

Putting Customers First

**A Customer Strategy for
Wyre Forest District Council
2009 - 2012**



2009 - 2012

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PUTTING CUSTOMERS FIRST - A CUSTOMER STRATEGY FOR WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

1.0 OUR COMMITMENTS

- 1.1 We want to achieve an excellent standard of Customer Service and improve our performance in all aspects of our work. Here is how we are committed to doing it:

We will agree to put the customer at the heart of everything we do and will design our services with the customers needs as the driver.

We will recognise that excellent service does not begin and end with the Worcestershire Hub and is a responsibility for everyone in the Council.

We will use technology to enhance our services and to ensure the diverse needs of our customers are met.

We will adhere to our Customer Service Charter which sets out our customers expectations. This will allow our customers to receive the same level of excellent service regardless of which channel they access.

We will monitor and evaluate our performance based on local and national service standards and publish our achievements. We will use customer feedback to improve our service delivery.

We will provide value for money services with focus being on customer contact through efficient and effective self service options to ensure take up of the lower cost channels are increased.

Corporate Management Team

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Wyre Forest District Council acknowledges the important role that effective access to services has in building stronger communities and improving well-being and customer satisfaction. Our Worcestershire Hub partnership provides us with a strong foundation for the future as we develop our services to meet the needs of our customers.
- 2.2 Technology has allowed us to increase the number of ways in which customers contact us, allowing customers to decide how and when to contact us at times and by methods most convenient to them.
- 2.3 Our ICT strategy further details how we are seeking improvements in our processes that will ultimately lead to improved service delivery.
- 2.4 Our Putting Customers First Strategy will:
 - Provide a high level framework that redefines how customer service is delivered by the Council. Providing excellent Customer Service is important for everyone who works for the Council and is therefore the responsibility of all employees. We should provide customers with choice in ways they access our services. We should be open and outline expectations in ways we can measure and feedback.
 - We will listen to all feedback and take comments as opportunities to improve in ways that will enhance our services. The importance of the equality and diversity of customer needs, the ease of access, quality and speed of response will all be taken into account.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The District of Wyre Forest covers over 75 square miles with most of its 98,500 plus population living in three major towns Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn, Bewdley and rural villages.
- 3.2 We have invested significantly in improving the ways in which customers access Council services. In 2006, we created a single point of contact through the Worcestershire Hub which is a partnership of the six district councils and the County Council. Customers can visit, call or email skilled Customer Service Advisors who are the first point of contact for all Council services.
- 3.3 We are very proud of our success and of our performance and 98% of customers who make contact through our Hub Centres, are satisfied with the way their enquiry was dealt with.

4.0 NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

- 4.1 A new Government National Indicator (NI14) focuses on 'Avoidable Contact' which emphasises our strategy of Putting Customers First and realigning our services so customers don't have to contact us unnecessarily to get the service or information they need.
- 4.2 Service Transformation: a Better Service For Citizens and Businesses, a Better Deal for Taxpayers was a report published by Sir David Varney in 2006 which identifies opportunities to strengthen public service delivery to make it more accessible, convenient and efficient to meet changing citizen and business expectations.
- 4.3 In order to effectively change the way we work, QEDIS consulting Ltd have developed a Transformation and Delivery Programme for the Council. The plan recognises our Value of Putting Customers First and the importance of protecting the front line services whilst delivering improved value for money and efficiency improvements.
- 4.4 Worcestershire County Councils 'Our Customers' strategy shown in **APPENDIX 2** will be the overarching Customer strategy and our 'Putting Customers First' strategy will support this way forward.
- 4.5 Our strategy will also support the aim of 'A well run and responsive Council' and the priority 'Improving efficiency and value for money'. It will fit with and operate within the context of the Council's Corporate Plan and links to the Council's vision, values and priorities for Wyre Forest. It also links closely with the Community Strategy, the Council's ICT strategy, Equality and Diversity policy, internal Business Plans and the Council's budgeting process.
- 4.6 Whilst public perception of Local authorities varies, what remains consistently accurate nationally is that there is a strong connection between how informed people feel about Council services and how satisfied they are with those services. Council's that invest in proactive and dynamic communications are those that are consistently placed higher in the satisfaction ratings by residents. We are delivering a programme of internal and external communications focussed on delivery of local services. This is done in consultation with residents and key strategic partners. We are using the Local Government Association (LGA) Reputation Campaign as a benchmark for its communication activities.

