

Customer Services Strategy

2011 - 14

To create the conditions for Cumbria's communities to thrive by putting customers at the heart of everything we do and work with others to deliver excellent services for those who need us most.

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1. Foreword

At a time when local government is facing some of the most severe budget restrictions it has ever seen, it is more important than ever that we put the customer at the heart of everything we do. We need to concentrate our ever limited resources providing services that our customers need and want and to understand how well our services are working. We can only do this by listening to customer feedback and using that valuable information to help us improve and ultimately deliver better services that provide value for money.

Putting customers at the heart of all we do is one of our top priorities within our council plan. This customer services strategy is an important step to making this a reality.

Cllr Oliver Pearson
Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities

2. Introduction

This strategy builds on the council's 2006-2009 customer access strategy. It sets out our ambition to be an organisation with the 'customer at the heart of everything we do'.

The strategy focus is not limited solely to customers from outside our organisation or to the services who undertake front line roles in dealing with customers. The strategy applies to all staff and services within our organisation even when the predominant function of the service is seen as supporting the organisation.

Our definition of a customer is anyone who requires the services we deliver.

Our definition of customer service is the experience the customer has at any point of contact with us.

We want to be a council where the customer knows what we offer, can get what they want, when they want it and can tell us what they think.

We want to be a council that uses customer feedback and insight to deliver improved services.

This strategy considers how the council will respond to the needs and wants of our customers from their perspective by putting in place mechanisms that will:

- support service improvement and decision making
- improve access to the council, its services and the services of partners; and
- inform and communicate with residents in the right ways

We recognise that customers want their enquiries resolved first time. They also expect the information and advice they are given to be correct; they want to be treated well; they want us to know who they are and use what we know about them properly; they want a choice of access channels; they want us to work with partners; and they want a say in how we do all of that.

We need to ensure we reflect local needs, recognising the unique nature of our communities and the individuals within them.

This strategy is primarily for Cumbria County Council, but it is hoped that the existing joint customer service work with our public sector partners can continue, building on the successful work already taking place.

3. About Cumbria

Approximately 495,000 people live in Cumbria. Covering an area of approximately 2,630 sq miles, Cumbria is the second largest, and one of the most sparsely populated, counties in England.

At some point in their lives, all of these 495,000 people will either, in some way, shape or form, either deal directly with the Council, or use a service the Council provides – whether in relation to schooling, to social services or social care, to transport or to the economy. Many will share common concerns or issues, but many will have very different or unique needs and requirements. All of them are the Council's 'customers'.

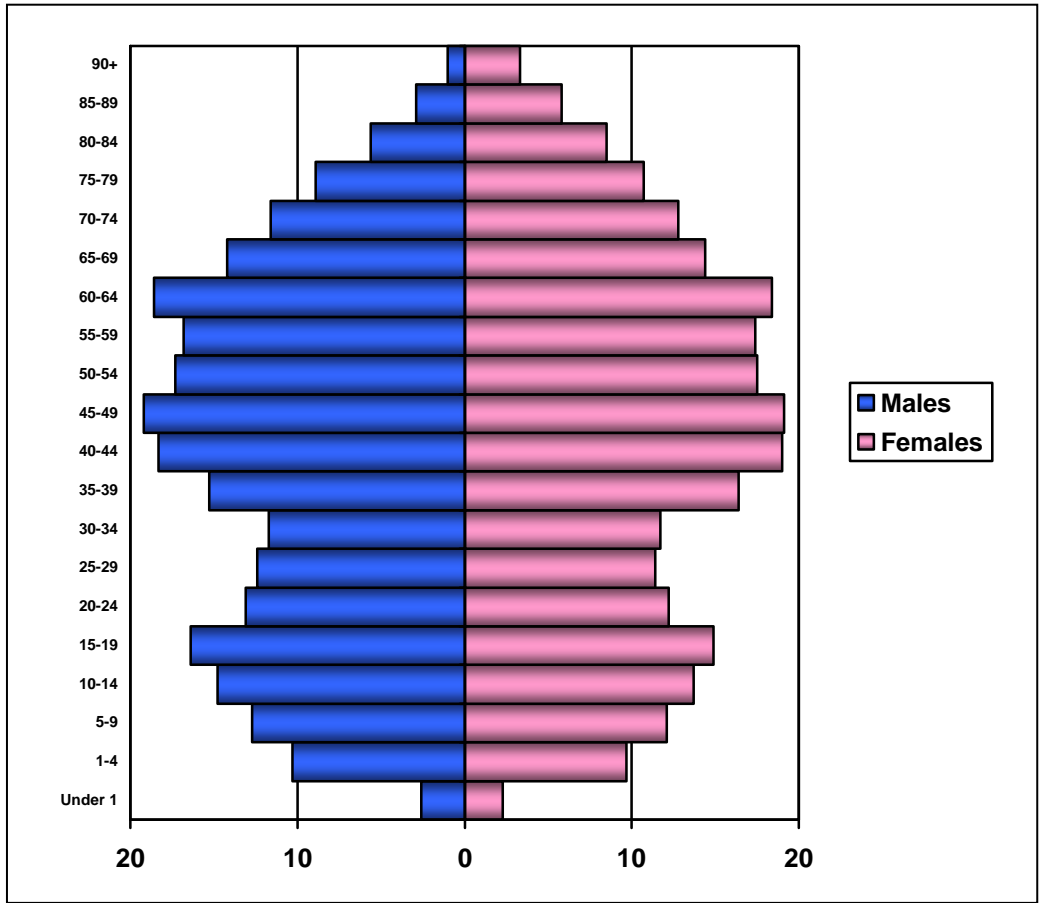
Within the county there are 28 Key Service Centres: areas that have been identified as being able to - or having the potential to - support and build on existing levels of service provision and to provide transport links to outlying areas. While the majority of the population of Cumbria live in those areas, over 153,000 people, or approximately 30%, of the population live outside of a Key Service Centre.

Supporting and delivering services over such a large area, to a comparatively small population, can present a number of challenges and issues. While north-south transport links in the eastern half of the county are good, despite recent improvements east-west road and rail links, and north-south transport links in the western half of the county, are relatively poor. For some of the comparatively more isolated individuals and communities, this can present barriers and challenges to their ability to benefit from the services available as they may have to rely more heavily on sometimes limited public transport options, or on private transport, to access the services they need. The county's transportation challenges can particularly affect those people with mobility impairments, who are likely to be more dependent on services such as Rural Wheels and other community transport schemes. The county's geography and transport challenges also present a number of challenges and difficulties for the Council itself in how we are able to engage fully with individuals and communities across the county.

Cumbria is a two-tier local authority area: Cumbria County Council is the upper tier authority, with the county split into 6 different district areas: Carlisle City Council; Eden District Council; Allerdale Borough Council; Copeland Borough Council; South Lakeland District Council; and, Barrow Borough Council. The county is also served by Cumbria Constabulary and NHS Cumbria. While working relationships and partnerships between these different public bodies are good, the number of bodies providing varying services, often with differing methods, processes and procedures, can potentially lead to some degree of confusion for communities and individuals as to what each body is responsible for or is able to do.

The county's main urban areas are Carlisle, in the north of the county (population: 70,706), followed by Barrow (population: 57,951) in the extreme south of the county, 56 miles from Carlisle; Kendal (population: 27,841); Whitehaven (population: 25,116) and Workington (population: 24,046) followed by Penrith (population: 13,213). Over recent years the county's population has been growing at a faster rate than the northwest region, but more slowly than the England average.

