complaints needs to get better – we may not be able to do everything a citizen has asked us to, but need to ensure that the complaint is handled well. Our approach to better customer care will be delivered as part of our work ‘to ensure we deal with citizen queries more quickly, clearly and effectively’.



## Citizen First aims

In line with priorities set out in the Council Plan, the Citizen First Policy aims to ensure that by 2015 “services are flexible, cost-effective and meet our Citizens’ needs”.

**The aims for the ‘Citizen First’ policy can be broken down into 5 key elements. These are:**

- To work with our partners to establish a single standard for service delivery.
- To improve the range and quality of access citizens have to services and information.
- To ensure that we deal with citizen queries more quickly, clearly and effectively.
- To engage with citizens better and use their feedback to continually improve our standard of service.
- To find better ways of working.



## What will Citizen First deliver

### 1. To work with our partners to establish a single standard for service delivery

We will work with other organisations so our Citizens know what to expect of service delivery, conduct and values regardless of who delivers the service.

#### Actions that we are taking forward

Work with partners to write and implement a single customer service standard (Nottingham Promise). This will set out the standard of service citizens can be expected to receive and what we need citizens to do to achieve these standards.

Work with partners so that citizens can access public sector websites in Nottingham from one website address.

Deliver a joint plan of customer care activity.

### An example of what we would like citizens to be able to do in the future

Mr Small lives in a registered social landlord property and has a number of things that he would like to get some help with. He has a disability and needs help with having his green bin pulled out so it can be emptied in the future. His next door neighbour has let his garden overgrow and the rubbish has blown down the street. He would also like some information on making his property safer. When Mr Small contacts the Council, he is told that he will have to contact different services and the registered social landlord himself to get this all sorted out.

In future Mr Small will only have to make one call to either the Council or registered social landlord. His address is logged so he can benefit from the Council's bin pull-out scheme. A road sweep is arranged to clear up the litter on the street. The landlord gets in touch with Mr Small's neighbour to make sure that they tidy up the garden and ensure they keep it tidy in the future. A community protection officer visits him to provide advice on keeping his property safe.



### 2. To improve the range and quality of access citizens have to services and information

We will work with other organisations so Citizens receive:

- A better telephone service;
- Clearer and better structured information on services available, describing what the Council and partners can do and what they can't;
- Updated information that is easier to understand; and
- Access to services that provides choice in how Citizens can request a service, raise issues and deal with public services.

#### Actions that we are taking forward

**Ensure that the website is user-friendly and responsive to citizen needs. The website will provide more targeted and current information to citizens. We will do this by:**

- Delivering e-services on mobile devices (e.g. mobile telephones).
- Creating a portal to allow businesses to connect better to each and with Council services.
- Increasing the options for citizens to complete and submit necessary forms electronically instead of seeing a person, making a call or completing forms manually. Examples include school admissions, blue badges and e-benefits.
- Simplify the website and focus on the information citizens need and find useful.
- Focusing on live top tasks and ensure that the website is responsive to them.
- Using location based data to target online services to neighbourhoods.
- Using marketing and communications expertise to influence customer choice of channel.
- Ensuring all channels have consistent information available on them (i.e. if a text was sent, this same content should be visible if the same user logs in to the website, or rings the Council).
- Advertising our choice of contact channels, particularly to hard to reach

groups for example citizens who move around the City and socially excluded groups.

- Using customer insight and evaluation to target information at specific audiences using the most appropriate communication channels.
- Development of new ideas for the use of social media in communicating with citizens including:
  - email marketing
  - SMS messaging
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
- Make the website content more engaging to increase public confidence, usage and interaction with the site.
- Review of all content on the Council website to ensure that it is fit for purpose and useful for citizens.

**Implement the recommendations of the Digital Inclusion strategy:**

- Making better use of existing resources to assist citizens in need of training to become digitally included.
- Support citizens who need help to access the Council’s online services.
- A marketing programme to support citizens become more digitally included.
- A better digital offer to take account of those Nottingham citizens who are not currently digitally included:
  - Supporting citizens who are digitally excluded to become included.
  - Developing front-line services to help support the digitally excluded and enable them to be included.
  - To support carers of older people, people with disabilities and other groups who are at risk of digital exclusion in using digital channels.
- Developing Council colleagues to be digitally confident.
- Digital Outreach Trainers scheme to support colleagues and potentially citizens.
- Identify when working with the digitally excluded what interests they have that would encourage them to become digitally included and show this.

Review access for citizens to Council buildings to ensure that – where possible – they are accessible to the public. Look at opportunities for bringing additional services into core Council buildings.



**Ensure that our printed material is:**

- high quality at all times, particularly of external documents;
- all documents produced both externally and internally are written in plain language.

Communicate and deliver the agreed Council ‘equality offer’ to support the City’s diverse communities.

