# Borough of Telford and Wrekin

## Cabinet

## Thursday 25 September 2025

## Customer Strategy - 2025-2030

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| **Cabinet Member:** | Cllr Zona Hannington - Cabinet Member: Finance, Governance & Customer Services |
| **Lead Director:** | Katherine Kynaston - Director: Housing, Commercial & Customer Services |
| **Service Area:** | Housing, Commercial & Customer Services |
| **Report Author:** | Lee Higgins - Customer Relationships & Welfare Services Service Delivery Manager |
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| **Wards Affected:** | All wards |
| **Key Decision:** | Not key decision |
| **Forward Plan:** | N/A |
| **Report considered by:** | SMT – 26 August 2025 |
| | Business Briefing – 4 September 2025 |
| | Cabinet – 25 September 2025 |

## 1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1.1 Approve the update to the Customer Strategy, noting the progress delivered to date and endorse the refreshed action plan; and

1.2 Confirm the Council's commitment to providing multi-channel access to services, with the continuation of telephone and face to face services where appropriate, alongside the development of digital contact channels; and

1.3 Grant delegated authority to the Director: Housing, Commercial & Customer Services in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance and Customer Services to take the necessary steps to implement these

recommendations and to agree on future updates to the action plan, with an interim progress report to Cabinet in early 2028.

## 2.0    Purpose of Report

2.1    This report presents the new Customer Strategy 2025–2030 for approval by Cabinet. This builds on the success of the 2021–2025 strategy, which culminated in Telford & Wrekin Council becoming the first local authority in the UK to receive the Institute of Customer Services' ServiceMark accreditation in April 2025, recognising excellence in customer service.

The new strategy sets out a bold and inclusive vision for the next five years, reaffirming our commitment to putting residents at the heart of everything we do and getting the basics right while embracing the transformative potential of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) in meeting the needs of all our residents. The strategy outlines how we will continue to deliver excellent, accessible, and responsive customer services across all channels—digital, telephony, and face-to-face—ensuring that all residents are able to access Council Services.   It also expands our customer focus to include local businesses, tourists, and users of commercial services, recognising their vital role in the Borough's vibrancy and resilience.

## 3.0    Background

3.1    The previous strategy, "Our Journey to Excellence," laid the foundation for a customer-focussed culture across the Council. Over the past four years, we have achieved significant milestones and genuinely transformed the Council's understanding and approach to delivering an exceptional customer experience.

Some of the key achievements include:

- A 68% increase in positive customer feedback since 2021.
- A UK Customer Satisfaction Index score of 74, well above the national average for councils (64.4).
- Successful implementation of the "Ask Tom" digital assistant on to our website, and a subsequent pilot on the Customer Contact Centre telephone lines. This has exceeded our expectations of being able to handle 30% of customer enquiries, as well as providing access to an automated telephony service 24/7.
- A growing MyTelford user base, with 59% of adult residents now registered.
- Development of a pool of Mystery Customer volunteers, who have played a pivotal role in testing the customer experience of using our website, our digital channels, contacting us by telephone, physically visiting our public spaces and helping us to develop our improvement action plans.
- Early adoption of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and achieving the new, reduced complaint response timescales.
- A 33% reduction in calls to contact centres due to increased digital engagement.

We have also responded to more frequent emergency events such as flooding

and heatwaves, demonstrating our agility and commitment to supporting residents in times of need.

In developing this new customer strategy, we have drawn upon the results from the 2024/25 residents survey to inform our understanding of customer satisfaction with Council services and their local area as a place to live.

## 4.0    Summary of main proposals

4.1    The strategy builds upon the success of the previous strategy by continuing to improve accessibility for all residents to council services and listening and acting on the feedback of our customers.  In addition, the new strategy expands the scope to include more of a focus on the customer experience of our non-resident customers, i.e. business, tourists and visitors.

It also recognises that we are currently in the foothills of an AI revolution which has the potential to entirely reshape the deliver customer services in ways which we cannot yet fully envisage.

