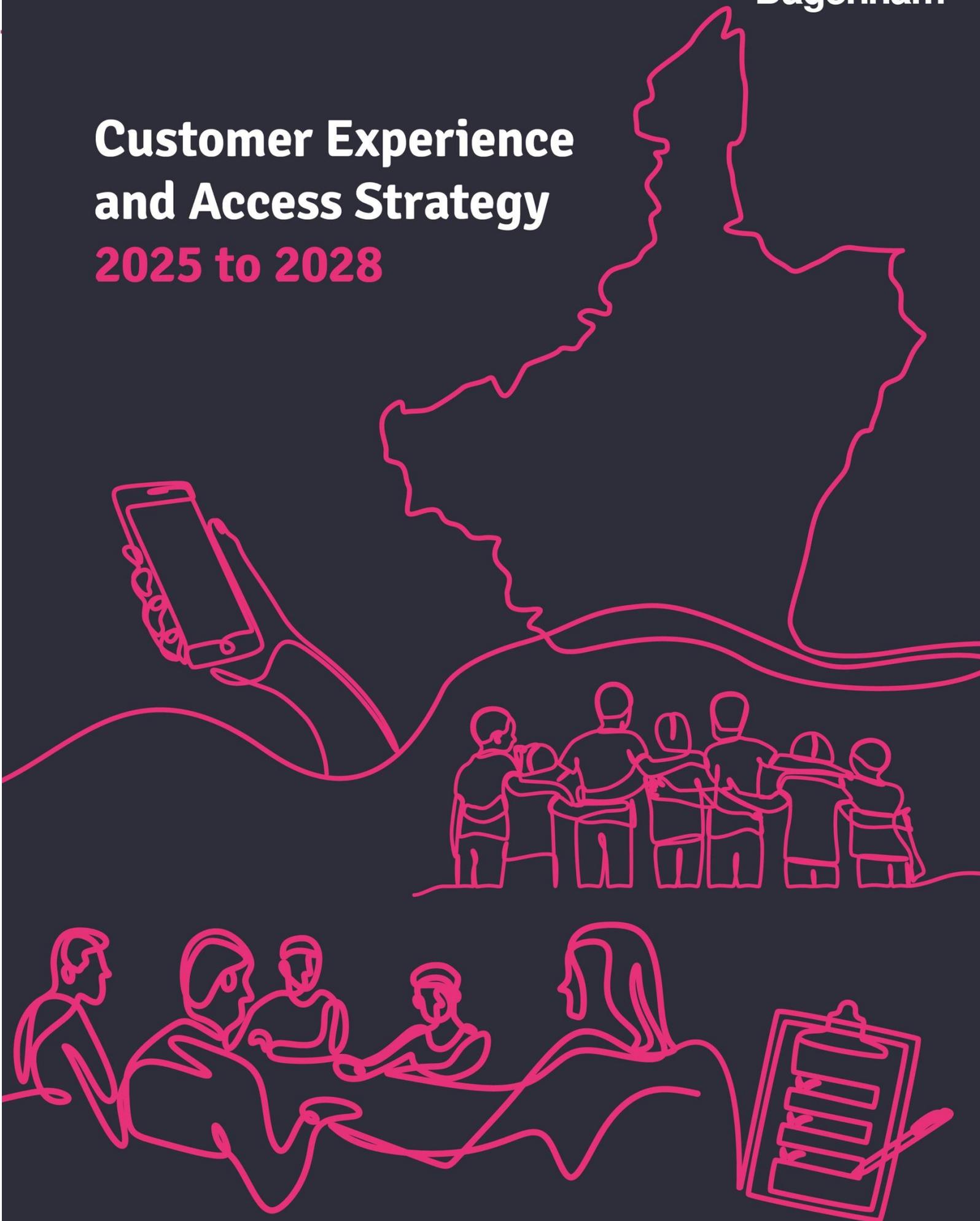


Customer Experience and Access Strategy

2025 to 2028





Introduction

Our goal is to create a community where everyone feels valued and connected, and we want to ensure all residents can benefit from accessible and high-quality council services regardless of how they contact us.

