

St Albans City and District Council Customer Engagement Strategy (2021-2024)

FINAL DRAFT

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1 Purpose of this strategy

1.1 Council priorities and the alignment of this strategy

St Albans City and District Council has embarked on a council wide change programme called 'Building our Future'. The programme will review and revise (as required) services, systems, and processes to deliver an 'Adaptive Council' operating model. An initial view of what being an adaptive council means to us is shown in Figure 1 below.

This strategy builds on the work that was undertaken under the Council's previous 'Shaping our Future programme'. This included the investment in a digital platform, new modern website and the on-going development of a Local Services Hub within the Civic Centre where a range of partners, including Citizens Advice, NHS Health & Wellbeing Clinic and Police are co-located.

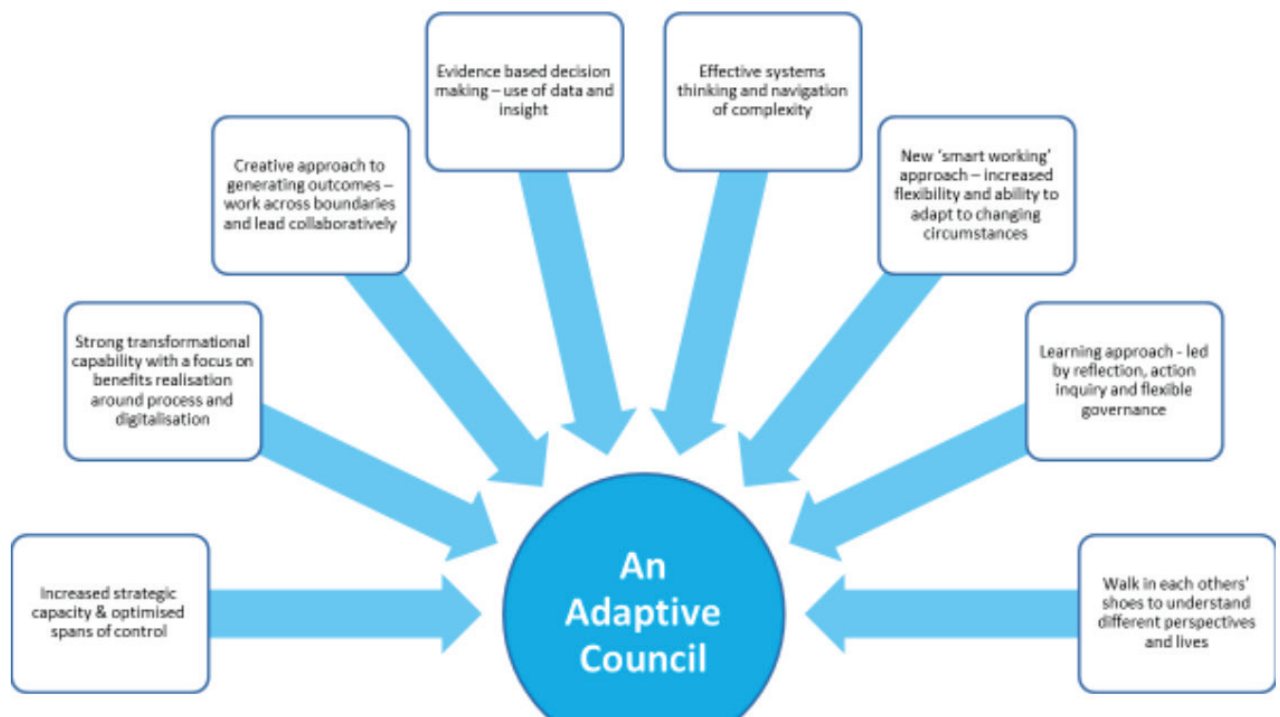


Figure 1: What being an Adaptive council means

Aims of the Adaptive council operating model are:

- Deliver the Council's vision and corporate priorities
- Align with the Council's values and behaviours
- Build on current agile working practices
- Maximise the use of new and existing technologies
- Harness recent community empowerment and activism
- Enable efficiencies in service delivery to our communities
- Generate savings of £1.3m p/a primarily from the General Fund

The Building our Future transformation programme comprises of 6 workstreams as shown in Figure 2. One of these is the cross-cutting 'Channel Shift and Digital Transformation', which contributes to three of the aims of our Adaptive council operating model:

- enable efficiencies in service delivery to our communities,
- generate savings of £1.3m p/a primarily from the General Fund
- maximise the use of new and existing technologies.

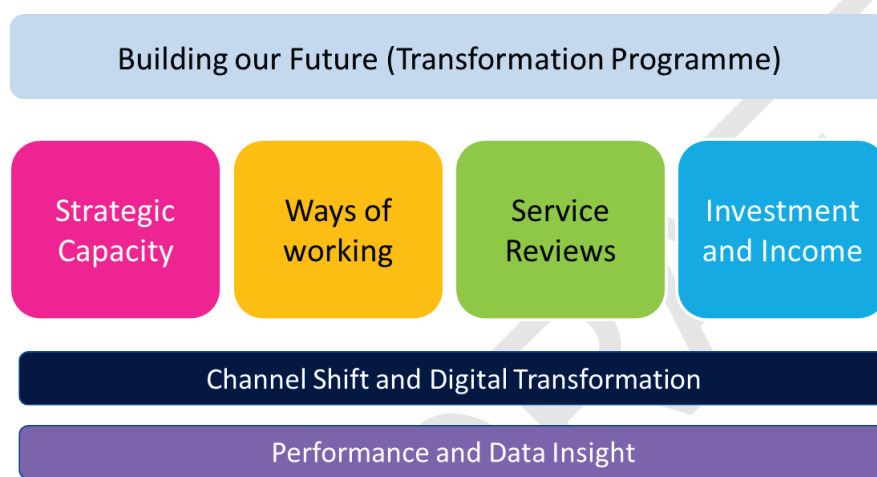


Figure 2: Indicative overview of the transformation programme

Budgetary pressures mean that we must be lean and efficient to make the best use of our people and resources whilst continuing to manage changing customer expectations. Digital technologies are evolving, and service delivery needs to adapt, aligned with our vision, values, and objectives.

Customer satisfaction is driven by factors such as delivery, timeliness, providing the right information, and staff who are well informed, professional and customer focused.

There is a growing preference for digital interaction and 24/7 access. By making it easier to transact with us, many more people can find solutions for themselves and complete interactions quickly and simply. This will create the capacity (both time and money) to ensure that we can continue to focus our resources on those that need that extra help and support.

Our focus continues to be on resolving customers' issues and making it easier for them to get the help and information they need at the time they need it.

Customer service is about prioritising and embedding the customer need in everything we do and we should continue to ensure this is a focus throughout the organisation.

Our values and behaviours framework (see Figure 3) has been developed with this in mind: 'Customer Driven; our customers are at the heart of what we do, and their feedback helps us shape our services.'

Values and Behaviours



Figure 3: Values and Behaviours Framework

Our Customer Pledge¹ aims to ensure that:

- Staff are clear about our expectations of them for delivery of consistently high-quality customer interactions.
- The customer can understand how we will work with them and what to expect from us.
- We are an organisation that clearly sets out its offer and is accountable, transparent and builds confidence in the community.

We have strong foundations to build upon, and this strategy sets out the principles that will guide our approach to applying practical solutions to deliver the outcomes and impact we are striving for.

1.2 Goals of this strategy

Our goals are:

- to reduce the cost of customer interactions;
- to proactively influence customer behaviour to encourage increased adoption of online and automated channels;
- to provide a better customer journey 24/7 for those who are digitally enabled;
- to provide us with customer insight and increase intelligence-led decision making.

Industry accepted estimates on the cost of customer contact across channels, based on data collected from 200 councils for SOCITM's Customer Access Improvement Service briefing, show that typical costs are £8.62 per visit for face-to-face meetings, £2.83 per call by phone, and £0.15 per "visit" via a council website.²

There is a corresponding trade-off with the level of reassurance provided to customers, as illustrated below. The principles established in this strategy will enable us to deliver the required efficiencies and customer improvements while allowing customers to still benefit

¹ Previous pledge has been reviewed. Following agreement of the strategy and way forward the development will be completed in line with the strategy.

² data from 2011 Socitm's Channel Value Benchmarking (CVB) work with Councils. (*This was the most recent report available regarding this data.*)

from traditional channels such as face-to-face and phone contact where specific circumstances apply.

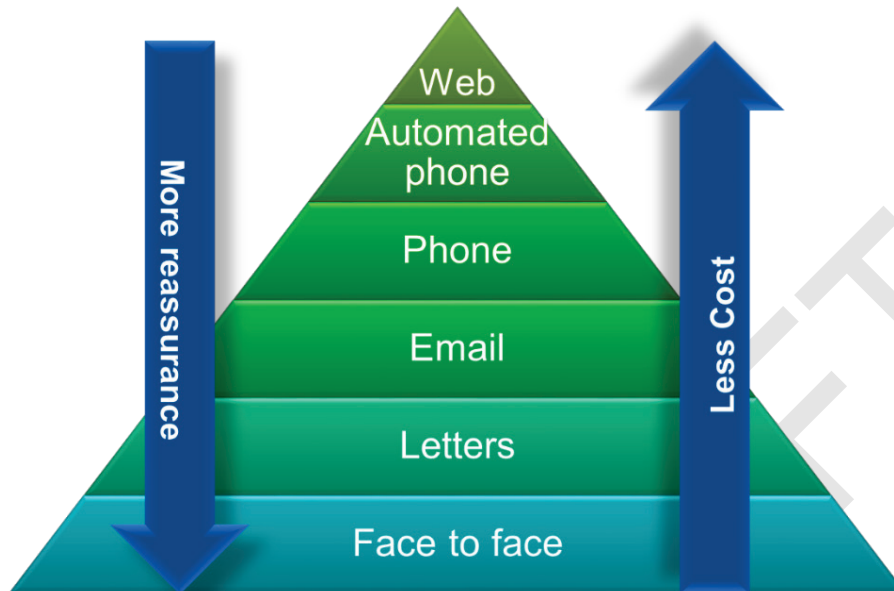


Figure 4: Cost vs reassurance by contact channel

Efficiencies can be achieved by encouraging customers to adopt self-service channels.

They can also be achieved through enabling enquiries and requests to be resolved as early as possible by customer service teams and minimising the amount of contact going direct to staff working on cases. It is important that customers can contact case workers who are handling work that is of a more complex or long-lasting nature (e.g, an application that might take weeks to process) but wherever possible contact should be via self-service or triage channels.

Figure 5 below, which illustrates customer contact volume as it filters through to the appropriate tier to be resolved.

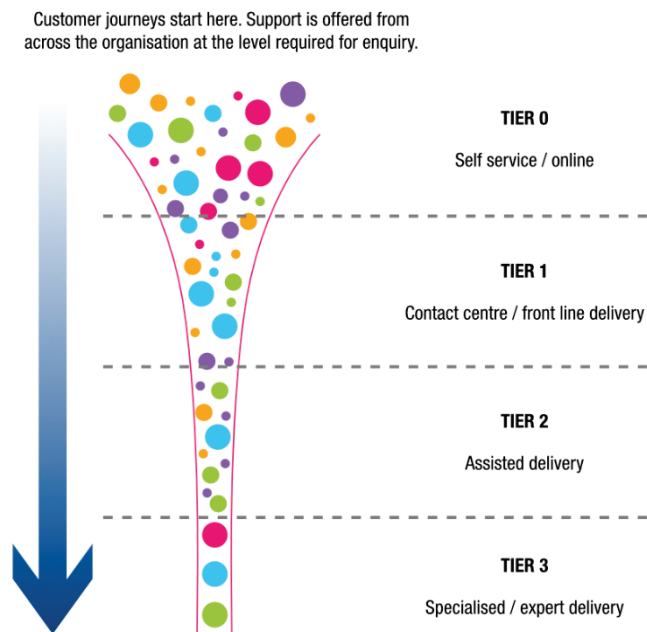


Figure 5: St Albans Customer Journey Tiers

1.3 Principles we will follow

The following principles will help ensure we strike the right balance between driving better use of digital channels and reducing the amount of face-to-face contact. They will inform current and future customer engagement action plans.

Customer

- We will design services around customer groups, needs and choices
- We will build customer insight to understand more about our customers
- We will offer joined up services with partners wherever possible
- We will ensure those without internet access have alternative access channels

Business Processes

- We will aim for first time resolution wherever possible
- We will simplify and standardise our internal processes
- We will share information internally and externally to improve customer services
- We will design digital services that are also accessible by other channels

Technology

- We will choose technology that is easy to use for customers and staff
- We will use technology to generate management information and drive improvement

Reception

- We will support and encourage customers to self-serve when they visit us
- We will adopt a triage approach to quickly resolve simple face-to-face enquiries

- We will extend our appointment-based approach for most longer enquiries across council services
- We will provide a warm and welcoming environment for customers visiting us

Cost effective

- We will promote more cost-effective service channels
- We will incentivise online channels over traditional channels
 - An example would be using different fees structures, where an online application has a lower fee than a paper application (the national passport application process model).
 - Another example would be using different response times and service level agreements depending on the channel used to make contact e.g., 3 working days for a response to an online form versus 10 working days for a response to an unstructured email.

Organisational Change

- We develop people to provide great customer service
- We will build staff capacity and capability to provide resilience in emergencies
- We will empower staff to use technology and work in modern, efficient ways
- We will learn and improve as individuals and teams

1.4 Being data-driven

Many of the principles above relate to gathering, and making better use of, data. Our approach to this will focus on four important areas:

1. **Customer profile:** age, preference, ability to access services and other factors;
2. **Service metrics:** what services we provide, including volumes, when are we providing them, how are we providing them and where we are providing them;
3. **Delivery channels:** the effectiveness of current delivery channels that are available to use, as well as those that may be available in future;
4. **External factors:** we will work closely with partners to share information, where appropriate, to deliver a seamless customer experience and we will respond to changes in legislation and Government directives.

2 Context – St Albans, the Council, and our demographic

2.1 Local context – St Albans City and District

St Albans is an affluent and green district with a mature urban centre and regional parks contributing to the 82% of district land designated as Green Belt². It has a population of 149,317³ with 61,723 households⁴, and a projection that in 2039 the population will increase to approximately 177,653⁵. Key facts and issues for the District include:

- Annual visitor spend of £209M generated from approximately 2.19 million visitor trips, in 2019⁶.
- Above average weekly income £819 vs. national average of £587 in 2020⁷.
- White British and Other White are the largest ethnic group in the District. The Bangladeshi population within St Albans at 1.9% (Census 2011) is the largest in Hertfordshire with the majority living in the wards of Sopwell, Cunningham and London Colney. Two of these wards fall within the 40% most deprived (Sopwell and Cunningham).⁸
- Life expectancy is higher in St Albans than in England & Wales for both men and woman (82 vs 79.44 and 85 vs 83.11 respectively)⁹.
- General low levels of homelessness; in 2019 9 single people slept rough in the borough, which reduced to 2 during the 2020 pandemic¹⁰.
- Above average economically active population vs UK average (82.5% vs. 79.1%)¹¹.
- Low levels of unemployment, below the national average (3.2% vs. 4.6%)¹².
- 78.1% of residents have a level of qualification equivalent to NVQ3 or above¹³, which is 17 percentage points higher than the national average.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-green-belt-statistics-for-england-2019-to-2020>

³

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalescotlandandnorthernireland>

⁴

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/St%20Albans%20City%20And%20District%20Council%20Corporate%20Plan%202021-2026web.pdf>

⁵

https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Basic%20facts%20about%20St%20Albans%20broken%20down%20by%20Ward_0.pdf

⁶ <https://www.visithertsbusiness.co.uk/media/63231/economic-impact-of-tourism-st-albans-2019.pdf> (page 4)

⁷ Earnings by residence <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157227/printable.aspx>

⁸

https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/council/Inclusion%20Strategy%202017-2020%20-%20Final_tcm15-53796.pdf (page 3)

⁹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/lifeexpectancies/bulletins/nationallifetablesunitedkingdom/2017to2019>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2020>

¹¹ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157227/printable.aspx>

¹² <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157227/printable.aspx>

¹³ Qualifications Jan 2020 - Dec 2020

<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157227/printable.aspx>

- Significant investment in infrastructure with the development of the City Centre Opportunity Site, Harpenden Leisure and Cultural centres and the Ridgeview, Leyland Avenue and Noke Shot housing development sites

In conclusion, St Albans has an increasing population which means we are likely to see increases in demand for council services with decreasing per head funding.

The population is better educated, more affluent, and has a high proportion of residents with English as their first language.

The majority of the people of St Albans are well placed to access services online, with the skills and tools to do so. However, there is a small proportion of the population for whom accessing services online may not be possible or suitable.

2.2 Organisation context – the council and our customers

2.2.1 Customer demand

Like all councils, St Albans City and District Council has seen reductions in government funding over the past 10 years. According to National Audit Office figures¹⁴, the Council's spending power reduced by 26.0% between 2010-11 and 2017-2018, a slightly lower reduction than the average for district councils of 30.1%. New analysis shows that local services face a funding gap of £7.8 billion by 2025¹⁵.

During that period our customer base has grown. 'Customer' means any user of our services, including residents, non-resident, businesses, and parish councils.

Our customers have many reasons to contact us, which we can categorise:

- Finding information and guidance: e.g., web pages, promotional information, community campaigns;
- Requesting a service: e.g., planning enforcement, registering for council tax, paying a bill, obtaining advice;
- Getting help with vulnerable circumstances: e.g., homelessness, rent arrears, council tax discounts or exemptions;
- Having their say: e.g., public consultations, making complaints;
- Providing service updates: e.g., a contractor providing an update on a gas service they've completed on a council asset.

These contact types come through to us across the different channels we offer. As shown in Figure 4, each of our channels has a cost implication and we need to consider each of our contact types, and which channels we are shifting customer contact towards. The opportunities to shift customer contact to more cost-effective online solutions will vary depending on the type of transaction, the amount of risk involved, the comfort with

¹⁴ <https://www.nao.org.uk/highlights/financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018-visualisation/>

¹⁵ https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/5.40_01_Finance%20publication_WEB_0.pdf
(page 7)

technology and the intricacy of the query. This is visualised for the different contact types in Figure 9 below.

For example, a customer who needs to get help with vulnerable circumstances will most likely either call us, or ‘walk in’ and meet with us face to face. While this is a more expensive type of contact, we must balance the risk, the complexity of needs and the assurance the customer needs to deliver the right outcomes. This would be different to a customer who wants to find out what they need to provide for a licensing application. In this example, we would want to shift this customer contact to self-service using our website, as this contact type is less risky, less complicated and less assurance is required.

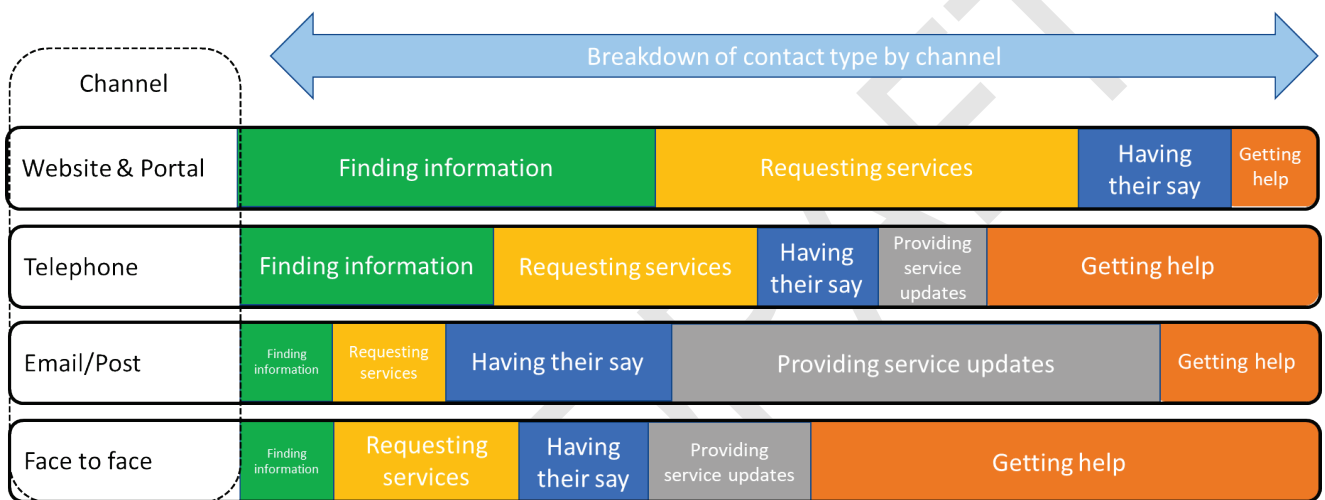


Figure 6: Visualisation of contact type by channel (coloured time blocks represent illustrative assumptions on how long different processes could take in different channels)

We define online services as those that can be managed digitally from start to finish. An example is where the customer completes an online form, which automatically creates a case in a Council system using the data provided for them, and the customer then tracks their case online to completion. For this reason, we do not consider PDF application forms or online forms that generate emails to be true online services. **We will need to create the right mix of service channels, for each type of contact and for each type of customer to maximise the customer experience and efficiency opportunity.**

2.2.2 Current performance

Figure 10 below shows the current split of customer contacts by channel, between 1st June 2020 and 31st May 2021. Our systems for generating data on customer demand across different channels are varied depending on channel or team. The proportional split clearly indicates that across this 12-month period, interactions are most commonly made via telephone calls or unstructured email rather than through online forms and portals.

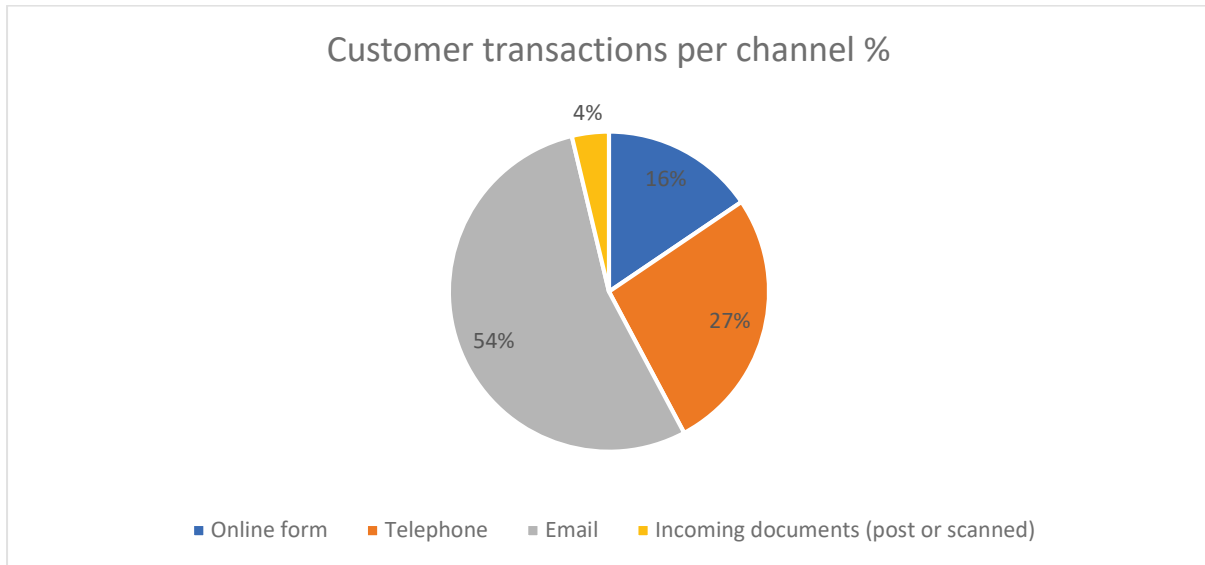


Figure 7: Customer transactions by channel June 2020 – May 2021

Email

The findings of the analysis (appendix 2.2.2a) on emails received by the Council during the period were as follows:

- In a sample of 23 group inboxes 211,700 emails were received;
- Our website lists 99 different email addresses (78% of these are group inboxes).

Emails are nearly as inefficient as receiving paper, as the data is unstructured, the onus is on the customer to give us all the information we need, and the data still needs to be re-keyed into other systems. The process of sending and receiving emails also impacts on the carbon generation of the organization. For example, the average spam email generates 0.3g CO₂e, a standard email 4g CO₂e and a long email with attachments can be up to 50g CO₂e¹⁶. The visibility of emails provides a challenge for performance management; it is not easy to see who is working on which cases for which customers, to re-allocate work among teams during operational peaks and troughs, use data intelligence to continuously improve or manage response times against service level agreements and key performance indicators.

With over half (54%) of interactions being made via email, it is critical that we focus on how we shift customers away from this channel to structured, cheaper channels that provide us with better business intelligence data.

Telephone

We received 104,544 calls into the Contact Centre in the period surveyed, which includes the main switchboard volumes. The last quarter (April – June 2021) saw the introduction of

¹⁶ Mike Berners-Lee 'How Bad are Bananas?: The carbon footprint of everything' (2010)

the new garden waste service where additional telephone support was put in place to help residents to self-serve.

Data for calls has been broken down into normal call queues and garden waste calls so as to reflect the volume of calls more accurately. Normal calls largely appear to follow typical levels of calls for the time of year (see Figure 11). Excluding the initial lockdown period between March – May 2020, the pandemic’s impact on the St Albans Contact Centre and telephone volumes seems to have been limited.

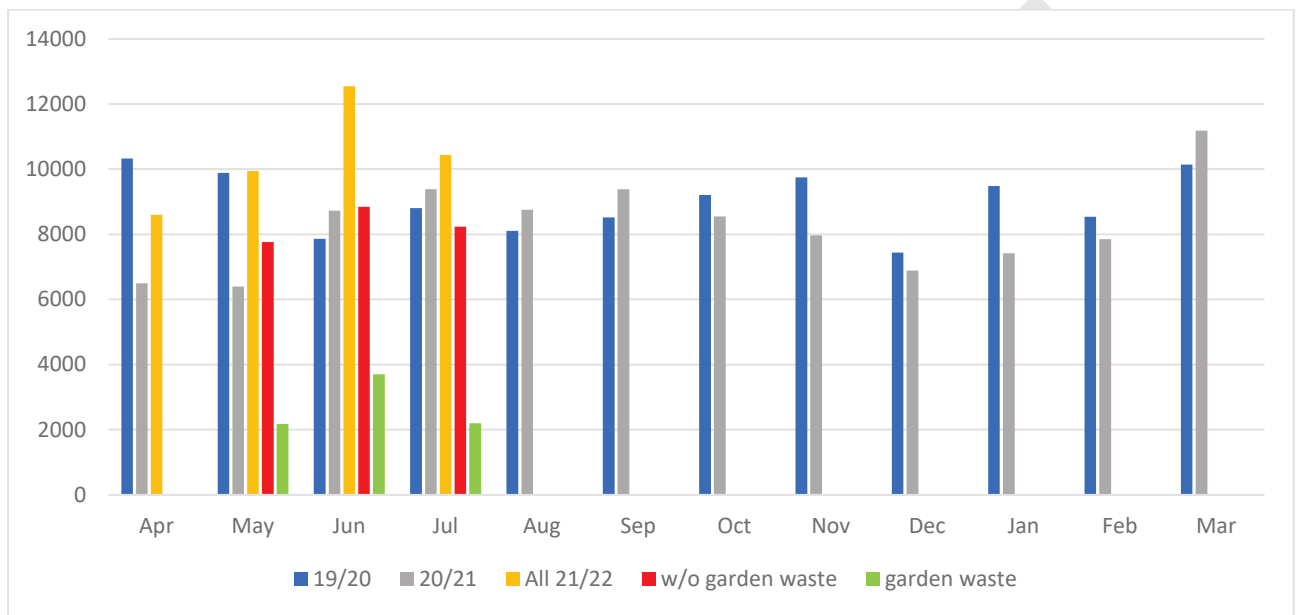


Figure 8: Year-on-Year comparison for calls to the contact centre between 2019-2022

Current work is being done on a sample of the hunt groups within the organisation that typically have high customer traffic. There are metrics that categorise the calls by whether they were ‘answered’, ‘abandoned’ or reached ‘voicemail’. During the same surveyed period, 54% of the hunt group calls were answered, 17% were abandoned and 29% went to voicemail. Out of the 11 hunt groups sampled, 3 lines answered 80% or more calls, 4 lines answered between 50-79% of calls, 3 lines answered between 30-59% of calls, and 1 answered less than 10% of calls. These metrics are monitored and reviewed quarterly, creating continuous improvement opportunities.

It is difficult to account for the number of calls that go directly to individuals within the organisation but even without this data, we know that the total number of calls is higher than the 104,554 stated because this figure does not include calls made directly to officers (direct dials).

Online

Powerful customer insight can be provided by the data that our website gives us which can support the analysis of trends in customer behaviour. We can draw hypotheses about our customers, their engagement with the digital services we provide and the impact this is having. We can see:

- What our customers search for most; which during the surveyed period was 'councillors', 'jobs' and 'pest control';
- The average amount of time a customer spends on any webpage; whether they leave straightaway or stay for longer;
- Behavioural heat-maps; where customers focus their time and navigate across the page.

Since March 2018 St Albans has had 58,320 individual customers sign up for an online MyStAlbans district account, which is equal to a third of our population.

During the surveyed period of 1st June 2020 to 31st May 2021, we received 80,112 online transactions broken down as follows:

- 28,318 transactions via the online forms on our portal;
- 29,345 transactions via Citizens Access (our revenues and benefits portal);
- 19,288 parking transactions via the website;
- 3,161 planning applications via the national planning portal.

The top 10 request types we receive through the portal contribute 98% of the total sum, with 73% relating to waste and recycling reports and requests. This is to be expected as the second and third most viewed pages on the website relate to rubbish collections and recycling. Most other service requests are created via other portals e.g., revenues and benefits, or directly into back-office systems e.g., social housing applications.

The most viewed page (excluding the homepage) is the page which allows customers to view and track planning applications.

Whilst we have made significant strides in our digital service offering, we need to take targeted actions to increase and maintain the adoption of online channels by our digitally enabled population. Using the business intelligence data available to us will enable us to propose journeys for improvement, undertake customer research to understand and validate our assumptions, and create truly customer-driven solutions. We want to ensure that we have created consistent customer journeys across all our portal, website, and third-party system forms, delivering quality and value for money.

Incoming documents (post or scanned)

Documents that are sent to us by post or scanned and sent digitally are filed by the Digital Services team. This accounts for 4% of the channel transactions that we receive. This is significantly low compared to email and shows that we have already made the move away

from traditional paper-based methods of interaction. We want to maintain this position. We need to prevent customers from returning to this channel by demonstrating that we can provide an improved customer experience when they interact with us through our preferred channels.

Face-to-face

During the surveyed period, we received 902 visits at our Civic Offices (managed by Customer Services), which includes appointments and walk-ins. This timeframe doesn't include the necessary closure periods of the Customer Services Centre (Civic Offices) due to the pandemic. We do not have data available for face-to-face interactions for other services and cannot fairly compare this channel with the others. However, it is important to note that on average 55% were interactions where Customer Services was supporting the customer to complete an online form, scan supporting documents or access information available on our website.

Face to face is the most expensive channel and it is difficult to plan for volumes of customers through the front door.

Summary

Despite the wide range of services with full or partial online journeys available, the increasing demands on our services, and a local population well-equipped to do business with us online, we currently engage with over half of our customers via unstructured channels that are difficult and relatively expensive to manage.

3 Who are our customers?

3.1 Our approach

As part of the organisation’s ‘Shaping our future’ change programme, customer types were developed. We identified five core customer types; standard, paying, high need, business and internal, which you can see at the centre of the diagram in Figure 12. These customer types have been adopted, reviewed, and updated as part of the work on the strategy development for the ‘Building our future’ change programme.



Figure 9: Customer Types (Existing)

3.2 Our definitions

While reviewing the customer type definitions, we found that there were some types that could be consolidated, some that needed to be split further, and some that were missing. Below are the updated types of customers and their definitions.

Standard customers - Residents, or visitors who contact us with everyday enquiries and requests, or who contact us to pay for a service. This could be something they must pay, such as Council Tax or social housing rent, or something they choose to pay for, such as leisure centre memberships.

Complex need customers - Residents who contact us because they have complex needs that they need support with. These needs could be medical, financial and/or circumstantial (e.g., domestic abuse, being evicted).

Business customers – Individuals or organisations which deliver their services within the district and contact us with enquiries and requests relating to the provision of these e.g, food businesses, taxi drivers. Individuals providing their services to support residents or businesses in the district who contact us in relation to their specific needs e.g, planning agents.

Internal customers - Individuals who work at St Albans City and District Council and Councillors who represent the electorate and interact with multiple services.

Partners - Organisations or people who contact us in relation to our residents, and businesses, such as DLUHC (previously MHCLG), Citizen’s Advice Bureau, DWP. Organisations which provide leisure and culture services and contact us with enquiries and requests.

We recognise that there will be cross over between our customer types but find that people or organisations predominantly contact us in one capacity over another. There is an exception to this rule which is a ‘high dependency customer’ (explained below).

High dependency customers – Any of our customer types who either require more support and reassurance during their interactions with us, or people who refuse to subscribe and interact with us via our preferred channels. They could also be people who are known to us and prefer to interact with us verbally (via telephone or in person) for a multitude of reasons such as loneliness, trustworthiness, or to be vexatious.

3.3 How will we use the Customer Types?

We have developed a set of principles that standardise how we engage with different groups of customers, providing them with the right mix of channels for each type of contact. Aiming to maximise the customer experience and efficiency opportunity.

Customer Type	What is the preferred channel for engagement?	Most common reasons to contact us	Design principles
All			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver professional and personable customer service Address issues at the first point of contact Use data and customer feedback to drive improvement
Standard	Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requesting a service Finding information and guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide end to end digital customer journeys Make interactions as slick, quick, and easy as possible Keep customers informed and manage their expectations Collect information once and only if we need it
Business			
Internal			

Complex needs	Whichever delivers the outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting help with vulnerable circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help people access the services they need, in the right way, at the right time Provide joined up services for the broader customer need Keep customers informed and manage their expectations Collect information once and only if we need it Provide digital customer journeys
Partners		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requesting a service Getting help with vulnerable circumstances 	
High dependency	Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requesting a service Finding information and guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build customer capability through assisted self-service Harness the power of communities to help one another

Table 1: Design principles, preferred channel and contact reasons per customer type

We will use these customer types and principles firstly to review and update our library of customer personas that were developed as part of the website development project. See Appendix 3.3a for more information on the use of personas including examples.

During service improvement work, staff will select a set of personas which are the most akin to the customer types they serve. We will move through the steps of the journey from the perspective of each persona, from the moment they have contact with us through to the resolution of their case. We will use customer research findings to highlight pain points for customers, suggested improvement opportunities, and test newly developed solutions.

4 What are our core customer journeys?

4.1 Customer Journey Definitions

Customer journeys are a visual representation of a customer's experience, from the moment they have contact with us. Mapping a customer journey enables us to put ourselves in the shoes of the customer and see things from their perspective.

We will develop corporate customer journeys for the organisation that are aligned to our tiers, customer types and design principles. The benefits of developing these corporate customer journeys are:

- Creating a consistent experience for customers who interact with us;
- Assessing the way we deliver now against our ideal journey and identifying the gaps;
- Setting expectations about the way we want both external and internal customers to interact with us;
- Identifying where we need to make key decisions to bring consistency across all services.

4.2 Tier Specific Customer Journeys and Principles

Each customer journey will have a set of core activities across the top which represent key touch points within the customer experience as they interact with us. Down the left-hand side there are information headings which force us to consider both the customer and Council viewpoint across various factors. Further information about the core activities and customer stages are detailed in appendices 4.2a.

Taking this approach enables us to review and improve the customer experience in a consistent, structured manner. An example tier 0 customer journey, which is a completely self-serve interaction for a 'standard' customer, is shown in Figure 14 below. We can use these core customer journeys to hold ourselves accountable to the corporate principles of customer engagement, while we re-design processes and systems. We will use customer research to validate the 'moments of truth' and how successful our current service offer is at delivering the ideal customer journey.

Using the example below, we will develop our own core customer journeys in more detail with input from teams and roles across the Council. Once developed, these core journeys would require some key organisational decisions and principles to be agreed, to enable these to be implemented as part of the 'Building our Future' programme.

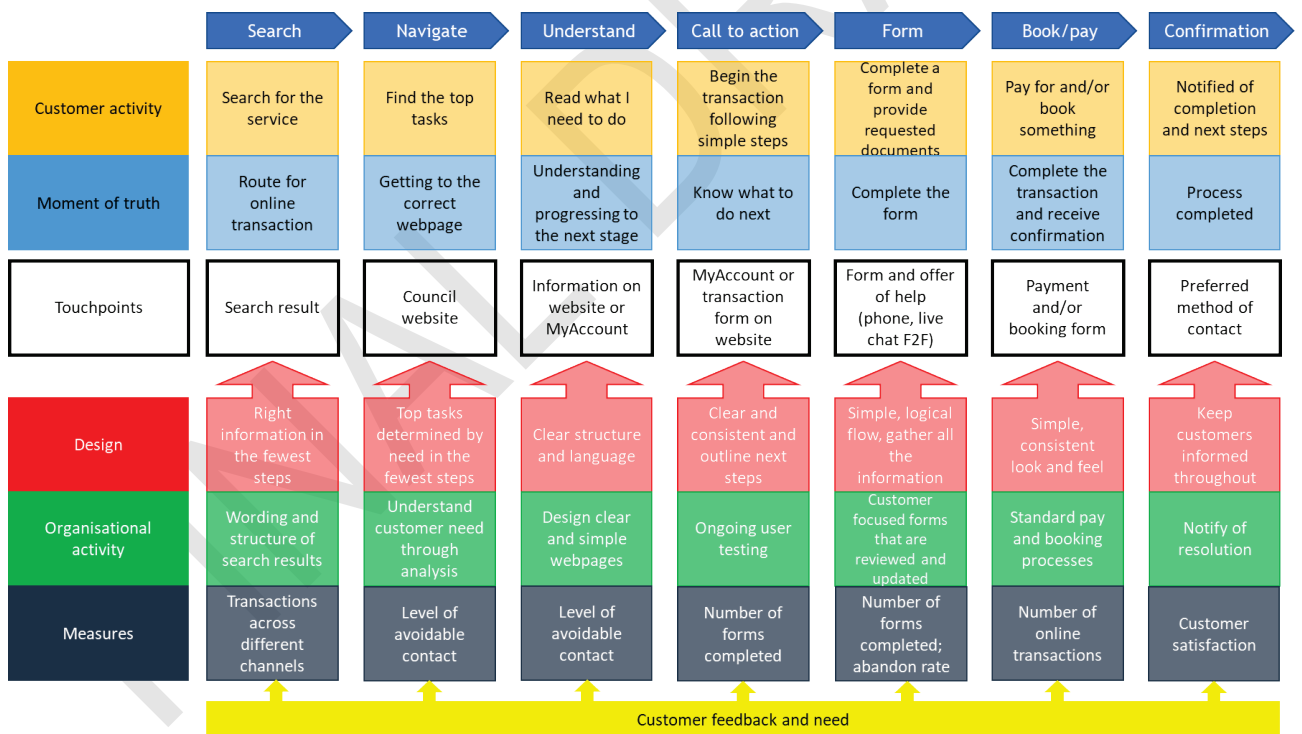


Figure 10: Tier 0 Standard Customers Example

5 How will we measure our progress?

To achieve the maximum impact, we need to ensure that our measurements are directly related to our goals and the impact we are trying to achieve.

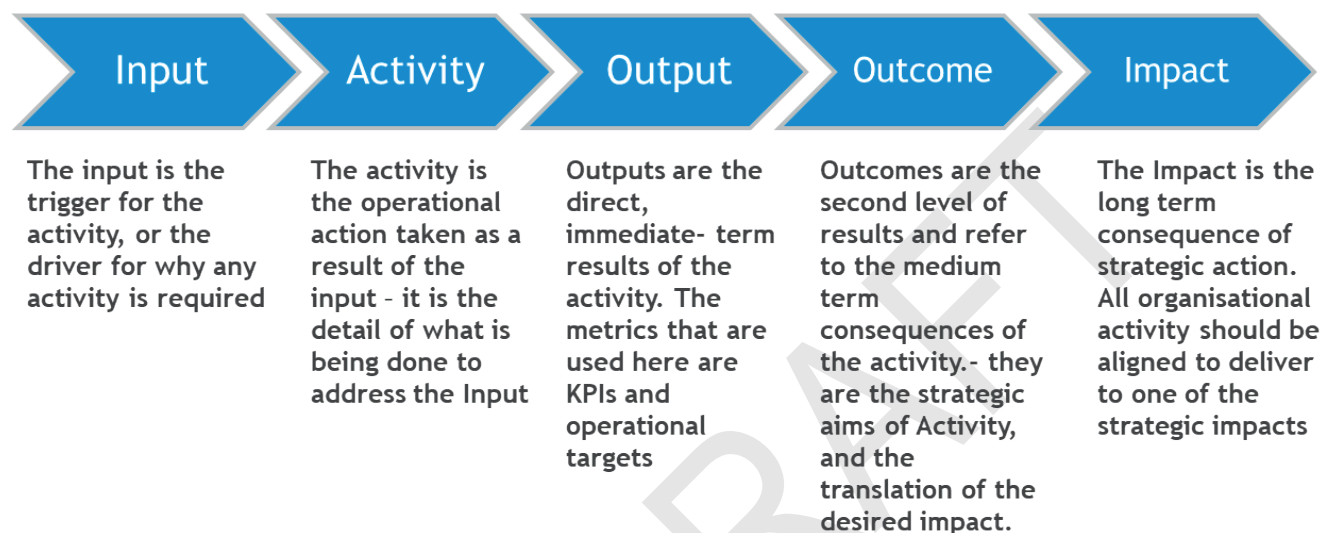


Figure 11: Strategic Framework

Using the strategic framework shown in Figure 15, we can use right-to-left thinking to map out the impact, outcomes, outputs, and activities for this strategy (Table 1 - Measures of Success).

