

Customer Experience Strategy 2025 – 2028



We Are Sandwell

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FOREWORD

I am proud to launch this customer experience strategy – the first of its kind in Sandwell.

Sandwell has a diverse multi-cultural community, and our residents want to engage with us in a range of ways. Sandwell Council is committed to providing a high-quality modern customer service that is efficient and accessible to everyone who lives in or visits Sandwell.

Our purpose is to put the customer at the heart of all that we do. However customers get in touch with us, we must always aim to consistently provide an excellent and efficient service.

This strategy sets out how the council will optimise the experience of customers when they contact the council to get help or get something done in their home or neighbourhood, by using its resources in a co-ordinated way so their specific needs are met in the most efficient, modern and effective way possible.

This is the renewal of our ongoing commitment to meaningfully listen to residents, constantly adapting how they can connect with us and delivering industry leading customer experiences in a modern, efficient & sustainable way.

Councillor Kerrie Carmichael
Leader of the Council



INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced and ever-changing world, providing excellent customer service and creating a positive customer experience has become more important than ever. We are committed to ensuring that residents have access to the services and information they need in a convenient, personalised, and efficient way. We want to ensure that however you choose to contact us you have a positive experience.

We want every contact to matter.

This – our first customer experience strategy – outlines our approach to achieving this aim by putting the needs of our customers at the forefront of everything we do.

Through this strategy, we aim to utilise multiple channels of communication, to personalise our services to meet the needs of our diverse community, make sure we're quick and efficient in getting to the resolutions you need and ensure transparency and accountability in all our interactions. In addition, we will make sure residents' interests are at the heart of all of our services ensuring they are not only accessible to everyone but provide modern customer experiences that reflect best practices across the sector and beyond.

"We are excited to embark on this journey of improvement and we look forward to working closely with our customers to deliver the best possible service".

This strategy clearly identifies:

- Our overall aims.
- The actions we will take to meet those aims.
- Our Customer Commitments.
- How we will know if this strategy is making a difference.
- Our timeline.

We understand that customer service and experience is an ongoing journey, and we are committed to continuous improvement. We will not only regularly gather customer feedback but will also hear the voice of those we are unable to reach by using the data made available to us through the services you use. This strategy sets out our commitment to use every insight available to listen more intently to our customers than we ever have. To understand the needs, expectations & aspirations of Sandwell residents and use them to constantly adapt how we deliver our services as we navigate the challenges and opportunities of the future.



Shokat Lal
Chief Executive

OUR STORY

In Sandwell, we care about each other, and it is our community that makes us proud to call this place our home.

We're down to earth and proud of our heritage as a powerhouse of the industrial revolution, and this history is still evident today in the unique and distinct character of our towns and neighbourhoods.

2024 marks the 50th anniversary of Sandwell Council, when our six towns were brought together under our current boundaries. Sandwell is at the heart of the West Midlands and we have a young and rapidly growing population. We're proud of the diverse communities that bring so much to our borough.

Our borough is full of wonderful green places, like our much-loved Sandwell Valley Country Park. We're the green gateway to the Black Country from Birmingham and have great connections to the rest of the country.

We already have an outstanding track record in bringing funding into our borough and are passionate about supporting businesses to grow in a way that ensures people and communities benefit too.

We are determined to make the most of our peoples' skills, abilities, and resourcefulness to create good jobs and opportunities that will boost everyone's life chances and attract even more investment into Sandwell for the long term.

The Sandwell Aquatics Centre showed what we can do when we get the chance. We played host to visitors from all over the world during the Commonwealth Games and we now have a state-of-the-art community leisure centre for all of our residents to enjoy.

But the thing that really makes Sandwell bostin is our people. It's not like us to shout about our achievements or put ourselves in the spotlight. We know that we face some big challenges here. Too many of our residents' have their health and life expectancy impacted by their social circumstances. Child poverty is double the national average and some people's prospects – especially when it comes to health – might not always be as good as they can be.

Times have been hard for many of us in recent years. But we also know our community is amazing when we come together, and there is so much potential to unlock. The council hasn't got everything right in recent years, but we've maintained vital services for our residents most in need.