Population forecasts show that the working age population (ages 16-64) of the county is decreasing and that we are experiencing the fastest decline in the number of children of any county in England. At the same time, both the number and proportion of older people in the population are increasing. This may potentially lead to an increase in demand for those services more traditionally associated with an older population, such as residential care. This changing demographic may also have an effect on how the Council engages with its population, as the needs of the population, and preferred ways of dealing with the Council and accessing advice and services, will change accordingly.



The above table shows the population of Cumbria, split by age and gender

The ACORN geodemographic profile of Cumbria reveals quite significant differences across Cumbria. For example, in Eden 56% of the population are classed as ‘Wealthy Achievers’ – people within this category will tend to own large, often detached, houses with 4 or more bedrooms, will be well-educated with high levels of academic qualifications and professional skills, and will often be employed in managerial or professional occupations, or run their own business. In Barrow, 11.6% of the population are in this category.

In South Lakeland, 10.4% of the population are in the ‘Hard-Pressed’ category. This category tends to contain the poorest areas of the UK, with unemployment levels well above the national average. Levels of qualifications will be low, with those who are working likely to be employed in unskilled, low-paid jobs. Household incomes are low, and there will tend to be high levels of long-term illness in some areas. In Copeland, 28.1% of the population are in this category.

District	Total	1: Wealth achievers	2: Urban prosperity	3: Comfortably off	4: Moderate means	5: Hard-pressed	Unknown
Allerdale	100.0%	32.8%	0.9%	22.1%	20.3%	22.9%	1.0%
Barrow	100.0%	11.6%	1.1%	25.6%	45.2%	15.8%	0.7%
Carlisle	100.0%	27.1%	2.8%	28.3%	18.9%	21.9%	0.9%
Copeland	100.0%	25.4%	0.7%	23.6%	21.1%	28.1%	1.2%
Eden	100.0%	54.8%	2.2%	23.5%	10.2%	7.9%	1.4%
South Lakeland	100.0%	40.7%	4.4%	31.8%	9.9%	10.4%	2.7%
Cumbria	100.0%	31.5%	2.2%	26.3%	20.5%	18.2%	1.4%
Britain	100.0%	24.7%	2.2%	26.3%	20.5%	18.2%	1.4%

This table shows the population of Cumbria (and Britain) split by district, in to the 5 main ACORN categories.

As income, employment (or lack of), standards of living, educational attainment and levels of qualifications/skills and health and wellbeing are all intrinsically linked, so the needs of these individuals and communities will differ quite widely both across the county, and even to some extent within district areas and from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. A child born in the ward of Ellen, in Allerdale, has a life expectancy of approximately 81 years. A child born in the neighbouring ward of Ewanrigg has a life expectancy of just under 75, over 6 years difference.

Approximately 96% of the Cumbria population is of White British ethnicity. At roughly 4%, the proportion of residents from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups is much lower than the national average of over 16%. In recent years, however, the proportion of residents from black and minority ethnic groups has been increasing much more rapidly in Cumbria than it has nationally. Should this rate of growth continue, over time the ethnic profile of Cumbria will change to become more representative of the rest of the UK.

Cumbria already has a number of well-established BME communities, such as Polish and other central and eastern European, Chinese and South Asian, and a growing Nepalese community. Cumbria has a much lower proportion of people who have a religious belief other than Christian (0.6% in Cumbria compared to 6% nationally).

The changes to the ethnicity of Cumbria’s population are leading to a growing demand for interpreters and translators. There is also a rising need for supporting victims of hate crime, promoting better awareness of diversity and changing the way that information, advice and advocacy services meets the needs of people who are new to the UK. The geography of Cumbria can mean

that access to trained interpreters is sometimes difficult – for some languages, interpreters need to be brought in from outside the county.

Some County Council services have seen a disproportionate demand from BME people. Library Services have monitored the diversity of new members for four years, and this shows that 10% of new members are from a BME background (against approximately 4% of the population). Also Children's Services' monitoring of School Choice Advice Service shows a higher than expected proportion of BME people using the service. Cumbria Fire and Rescue data shows that BME people are no more or less likely to be injured in a fire incident, however a number of fires in houses of multiple occupation where migrants live, as well as at least one fatal care accident involving Eastern Europeans, has raised the need for ongoing engagement work with migrants, BME business owners and the Tourism industry on fire prevention and safety.

9.7% of Cumbria's population are entitled to receive either Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance, slightly higher than the national figure of 7.8%. There are minor variances across the 6 district areas, with Barrow having the highest proportion (13.7%) and Eden the lowest (7.2%). One in five Cumbrians have a long term health condition, and this is set to increase to one in four over the next twenty years. Approximately 16% of the Cumbrian working age population are on incapacity benefit or disability living allowance, however in some wards in Barrow this figure is significantly higher, rising to 40% in some instances.

Disabled people are more likely to be out of work and to have a dependence on specialist services. Disabled people are also more likely to have complex systems to negotiate in terms of access to advice, information and advocacy – all of which needs to be considered when designing services and in deciding how the Council will interact with disabled people.

For Cumbria as a whole, unemployment is low compared to regional and national averages, however this figure hides some pockets of the county which have particularly high levels of worklessness. Cumbria also has some of the most deprived wards in England.

4. The national, regional and local context

In 2010, government published proposals for reform in a number of areas, including schools, health and public health, policing and rehabilitation and sentencing.

One of the key elements of all of these reforms is a transfer of powers from central government to local communities and individuals, with the latter having greater control and influence over the services they pay for via their taxes.

Alongside all of these reforms is the idea of the Big Society – a reduction in the size of the state and an increase in the size of society, with communities and individuals taking greater ownership of and responsibility for the running of their communities. To enable this, the reforms talk about a greater level of engagement with service users – of service users being involved in the actual design of the services they receive, and having greater choice over who they can receive services from.

To encourage this more involved engagement, there is an increasing demand and requirement for much greater transparency from public sector organisations – to make huge swathes of information available for the private sector, voluntary and community sectors, alternative providers, communities and individuals to access and use to challenge the performance of organisations.

All of these reforms are as a result of communities and individuals expecting greater influence and control over their own lives.

In today's society, services are often accessible 24 hours a day, whether you want to buy a coffee, arrange an overdraft or order a new television. As the internet becomes an intrinsic part of everyday life for many people, there is a greater expectation that services should be available at the touch of a button. This expectation has now spread to the public sector.

All of this can be wrapped up in to customer services – how an organisation, whether it is in the private or public sector – assesses and meets the various needs and expectations of its customers.

We are not alone in reviewing what customer service means to us, and how we can improve it. Many organisations across all sectors are doing exactly the same. Within local government, there has been a general trend towards reducing what has historically been a huge amount of different phone numbers for contacting various parts of the organisation to a handful of common numbers. Websites are developed to make sure they are as effective, efficient and user-friendly as possible. Many others are looking at how 'standards' of customer service can be put in place across their organisation.

Within our Council Plan, which sets out the County Council's overarching strategic priorities for the next three years, the idea of increased influence and control is embodied within one of our key priorities:

"We want you to enjoy an independent and healthy life and to be safe from harm, with more control over your life and say in the decisions which affect you."

The Council Plan goes on to describe the role of the County Council as:

"...to create the conditions for Cumbria's communities to thrive by putting customers at the heart of everything we do and work with others to deliver excellent services for those who need us most."

It is important, therefore, that we have a clear strategy for how we will meet our customers' needs and expectations both now and in the future.

Best practice

Best practice shows that customer service and customer satisfaction can be affected by how well public service bodies work together and join up delivery. Solutions do not need to be technological but require staff to put themselves in the customer's shoes, be able to see past the problem presented and be able to signpost to appropriate services and agencies.

Many organisations are implementing 'tell us once' approaches so that the customer only need provide information once to update their details, rather than contacting multiple offices or providers for the different services they access.

Where we are now

Cumbria County Council agreed its first customer services strategy in 2006. Since then much has been achieved, but there is still a lot of improvement required. Appendix 2 below provides details as to what the achievements have been.

Nationally levels of customer satisfaction and the ways it is measured vary greatly. Through the Place Survey in 2008, we can compare Cumbria's performance across a number of key areas that affect or have a direct correlation with customer satisfaction:

Percentage who have been involved in decisions that affect the local area in the past 12 months - Cumbria scored 15.1% compared with the national average of 14%

Percentage who agree that they can influence decisions in their local area - Cumbria scored 28.7% compared with the national average of 28.9%

Percentage who would say that they have been treated with respect and consideration by their local public services in the last year- Cumbria scored 73.3% compared with the national average of 72.4%

Percentage who strongly agree or tend to disagree that their council provides value for money - Cumbria scored 28.0% compared with the national average of 33.2%

Percentage who are fairly or very satisfied with the way their council runs things - Cumbria scored 35.5% compared with the national average of 45.4%

If these measures can be taken as an assessment of customer satisfaction, then we can say that the council matches the UK average in most circumstances. The two critical exceptions are associated with perception of value for money and the way the council runs things.

A range of customer measures are now being developed across our services to allow customers to see what we are aiming to achieve. In addition procedures are being put in place that will give customers the opportunity to provide feedback not only on the services they have received but how they have been treated.

5. Our vision, outcomes, priorities

In line with the Council Plan 2011-14 we are:

'Creating the conditions for Cumbria's communities to thrive by putting customers at the heart of everything we do, and working with others to deliver excellent services for those who need us most.'

To support this ambition, this strategy is focused around four key principles to ensure we can respond to the demands of our customers. The principles and what each of them means for our customers are as follows:

We make it easy for our customers

"As a customer, I know what services are available and they are available at a time and a place that suits me. I am able to access a range of professional help from my first point of contact with the council."

We treat people with dignity and respect

"As a customer, my relationship with the council is based on an understanding of my needs and takes into account how I would like to be treated."

We take responsibility

“As a customer I am confident that when I contact the council someone will take responsibility and keep me fully informed about the progress and timescales of my enquiry until it is resolved. Where I receive an ongoing service, I will have a dedicated contact to provide continuity.”

We use customer feedback to improve our services

“As a customer, I expect the council to listen, learn and change accordingly.”

Each of these principles is encompassed in three strategic areas:

Quality

Strategic approach

Our commitment to our customers will be demonstrated through our customer charters and service pledges which will be defined on a service-by-service basis to ensure customers know what to expect. Customer feedback will be used to inform our service planning process and service improvement activities to ensure we are focusing on the elements of our service which are of value to our customers. We will also communicate how we are performing to allow customers to hold us to account on this.

Customer service will be embedded as a core competency for all our staff ensuring a consistent quality of service is provided regardless of the service accessed or the method of contact selected.

To support effective performance management it is proposed (currently subject to Cabinet approval) that the Council operates a balanced scorecard which will contain a ‘customer’ element. The customer element will provide details of our customer priorities at a corporate, directorate and area level. These priorities would then used to measure our progress against delivery of the priorities.

Where we want to be

- Maintaining web information to ensure it is up to date, accessible and easy to understand
- Moving to a culture where excellent customer service is everyone's business, a culture that is focused on the needs of the customer and not of the organisation.
- Developing consistent and meaningful measures of customer service priorities which are published at customer access points, on the website and within service literature.
- Ensuring service planning and improvement activity links with the principles of our customer services strategy, it is evidence based and takes into account customer feedback.
- Embedding customer service as a core competency for all staff, assessed through appraisals and individual performance management.
- Developing a customer services training programme to be included as part of mandatory induction training for new staff
- Carrying out service level customer satisfaction surveys at least annually.
- Obtaining charter mark status for our customer service delivery.

Responsiveness

Strategic approach

Our strategy is to focus on the needs and expectations of our customers and to do this we will engage with our customers through consultation, be transparent in terms of the information we provide, and use the feedback received to shape the delivery of our services.

We recognise customer services is not a one-size-fits-all issue, but something that needs to be guided by information about our customers and their involvement in planning and reviewing, improving and changing those services.

Services will be shaped and developed based on insight into our customers' needs with the strategy principles linking with the work of our Local Committees to ensure services can be tailored according to local need and demand.

Where we want to be

- Consulting with our customers regarding proposed changes to services to ensure the development of our services is based around customer needs.
- Utilising online and social media to maximise opportunities for customers to communicate with us and for us to communicate with customers in ways which are appropriate for them.
- Ensuring our services are clearly defined and being delivered as efficiently and timely as possible to meet customer needs.
- Providing an advocacy service for our customers.
- Taking responsibility for complaints and ensuring they are owned and managed, apologising where we get things wrong and explaining the reason for our decisions.
- Improving the council's complaints procedures to provide a high quality, timely and consistent response, ensuring services utilise the council's approved complaints system to support the collection and use of feedback in reshaping our services.
- Implementing standards for consultation and engagement to gather robust feedback and consult with service users.
- Using customer segmentation data to ensure that we are providing accessible and appropriate services for all customers and that no-one is disadvantaged by the way we deliver services.
- Having the ability to share our customer data between services and systems to identify needs and trends, on a locality basis if appropriate, and not seeing contacts as customers of specific services but as customers of our organisation.
- Understanding the feedback we receive, such as the web satisfaction monitoring, to identify trends and needs so they can be targeted accordingly.

Access

Strategic approach

Improvement work has demonstrated that local teams, with responsibility for delivering services to customers within a geographical area, have a thorough understanding of demand and needs within their area and are in the position to offer the best service to their customers. They can provide expertise, continuity of service, signposting to partners and other agencies where appropriate.

However, customers contact us for many reasons, ranging from a one-off request for information to a detailed and often complex assessment of their needs to ensure they can access appropriate services. For this reason, the way in which customers are able to contact us needs to be flexible to cover all types of contact.

The focus is not just on customers coming to us but us being proactive in identifying customers or groups who require our services, and ensuring their needs are met - working closely with our partners in other agencies to commission services and promote and combine our delivery approach.

Cumbria has been named as one of four areas in the country to receive better broadband by the government's Broadband UK (BDUK) project. One of the key objectives of this project is to reengineer public services through the innovative use of ICT to deliver significant improvements in efficiencies. The project will help to enable more people, particularly those in rural areas, to access improved broadband internet and the range of services online.

Customers will always want to contact the council for general information and service requests which they can fulfil quickly and easily. They may be experiencing a so-called 'life event' such as moving to the area, or starting a business, and are looking for a range of information. We will therefore ensure that the website can be used to provide wider access to our services and information, developing a more intuitive approach to navigation.

The site will contain details of all our services and the various options and contact points available for accessing them. Where appropriate, the ability to request a service on line will be available.

The site will form the hub of information and knowledge and be the point of reference for other contact channels in response to customer enquiries.

The Local Link 'brand' has been well received and customers have an understanding of what it offers them. The brand centres on the access opportunity the facility offers to customers to 'link with us' as opposed to describing the physical building.

Extending this concept of linking will be evaluated whenever opportunities arise, such as the Library review or shared service proposals to ensure our delivery locations are able to offer wider opportunity for access to services.

Appendix 3 of the strategy provides maps of Cumbria, on a district boundary basis, showing our current footprint of advertised customer contact points and the services offered in these locations.

Where we want to be

(Working on the basis that a one size does not fit all approach)

- Reviewing how we use the internet as an organisation and how we can transform public access through broadband.
- Optimising the information available about the organisation on the web and extending opportunities to interact with us.
- Ensuring the option for customers to request any of our services or assistance is available online.
- Developing a bespoke approach to handling telephone calls and e-mails through a central contact number or via a dedicated locality service operation.
- Ensuring staff in our advertised customer contact points delivering face-to-face services have the training, knowledge and ability to access and deliver our services.
- Providing a 'mediated' self-service to support customers. Staff will assist customers to access web-based information and services to improve the shift from using more expensive access channels - face-to-face and telephone - to web based channels.
- Publishing information in a transparent manner to make it easy for customers to access.
- Undertaking equality impact assessments of existing and emerging customer channels

- Developing opportunities to work with partner organisations (police, health, district partners) to ensure a joined up and integrated service for our customers.

6. Delivering the strategy

In the previous sections, a number of priority tasks were outlined. The strategy is accompanied by an action plan (see Appendix I). This covers the key actions which will have the biggest impact on the strategy's delivery and be managed by the Customer Services Executive Board and its project team:

Some of the activity is ongoing from the previous strategy, such as the development of our website. Other activity will be instigated as part of the implementation plan and then mainstreamed and delivered on an ongoing basis, such as customer service training. Once an action has been mainstreamed they will no longer be under the management of the Customer Services Executive Board.

With regard to 'area plans' our Area Support Managers will be working with the rest of the organization to ensure we incorporate an area based approach to our strategic planning. This will be a way of ensuring local needs are clearly expressed; and inform decision making and service design, meaning we get local solutions for local people – which should support customer satisfaction.

A Scrutiny task and finish group was undertaken as part of the previous strategy development, which looked specifically at the proposal for a shared service with regard to customer contact. Building on from that work Scrutiny have been asked to review the new strategy proposals and identify areas of work they wish to be involved in with regard to the shaping and delivery of the proposals.

As the strategy will impact on all of the council's service areas, staff at all levels will be involved to different degrees - some in specific actions and activity, others to ensure they are personally aware of how they put their customers at the heart of their work.

The biggest risk to the delivery of the strategy's outcome will be the cultural shift required to deliver on the leadership's ambition of putting the customer truly at the heart of everything we do.

7. Performance managing and reviewing the strategy

The council's Customer Services Executive Board will be responsible for performance managing the implementation of this strategy. The board is held to account by the Corporate Programme Board, chaired by the Chief Executive.

The strategy action plan (see Appendix I) will be reviewed as part of the Customer Services Executive Board's planned programme of work to ensure the strategy is being delivered, the success measures are being achieved and the focus remains on putting the customer at the heart of everything we do.

The customer services sponsor is the corporate director for organisational development.

The portfolio holder for Communities is the council's customer champion.

8. Shaping the strategy

The strategy has been developed through a combination of approaches:

A scoping paper was discussed with Customer Service Executive Board, the portfolio holder for Communities, Corporate Management Team and Cabinet members.

A dedicated project team was put together which looked at:

- Current customer access activity
- Customer insight information
- Best practice elsewhere in the public and private sector

A visioning session was held to explore the way forward based on the research undertaken by the project team. The outcomes of the day were used to develop a draft strategy.

As part of the further shaping of the strategy the early findings and principles being developed were subject to further challenge through the Corporate Management Team & Cabinet members before wider consultation with the public, members and staff.

After the consultation, the draft was revised in line with the feedback gained and subject to equality impact assessment and peer review, before being taken through the council's decision making process for agreement and adoption.

The process was overseen by the council's Customer Executive Board.

9. Glossary and appendices

Appendix 1: Strategy Action Plan. The action plan template is an Excel document.

Appendix 2: Review of work undertaken from 2006 strategy.

Appendix 3: Locality maps showing our current footprint of service delivery points.

Appendix 4: Equality Impact Assessment.

CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

Code	Action	Owner	Timescale	Expected outcome of activity	Measure of success	Lead Directorate	Resources
CSSAP01	Identification of proposed Local Link locations across County	Assistant Director Local Services	31/03/2012	Location of Local Links network across County area identified along with timetable for implementation, to include all business and service changes required.	Locations identified as 'Local Links' & service changes	Adult & Local Services	Corporate property team, All Directorates
CSSAP02	System in place to ensure data quality checks undertaken on the web site on a routine basis.	Senior Manager Communications	31/12/2011	Web information up to date, accessible and easy to understand.	Web satisfaction feedback indicator.	Chief Executives	Corporate Web Officer & Web Officers User Group.
CSSAP03	Culture developed where excellent customer service is everyone's business	Assistant Director - Improvement	31/03/2013	Culture developed where excellent customer service is everyone's business, a culture that is focused on the needs of the customer and not of the organisation.	Improved customer satisfaction levels	Organisational Development.	Customer Services Project Group
CSSAP04	Implementation of the refreshed Performance Management Framework.	Senior Manager Performance & Intelligence	31/12/2011	Consistent and meaningful measures of customer service priorities developed which are published at customer access points, on the website and within service literature.	Measures incorporated into Performance Plus	Chief Executives	P & I Team Directorate Reps Customer Services
CSSAP05	Strategy considered as part of service planning process with customer service proposals captured and developed.	All Directorates	On-going	Service planning and improvement activity links to the principles of our customer services strategy, it is evidence based and takes into account customer feedback.	Delivery of customer service elements of service plan.	Chief Executives	Customer Services All Directorates
CSSAP06	Appraisal process amended to incorporate Customer Service competency. Training opportunities available on customer service.	Assistant Director - People Management	31/12/2011	Customer service recognised as a core competency for all staff, assessed through appraisals and individual performance management.	Assessment of staff being undertaken with regard to c. s. competency.	Organisational Development	Organisational Development. All staff undertaking appraisals

CSSAP07	Establishment of customer services training programme.	Assistant Director Local Services	31/03/2012	Customer services training programme to be included as part of mandatory induction training for new staff.	Establishment of programme and delegate feedback.	Adult & Local Services	Customer Services Organisational Development
CSSAP08	Link customer surveys to the measures identified as customer priorities.	All Directorates	On-going	Service level customer satisfaction surveys carried out at least annually.	Increased levels of satisfaction.	Adult & Local Services	Customer Services P & I Team
CSSAP09	Identify quality standard to be obtained and undertake process to gain accreditation.	Assistant Director Local Services	31/03/2013	Obtaining charter mark status as recognition for our customer service delivery.	Accreditation achieved.	Adult & Local Services	Customer Services Project Group
CSSAP10	Development of new and existing media channels for contacting customers.	All Directorates	On-going	Online and social media utilized to maximise opportunities for customers to communicate with us and for us to communicate with customers in ways which are appropriate for them.	Customer 'take-up' following development and expansion of communication methods.	Chief Executives	Communications Customer Services Project Team Relevant Service Leads.
CSSAP11	Services are clearly defined as part of service planning process, continuous review and Business Improvement Reviews.	All Directorates. Head of Business Improvement	On-going	Services are being delivered as efficiently and timely as possible to meet customer needs.	Delivery of the actions agreed following the 'Better Review'.	Organisational Development.	Business Improvement Team
CSSAP12	Implementation of actions of Advocacy & Advice Services Review	Strategic Policy Advisor	31/03/2012	A refreshed approach to providing an advocacy service for our customers which will enable the Council to achieve a better understanding of the impacts of service provision.	Implementation of the changes agreed as a result of the review.	Chief Executives	Advocacy Review Steering Group
CSSAP13	Implementation of the action plan resulting from the Complaints review in 2010/11.	Senior Manager Communications	30/09/2011	Improved complaints procedures providing a high quality, timely and consistent response. Learning from the complaints we receive, apologising where we get things wrong and explaining the reason for our decisions. Services utilise the council's approved co	Improved satisfaction levels with complaints handling. % of complaints resolved at Stage 1.	Chief Executives	Corporate Complaints Officer. Directorate representatives responsible for complaint handling.

CSSAP14	Development and roll out of consultation and engagement standards.	Senior Manager Policy Planning & Communities	30/09/2011	Standards developed for consultation and engagement which ensure the gathering of robust feedback.	Compliance with standards.	Chief Executives	Policy Planning & Communities Team. Strategic Comms Advisor & Consultation Officers
CSSAP15	Promote the support offered corporately through the Communications & Communities Teams when undertaking consultations and engagement.	Senior Manager Policy Planning & Communities	On-going	Communications & Communities Teams engaged when customers consulted regarding proposed changes and reductions to services to ensure the development of our services is based around customer needs.	% consultations / engagements involving Comms & Communities Teams.	Chief Executives	Policy Planning & Communities Team. Strategic Comms Advisor & Consultation Officers
CSSAP16	Undertaking equality impact assessments of existing and emerging customer channels	All Directorates	On-going	Customer segmentation data used to ensure that we are providing accessible and appropriate services for all customers and that no-one is disadvantaged by the way we deliver services.	Undertaking of actions identified as a result of EIA to remove service barriers.	Chief Executives	All Directorates Supported by Performance & Intelligence
CSSAP17	Customer 'Data Sharing' requirements incorporated into ICT strategy with systems integrated and tools available to analyse the data. Data capture forms amended to allow confirmation as to right to share data.	Assistant Director Local Services	31/03/2013	Customer data shared between services, systems and service partners, (where appropriate) to identify needs and trends. With contacts not seen as customers of specific services but as customers of our and partner organisations.	Identification of needs and trends and 'cross selling' of services.	Adult & Local Services	Customer Services ICT Client Team Performance & Intelligence Team
CSSAP18	Implementation of the Corporate Balanced Scorecard incorporating customer service measures.	Senior Manager Performance & Intelligence	30/09/2011	Customer feedback, such as the web satisfaction and telephone performance monitoring, used to identify trends and needs so they can be targeted for improvement accordingly.	Measures incorporated into Performance Plus	Chief Executives	P & I Team Directorate Reps Customer Services
CSSAP19	Local Committee Leads & Area Support Managers to receive a briefing/induction to the strategy for integration with respective committee.	Assistant Director Local Services	30/09/2011	The work of Local Committees is linked to the strategy principles ensuring Members informed of progress and performance in their area as well allowing for area specific developments to be proposed.	Links established between Local Committee work and strategy principles.	Adult & Local Services	Customer Services

CSSAP20	Delivery of 'Accessible Cumbria' Broadband project.	Senior Manager Corporate Information	31/03/2014	Review of how we use the internet as an organisation with public access transformed through the use of broadband.	Delivery of the project plan.	Organisational Development.	Accessible Cumbria Project Team
CSSAP21	Channel migration strategy developed and implemented.	Assistant Director Local Services	31/12/2012	Providing a 'mediated' self-service to support customers. Staff will assist customers to access web-based information and services to improve the shift from using more expensive access channels - face-to-face and telephone - to web based channels.	Delivery of the migration strategy action plan.	Adult & Local Services	Customer Services Project Group
CSSAP22	Identification of services and service information not currently available on line, with online service then established.	All Directorates	31/12/2012	All appropriate Organisational information and services available on-line which maximises opportunities for customers to interact with us.	Availability of all appropriate information and services on line.	Adult & Local Services	Customer Services Project Group Corporate Web Officer
CSSAP23	1) Classification of services between those requiring locality based delivery and those for central delivery. 2) Development of Switchboard/Contact Centre to accommodate 'central' services.	All Directorates	31/12/2011 31/03/2012	1) Bespoke approach developed to handling telephone calls and e-mails through a central contact number or via a dedicated locality service operation. 2) locality service operation.	Creation of Locality based service numbers and Central Contact Centre.	Adult & Local Services	Customer Services Project Group
CSSAP24	Staff in advertised customer contact points trained on how to access service information, services and how to how facilitate customers accessing the web.	Assistant Director Local Services	31/12/2012	Staff in our advertised customer contact points delivering face-to-face services have the training, knowledge and ability to access and deliver our services.	Customer feedback and satisfaction monitoring of service received.	Adult & Local Services	Customer Services
CSSAP25	Implementation of Transparency Agenda.	Assistant Director - Improvement	31/12/2011	Information published in a transparent manner to make it easy for customers to access.	Compliance with agenda requirements.	Organisational Development	Asst. Director Working Group.
CSSAP26	Exploring opportunities for delivering customer services as part of a shared service.	Assistant Director Local Services	On-going	Developing opportunities to work with partner organisations (police, health, district partners) to ensure a joined up and integrated service for our customers.	Shared service arrangements entered into.	Adult & Local Services	Customer Services Project Group
CSSAP27	Appropriate branding of our service points to ensure customers are clear on Cumbria CC involvement in the services being provided.	Senior Manager Communications	On-going	Clear branding of Cumbria CC services and facilities	Public awareness of and satisfaction with Cumbria CC services.	Chief Executives	Communications Customer Services

The 2006 Customer Access Strategy focused on four key areas – face-to-face, telephone, web contact and performance management.

Face-to-Face

The focus of our face-to-face contact has been on the creation of Local Links offices. A Local Link is an access point where a member of the public can go to receive a service, advice or information regarding public and voluntary sector services. A Local Link offers facilitated access to these services by trained staff. It is open during the hours that suit the needs and demands of the locality in which it is based. Cumbria County Council services available include applications for 'blue badge' parking permits, school clothing grants, free school meals, referrals for adult social care, the ability to report highways faults as well as signposting and information on council services.

The benefits of the Links are that they create a hub for the community by providing local information and activities as well as access to the web. The Links also provide us with a channel to communicate with the public in terms of consultation and feedback.

The 2006 Customer Access Strategy identified 28 locations (key service centres) where the Links would be developed. At that point there were multiple contact points and receptions for members of the public to visit regarding specific services. This caused confusion for the public as to where to go for which service. By bringing the services together in a single point this would allow us to close these duplicated access points.

The Local Link project is entering its fourth year and to date eleven Local Links have been established. Seven are based within libraries at Aspatria, Ambleside, Grange-over-Sands, Milnthorpe, Longtown, Cleator Moor and Kirkby Stephen with a further four within partner owned buildings at Alston, Wigton, Ulverston and Carlisle.

Partnership commitment to the project has been very successful and used as a case study for the FOSS (front office shared services) in 2009. Learning from the project confirms that working with numerous partners and trying to meet everyone's needs, concerns and governance procedures is more time consuming than anticipated.

Building works associated with the project have been funded by a yearly £200K capital allocation since 2008/09, an additional £60K of funding was also received from CIEP in 2010.

The benefits of the development have seen:

- Improved access for the public, as well as meeting DDA compliance in some locations, and ensuring the buildings are fit for purpose in the future.
- The creation of a modern, accessible environment for both users and staff.
- Positive customer feedback and satisfaction. A survey of Local Links visitors in November 2010 showed 98.7% of people rated the service as good.
- 93.3% of those responding said their query had been fully resolved during the visit.
- Increased customer footfall.

The project has not delivered on the following:

- Imbedding the approach across all service areas and new initiatives e.g. The 'Better' programmes.

- The closure of other customer access points in the localities.
- Establishing funding streams as a result of delivering services to provide revenue funding to make the locations sustainable.

Telephony

The 2006 strategy proposed bringing together all telephone contact for the council into a single dedicated contact centre. This would provide a joined up solution for our services to our customers in the most cost effective way whilst allowing for a consistent application of customer standards through single management of staff, joint training and performance monitoring. The contact was to be rationalised into a smaller number of themed areas with a series of golden numbers. At that time, 75% of customers surveyed reported the telephone as their preferred method of contact.

The benefits of the development have been:

- The implementation of a customer relationship management (CRM) system which allows for the creation of a single view of a customer's interactions with us. It also allows for contact centre advisors to view and capture details of the services we provide as well as responding to enquiries for progress updates. Services include 'blue badge' parking permits, comments, compliments and complaints and requests for documents in other formats.
- The creation and population of a knowledge database which contact centre advisors can access to obtain details of our services and provide responses to frequently asked questions.
- Provision of call data to allow us to track demand for this contact channel to ensure it is available to customers at appropriate times as well as measuring and reporting on our performance against service standards.
- Trained staff with a wide knowledge of the services offered by the council.

The project has not delivered on the following:

- The effective transition of services for delivery through the contact centre.
- Overall reduction in advertised telephone numbers through the creation of eight 'golden numbers' based on service themes.
- Integration of the CRM system with 'back office' systems.
- Establishing a funding stream as a result of centralising services to make the contact centre self funding.

The service has also seen a year-on-year reduction in terms of demand as shown in the following table. Early work on customer access prior to 2006 showed the switchboard service was handling in the region of 300,000 calls a year.

Contact period	Calls offered	Calls answered	*Performance achieved
14.04.08 - 31.03.09	164 085	140 985	91.35%
01.04.09 – 31.03.10	131 298	118 098	89.83%
01.04.10 - 31.03.11	94 518	85 971	85.34%

* Performance is based on calls answered within 20 seconds.

Web

The drivers for the web from the 2006 strategy were to ensure transactional services were available, accessible and met customer needs. To encourage a better take-up through marketing and continuously review the web to ensure customers could find what they were looking for quickly and easily.

The benefits of development have been:

- An increase in the number of transactional services available.
- The creation of an on-line shop allowing customers the ability to purchase goods from the Archives Service.
- Achieving 'transactional status' for our web site. This is awarded to sites which meet a certain criteria in terms of the number of services it offers that can be delivered on line, including the ability to pay for services in this way.
- An increased usage in the web. Web visits have increased significantly over recent years. The following table shows the number of 'unique' visitors to our site over the last three years.

Year	Number of unique visitors.
01.01.2008 – 31.12.2008	1 162 129
01.01.2009 – 31.12.2009	1 463 988
01.01.2010 – 31.12.2010	1 487 059

- The introduction of the frequently asked questions (FAQ) database which allows customers to 'self serve' in terms of obtaining information.
- A range of facilities to meet customer demands and accessibility requirements. E.g. RSS feeds for job vacancies and news releases, a 'find my nearest' mapping facility for council and partner facilities, a translation facility, text reading software and a twitter page for council news releases.
- The introduction of a feedback tool attached to all web pages which allows customers to comment on the quality of the pages in terms of ease of finding them and the information they provide. This feedback is then reviewed and incorporated into web improvements.

The project has not delivered on the following:

- A year-on-year increase in the take-up of online services.
- Introduction of a discussion forum.

Performance

Performance links to each of the face-to-face, telephone and web channels covered above.

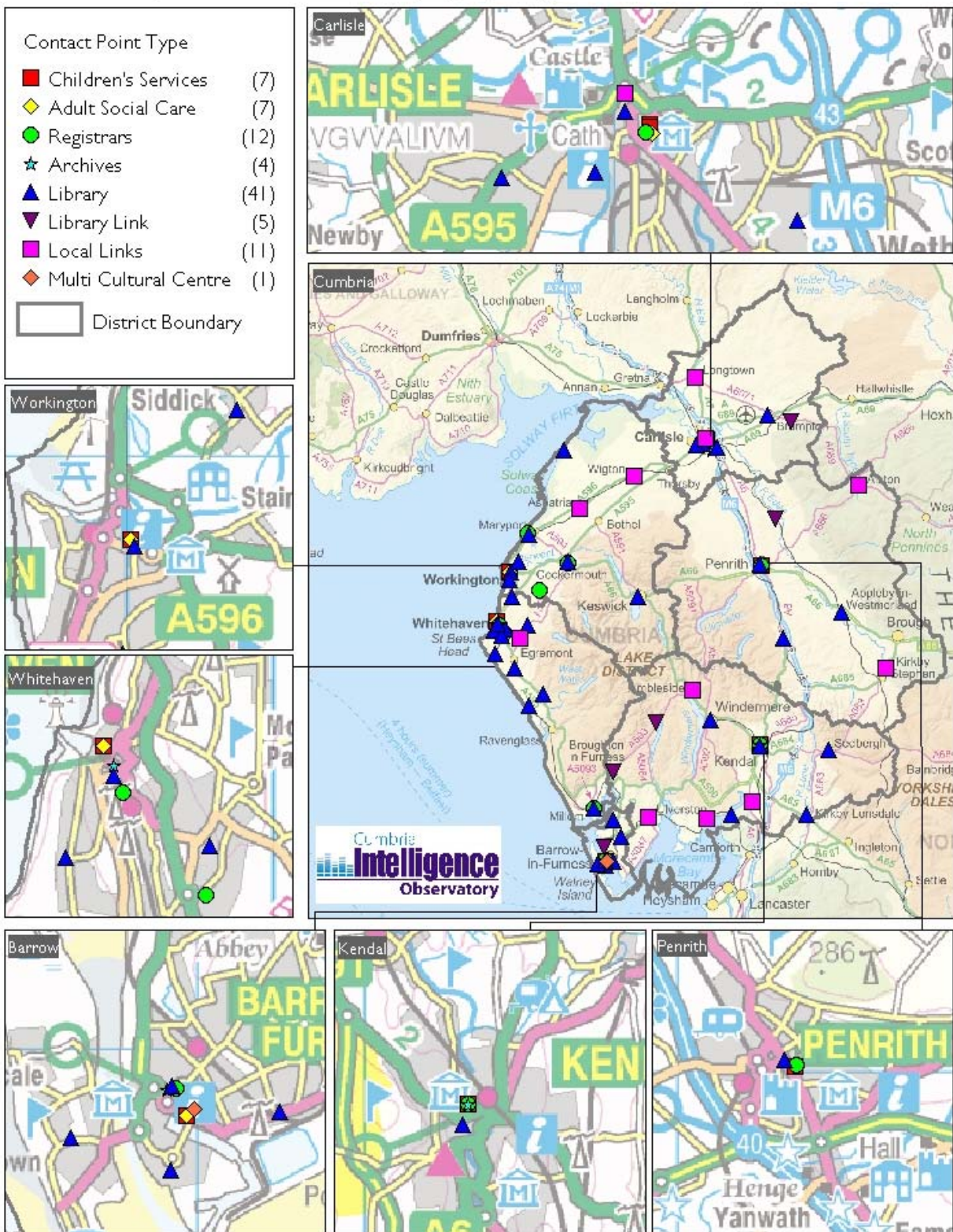
The benefits of the development have been:

- The introduction of corporate standards and a customer charter to inform customers of what they can expect on contacting us. Performance against these standards is also made available on the website or through our publications.
- The introduction of feedback tools to allow customers to comment on the services they have received. E.g. Comment cards in our public receptions and the web tool mentioned.
- The creation of specific service standards and charters for some of the services we provide such as The Fire and Rescue Service.

The project has not delivered on the following:

- Creation of specific service standards for all our services and provision of information as to how we are performing against them.
- A corporate approach to the use of feedback as a driver for delivering service improvements for our customers. E.g. the use of complaints information.