The key principles of the new strategy cover the following:

### Multi-Channel Service Delivery

- Maintain and improve access across digital, telephony, and face-to-face channels.
- Ensure all services are accessible online, with support for those who need help using digital tools.
- Continue to provide telephone and in-person support for complex or urgent enquiries.

### Embracing Technology and AI

- Explore the use of AI to streamline services, automate routine tasks, and improve customer experience.
- Expand the use of tools like the "Ask Tom" virtual assistant and further integrate platforms such as MyTelford with back-office systems.

### Customer Engagement and Feedback

- Strengthen mechanisms for collecting and acting on customer feedback at the point of contact.
- Encourage wider participation in the Mystery Customer programme and co-design of services.

### Performance and Accountability

- Monitor progress through a new set of key performance indicators (KPIs),

including:
- Increase in digital transactions
- Customer satisfaction scores
- Reduction in upheld complaints
- Volume of compliments and positive feedback
- Publish improvements made as a result of customer feedback.

**Accessibility and Inclusion**

- Conduct annual access audits of key buildings.
- Expand translation, interpretation, and assistive technologies.
- Develop a corporate approach to reasonable adjustments and staff training on hidden disabilities.

**Workforce Development**

- Deliver refreshed customer service training for all staff and elected members.
- Include customer service objectives in performance reviews.
- Promote a culture of continuous improvement and responsiveness.

**Partnership and Collaboration**

- Work with community organisations to improve digital inclusion.
- Strengthen referral pathways and signposting between agencies.

The accompanying action plan outlines specific deliverables, timelines, and responsibilities to ensure successful implementation and ongoing review of the strategy.

## 5.0     Alternative Options

5.1     Cabinet could decide not to approve the revised strategy, however the report sets out the benefits to customers of the measures proposed by the strategy, so to not do so may mean satisfaction with the Council's customer service offering reduces.

## 6.0     Key Risks

6.1     Potential risks include exacerbating digital exclusion for residents without skills, devices or data, and the need to maintain robust human support for complex, urgent or sensitive matters. These are mitigated through the Strategy's commitments to retain multi-channel access, expand assisted digital support, and deliver targeted digital inclusion actions (devices/data access, skills, and supported journeys) in partnership with health and community stakeholders.

## 7.0     Council Priorities

7.1     A community focused innovative council providing effective, efficient and quality services.

**8.0    Financial Implications**

8.1    It is good practice to set out how the Council intends to interact with its customers in the provision of services. The implementation of the action plan and any subsequent actions will be implemented from within existing resources.

**9.0    Legal and HR Implications**

9.1    Although there is no statutory requirement for a local authority to have a customer strategy, it is good practice to set out how the Council intends to interact with its customers in the provision of services.

9.2    The Customer Strategy has been assessed in accordance with the Council's duties under the Equalities Act 2010 and in particular section 149, the public sector equality duty.  All forms of customer interaction and strategic engagement must be delivered in accordance with these duties and the need to deliver services having due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.  To these ends, the strategy recognises the requirement to consult and seeks to engage different customer groups at various stages of process development to ensure that our services are fit for purpose.

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**10.0    Ward Implications**

10.1    The customer strategy will determine the customer experience of all customers of the Council in all wards

**11.0    Health, Social and Economic Implications**

11.1    **Health and social wellbeing**

The Strategy strengthens access to council services across digital, telephony and face-to-face channels and commits to reasonable adjustments and assistive technologies. This improves reach to vulnerable residents, reduces barriers for people with disabilities and long-term conditions, and supports earlier help, especially at times of crisis when customers are more likely to use traditional channels. The approach is informed by the 2024/25 residents survey and the Council's experience responding to frequent emergency events such as flooding and heatwaves.

There is a recognised link between digital exclusion and health inequalities. The Strategy's actions to expand digital inclusion, skills support and assisted digital pathways will help reduce isolation, increase self-management, and enable residents to access the right support at the right time. These actions align with the Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2025 - 2026.

11.2    **Inclusion and access**

The Strategy commits to annual access audits of key buildings; expansion of translation, interpretation and assistive technologies; a corporate approach to reasonable adjustments; and staff training on communicating with customers with hidden disabilities. These measures are expected to deliver measurable improvements in accessibility and customer satisfaction for people who face the greatest barriers.

## 11.3 Economic impact

By broadening the customer focus to include local businesses, tourists/visitors and users of commercial services, the Strategy will support economic activity, repeat engagement and positive reputation for the Borough. This includes better signposting, more consistent service standards and clearer "closing the loop" communications, supporting growth in non-statutory and income-generating services.

## 11.4 Service efficiency and customer outcomes

Greater digital adoption (e.g., MyTelford) and use of automation (e.g., "Ask Tom" virtual assistant across web and telephony) are already reducing pressure on contact centres, enabling advisors to spend more time on complex cases and safeguarding calls. Since 2021 the Council has seen a 33% reduction in calls to contact centres as digital engagement has increased, with "Ask Tom" now handling significant volumes of enquiries across channels.

Performance shows the "Ask Tom" telephony trial consistently handling c.37% of routine enquiries without handover to an advisor, improving speed to information and freeing capacity for higher-need customers.

## 11.5 Risks and mitigations

Potential risks include exacerbating digital exclusion for residents without skills, devices or data, and the need to maintain robust human support for complex, urgent or sensitive matters. These are mitigated through the Strategy's commitments to retain multi-channel access, expand assisted digital support, and deliver targeted digital inclusion actions (devices/data access, skills, and supported journeys) in partnership with health and community stakeholders.

## 12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 All of the borough's customers and stakeholders will be impacted by the Customer Strategy and Customer Contract. The strategy will benefit those customers who have protected characteristics for example, those with disabilities, older people and those where English is not their first language.

The needs of our customers have been considered throughout the development of this Customer Strategy and its associated actions. We have incorporated outcomes identified through our ongoing integrated equality analysis into the Customer Strategy and supporting action plan

**13.0    Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications**

13.1    **Positive environmental effects**

Channel shift to high-quality digital services is expected to reduce avoidable travel to council sites, postal volumes and printed materials, with associated reductions in carbon emissions and waste. The Strategy's commitment to "digital where it works best, human where it matters most" aligns with the Council Plan priority to protect the natural environment and take a leading role on the climate emergency, and with the Council's Digital Strategy direction to maximise the potential of digital while ensuring no-one is left behind.

13.2    **Resilience and adaptation**

The Strategy embeds learning from recent emergency responses (e.g., support during flooding and extreme heat), strengthening the Council's capacity to communicate, triage and provide timely assistance across channels during climate-related incidents. This supports community resilience and reduces harm to residents during adverse weather events.

13.3    **Alignment with corporate climate objectives**

Implementation will align with and contribute to the Council's wider climate programme, ensuring activities and procurement decisions under the Strategy reflect low-carbon and resource-efficient good practice.

**13.4    ICT footprint, risks and mitigations**

While digital channels bring environmental benefits, there is an associated ICT footprint, such as the energy use of data centres, particularly regarding generative AI. Where possible this should be mitigated through supplier management, such as prioritising cloud services and hosting arrangements that evidence renewable energy use/energy-efficient operations.

13.5    **Net effect**

On balance, the Strategy is expected to have a positive environmental impact through reduced travel and materials use, improved emergency response and better digital design, with proportionate mitigations in place to manage the ICT footprint.

**14.0    Background Papers**

Not applicable

**15.0    Appendices**

A    Customer Strategy 2025 – 2030

## 16.0   Report Sign Off

| Signed off by | Date sent | Date signed off | Initials |
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| Legal | 19/08/2025 | 27/08/2025 | RP |
| Finance | 19/08/2025 | 22/08/2025 | CM |