As we mark our 50th anniversary, our focus is on being brilliant at the basics. That means getting things right for our residents – delivering high-quality services that are easy to use and working for the people who need them.

And our ambition doesn't stop there. We want our borough to be a great place for children to grow up. We want to make Sandwell a cleaner, greener and safer place to live and for our residents to live longer in good health. And we want to create the good jobs and opportunities that will help everyone realise their potential.

Together we can deliver a great future for Sandwell and change people's lives for the better.



OUR VISION

We will provide excellent customer service, to all our residents, staff, businesses, partners, visitors and community groups. We will work with all customers to ensure that our services meet their needs and are inclusive and accessible for all.

PRINCIPLES

We will achieve our vision by:

- Delivering a customer FOCUSED culture within our organisation.
- Providing an excellent and consistent customer services.
- Focusing on digital customer services but always create inclusive, accessible services that meet the changing needs of our customers.
- Listening, learning and improving our services based on our Customer Feedback. When we get things wrong we will say sorry and we will fix the problem as quickly as we can.
- We will provide value for money services that balance the needs of our vulnerable service users within the resources available to us.



“Every Sandwell customer has the right to receive the best possible service. So whenever and however you contact us, we will make sure you receive the highest standards of customer service through the following customer commitments”

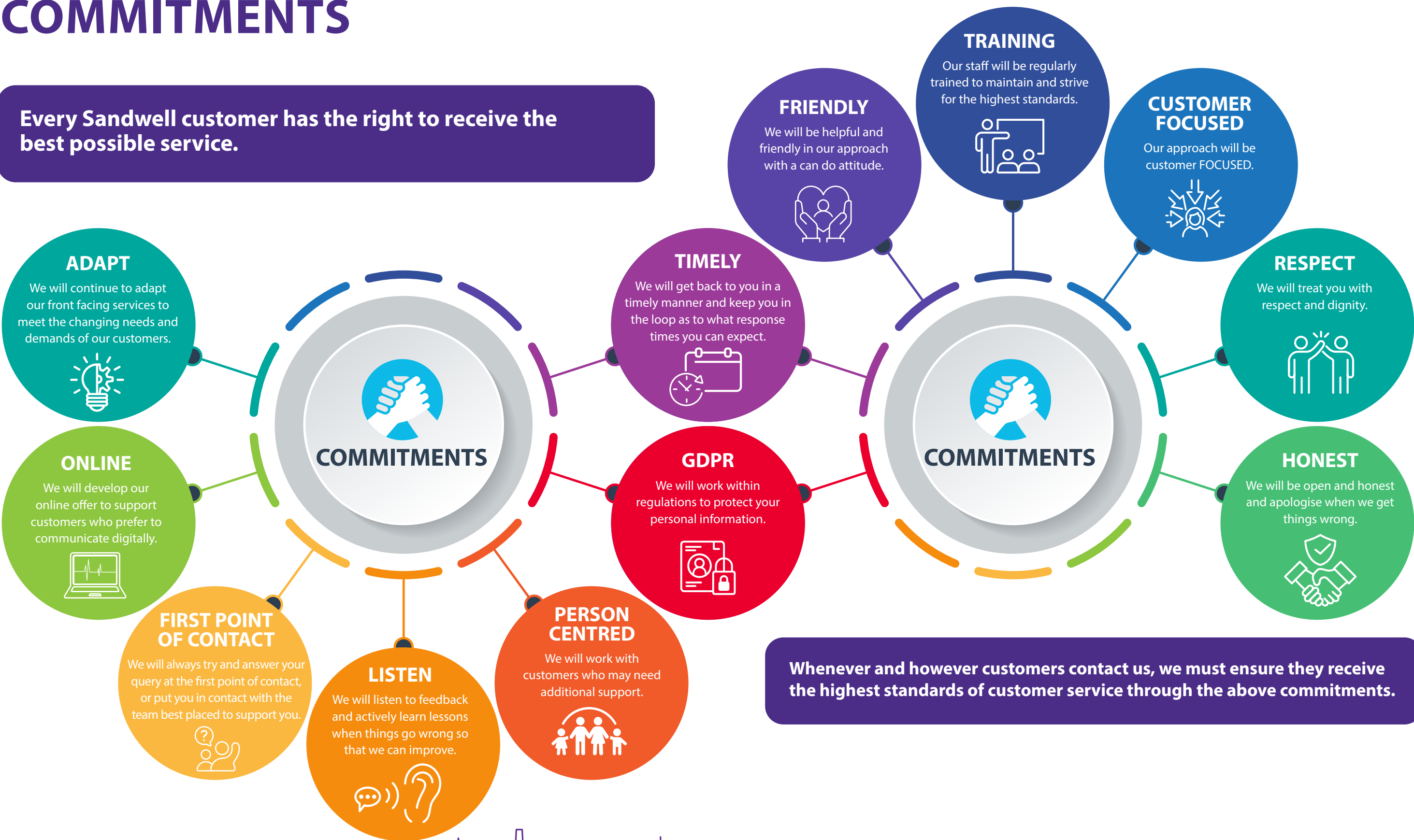


WE ARE **SANDWELL!**



COMMITMENTS

Every Sandwell customer has the right to receive the best possible service.



Whenever and however customers contact us, we must ensure they receive the highest standards of customer service through the above commitments.