Our Customer Experience and Access Strategy is key to making this happen. Right now, we know our system has too many ways for people to get help, which can sometimes make things confusing and disjointed.

To fix this, we have a plan. We use data and resident feedback to understand how people feel about our services. This includes looking at how people interact with us, their opinions, and the results they get. It helps us see where we need to improve and drive forward solutions. This strategy sets out the steps we're taking to ensure we deliver excellent customer service which is accessible and inclusive for all.

A key part of this is continuing to invest in technology to make our services simpler and easier to use. This will help us manage demand better and free up resources for those with more complex needs.

We will deliver services that are efficient, effective, and easy to access, maintaining high standards of service across all our contact channels. We're committed to providing a consistent and positive experience, whether online, by phone, or in person and being a truly customer-focused council that continues to listen, learn, and adapt.

We will continue to improve by focusing on resident feedback, and understanding your experiences, expectations, and needs.

Our focus is to deliver consistently high-quality experiences for all our residents, businesses, and visitors, putting you at the heart of everything we do.

Thank you

Councillor Dominic Twomey, Leader of the Council
Fiona Taylor, Chief Executive





Why do we need a strategy?

Barking and Dagenham has an aspiration that all residents will benefit from accessible and high-quality services regardless of how they contact the council.

We know that not all of our residents need to contact the council and we also know that we need to change and improve our approach to customer service, whilst over the last four years we have improved the online offer, the way we currently provide customer services is still largely based around having contact by phone.

We experience many follow-up calls/contacts, which is a drain on the council's limited resources and also it can take our residents who need to contact us longer to get through on the telephone.

Every time a resident uses one of our services or interacts with us, it shapes their experience and thereby their perception of the council. The purpose of this strategy is to provide clarity to all staff, residents, and customers on the steps Barking and Dagenham is taking to deliver excellent customer service which is accessible and inclusive.

We need to keep investing in technology to make our services simpler and easier to use. This will help us manage demand better and free up resources for those with more complex needs.

We will create a 'digital by design but not digital only' culture across the Council because our residents want quick, personalised service and expect to contact us anytime, day or night. We aim to provide 24/7 access to as many services as possible and give the right information quickly and easily.

For residents with more intensive needs, we will offer high-quality assessment and referral services, based on their needs helping them to receive the right support at the right time. Our new Neighbourhood approach will personalise support to residents, in their community.

We are finding new ways of working to transform how we deliver our services, focusing on understanding our residents' experiences, expectations, and needs. We must manage the growing demand for our services, support residents to help themselves where possible, and embrace technological solutions.

The financial environment will continue to be challenging over the next few years. Recent high inflation has increased fuel and energy costs, making council services more expensive to deliver. To support our residents and protect them from the cost-of-living crisis, the council continues to invest in services.

We need to make significant savings over the medium term to make sure the council's budget is balanced and sustainable, meaning it's important to provide solutions at the first point of contact to avoid repeat requests.

Customer Experience and Access Strategy 2025 to 2028



This strategy aims to achieve three key outcomes:

- Council services are easily accessible and inclusive.
- Services are improved using customer feedback, data, technology, and innovation.
- The council embeds a customer-focused culture to deliver an excellent customer experience.

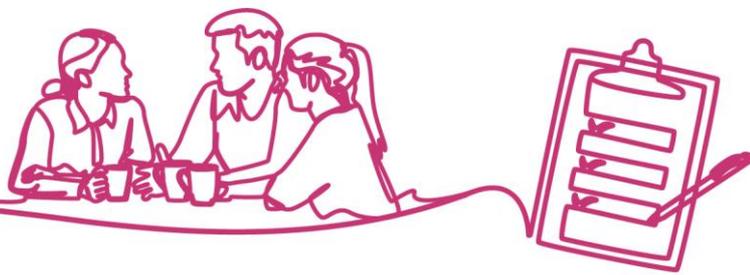
Our procurement practices enable us to work with suppliers to deliver economic, social, and environmental benefits for our community, while supporting the voluntary and community sector in the borough.