Extract from Corporate Plan 2008-2011

Vision, Aim, Priority and Values

Corporate Plan 2008-2011	
Our Vision	“We want Wyre Forest to be a District with healthy, safe and flourishing communities that are supported by a strong and diverse economy. The local environment will be clean, inspiring and valued, where people are proud to live and work and are attracted to visit and invest.”
Our Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A better quality of life ■ A sustainable environment ■ A vibrant local economy ■ A well run and responsive Council
Our Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ More affordable housing ■ Reducing waste to landfill and increasing recycling ■ District-wide regeneration ■ Improving efficiency and value for money
Our Values	
Being open, responsive and accountable	We will ensure that decision making processes are clear and transparent and that there is effective and regular consultation with our communities
Value for money	We will provide high quality, value for money service and strive for continuous improvement
Promoting sustainable development	We will make sure that decisions will benefit both present and future generations by considering the social, economic and environmental implications
Putting customers first	We will ensure that the needs of our customers are at the heart of everything we do
Valuing employees	We will support, praise and invest in our workforce to develop our organisation
Working in partnership	We will continue to develop productive working relationships with other organisations and our communities to achieve common goals and provide effective services

5.0 PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- 5.1 There are many opportunities to work in partnership with others both within the District as well as neighbouring local authorities and private sector providers. Sharing Services and Partnerships can bring significant benefits and the key points of our Shared Service Strategy show that we will look at Partnerships that give us cost effective service improvements, efficiencies and improved service resilience.
- 5.2 Work is underway with certain service areas with the Worcestershire Enhanced Two Tier (WETT) project. The underlying principles for the programme are that the customer is at the core of service design and delivery and the provision and support of services must be as efficient as they are effective. The current priority is to focus on Regulatory Services such as:

- Environmental Health
- Licensing
- Trading Standards

Further development during 2009 will focus on:

- Property Services
- Human Resources
- Internal Audit
- Street Scene

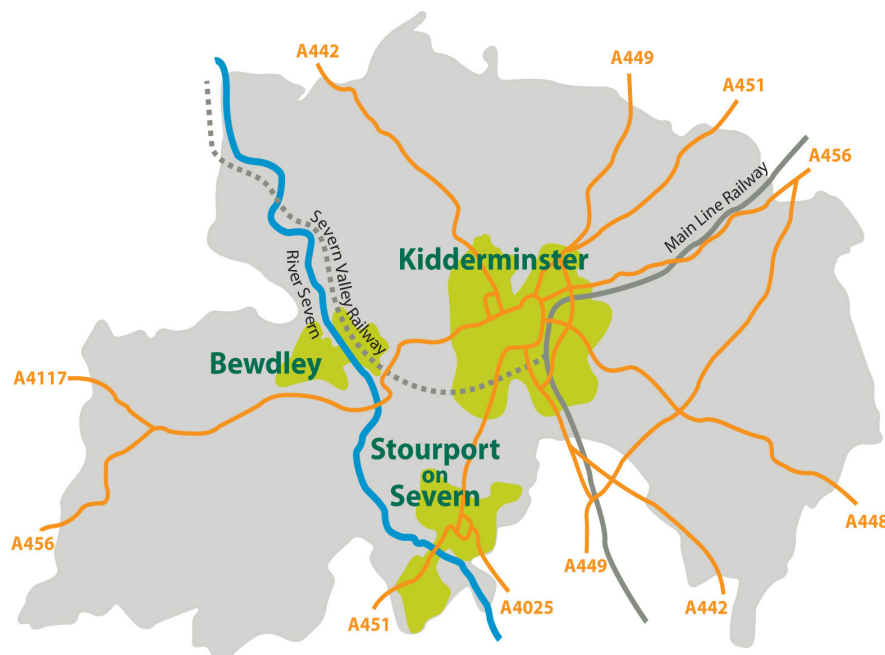
- 5.3 The Worcestershire Hub Partnership is continuously developing with more recent progress being made with the Hub Shared Service involving Worcestershire County Council, Malvern Hills District Council and Worcester City Council.
- 5.4 Any decision to join a Shared Service or Partnership must be based on demonstrable and tangible improvements to the quality of service to our customers as outlined in the Councils Shared Service Strategy.