Impact	Outcome	Output	Activity
An adaptive council that provides quality services and value for money	- Improved customer visibility of interactions	<i>Target:</i> 75,000 unique individual online customer accounts set up on MyStAlbans district account <i>End date:</i> 30/12/2022 <i>Current position:</i> 64,693 unique individual accounts at 10/1/2022	Review and update key correspondence templates with channel shift 'nudges'
	- Improved customer data integrity	<i>Target:</i> 100% of customer records within the CRM system validated each year to	Implement annual customer data reviews

		<p>identify errors, data gaps, duplications.</p> <p><i>End date: 31/12/2022</i> (resets annually)</p> <p><i>Current position: New measure, no data to compare against</i></p>	
	- Improved levels of customer satisfaction	<p><i>Target: 85% satisfaction for all services provided by Customer Services</i></p> <p><i>End date: 30/12/2022</i></p> <p><i>Current position: New measure; no data to compare against</i></p>	Implement customer ratings and feedback in customer journeys
		<p><i>Target: 85% satisfaction (CSAT score) for all services across the Council</i></p> <p><i>End date: 30/06/2024</i></p> <p><i>Current position: New measure, no data to compare against</i></p>	Implement customer ratings and feedback in customer journeys
		<p><i>Target: 100% quality assessment scores for each customer services team member</i></p> <p><i>End date: 31/12/2022</i></p> <p><i>Current position: New measure, no data to compare against</i></p>	Embed quality framework & link to new Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
	- Significant reduction in unstructured	<p><i>Target: 50% reduction in email enquiries (replaced by forms and self-serve information) in Housing,</i></p>	Review and rationalise group email addresses; and implement approach

	incoming email to the organisation	<p>Planning, Revenues and Benefits</p> <p><i>End date: 31/12/2022</i></p> <p><i>Current position: New measure, no data to compare against</i></p>	to reduce email to high volume inboxes
		<p><i>Target: 80% reduction in email enquiries (replaced by forms and self-serve information) in Housing, Planning, Revenues and Benefits</i></p> <p><i>End date: 31/12/2023</i></p> <p><i>Current position: New measure, no data to compare against</i></p>	
		<p><i>Target: 50% reduction in email communications (replaced by digital communications via the portal)</i></p> <p><i>End date: 30/06/2023</i></p> <p><i>Current position: New measure, no data to compare against</i></p>	Consistent communications and promotions to drive people to online solutions
		<p><i>Target: 50% of transactions through structured channels (see Figure 10 for current position)</i></p> <p><i>End date: 31/12/2022</i></p>	
	- Reduction in telephone interactions for transactional services (that can	<p><i>Target: 75% of enquiries resolved at first point of contact</i></p> <p><i>End date: 30/06/2023</i></p>	Review the information available to Customer Services, agree what should be accessible and create supporting

	be completed online)	<i>Current position: We have no data on this as at present is not able to be measured, but with the introduction of the CRM system it will be</i>	'knowledge' guidance in Salesforce to support
		<i>Target: 80% of calls answered within 30 seconds</i> <i>End date: 31/12/2022</i>	Understand core hours and ensure full telephone coverage for all teams (e.g., not everyone having lunch at the same time)
		<i>Target: Maximum 10% calls going to voicemail across all teams and telephone numbers</i> <i>End date: 31/12/2022</i>	
- Improved performance because of continuous improvement projects		<i>Target: 5 initiatives completed per year to address performance improvements aligned to strategic aims. These initiatives will be identified through business intelligence and continuous improvement activity.</i> <i>End date: 31/12/2022 (resets annually)</i>	Implement Service Level Agreements within customer journeys
			Implement corporate performance dashboards
			Implement continuous improvement cycles
			Provide refresher training for management roles (operational and functional) on the data and reports available within systems

Table 2: Measures of Success and targets

6 Who is accountable?

For the successful implementation and continuous improvement of the customer strategy, it is important to determine what the roles and responsibilities are within the organisation.

Below is a table showing RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed) information for the delivery of this strategy and its supporting actions.

	Chief Executive Board	Programme Team	Customer Delivery Manager	Strategic Principal Officers	Councillors	Customers
Support the implementation of the principles in this strategy	A		R	R	C	
Model the behaviours that we expect of all staff during their interactions with our customers	R	R	A	R		
Design processes aligned to the principles within this strategy	I	A	C	R	I	C
Introduce new digital tools and processes		A		R	I	C
Introduce core concepts through training and transition into new ways of working			R	A		
Align performance measures and monitoring to new Strategic Framework	A	R	R	R	I	I
Own the Customer Engagement Strategy			A			
Own Tone of Voice / Style Guides that are reviewed off the back of this strategy			R			
Implement the actions within the plan	C	R	A	R	I	I

7 Action plan

This plan organises the initial set of priority actions for the 'Building our Futures' programme by service tier, as illustrated in Figure 5. The plan will be reviewed and refreshed on an annual basis following the programme.

Category	Action	Impact	Completion date
All tiers	Develop core customer journeys for each tier	Standard and consistent set of journeys to validate further customer journey activity	April 2022
Tiers 0/1	Establish clear hierarchy of channels: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-serve (via web forms or portals) 2. Web chat 3. Phone 4. Face to face 	Clear principle to inform design of systems, scripts, communications, and training.	April 2022
Tiers 0/1	Develop new customer KPIs	Drive improvement in customer experience	April 2022
Tier 0/1	Update website content for core customer journeys, telling customers what they need to provide, how they need to provide it and what happens when they do not.	Improved information provision from the customer, which helps progress their enquiry or case without delays.	June 2022
Tier 0	Review and rationalise the number of group email inboxes and develop a plan to reduce these.	Reduction in unstructured email requests, increase in genuine online requests	April 2022
Tier 0	Remove individual email addresses and group email addresses from the website and key correspondence. Replace with further information and guidance, or structured 'contact us' forms. Individual email's only to be provided once a case-specific relationship has been established between a customer and a Tier 2/3 member of staff.	Improved visibility of customer contact data and management of workflow through the organisation, as people interact through structured channels	May 2022

Tier 0	Review and update key correspondence templates with channel shift 'nudges'	Increased adoption of online services	June 2022
Tier 0	Remove paper forms from the website, where an online form is provided, and it is not a statutory requirement to have a paper form available	Reduction in incoming post and paper, increase in structured data through genuine online requests	June 2022
Tier 0	Undertake customer research to understand online account and online services adoption. Develop a plan to address key blockers and pain points.	Increased adoption of online services and accounts	April 2022
Tier 1	Establish which system holds the key customer record, which is the 'single version of the truth' and should inform other systems, and the approach for validation	Improved customer data integrity.	End February 2022
Tier 1	Develop guidance for customer services (and other staff interacting with customers) to support high dependency customers to self-serve whenever possible/appropriate	Embed culture of promoting and fostering self-service	April 2022
Tier 1	Embed the quality framework into the Customer Services performance management cycle	Improved performance of staff against key customer services skills and knowledge	February 2022
Tier 1	Eliminate unstructured email. If online option is available, customers will receive a link to the website to log their request or be asked to contact their named officer dealing with their case	Reduction in unstructured email requests, increase in genuine online requests	September 2022
Tier 1	Review the complaint procedure and policy against LGA guidance. Design and implement solutions where improvements are required.	Fewer complaints, with non-corporate complaints directed appropriately, and faster resolution at earlier stages of corporate complaints. Embedded	June 2022

		continuous improvement cycle following complaints.	
Tier 1	Only publish and promote the main contact number (01727 866100) on the website and in key council publications. Remove service direct numbers from the website. Direct dial numbers to case officers and teams only to be provided once a case-specific relationship has been established between a customer and a Tier 2/3 member of staff.	Increased chance of shifting customers online and embedding customer services team as first point of contact if they do call	September 2022
Tier 1	Consider web chat and how we would train customer service agents to support customers via this channel as well as the phone.	Increased chance of effectively promoting self-service as the customer is already online.	Sept 2022
Tier 1/2	Review and update key correspondence templates with channel shift 'nudges'	Increased chance of shifting customers online	June 2022
Tier 1/2	Review peak areas where customers chase for updates. Undertake customer research to understand what could have prevented them from contacting to chase.	Reduced chasing from customers, and improved customer experience	June 2022
Tier 2	Stop case officers from updating customers on progress when the updates can be automated	Increased chance of shifting customers online	July 2022
Payments	Adopt a payment up front approach wherever possible. An application should not be progressed to the next stage without the payment unless they require an invoice.	To increase efficiency by eliminating unnecessary chasing for payments and increase income	Sept 2022
Payments	Adopt the following hierarchy of payment methods (in order of preference):	To encourage electronic forms of payment which	June 2022

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Direct debit 2. Online and automated telephone payment (cardholder self-service) 3. Telephone assisted electronic payment (card not present) 4. Face-to-face electronic payment (cardholder present) 	are more efficient to process	
Payments	Assess the volume of payments received via each method currently and undertake a campaign to move customers to the preferred methods	To reduce the effort spent on reconciling payments and suspense accounts, and force the shift towards the hierarchy of payment methods above	June 2022

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Appendix

2.2.2a

More than 211,700 emails were sent into the organisation over the 12-month period we analysed. This figure is the sum of a sample of the most heavily used group email accounts, which is a fraction of the group inboxes that St Albans uses. Our samples of 23 inboxes included those from across Customer Services, Housing, Planning, Building Control, Revenues, Benefits, and Regulatory services. The sum of 211,700 does not include emails received into individual personal inboxes.

Throughout the organization we have a mixture of group inboxes, as well as individual personal email inboxes. On our website we have published 99 unique email addresses, 78% are for group emails, 19% are for individual staff members and 3% for Councillors. Planning and Building Control have 7 published group email addresses which received 77,840 emails, whilst Housing services have 8 published email addresses, which received 56,892 emails.

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Appendix 3.3a - Personas

Personas are a powerful tool that we can use to consider the impact our processes have on our customers lives and how we make them feel. Rather than simply focusing on the way we do the process for our internal purposes. Personas make us reassess the way we've always delivered services versus what different customer types expect, want, or need. Developing a set of customer personas answers the question 'Who are we designing this for?' but we must get real customer feedback to truly challenge our assumptions and be truly customer driven.

This is Nick

Business Owner



"I don't want to waste time and need what I want quickly, so I want a business section that gives me everything I need to know"

Age: **45** Occupation: **Pub Owner** Location: **St Alban's**

Devices Used



Bio / Backstory

Nick is 45 years old, and previously worked in a bank, as a Business Development Manager. He has always been passionate about food and drinks, and has recently left his job to buy a pub in the St Albans area. He is interested in finding out about local events/sponsorship opportunities in the area, as this can have a potential profit for his business. He also wants to enquire about putting up an 'A-board' to promote his business. His personal life has left him feeling very stressed, and he's struggling to keep on top of the day-to-day administration tasks. He wants to find out about what the Council can do for his business, as he feels that business rates are outrageous and has no previous experience of setting up simple things like bin collection. He would ideally like to see a section of the website specifically relevant to businesses. He has very strong opinions, but hates social media so he won't waste his time posting anything there. He thinks time is money.

User Goals / Needs

- Advice on setting up and managing his business
- Ability to apply for business rate reduction
- Information on commercial waste firms to collect his bins
- Applying for a licence to sell alcohol and play live music
- Using an A-board to promote his business
- Sponsoring events in the local area
- Trading at events
- Information about customer parking
- Information about the BiD levy
- Food safety information in relation to selling food in his pub

Ideal Experience / Must Have

- Dedicated business sections with specific information, including:
 - Business rates
 - Bin collection
 - Licences
 - A-board permissions
 - Targeted news and events
 - Sponsoring opportunities
 - Customer car park
 - Business Levy
 - Food Safety
- Powerful internal search engine
- Simple design and navigation structure
- Simple to read/jargon free language (Plain English)
- Minimal clicks to find information
- Instant and targeted information - e.g 'I am a business owner'
- Live chat
- Likes quick responses and immediate answers

Technical Experience



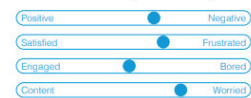
Pain Points / Frustrations

- Lack of dedicated section for businesses
- Information all over the site, making it difficult to find business specific information
- Inability to find out where to report a missed bin collection
- Too many clicks to find information
- Difficult to understand Council jargon
- Lack of news specific to businesses
- Poor internal search engine
- Out of date and irrelevant content

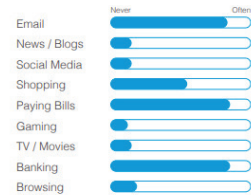
Experience with Council



Emotional State (with the Council)



Personal Internet Use



This is Matilda

Council Tenant



"I want clear, easy to understand information and advice"

Age: 53

Occupation: Shop Assistant

Location: Telford Court

Bio / Backstory

Matilda is a Council Tenant who lives alone and is therefore entitled to single occupancy reductions on her Council Tax. She works part-time in a local shop where she's paid minimum wage and looks after her elderly mother in her spare time, as she can't afford residential care. She uses the Council's website to pay her monthly rent and to find out about other potential benefits she can receive for her mother and herself. The rest of her family live locally and she is very familiar with the area. She doesn't have a car, so uses public transport to get around. She is also a member of her Residents' Association and regularly checks the Council website to find out about local news and events. She finds it difficult to contact the Council during working hours, and often accesses the website on her mobile after work, but struggles to read the content without zooming in. Matilda is digitally savvy but has dyslexia and needs simple, easy to understand help and advice. She likes it when websites provide the options to change the colour contrast to yellow text on black background, as this improves her reading ability.

User Goals / Needs

- Access to MyStAlbans in order to pay her rent online
- Information on benefits she may be entitled to as a part-time carer and low-paid employee
- Information about Council garages and whether she is permitted to use these for storage
- Council Tax payments and reductions
- Ability to report a repair needed on her property
- Ability to report noisy neighbours
- Information about available services for her elderly mother, including aids and adaptations
- Meet-up locations for the Residents Association and previous discussions
- Information on local news and events
- Information on public transport

Ideal Experience / Must Have

- Clear, easy to access and understand information and advice
- A responsive website that works well on her mobile
- The ability to make transactions 24/7 and access her rent account whenever is convenient
- Clear distinction between Council services
- Content written in Plain English
- Quick to load information
- Secure area for reporting incidents, with a staged process and submission acknowledgement/feedback
- Accessibility toolbar to change colour contrast and enlarge font

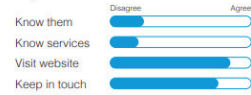
Pain Points / Frustrations

- Having to zoom in to read content when using her mobile phone
- Lack of accessibility options to enlarge font and change colour contrast
- Websites that are difficult to navigate/find relevant information
- Lack of feedback from the Council when reporting an incident
- Relying on Google Search as the website search is very poor
- Confusing language used to differentiate services
- Lack of information about garage inspections, and potentially using it for the wrong purpose
- Too many clicks to find daily transport information

Devices Used



Experience with Council



Emotional State (with the Council)



Technical Experience



Personal Internet Use

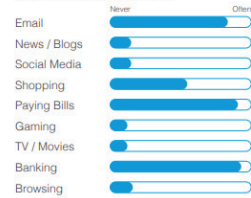


Figure 12: St Albans Customer Personas (2 examples)

Appendix 4.2a - Core activities

The definitions that we use for our core activities are as follows:

Customer Stages:

- **Search** – Using a search function
- **Navigation** – Moving around a website or page
- **Contact** – Contacting the teams
- **Understanding** – Building understanding of topic or process that is searched for
- **Call to action** – Knowing what need to be done next and using appropriate tools to take that action (e.g., pressing a 'Apply' button)
- **Form completion** – Completing a form
- **Pay/book** – Paying or booking an appointment to support request
- **Confirmation** – Receiving a notification that the transaction has been completed successfully

Internal stages

- **Receive** – Receiving the case information from the customer or 'first line' support
- **Review** – Reviewing the case information
- **Decision** – Deciding how the case should be handled
- **Allocation** – Allocating the case to team or individual
- **Progress** – Completing all required activities for the case
- **Completion** – Concluding the case

The definitions that we use for the information headings down the left hand side of the diagram on page 20 'Figure 14: Tier 0 Standard customers examples are:

- **Customer activities** – What we would expect the customer to be doing?
- **Moment of truth** – What needs to happen for the customer to complete this transaction in a way appropriate for the Tier?
- **Touchpoints** – What are the tools they would use to do this?
- **Design (principles)** – What are the most important design principles?
- **Organisational activity** - What do we need to do to enable the journey?
- **Measures** – What do we need to measure to know we are achieving successful journeys for this Tier?