Our staff are crucial in ensuring our residents receive the best possible experience. We will invest in and train our staff to deliver our customer care standards and promise, maximising the value they provide at every interaction.

In delivering our Customer Experience Strategy, we will ensure our culture is resident centric. By working together, we can make Barking and Dagenham the best it can be. Our values commit us to working together, listening to, and understanding what our residents need, and responding appropriately to provide accessible services equally and responsibly.

Our vision is that our residents will receive an excellent experience when contacting the council for a service, regardless of the channel they use, connecting communities and empowering residents.





Our Borough, Our Residents

Barking and Dagenham's population has grown significantly by 17.7% since last census data (2021), and it's expected to grow even more, by 42% by 2041. The area has the fourth largest average household size in England, with 2.96 people per household.



A large part of the population, 26.1%, is under 16 years old, which is the highest in England and Wales. The community is very diverse, with 2 out of 5 residents born outside the UK and non-white residents increasing by 18.6%.*
*(*Census Data 2021)*



However, there are challenges. About *62.4% of households face some form of deprivation, and *24.5% of households rent from the Council, which is the third highest rate in England and Wales.

These facts are important for planning strategies to support Barking and Dagenham's growing and diverse population. By understanding these trends, we can create policies that help the community and make the most of its strengths. To truly make our services work for our residents, we need to actively engage with them and ensure accessibility for everyone.

This means not just listening to their needs but also being proactive in letting our residents know what is available to them should they wish to interact and use our range of services. Flexibility is crucial, allowing us to adapt and evolve as our population changes.

***Data Source: Barking & Dagenham Corporate Plan 2023 to 2026, taken from Census Data March 2021**

Customer Experience and Access Strategy 2025 to 2028



By focusing on these areas, we can create a customer experience strategy that is inclusive, responsive, and forward-thinking, where every resident feels valued, supported, and connected to the services they need.





What you can expect from us

At Barking and Dagenham Council, we are committed to delivering consistently high-quality experiences for all our residents, businesses, and visitors. Our Customer Promise sets out the standards you can expect from us and how we will work together to build a borough that is inclusive, responsive, and resident-focused.

We will:

- Put our residents at the heart of everything we do, treating every individual with empathy, dignity, and respect.
- Deliver services that are efficient, effective, and easy to access regardless of circumstance.
- Maintain high standards of service across all contact channels with a commitment to follow up and provide meaningful support when you need it most.
- Actively seek your feedback and use it to improve how we deliver services making sure your voice shapes our actions and priorities.
- Provide a consistent and positive experiences, whether online, by phone, or in person.
- Be a truly customer-focused council that listens, learns, and adapts, holding ourselves accountable for the promises we make and the service we deliver.

You can expect us to:

- Introduce ourselves, take ownership and make sure you know who is responsible for supporting you.
- Be helpful, polite, and respectful at all times, showing genuine empathy and understanding for your situation.
- Provide clear, honest, and accurate information, proactively sharing what you need to know.
- Respond within our published timescales, keep you informed throughout, and make sure no enquiry or complaint goes unanswered. Set clear expectations and keep you informed every step of the way.
- Own it and put things right, because keeping our promises to you matters.
- Uphold equality and inclusion by regularly assessing our services.

In return, we ask our you to:

- Treat our staff and other customers with respect and courtesy.
- Let us know promptly if your circumstances or service needs change.
- Provide accurate and complete information to help us support you effectively.
- Work with us constructively to achieve the best outcomes for everyone.
- Share your feedback and ideas to help us improve our services so we can make sure we can design our services with you for you.





Where do we want to be?

Over the next three years, our goal is to automate and expand the range of transaction types across services in Barking and Dagenham. This automation will cover various contact points, including payments, information services (such as waste collection), bookings, and general enquiries. The focus of this initiative is to streamline and enhance customer service by enabling self-service options and reducing the need for manual intervention.