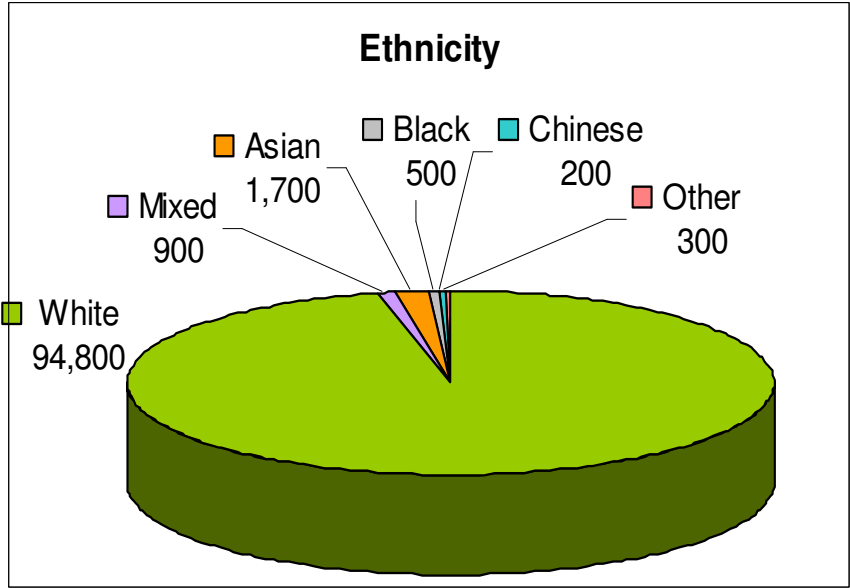
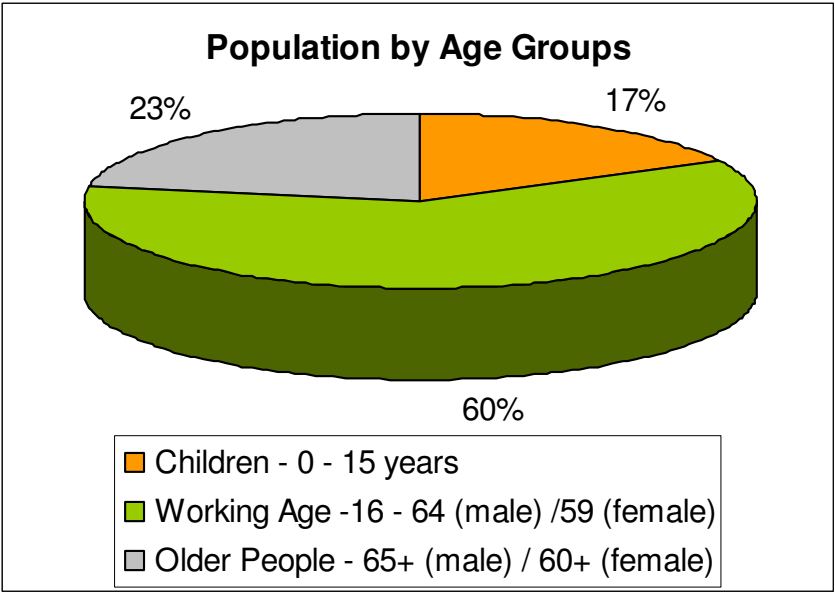
6.0 KNOWING OUR COMMUNITY

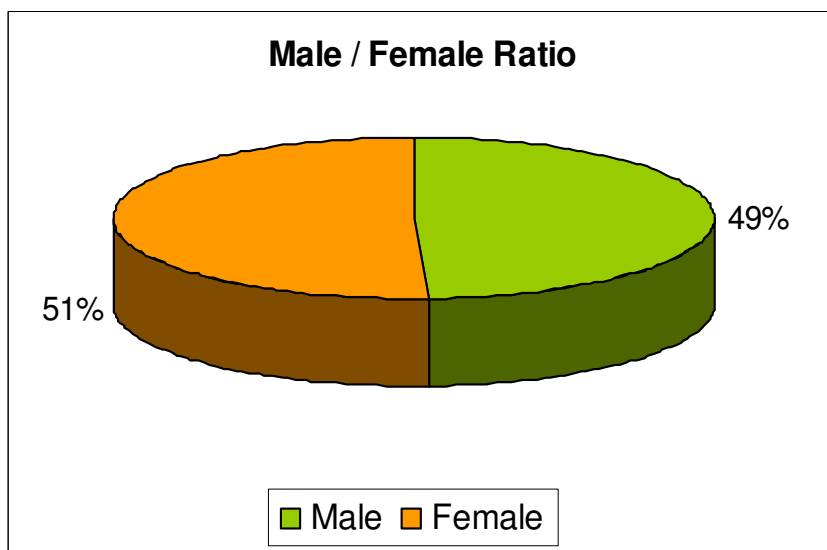
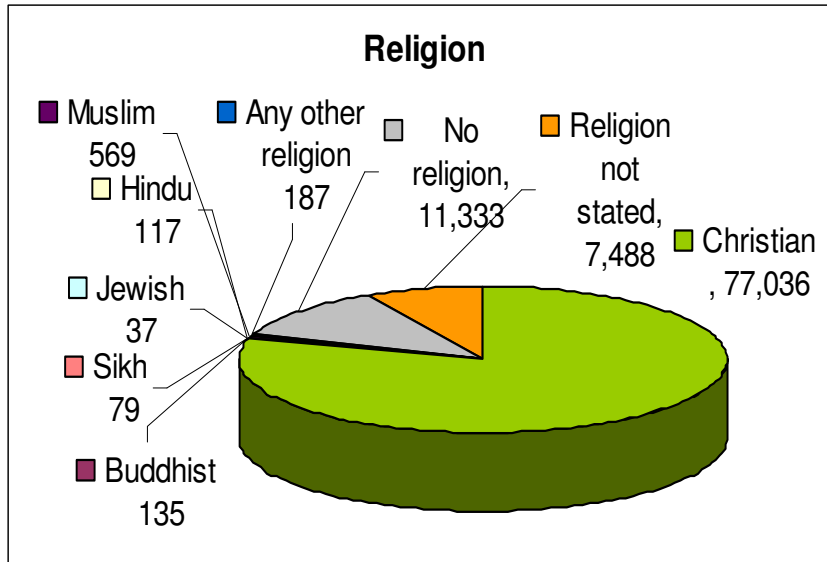
- 6.1 In order to provide the best level of service, we need to understand our community and ensure we deliver services targeted to their needs. We are aware of the diversity of our customers and our services aim to reflect those needs to ensure accessibility for everyone. We will continue to seek to understand our customers in order to continuously develop our services to suit.
- 6.2 Levels of deprivation overall are relatively low, however there are still pockets of relatively high poverty, poor health and social exclusion which are important drivers for our work with partners.

6.3 Although the statistics are not exhaustive of our diverse population, the following information has been taken from the Office of National Statistics and the Census 2001.