7.1 National context

According to the Office for National Statistics¹⁷, 96% of households now have internet access across Great Britain (see Figure below). 100% of households with children, or 2 adults aged between 16 – 64 have access to the internet, and 95-97% of households with at least one adult between 16 – 64. For households that have a single adult at 65 years old or more the amount drops to 80%, but when another adult (ages 16 – 64) lives in these households, this rises to 94%.

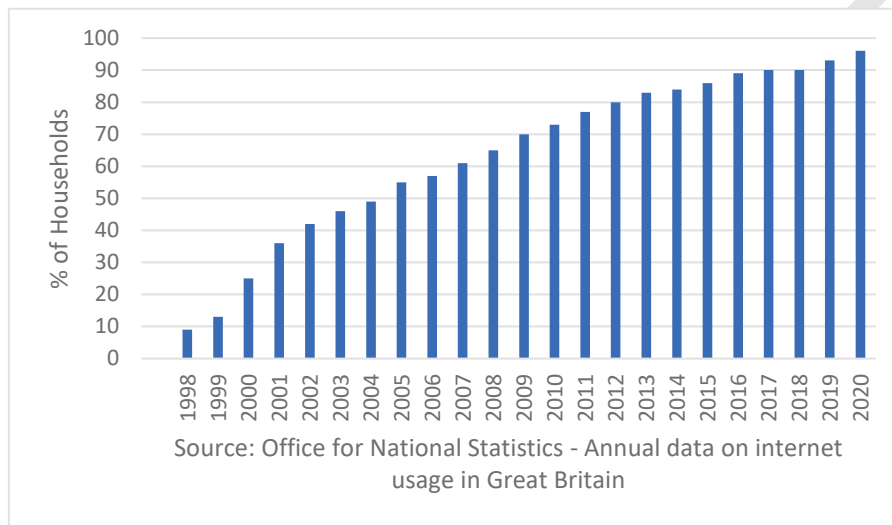


Figure 13: Households with internet access in Great Britain, 1998 to 2020

While 89% of adults used the internet daily in 2020, this percentage reduces significantly across age groups over 44 years old, 67% of adults aged 65 years and over, used the internet daily, while 18% had not used the internet in the last three months (see Figure 7). However, this is a large increase against 2019, when 61% of adults aged 65 years and over, used the internet daily and 24% had not used it in the last three months.

The statistics also indicate that 84% of adults who are defined as disabled in line with the Equality Act definition, use the internet daily, while 8% had not used it in the previous 3 months.

¹⁷

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2020>

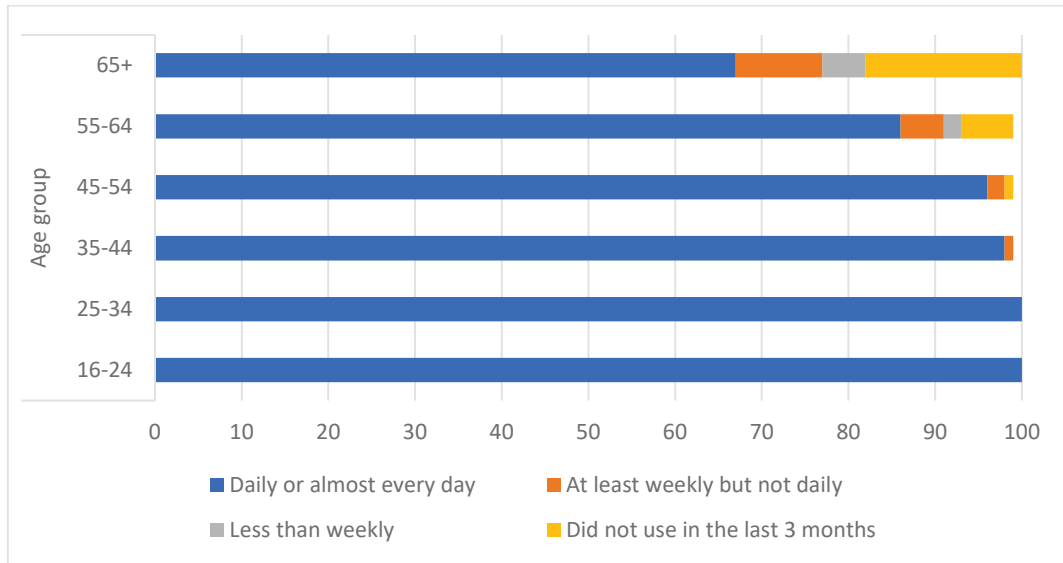


Figure 14: Internet use within the last three months, Great Britain, 2020

Since 2014, the ONS has been collecting information on the reasons why households use the internet to interact with public authorities or services, over the previous 12 months. Between 2014 and 2020, there has been a 7% increase to 44% in people using the internet to obtain information about public authorities or services from websites. In the same timeframe, submitting online forms has increased by 5% to 37% and downloading official forms has dropped 3% to 26%. Figure 8 shows the breakdown of the age groups, and their reasons for interacting over 12 months.

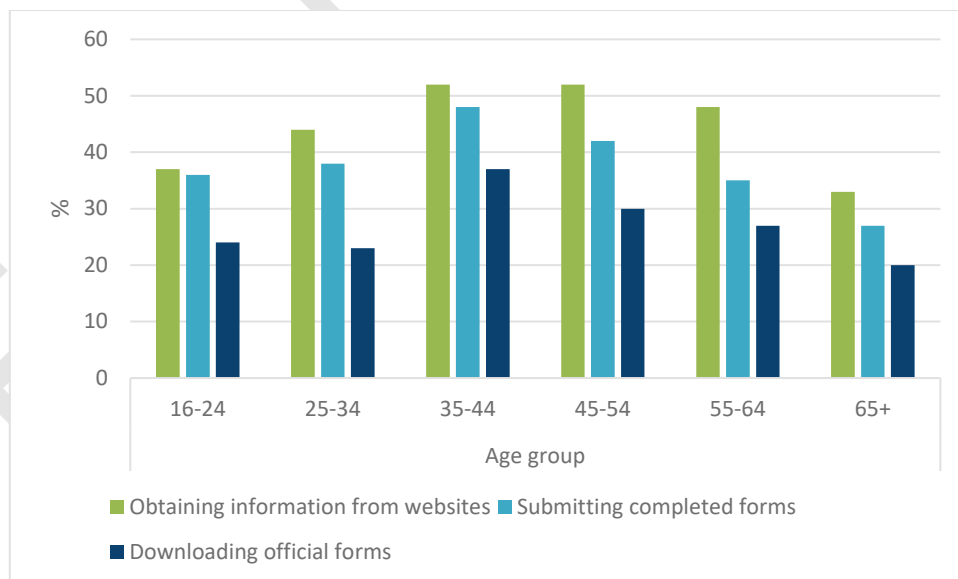


Figure 15: Reasons for interacting with public authorities or services using the internet, in the previous 12 months, Great Britain, 2020

Since 2009, the percentage of adults who use the internet daily has grown by 34 percentage points, to 89% in 2020. Mobile phones or smartphones are the most popular devices used to access the internet, but there is an emergence of devices that connect and exchange data with other devices and systems over the internet, the 'internet of things'. For example, 35% of the population used a virtual assistant smart speaker or app to access the internet in the past three months.

In conclusion, the vast majority of the UK population now routinely uses the internet to communicate, find information and transact. Although older adults are still least likely to use the internet, this is changing more quickly than for any other part of the population. The internet of things is being used more frequently to help overcome barriers for the elderly and vulnerable in a range of sectors including, social care, health care and community. However there is still a large proportion of people who do not use the internet to access information about public services and with the nature of the activities they are completing, they prefer to do it over the phone or in person.

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¹

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¹

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¹

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