In addition to these improvements, we aim to significantly enhance our residents' experience and make it easier for them to access services across the council. By providing more digital options, we can ensure that our phone lines remain open for those who truly need us and are unable to connect digitally. This approach will help us serve our community more efficiently and effectively.

To achieve this, we will focus on the following key areas:



Improving Accessibility to Digital Services

We will ensure that our digital platforms are user-friendly and accessible to everyone. Designing our websites and applications to be easy to navigate, with clear instructions and support available for those who need it.



Enhancing Self-Service Options

By expanding the range of services available online, residents will be able to complete transactions, access information, and make bookings at their convenience. This will reduce the need for them to visit council offices or wait on hold for phone assistance.



Complex Needs

While we aim to automate and simplify many processes, we recognise that some residents have more complex and long-term requirements. For these individuals, we will offer intensive and extended support to ensure their specific needs are met effectively.



Building Stronger Relationships with Residents

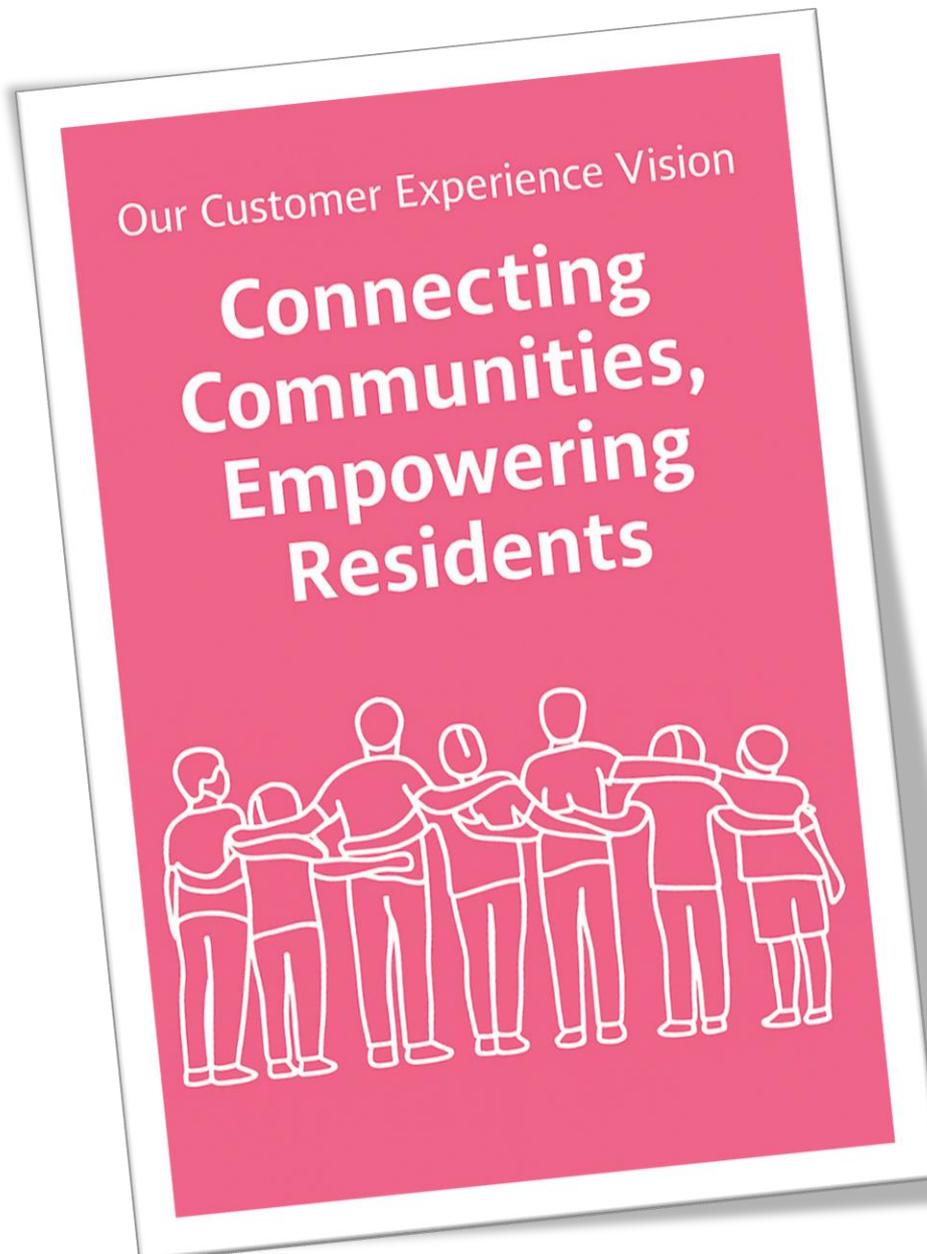
By focusing on personalised support for those with complex needs, we will build stronger relationships with our residents. This will help us understand their unique situations better and provide tailored solutions that improve their overall experience.