**An example of what we would like citizens to be able to do in the future**

Ms Walker is a single parent living in a deprived part of the City. She will have to apply for her daughter’s secondary school place next year. She notices that the Council offers the chance to apply for school places online, but she isn’t confident in using the internet. This means that Ms Walker needs to complete an application form manually and the only way she can check progress is by calling the Council, which has to be done during her working day.

The Council was able to target an offer of internet training for single parents in the part of the City Ms Walker lives. She attends a training course at her local library and after a short space of time feels confident in using the internet. She submits her daughter’s school place application online.

Ms Walker finds the application online quick, easy and reduces the amount of paperwork she has to deal with. She completed all the drop down boxes and used the step by step instructions when she needed to. She gets a message to inform her that the application is being processed and a unique reference number, to allow her to track progress on her application.



### 3. To ensure that we deal with citizen queries more quickly, clearly and effectively

We will work with other organisations so citizens can expect:

- Colleagues who will try and resolve your query first time and help improve services;
- More queries resolved at the first point of contact, regardless of who delivers the service;
- Honesty if we can't meet all of your needs;
- Well trained, well informed colleagues who deliver high-quality services, professionally and with customer services at the forefront of their approach.
- Ensure local services are delivered by teams of staff managed in communities and responsive to priorities set by local people and their councillors.

#### Actions that we are taking forward

Improve technology for all 'field staff', including the use of mobile resources where appropriate.

Devise and implement actions to ensure all telephone calls are answered within acceptable timescales. This may include a single structure for managing and dealing with Citizen calls through 'Golden Numbers'. Any changes would be to ensure the services that receive highest volume calls are dealt with more quickly and other calls can be better managed.

Implement customer care training, shaped by citizens, on what to expect and colleagues deal with queries in the right way and in the right manner.

Changes to performance review processes for colleagues and councillors within the Council and in partner organisations to improve customer care.

Establish a picture of current engagement of front-line colleagues with citizens (for example through ward walks) to make sure action is taken from issues raised and citizens informed on what has been done.



#### An example of what we would like citizens to be able to do in the future

Mr Ahmed called to report his green bin being missed for the third time. Although he spoke to an understanding and apologetic customer service operative, the same advice was given, that he needed to leave his bin outside his house for 48 hours and it would be emptied. He was also advised that the officer would pass his details to a manager to investigate. His bin remained un-emptied with no explanation for a further week.

In the future Mr Ahmed will be able to choose whether to report his missed collection through the online self-service technology or call the contact centre. The customer service operatives will be able to advise him on the refuse wagon's progress and whether it has passed or been to his street; confirm if the bin has been missed and the reason why.

Through the use of 'in cab' technology linked to real time mapping, Mr Ahmed will be able to check progress online or call the customer service operatives who will be able to provide bespoke information and realistic recovery timescales. Crews will be made aware of the missed collections and arrangements will be made to return for the bin. Route data will be maintained so that previously missed collections or special collection requirements can be flagged to crews.

#### 4. To engage with citizens better and use their feedback to continually improve our standard of service

We will work with other organisations so when citizens want to make a comment, compliment or complaint:

- This is easy to do;
- There are different ways of doing this;
- Full and joined up responses are made according to published standards; and
- Learning from the nature of the comments or complaints is used to improve what we do and how we do it.
- Ensure the Council works to engage young people in its decision making
- Regular neighbourhood consultation meetings so the Council can listen and take account of citizen views.

#### Actions that we are taking forward

Create new structures and policies for dealing with all feedback into the Council and partner organisations. Suggested actions include:

- A unit established to oversee all comments, compliments and complaints;
- A new case management system for comments, compliments and complaints.
- A permanent and joint approach with partner organisations to engage with citizens and ensure findings are considered and acted upon where appropriate.

Benchmark against good practice identified through the national Customer Services Excellence Standard, with ongoing improvements based upon the findings.



#### An example of what we would like citizens to be able to do in the future

Ms Owen wants to make a complaint about an event she attended with her children in the area she lives. She writes to the Council and after several weeks hasn't heard who is dealing with the complaint or what has been done about it.

As part of the revised 'Have Your Say', Ms Owen can now submit her complaint online or anyone from the Council will submit the complaint on her behalf. She will be given a unique reference number and told what will happen next. Her complaint will be automatically directed to the relevant service and a named individual will get in touch through Ms Owen's chosen method of contact (e.g. telephone, email, in writing).

The Council will try and resolve her complaint within a couple of days if possible and if not will send her a full response of what we will do within 10 working days. Ms Owen's complaint will be used to make improvements to the event in future.

## 5. To find better ways of working

### We will change the way we work with other organisations:

- Making changes based upon citizen and colleague feedback wherever possible;
- Making it simpler to deliver services and for citizens to receive seamless service delivery;
- Using IT where it helps to provide a better service; and
- Provides better value for money.

### Actions that we are taking forward

#### Plans for the development of each access channel (e.g. face to face, telephone, letter, online) including:

- Base lining of existing access to services and setting targets for channel shift.
- Reviewing all transactions across all channels and proposing which ones should be provided on which channels.

Deliver Council 'contact centres' through one structure. A possible new organisational structure and target operating model to deliver customer facing services and customer access channels.

Working with Council services and external partners to streamline processes and avoid duplicate contacts.

Explore the potential for customer relationship management (CRM) or other systems to collect contact records and automate their analysis.

Assessing the business case for citizen accounts and the ability to track progress of issues raised in real time.



### An example of what we would like citizens to be able to do in the future

Mr Simpson has to contact the Council for a number of things. This includes his application for housing benefits, council tax payments, applying for a blue badge and to renew his Citycard. For each transaction he has to speak to a different department, go to a different office and supply a lot of the same information on each occasion. He recently wanted some bulky waste to be removed from his house and had to give the same information again to someone else at the Council.

In the future all of Mr Simpson's information will be kept in a secure account, similar to online banking. With one account number, Mr Simpson will be able to access all of his transactions and will only need to inform us once if his circumstances change. He can also use his account to report other things, such as flytipping.

Mr Simpson will be able to access his account online or on his mobile telephone. If he decides to visit a Council office or telephone, the person he speaks to will be able to update the account on his behalf. Mr Simpson will also receive updates through his account, for example his council tax bill for the following year or promotional offers from Council leisure centres. He can also receive updates by email or text.





## What success will look like

### Achieving our outcomes

A good customer care policy will never reach an end point, because good customer care is an ongoing process. However, it is important that we benchmark what we consider to be success. Our key performance indicators up to 2015 will include:

- More people are satisfied with way they are treated, with a target of 95%.
- Services equally available whoever citizens are, wherever citizens are.
- Services offered in a more innovative and modern way.
- Improved website information and more services available online to those who want to use them.
- Telephone services answered promptly and by a person, not a machine whenever that is the most effective way of doing so.
- Appropriate and meaningful performance measures of our customer service standards, published regularly so citizens know how well or not we are doing.
- More services can be delivered at times and different ways when they are most needed.
- More accessible public buildings.
- Appropriate Council and other public services brought together so they can be delivered more efficiently and effectively and conveniently through a one-stop shop approach.
- Aim to reduce bureaucracy by working with other councils and public organisations to reduce costs and improve service delivery.
- Maintain and enhance the Council's independently judged reputation as a well-run and improving authority.
- Reduce the impact of cuts on frontline services we will add to efficiency savings we have achieved over the last few years.

## What will happen next

To achieve the Citizen First Policy, the Council has developed a transformation programme. A number of delivery project groups have been developed who are responsible for delivering the actions we have identified. The delivery project groups that have been established are:

- **Single Service Standard** - To develop a 'Nottingham Promise' with other organisations.
- **Comments, Compliments and Complaints** - To improve the way the Council manages and learns from comments, compliments and complaints.
- **Telephones** - To improve how we deal with citizen telephone calls.
- **Citizen Insight** - To ensure we act upon what citizens tells us when we consult with them.
- **Customer Care** – Ensure our colleagues deal effectively with citizen enquiries in the right way and right manner.
- **Customer Access Programme** – Improve information on the website. Enable more services to be accessed by citizens online.
- **Communications** – Make sure our written communications is in plain English. Outline our 'service offer' for our diverse communities.

## For more information

If you would like more information or to tell us what you think:

- 📄 Our policy can be found at [www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/citizenfirst](http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/citizenfirst)
- 📄 Give us feedback about our services by completing an online form at [www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/haveyoursay)
- 😊 Speak to us in person at any Council reception point or office
- ☎ Phone us direct about a particular service if you know the number or call us on (0115) 915 5555 and we'll put you through
- ☎ Use Textphone or minicom by dialling 18001 0115 then the direct telephone number of the service you want to feed back about if you know it, or 0115 915 5555 and ask them to put you through
- ✉ Write direct to the service you want to feed back about or, if you don't know their address, write to: Citizen First, Nottingham City Council, Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG.

## Consultation undertaken on Citizen First

### Citizens

- Citizen Survey, December 2011
- Nottingham Arrow Survey, January 2012
- Area Committees, January to February 2012
- Community Equalities Forum, September 2011 and November 2011
- Deaf Focus Group, August 2012

### Partners

- One Nottingham Executive, June 2012

### Councillors

- Leadership Group, February 2012
- Pre-panel, September 2011
- Majority Group, October 2011
- Councillor ideas sessions, November 2011 to January 2012

### Colleagues

- Corporate Leadership Team, September 2011
- Team Nottingham, September 2011 and July 2012
- Middle Managers Event, October 2011 and July 2012
- Colleague Listening Events, October to December 2011
- Equalities Board, February 2012
- Intranet, from September 2011