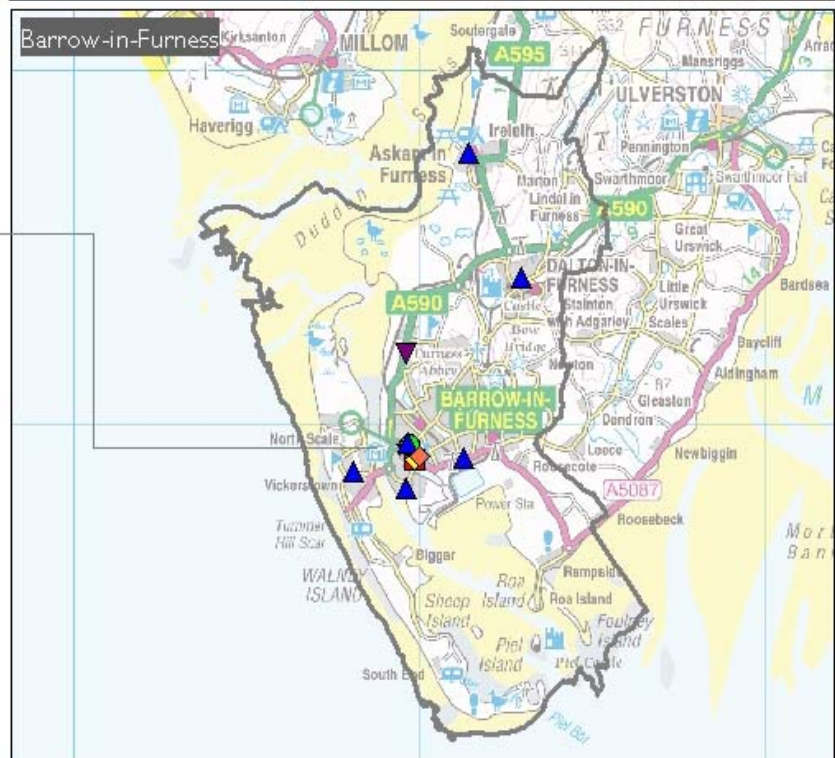
Cumbria County Council Contact Points by Type (2011)



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Cumbria County Council Contact Points by Type (2011)

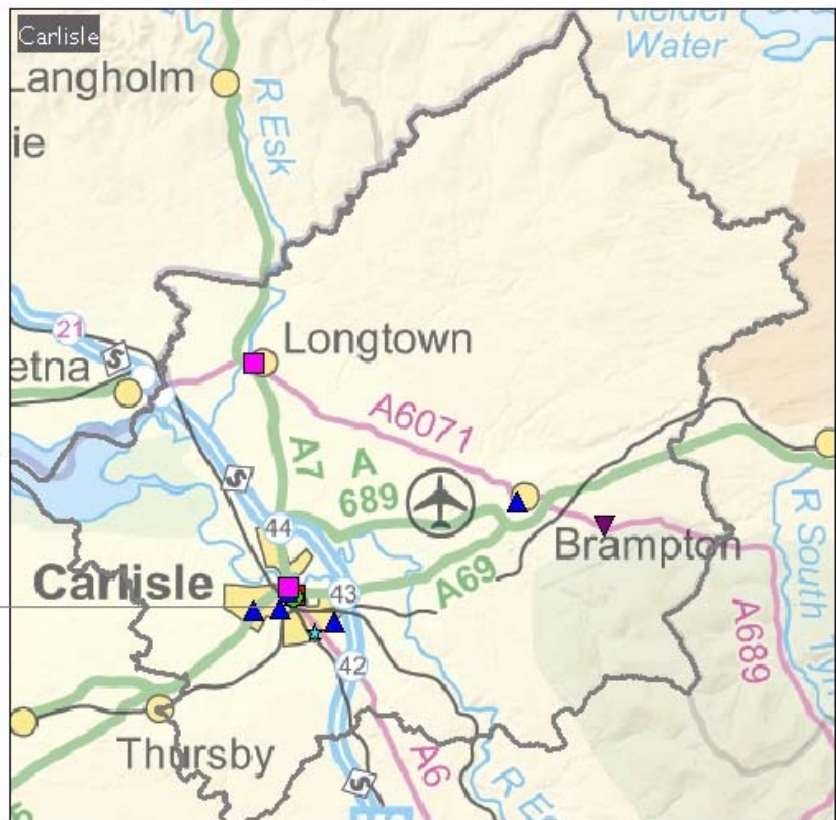
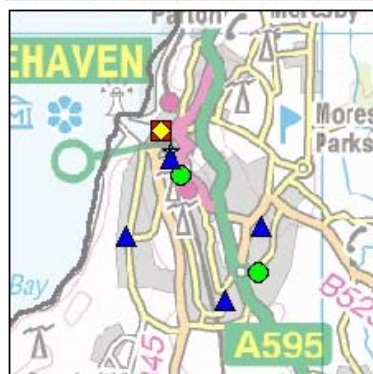
Contact Point Type	
■	Children's Services (7)
◆	Adult Social Care (7)
●	Registrars (12)
★	Archives (4)
▲	Library (41)
▼	Library Link (5)
■	Local Links (11)
◆	Multi Cultural Centre (1)
□	District Boundary



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Cumbria County Council Contact Points by Type (2011)

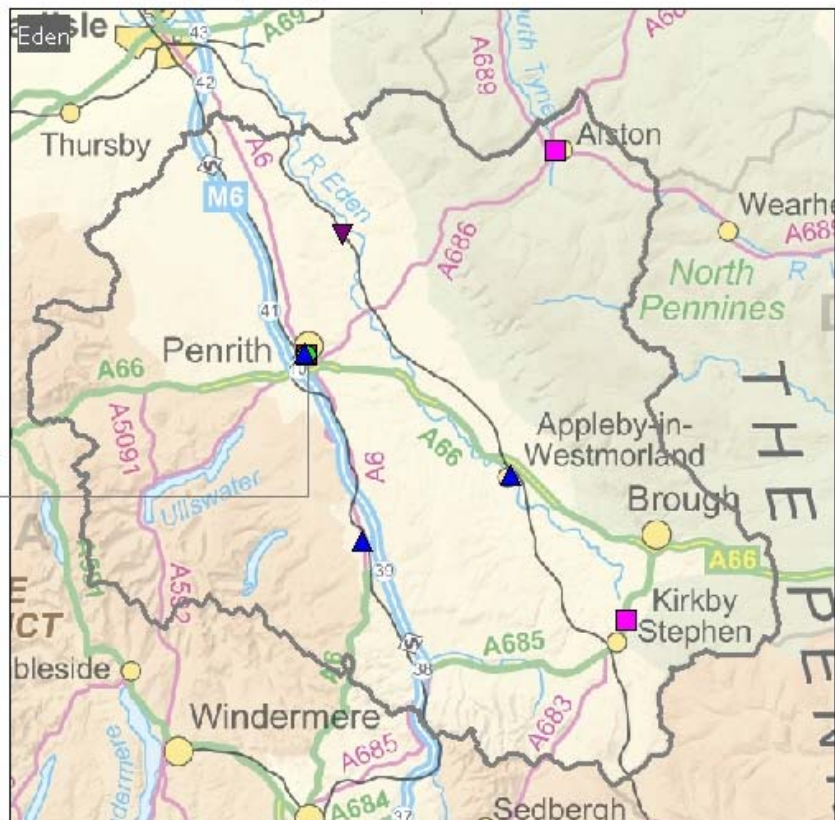
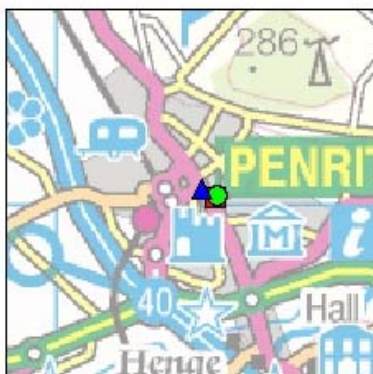
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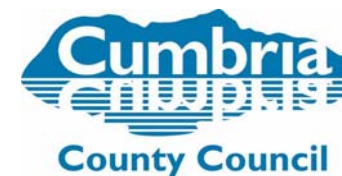
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Cumbria County Council Contact Points by Type (2011)