Customer Experience and Access Strategy 2025 to 2028



We envision a council where residents can easily access a wide range of services online, freeing up our phone lines for those who need direct assistance. Our digital platforms will be accessible and user-friendly, ensuring that everyone can benefit from our services.

At the same time, we will maintain strong, supportive relationships with residents who require more intensive help, making sure that everyone gets the support they need to continue to live happy, independent and prosperous lives.





How will we get where we want to be?

We believe our residents deserve excellent services, including top-notch customer service. Our goal is to make sure that our services are inclusive and accessible to all, allowing residents to easily access the support they need.

We understand the frustration that comes with having to contact us multiple times to resolve an issue, answering the same questions repeatedly, or waiting a long time for a response. We also recognise that our residents have different preferences for contacting us; some prefer 24/7 digital contact, while others favour face-to-face interactions. Our aim is to provide a consistently excellent customer experience, regardless of the channel used.

This strategy is built around four key outcomes that reflect our ambition to create a more accessible, inclusive, and responsive council. By simplifying digital access, enhancing self-service options, providing tailored support for those with complex needs, and strengthening relationships with our community, we aim to ensure that every resident feels supported, heard, and empowered.

Our approach is rooted in data, feedback, and collaboration, so that services are designed with and for the people who use them.





Outcome 1

Accessible and Inclusive Council Services

Our Customer Experience Strategy for 2023-26 focuses on making our website as user-friendly as possible. Currently, only 18% of the website is in plain English. By the end of next year, we want at least 90% of our website written in plain English.

We will do this by focusing on:

Objective 1: Quick and Easy Access

Help residents reach relevant services quickly by signposting them to the correct services at the earliest opportunity. This aligns with our commitment to ensuring residents are supported and can access services efficiently.

Objective 2: Inclusivity

Ensure our services are inclusive and accessible for all residents. This objective supports our vision of creating a place where everyone feels valued and has the opportunity to succeed.

Objective 3: Digital Availability

Expand the availability of services digitally. This is in line with our goal to make Barking and Dagenham a digitally resilient borough, supporting residents and businesses to thrive in the modern workplace.

Objective 4: Effective Communication

Ensure all communication is relevant and timely. This objective reflects our commitment to transparency, accountability, and good governance, ensuring residents are well-informed and engaged.



Outcome 2

Enhancing Self-Service Options

We aim to improve our services by using feedback, data, technology, and innovation to enhance self-service options. By analysing customer feedback, using data and adhering to Government Digital Service Design Principles, we aim to proactively address issues and make processes easier.

We will do this by focusing on:

Objective 1: Systematic Customer Feedback Collection

Continue our approach to systematically collecting customer feedback. This will help us understand our residents' needs and experiences, allowing us to make informed decisions to improve our services.

Objective 2: Data-Driven Service Improvement

Routinely use data and information, including performance and complaints data, and best practices, to inform and improve services. This ensures our services remain relevant and effective for our customers.