KEY CHANNELS

Our services will be delivered across three channels

Online and Digital

For information and transactional services that you want to do regularly, quickly and at your own convenience

One username, one password, for one unified customer experience.

Telephone

For transactional services either not available online, or where our online offer otherwise misses your need

Accessible during business hours, to discuss your issues more openly at your convenience.

Face to Face

For services you're unsure about or that you need time to discuss openly due to the complexity.

Local delivery of more complex services, prioritised to address local needs.

These principles incorporate Government Digital Service and LocalGov Digital standards. They will be used to support digital service decision making and ensure needs and opportunities are prioritised to deliver maximum benefits for the whole council and for the people of Sandwell.

OUR DIGITAL OFFER

Start with Community needs - not our own

Our service design is relentlessly FOCUSED on resident outcomes. We will organise our resources to achieve them in the most efficient way.

Provide Support

Our service design will be inclusive for complex user needs. For those than cant use online services, we will make sure all services are available however you choose to contact the council.

Work Together

Where multiple teams or services contribute to the outcome you need, we will work together to design services that make this seamless for you. We are one council, you will only need one login.

Make it simple, easy and better

Councils are big and complex, but our services wont be. We will do the hard work to make things simple in the design and delivery of processes and services across all channels.

Be Data driven

We commit to use data about how services are being used and the feedback you give, to improve our service offering to you. We will make every interaction count.

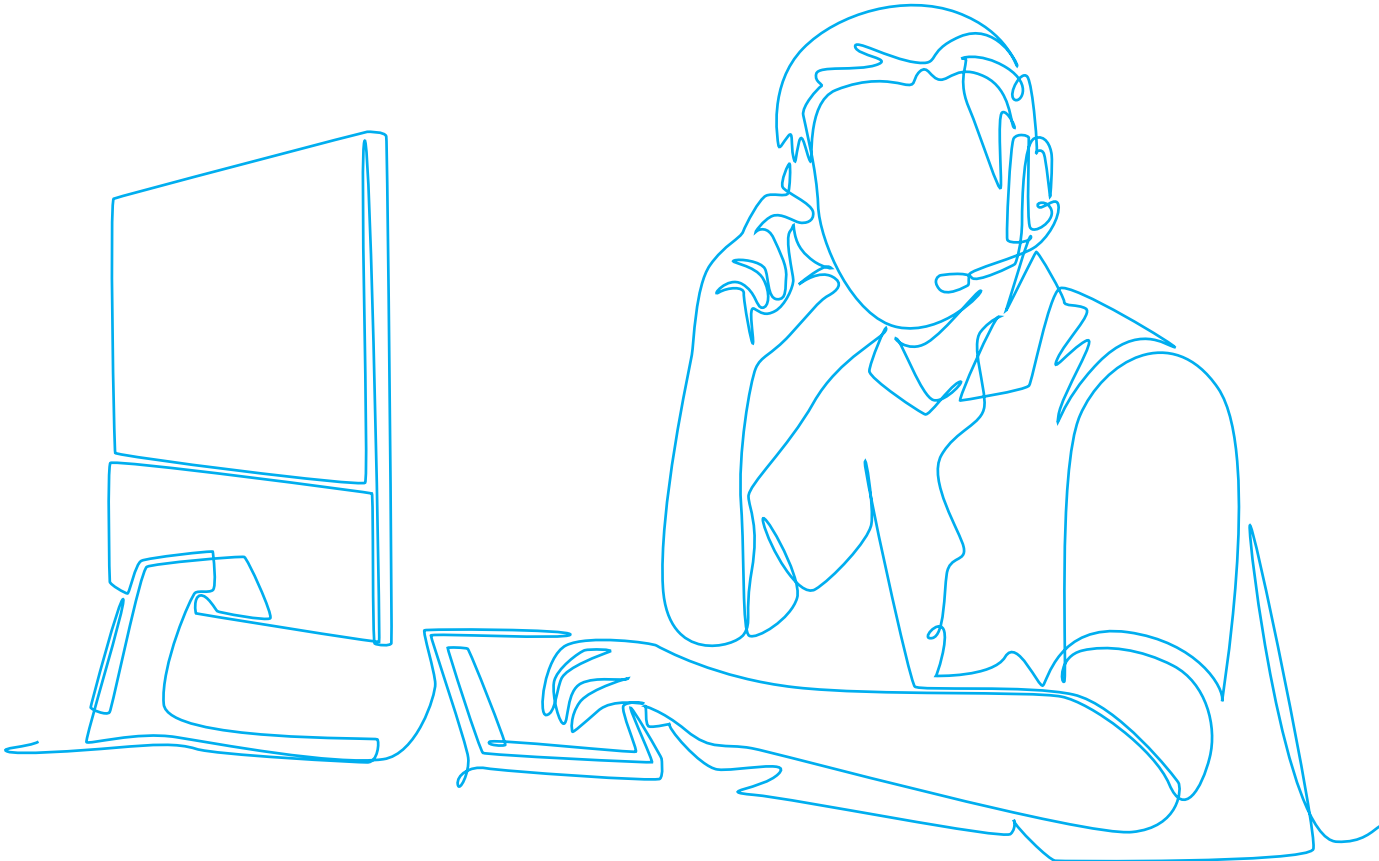
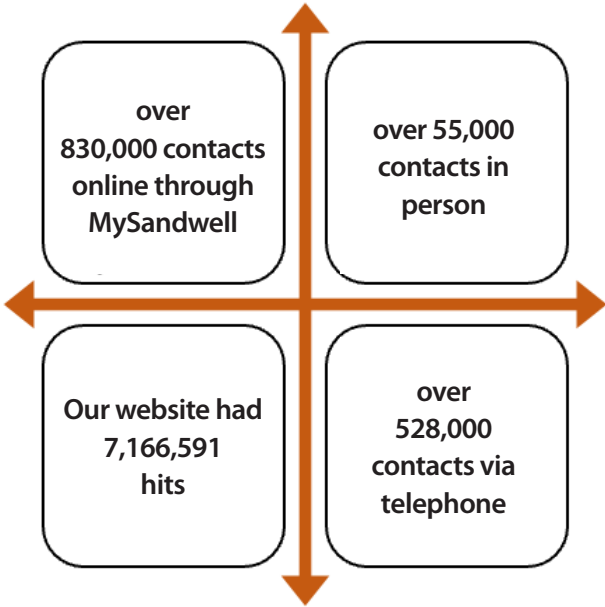
CONTACT METHODS 2023 - 24

Year on year, total recorded contact with the council has grown.

Customer Access trends show customers over time choosing to use online services for transactional service requests, with a consistent decline in the proportion of contact away from telephone and face to face contact.

This growth of online services supports the council to provide better customer experiences to residents accessing face to face and telephony channels.

Our aim is that by providing great online services, people accessing other channels who need help with more complex enquiries wait in smaller queues with less customers reporting transactional service requests.





PRINCIPLE 1

To always put you - our customer - first by delivering a customer first focused culture within our organisation:

We will raise the profile of the customer throughout the organisation.

We will ensure that customer service is a cross cutting theme that spans the whole organisation.

We will implement our customer commitments.

We will develop a customer training excellence programme for staff.

PRINCIPLE 2

To provide excellent customer service regardless of the channel you choose to use to contact us:

We will promote our digital services so that all customers who can - will use this as their first line of contact with us. This then allows for our Customer Service Advisors to spend more time dealing with our most vulnerable customers.

We will continue to increase the amount of services and forms you can access through the portal.

We will invest in a new telephony system.

We will develop a customer training excellence programme for staff.

PRINCIPLE 3

Focusing on digital customer services but always creating inclusive, accessible services that meet the changing needs of our customers:

We will use learning to develop our Community Hub model to ensure they are responsive and fit for the future.

We will continue to provide face to face, telephone and on line channels so that our customers have a range of ways to make contact with us that meets their needs.

We will work with our Equality & Diversity lead to ensure services are truly accessible to all.

We will review the current One Stop Shop operating model.

PRINCIPLE 4

To listen, learn and improve our services based on our Customer Feedback:

We will actively look at data and trends to ensure any lessons learnt are embedded in to all necessary parts of the organisation.

We will strive to ensure all avenues for feedback received are responded to within the set timescales and where this is not possible, we will explain why and agree appropriate timescales.

We will roll out our new customer Feedback training package to staff.

We will invest in a new Feedback/FOI & SAR recording system.

PRINCIPLE 5

We will provide value for money services that balance the needs of our vulnerable service users within the resources available to us:

We will continue to consult on our financial plans, ensuring we listen to the voices of our residents and the services most important to them.

We will develop a digital strategy to ensure we are making the best use of technology to offer the best online experience, allowing us to continue to offer face to face transactions for those who need them most.

We will ensure that we capture accurate customer data so that any decision around our customer offer is data driven.

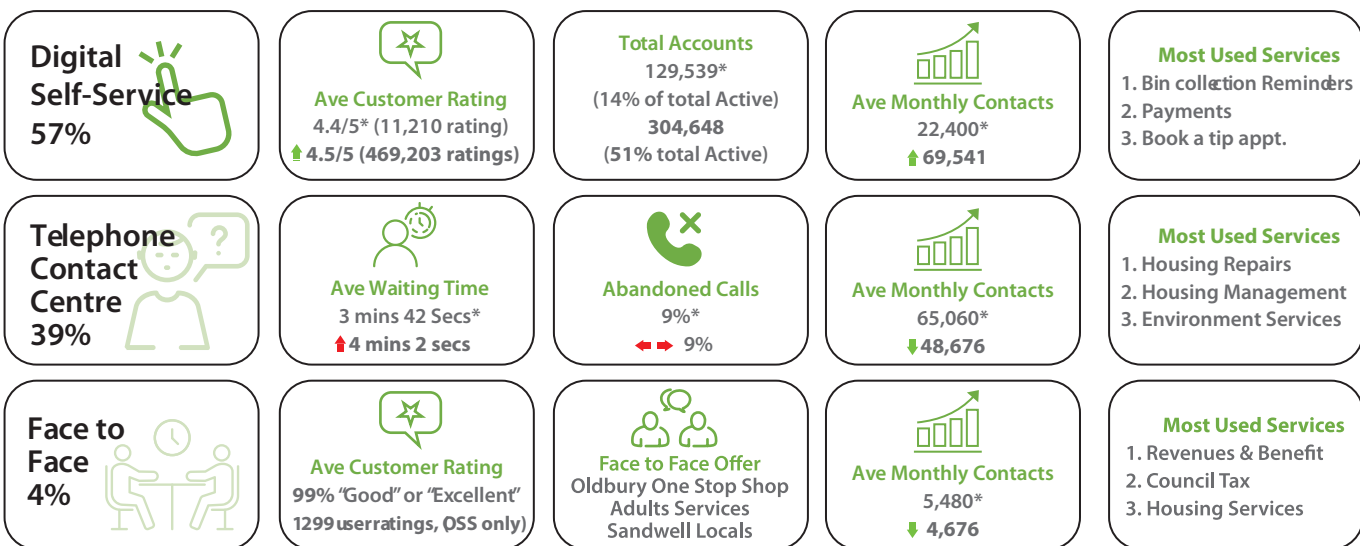
We will continue to transform council services to ensure we are constantly offering an efficient value for money service.



CUSTOMER ACCESS INSIGHT

April 2023 - March 2024

* Pre-Covid, measure (2019/20 FY)



OUR EXPECTATIONS OF OUR CUSTOMERS



Use our online services first, unless you are unable to



Ensure the information you give us is correct and timely and let us know if anything changes



If you need to rearrange an appointment, give us as much notice as possible



Understand that we will not tolerate abusive language or threatening behaviour towards our staff or other people using our services, please treat us politely and with respect



Tell us if you have received an outstanding service

Barriers we are aware of to getting things right

How we will overcome them

Limited resources: budget constraints create resource limitations, which can make it difficult to provide a high-quality customer service experience

By prioritising improving the services that are most critical to the daily lives of residents

Siloed departments: can make it difficult to provide a seamless customer experience across the whole council

By creating a culture of collaboration and cooperation across departments and making the right decisions about technology to ensure seamless access for customers

Lack of customer insights: it can be difficult to design and deliver services that meet the needs of customers without relevant data to inform necessary changes

Gaining feedback wherever possible so we understand our customers' needs and preferences in order to design, deliver and continuously adapt our services

Inefficient processes: Outdated processes or a lack of standardisation can make it difficult to provide efficient, consistent and effective service delivery

Review and streamline our processes to ensure consistency in service delivery, utilising automation and digitalisation of services to make them more efficient where possible

Limited technology: outdated technology can make it difficult to provide digital services and self-service options to customers

Keep up to date with, and investing in, the latest technology and digital services

Limited accessibility: Without proper accessibility measures in place, the council may not be able to provide services to people with disabilities or special needs

Conduct regular accessibility audits on our services and facilities and undertaking corrective action to make sure services are accessible