Contact Point Type	
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Equality Impact Assessment [Customer Services Strategy 2011 - 14]

Directorate	Adult & Local Services
Unit/Team	Customer Services
Assistant Director Responsible for EIA	Jim Grisenthwaite
Service EIA or Proposal	Customer Services Strategy 2011-14

Aims of the EIA

Purpose of the EIA	The EIA has been undertaken as part of the development of the Customer Services Strategy 2011-14 to assess the impact of the strategy proposals.
Summary of findings	Each of the three strategy areas (quality, responsiveness and access) has been considered as to the impact they may have on the different characteristic protected by the Equality Act. The relevant assessments are set out in 'Phase 2' below as to the potential impacts they may have. The 'action required' section in phase 2 provides the link to the appropriate strategy action plan reference for monitoring purposes. The monitoring of the strategy delivery will incorporate a review of the elements linked to the EIA to ensure they have been incorporated before signing off the specific action plan element.
Scope of the EIA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One directorate • Cross directorate • Outsourced organisation 	Cross directorate.

Phase I: Gathering information

List examples of background information that you think are **relevant**. If carrying out an assessment of a proposal this section should include the data used to establish whether the proposal has an impact.

Type of information	Findings
The assessment focuses on the three strategic areas which support the vision, outcomes and priorities for the Customer Services Strategy. They are quality, responsiveness & access, each of which has the potential to cut across a number of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act.	When considering ‘Where we want to be’ in implementing the strategy, Phase 2 below considers the aspiration and the potential risk it has regarding equality characteristics.

Phase 2 Impacts

From the evidence above use this section to identify the risks and benefits according to the different characteristics protected by the Equality Act.

All/general: Any issue that cuts across a number of protected characteristics

Issue	Positive Impact or benefits	Negative impact or risks	Action Required
Quality:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintaining web information to ensure it is up to date, accessible and easy to understand. ▪ Embedding customer services as a core competency for all staff with the focus on the needs of the customer. 	<p>Risk of excluding the following protected characteristics, disability and ethnicity.</p> <p>Risk that certain groups are not incorporated when implementing changes or views not sought when seeking customer feedback.</p>	<p>Strategy action plan ref CSSAP01 Data quality checks to incorporate checks on web site to ensure compliance with DDA and consider enhanced or additional web facilities that can assist accessibility.</p> <p>Strategy action plan ref CSSAP02 Culture developed where excellent customer services is everyone’s business. Measured by customer satisfaction ratings which must incorporate a range of customers from protected characteristics groups.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing a customer service training programme. 	<p>Risk that programme does not provide staff with skills required to address the requirements of the various protected characteristic groups.</p>	<p>Strategy action plan ref CSSAP06. Training programme to incorporate specific element on equality issues. Including the ability to understand and respond to individual requests, how to access specialist services as well as interpretation service and language line.</p>
<p>Responsiveness:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consulting with our customers regarding proposed changes to services to ensure developments are based around customer needs. ▪ Providing an advocacy service for our customers. ▪ Using customer segmentation data to ensure that we are providing accessible and appropriate service for all customers. 	<p>Risk that certain protected characteristic groups are not incorporated when consulting on changes.</p> <p>The Advocacy and Advice Service review does not provide clear outcomes as to how the advocacy service should be delivered or where further help groups and support can be obtained.</p> <p>Risks that systems are not in place to allow for collection of data in respect of protected characteristics for use in segmentation analysis.</p>	<p>Strategy action plan ref CSSAPI3. Consultation and engagement standards to provide guidance on the actions to be taken with regard to equality strands when consultations taking place.</p> <p>Strategy action plan ref CSSAPI 1. The strategy action plan identifies the implementation of the actions from the Advocacy and Advice Services Review as part of the strategy delivery plan. To ensure the service delivery and roll out is a clear outcome of the review.</p> <p>Strategy action plan ref CSSP15 to consider what systems we use, which services we should collect data from and use the data to identify gaps in service delivery. Data obtained to be compared against national profile.</p>

<p>Access:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Optimising the information available about the organisation and extending opportunities to interact with us. ▪ Providing a ‘mediated’ self-service to support customers. Staff will assist customers to access web-based information and services to improve the shift from using more expensive access channels. ▪ Undertaking equality impact assessments on existing and emerging customer channels. 	<p>Information is not shared across the authority or available to all potential contact channels or points.</p> <p>Risk of excluding the following protected characteristics, disability, age and ethnicity.</p> <p>Risk of excluding some/all of the protected characteristic groups if not considered as part of any new development proposals.</p>	<p>Strategy action plan ref CSSAP21. Information and services provided via the Multi Cultural Service be made available across the authority contact points.</p> <p>Strategy action plan ref CSSAP23. This links with the development of a training plan at CSSAP06 to ensure staff have the ability to provide this support and knowledge of the considerations that may need to be given dependant on the requirements of the customer.</p> <p>Strategy action plan ref CSSP15. Requires assessments to be undertaken on existing and emerging customer channels on an on-going basis.</p>
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Disability and health and wellbeing: All forms of disability recognised under the Disability Discrimination Act including sensory impairment, mental health, learning disabilities, mobility related conditions, conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma. This also covers any impact on health and well being

Issue	Positive Impact or benefits	Negative impact or risks	Action Required

Gender, Transgender and Marital Status

Issue	Positive Impact or benefits	Negative impact or risks	Action Required

Ethnicity: All ethnic groups including Asian, Black, East Asian and white minority ethnic groups, including Eastern Europeans and Gypsy and Travellers.

Issue	Positive Impact or benefits	Negative impact or risks	Action Required

Sexual Orientation: including heterosexual, gay, lesbian and bisexual people

Issue	Positive Impact or benefits	Negative impact or risks	Action Required

Age: Where a person is at risk of unfair treatment because of their age group

Issue	Positive Impact or benefits	Negative impact or risks	Action Required

Religion/belief: all faiths including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and non religious beliefs such as Humanism

Issue	Positive Impact or benefits	Negative impact or risks	Action Required

Socio-Economic Status: This can include people on low incomes, as well as issues around rural and urban deprivation

Issue	Positive Impact or benefits	Negative impact or risks	Action Required

Community Cohesion: This is where a decision or a change to services may risk creating tensions between community groups in a local area.

Issue	Positive Impact or benefits	Negative impact or risks	Action Required

Phase 3: Action Planning

Based on actions raised in the action required box above

Area for further action	Actions proposed	Lead officer	When	Resource implications	Outcome
Progression of Actions Required' from the 'Phase 2 Impacts' section above.	As stated in the actions section, that they be incorporated into the Customer Services Strategy action plan references identified and developed accordingly.	Various elements of the action plan have specific lead officers. Steve Tweedie, through the Customer Services Executive Board will monitor and report on progress.	In line with the timetable attached to each of the strategy action plan elements.	As identified in the strategy action plan for the specific elements.	Delivery of the Customer Services Strategy including the specific issues identified in the equality impact assessment.

Documents appended to the Equality Impact Assessment:
EIA is an appendix (4) to the Customer Services Strategy 2011-14.

Quality Assurance and EIA completion

Date completed	June 2011
Lead officer	Steve Tweedie
EIA taken through Directorate Equality Group/or DMT	Incorporated as Appendix 4 to the Customer Services Strategy when submitted for approval.
Have staff been involved in developing the EIA?	Yes.
Have community organisations been involved?	No.
Date of latest update of EIA	