■	22% of population over the age of 60	National: 21%
■	Gross weekly pay £406.70	West Midlands: £430.40
■	2.3% unemployment rate	West Midlands: 4.3%
■	77.7 crime rate per 1,000 population	National: 100
■	Average house price £185,660	West Midlands: £178,829
■	4% ethnic minority population	National: 13%







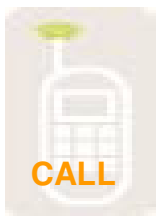
7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 We make it a priority to listen to the views of our communities and partners. This helps us to improve our performance in responding to their needs and interests.
- 7.2 The Worcestershire Citizens' Panel is being developed and will consist of local people from all sectors of the community who have agreed to be consulted on a regular basis. They have offered to give their views about the services they receive from the Council and what they would like to see changed to improve the quality of life in the region. Each year, panel members will be asked to complete a maximum number of surveys and are invited to take part in focus group sessions.
- 7.3 Wyre Forest District Council has also teamed up with Worcestershire County Council to help find out what public consultation is being planned in Worcestershire. This information is available to see on the Ask Me Consultation Planner. The planner which is available by visiting www.worcestershire.gov.uk/askme gives information about what has been learned from previous consultations and what has happened as a result. It also gives information about forthcoming consultations.
- 7.4 Findings of the Place Survey 2008 conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Council, finds that overall satisfaction with the Council has fallen (possibly related to a perceived decline in value for money) with particular reference to the ways in which residents feel they can have an influence of local decision making.
- 7.5 Two fifths of residents are satisfied with Wyre Forest District Council (42%). A further third are ambivalent (35%) while nearly a quarter are dissatisfied (23%). The survey shows that only a quarter of residents feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area.
- 7.6 The Council's brand strategy was adopted by Council on 28th November 2007. The strategy was supplemented by the proven LGA Reputation Campaign which links customer satisfaction to effective reputation management.
- 7.7 Focussing on the way we deliver our services throughout the organisation and imbedding the importance of improving customer satisfaction, should go towards improving the overall satisfaction rate in future surveys. This gives us scope to increase engagement with our local residents and during 2009 we will actively seek feedback in the way our services are delivered by reviewing existing mechanisms which seek our customers' comments, compliments and complaints.

8.0 ACCESS TO SERVICES

- 8.1 The customers' experience of accessing our services is as important as the quality of the service itself. Our aim is to achieve excellent customer access and customer satisfaction. In order to do this, we must put the customer at the heart of everything we do, get customer service right first time, every time and rectify any mistakes quickly.
- 8.2 We recognise that different customers look for different ways to contact us. A range of access routes are now available which will give customers more flexibility and choice in how to contact the Council. However customer expectations are increasing. Access to services at times most suited to them and in ways that suit their needs is expected. We need to develop this area and in conjunction with our ICT strategy, develop business processes that put the needs of our customers first.
- 8.3 The Worcestershire Hub is the single point of contact for all initial customer enquiries and the range of access includes by phone, in person, by email or by post. We need to build on these foundations by listening to our customers needs and making our services accessible to all. Regular surveys will be carried out with service users to identify areas of improvement in both ways services can be bettered as well as access to those services.
- 8.4 Our Equality & Diversity policy outlines our commitment to ensuring our approach to customer service, quality and equality is relevant to all services and involves all employees. This also includes equality in our service provision.
- 8.5 In recent years our website has seen significant improvements and more work is underway to make it more accessible for our customers, to increase availability of on-line services and to make it more attractive to use.
- 8.6 Customers make contact with us for a variety of reasons such as:
- Requesting a service
 - Asking for information
 - Making a payment
 - Using facilities i.e. leisure centres, museums, events
 - Reporting an issue
 - Providing feedback such as compliments or complaints
 - Responding to community exercises
 - Democratic processes
- 8.7 Customers still value the more traditional methods of contact such as in person or by phone and we acknowledge that these access methods are important to us and our customers.

- 8.8 We will ensure a range of access channels are available to our customers however we acknowledge that over time, use of these channels will shift as self service delivery becomes more popular.
- 8.9 We will continue to develop accessibility to our services for those less able to use electronic methods whether it be due to sensory impairment, disability, language needs, lack of access or confidence.
- 8.10 During 2009 as part of NI14 for Avoidable Contact, we will undertake detailed surveys on reasons customers contact us by phone, in person and by email and will develop an improvement plan as a result of our findings.
- 8.11 We will enhance our current access channels and build on new technologies to give the best choice for our customers.



- All initial contact from our customers is through the Worcestershire Hub. Direct dials are only used for ongoing cases and service areas must ensure the Hub team are provided with all marketing information in order for us to deliver excellent service.
- Approximately 97,000 customers made phone contact through our Customer Service Centres in 2008/09.



- Self Service is the most cost effective channel for us to manage and from an efficiency and value for money point of view this important area needs to be developed. On-line payments increased by 37% in 2008/09 and continue to rise.
- Web and email – We will build an interactive web site that allows the majority of transactions to be performed at a time which suits the customer.



- In person – Surveys shows that customers want a face to face service and many of the transactions we carry out require it. However it is not the most cost effective way of delivering services and we need to ensure we are giving our customers the best value for money.
- Our opening hours will be reviewed with customers in light of their requirements on an ongoing basis.

9.0 CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

- 9.1 We are accountable for the service we deliver and we will provide our customers with basic service standards so they know what to expect when they contact us. The Customer Service Charter will be launched to all existing employees and will form part of the employee Induction package so we all know what basic standards we will work to.
- 9.2 The Charter will be reviewed regularly (at least every year) and will be updated based on customer feedback and performance monitoring.
- 9.3 In conjunction with the Charter, phone and email standards have been agreed which will be launched internally to all office based employees.



Wyre Forest District Council

We want to achieve an excellent standard of Customer Service and improve our performance in all aspects of our work, here is how we're committed to doing it...

Customer Service Charter

Our employees will:-

- Be friendly, helpful and attentive
- Treat everyone fairly and to the same high standard and will respect people's differences
- Communicate clearly and professionally and will explain technical terms
- Be open, honest and respectful
- Contact you when we promise to
- Refer you to specialist staff for help and guidance when necessary

On telephone contact we aim to:-

- Answer your calls within 15 seconds or 5 rings
- Establish your concern and act accordingly to resolve your enquiry

On written contact we aim to:-

- Acknowledge your emails within 1 working day
- Respond to your letters and emails within 5 working days or tell you if it's going to take longer
- Write in plain language and provide alternative formats where appropriate

How will we deliver our aims?

- We will support our employees and encourage them to develop their skills in order to provide an excellent service
- We will listen to our customers and treat comments as an opportunity to improve
- We will regularly review our services to ensure they reflect the needs of our customers

What we ask of you:-

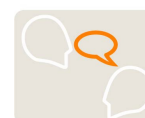
- Please support and respect our employees so that we can provide you with the service you require
- Provide us with the complete and accurate information we need to help you
- Inform us of any changes in your circumstances that may affect the services we provide you
- Tell us if we have delivered a service to your satisfaction and also when we have exceeded your expectations.
- If we get it wrong, please let us know so we can put it right and make sure it does not happen again.



call:
01562 732928
Monday - Friday



click:
www.whub.org.uk or
worcestershirehub@wyreforestdc.gov.uk



Visit:
List of 3 addresses to be inserted
Monday - Friday
8.30 - 5pm
(Wednesdays 10am - 5pm)

10.0 FEEDBACK

- 10.1 Our customers' comments are vital to our organisation and we want to embrace all feedback as a way of making service improvements. The mechanisms used to obtain feedback from our customers will be reviewed during 2009 with the aim of improving customer contact. We will welcome all comments, complaints and compliments and see them as an opportunity to build on our successes.

11.0 RISKS

- 11.1 Failure to improve access to services and building service delivery around the customer could further reduce the overall satisfaction rating of the Council.
- 11.2 The goal of One Council will be at risk if silo working continues rather than focussing on the reason we deliver services – our customers.

12.0 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

ACTION	TIMESCALE	LEAD
Launch Customer Service Charter (to be embedded in induction process)	October 2009	Customer Services
Review existing complaints/comments mechanism	November 2009	Customer Services
Refresh and launch new complaints/comments mechanism	March 2010	Customer Services
Compile improvement plan following NI14 survey	February 2010	Customer Services