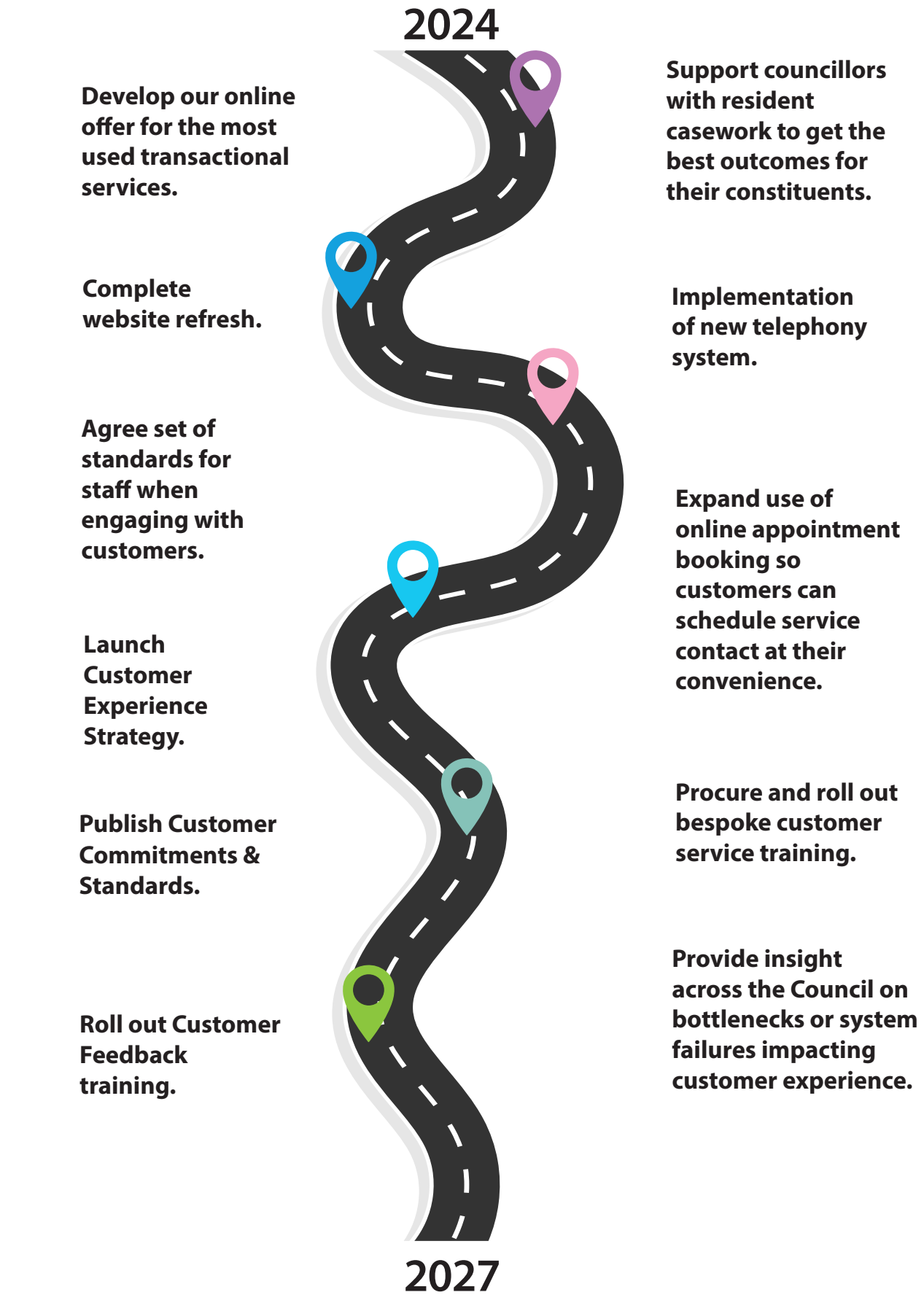
Limited employee training: Without proper training, employees may not be equipped to provide excellent customer service and create a positive customer experience

Establish bespoke employee training programs to ensure that employees are equipped to provide excellent customer service and create a positive customer experience

Limited complaint management: Without a proper complaint management system in place, the council may not be able to effectively address customer complaints and feedback

Ensure we are organised to minimise complaints but handle them quickly and efficiently where they are raised. Undertake regular customer satisfaction surveys to identify areas for improvement

THE JOURNEY TO EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE



HOW WILL WE KNOW IF THE STRATEGY IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

We will keep this strategy under review to ensure that we are continuing to meet our commitments and the actions set out under each of our Strategic Objectives. We want to keep developing and improving our services so that you - our residents - have access to the most up to date and relevant information possible.

DATA	FEEDBACK FROM YOU - OUR CUSTOMERS	FEEDBACK FROM OUR STAFF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of complaints & compliments (including those that progress past Stage 1 and those that end up with the Ombudsman) MP & Councillor enquiry volume and response performance Analysis of complaint trends and lessons learnt Contact volumes by channel and continued growth of digital first Adherence to service standards Trend Analysis of most highly used services allowing targeted improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer satisfaction scores for all channels of communication Quality Ratings on service(s) received, i,e repairs Feedback from Complaints & Compliments Engagement with focus groups Annual resident surveys Co-production workshops Specific Service Reviews Measure of customer effort - how easy is it to get service requests resolved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual staff surveys Staff forums Culture & listening groups Staff Check Ins and Annual Review Chance to chat sessions - for staff to have opportunity to speak to Senior Managers Buzz Sessions and Team Meetings



CONTACT US



Sandwell Council House, Freeth Street,
Oldbury, B69 3DE



0121 569 7867



customer_services@sandwell.gov.uk



www.sandwell.gov.uk/corporatecustomer