Objective 3: Early Intervention and Prevention

Use data to identify opportunities for early intervention, preventing issues from escalating. By acting early, we can help residents avoid severe problems and reduce pressure on high-cost services.

Objective 4: Implementing New Technology and Improve Existing Platforms

Implement new technology and enhance current platforms that will help better serve our community and improve efficiency. Ensuring the technology we use is fit for purpose, reliable, and easy to use for both customers and council staff.

Objective 5: Customer-Centric Process Design

Design our processes and systems with the customer in mind by co-designing with the local community. Adopt the Government Digital Service design principles to make processes more efficient and simpler, removing unnecessary steps and enhancing the overall customer experience



Outcome 3

Providing Intensive Support for Complex Needs

While we aim to automate and simplify many processes, we recognise that some residents have more complex and long-term requirements. For these individuals, we will offer intensive and extended support to ensure their specific needs are met effectively.

We will do this by focusing on:

Objective 1: Personalised Support Plans

Develop and implement personalised support plans for residents with complex needs. These plans will be tailored to address the specific requirements of each individual, ensuring they receive the appropriate level of care and assistance.

Objective 2: Multi-Agency Collaboration

Nurture collaboration between various council departments and external agencies to provide a holistic support system. This will ensure that residents with complex needs receive comprehensive care that addresses all aspects of their well-being.

Objective 3: Early Intervention and Prevention

Utilise data and insights to identify residents at risk of developing complex needs early on. By intervening proactively, we aim to prevent issues from escalating and provide timely support to those in need.

Objective 4: Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation

Implement a robust system for continuously monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of support provided to residents with complex needs. This will help us make necessary adjustments and improvements to ensure the highest quality of care.

Objective 5: Empowerment and Independence

Focus on empowering residents with complex needs to achieve greater independence. Through tailored support and resources, we aim to help them build the skills and confidence needed to manage their own lives more effectively.

Objective 6: Accessible and Inclusive Services

Ensure that all services provided to residents with complex needs are accessible and inclusive. This includes making necessary accommodations for disabilities and language barriers, ensuring that everyone can access the support they need.



Outcome 4

Building Stronger Relationships with Residents

By focusing on personalised support for those with complex needs, we will build stronger relationships with our residents. This will help us understand their unique situations better and provide tailored solutions that improve their overall experience.

We will do this by focusing on:

Objective 1: Co-Design Initiatives

We will involve residents in designing and improving our services to make sure we meet their needs. We will hold workshops and focus groups to get their ideas and feedback, use their suggestions, and see how these changes make it easier for our residents to connect with us.

Objective 2: Voice of the Customer Programmes

We will always listen to residents' feedback to improve our services. We will set up regular ways for residents to share their thoughts, like surveys and suggestion boxes, look at the feedback to find ways to improve, and let residents know what changes we make based on their input.

Objective 3: Collaboration with Volunteer Sector and Partners

We will work closely with volunteer organisations and other partners to provide better support for residents. We will build strong partnerships with local volunteer groups to offer extra help and coordinate with healthcare providers and community groups for comprehensive care. We will build a neighbourhood model with the community to strengthen relationships.

Objective 4: Community Engagement and Involvement

We will create a strong sense of community among residents. We will organise events and activities that encourage residents to join in and interact and promote volunteer opportunities for residents to contribute to their community and make connections.



How We'll Make Sure the Strategy Happens

To make sure Barking and Dagenham's Customer Experience Strategy is delivered successfully, we'll create a clear action plan with steps we can measure. We'll regularly check how things are going and share updates with the Customer Focus Transformation Board and Executive Team, so there's strong leadership and accountability.

This action plan will help us stay on track with our goals, making sure everything we do improves the experience for residents, businesses, and visitors who deal with the Council. We've also set up practical ways to measure success, so we can keep focused on what matters most to our community.

We will publish performance measures every quarter on our website and will monitor improvement programmes internally through the Customer Focus Board

We are committed to measuring what truly matters to our residents. Our performance will be assessed against the following key indicators:

