



CUSTOMER STRATEGY

2023 to 2028



Introduction



Lawrence Fitzpatrick
Leader of the Council

As a provider of essential public services to a growing community, we recognise the significant impact that the council has on West Lothian and how important it is that we find a way to deliver high quality and sustainable services for our customers. Our offer is wide, ranging from universal services that underpin the infrastructure of the local area to highly specialised and personalised support services for some of the most vulnerable in society. These services support better outcomes in education, employment, health and community safety and contribute to wider equality in society and the sustainability of the local environment.

The Customer Strategy sets out the key outcomes, activities and behaviours that the council will develop to create a culture of outstanding customer service, throughout the organisation.



Graham Hope
Chief Executive

The strategy reaffirms our commitment to putting the customer first in every thing we do. It sets out how we will develop our approach to service improvement and how we will advance the use of technology in our services to improve the customer experience.

Our ambition is that this strategy will support transformation and growth in a council that is working to improve lives and make West Lothian a great place to live, work, learn and do business.

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I. The Purpose of the Customer Strategy

Scope of the Strategy

The Customer Strategy is a corporate strategy and adopted across the council.

The strategy covers the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, which is also the duration of the Council's Corporate Plan. The Customer Strategy has been developed in support of this plan and the other key plans and strategies.

Outcomes

The Customer Strategy is part of suite of strategies that will support the council to transform and improve in a smart, flexible and efficient way.

There are four outcomes in the Customer Strategy and these are:

1. A culture that prioritises the customer
2. Services are designed to meet customer needs
3. Enhancing our digital offer
4. Improving the customer experience

Reporting on Progress

The Customer Strategy will be progressed under the direction of a corporate board. An annual update on progress in the outcomes and actions will be reported to Corporate Policy and Resources PDSP and published on the council website. An end of strategy report will also be published in 2028.

Purpose

The purpose of the Customer Strategy is to create a culture of outstanding customer service in the council, with a drive to improve the quality of customer experience and overall standard of service

**OUR WLC
TRANSFORMATION
AND PERFORMANCE**



2. Strategy Overview

	Strategy Outcome A culture that prioritises the customer	Strategy Outcome Services are designed to meet customer needs	Strategy Outcome Enhancing our digital offer	Strategy Outcome Improving the customer experience
Description	The council puts the customer at the centre of decision-making. We design services with the customer in mind and develop the culture and conditions to support our staff to deliver positive outcomes for our customers.	The council will examine the value and experience of key council services from the perspective of the customer.	The council will expand digital innovation in our service provision and ways of working. This will help make sure our services are more sustainable and accessible.	This outcome sets out the steps towards creating a more sustainable and effective relationship with our customers, one that is based on accountability, engagement and builds trust.
Challenge	The council is a large and complex organisation, with a diverse range of customers.	The design and review of services can require time and investment and the active involvement of service users in order to make sure it is effective. It is important that the council targets review activity to focus on the highest impact areas (for customers) across the council.	It is important that the council invests in proven technologies and maintains a strong focus on customer experience through the introduction and implementation of new technology.	We have a broad customer base with different engagement preferences. Significant skilled resource is required to collect the vast experiential data we need to cover the main service areas, and then analyse, prioritise and utilise that data effectively.

	Strategy Outcome A culture that prioritises the customer	Strategy Outcome Services are designed to meet customer needs	Strategy Outcome Enhancing our digital offer	Strategy Outcome Improving the customer experience
Opportunity	There are opportunities to improve our connection and develop a mutual understanding between the council and customers of our priorities.	Council services explore opportunities to increase the value delivered to customers. This will include updating service design in line with changing customer needs and identifying efficiencies or removing steps that do not add value.	Digital services can increase flexibility, choice and convenience for customers. It can also reduce costs and increase staff productivity.	The council will continue to review the quality and efficiency of our services, working with service users to find new ways to improve our services and the customer experience.
Action	The council is committed to building a strong and caring culture that puts the customer at the heart of everything we do.	The council continues to review services to ensure that they meet customer needs.	The council will explore opportunities to adopt new technologies that will enhance the quality of services and increase efficiency and accessibility.	The council will review our approach to consultation and engagement, looking for new ways to increase our reach in the community and increase the quality and depth of data that we collect from our customers. We will also improve our use of data.
Measures	Customer satisfaction with quality of services and staff attitude and professionalism	Resolution timescales for customer enquiries and customer satisfaction with enquiry handling	Increasing our digital services and self-service options	Customer satisfaction with experience

3. Supporting the Corporate Priorities

The new Corporate Plan and Budget Strategy were created to address the most pressing issues and challenges for the council in the next five years, ensuring that the council meets its statutory obligations sustainably and protects the most vital and impactful services for local people.

Corporate Priorities

The council has identified five priorities for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28. These reflect the areas that are the most important for the community and improving the quality of life for all living, working and visiting West Lothian.

The priorities have been set through consultation with our community, staff and partner agencies and identify and address the most pronounced, collective needs of the local area. They will also provide a focus for decision making and resource prioritisation in the next five years, ensuring that we target our efforts towards the issues that matter most to the community.

In the next five years, the council will focus on achieving outcomes in each priority.



The council is a high performing organisation because it holds the primacy of the customer as a key value. That commitment to customers has influenced decision making and changes since the council was formed and consequently, has ensured that the council continues to prioritise customers in the design and delivery of all services.

Supporting the five priority areas in the Corporate Plan, this Customer Strategy will enhance that customer first culture and continue to promote the needs of customers as a key consideration in the way that we think about, and measure the success of, essential public services delivered by the council.

We recognise that a good relationship with the customer stakeholder group is essential to setting and meeting our strategic priorities, and understand the importance of an approach characterised by the involvement of local people in shaping the long-term direction and ambition of the council. We will therefore continue to work to build a relationship with customers that is based on shared values and open dialogue to encourage understanding and cooperation.

The Customer Strategy will be an important lever for change in the next five years, aligning with the Budget Strategy and the Corporate Plan, to deliver a programme of transformational change in the council. The strategy will provide a strategic framework that will support the council to improve service delivery and set out how we can create improved conditions for true cooperation and a mutually beneficial relationship with our customers.

Council Values

As part of the development a new strategic direction and the Corporate Plan 2023/28, new organisational Values were also identified that better reflect the character and ambitions of the council.

The council wants to work with customers, staff and partners to make services better and deliver our Purpose and Vision of a *Thriving West Lothian*. In addition to a refreshed strategic direction, it was determined that the council needed Values that reminded staff and customers what the council stands for and the type of behaviours we want to promote across the organisation.



These Values have greatly influenced the development of the Customer Strategy as they relate to a culture that encourages our people to act ethically and create the right conditions for change and improvement.

In tandem with the other Corporate Strategies, the Customer Strategy has been created to support positive change in the council and those Values are a thread through many of the activities and actions in the strategy.

4. Operating Context

Looking ahead, 2023/24 to 2027/28 is expected to bring fundamental change to council services as we seek to transform council services to continue to meet customer needs, take advantage of opportunities, such as new technology, and bridge a funding gap of £47.6 million.

This strategy will help the organisation develop the capabilities and knowledge to transform the council for the future. The following factors reflect the challenges and opportunities that the council is likely to face and the strategy will address.

Societal Trends and Customer Needs

Customer service trends and customer expectations are likely to continue to evolve in the next five years. The norms of customer service will be influenced by wider societal trends and the innovations and market disruptions that occur in other sectors, in addition to the changing needs in our local area.

This will require the council to adapt services accordingly and at pace in order to continue to meet the most pressing needs and expectations of our service users and respond appropriately to any risks and opportunities.

The Customer Strategy will ensure that the council continues to prioritise customer needs in the development of service and transformation plans. The voice of the customer will be promoted in our decision-making and will be a key consideration in our approach to service improvement. Some of the expected trends that will impact upon the way that the council operates are outlined below:

Economic and Market factors

The financial context is challenging and will require changes that will fundamentally impact upon the future composition of council services and the services that are provided to customers in the next five years.

Economic and market factors will have to be closely monitored for the duration of this strategy, with steps taken to mitigate their impact on council services, where possible.

In anticipation of rising demand for key services the council will have to review and adapt service provision, in consultation with users and in response to the budget position.

Demographic Diversity

We serve a broad spectrum of people in growing and vibrant towns and the diversity of our service users, in all its forms, is ever increasing.

Every person who resides in or works in West Lothian will access or experience council services at some point in their daily life. It is vital to ensure that we design our services around the people that we serve. Reducing inequalities in society underpins a number of the strategic outcomes and objectives of the council. But, as a service provider, we also want to understand and address any barriers people may experience to accessing services and find out how we can better serve the whole community.

Technology, Automation and the Demand for Technical Skills

Digital services and on-demand transactions are becoming ever more present in all areas of society, with the pace of technology-enabled change in other sectors driving customer expectation about the way that public services can be accessed and delivered.

In the next five years, the council will need to maximise the use of proven technology by introducing systems and appropriately skilled staff to meet the changing demands of our customer base.

The demand for digital channels and flexible service provision across all market sectors accelerated during the Coronavirus pandemic. Previously resistant groups are now engaging and transacting via different channels, though some still prefer to utilise more traditional methods. The council will ensure that new technologies offer a positive experience for customers to help support them to transact digitally.

Automated customer services can also improve the speed and effectiveness of customer services. The council will have to undertake targeted work on the automation of internal processes and systems that can provide quick, reliable and robust outcomes for the customer.

Legislation and Regulation

Each council service has to be delivered and developed in line with the relevant legislative/regulatory frameworks and officers will have to ensure that future changes are considered and implemented timeously and with due consideration for the impact it may have on service users.

Changes in the legislation can impact upon the level of service that customers receive from councils and sometimes, the way that it will be provided.

Climate Change and Sustainability

The strategy will ensure that, where possible, green options are reviewed when procuring or sourcing new technologies and digital services.

The council will also review potential suppliers' use of renewable energy sources and commitment to reducing their carbon footprint.

5. Outcomes

The purpose of the Customer Strategy is to create a culture of outstanding customer service in the council, with a drive to improve the quality of customer experience and overall standard of service.

The strategy has four outcomes, that we will work to advance in the next five years.

The Council will monitor our success in the outcomes with appropriate performance indicators and targets set to encourage performance improvement.

Outcome 1

A culture that prioritises the customer

The council has a unique place in the lives of anyone who lives, works and learns in West Lothian.

The council will continue to put the customer at the centre of decision-making and prioritise the delivery of a positive customer experience by designing services with the customer in mind and put in place the culture and conditions that will support our staff to deliver positive outcomes for customers.

It is intended that this culture not only results in more satisfied customers and better outcomes for West Lothian but also, that our staff feel they are part of a purpose-driven organisation that is dedicated to improving lives.

In support of developing a positive culture that prioritises the customer, the council will:

- ▼ **Work with our customers:** the council will continue to invest in building a strong, collaborative relationship with our customers that is based on trust and understanding. The council will communicate more effectively our purpose, strategic priorities and ambitions (see [Action 1](#)) and will also continue to involve customers in the development of strategy and priority setting.
- ▼ **Know our customers:** we will improve our understanding of customer needs, utilising customer insights and research on trends, innovations and customer behaviours to inform decision making and change processes.
- ▼ **Match our culture to the strategy:** we will promote the values, behaviours and a WLC Way of Working that will support outstanding customer service. Through our People Strategy, the council will adapt our management and staff development approaches to prioritise customer orientation, with support and training resources that will improve skills and knowledge and result in improved levels of customer service.

- ▼ **Invest in customers:** we will prioritise our investment of council resources in the issues that matter most to customers, including staff, time and financial resources. This will support the council to find ways to protect and enhance services that are most impactful and important to the community.
- ▼ **Prioritise customer experience in our transformation approach:** we will co-create new services and service changes with our customers, using their input to review and improve the customer experience (see [Action 2](#)).
- ▼ **Measure success:** we will continue to make customer-centric results key metrics for assessing the performance and success of the council (see [Action 3](#)).

Performance will be monitored in this outcome through:

Key Output	Key Indicator	Target
Our customers are satisfied with the overall quality of service	Percentage of customers who rated the overall quality of the service as good or excellent*	WLC average of 85%
Our customers are satisfied with staff attitude	Percentage of customers who rated staff attitude as good or excellent*	WLC average of 85%
Our customers are satisfied with staff professionalism/ knowledge	Percentage of customers who rated staff professionalism/ knowledge as good or excellent*	WLC average of 85%
The council manages customer complaint levels	Number of complaints closed per 1,000 of population	20.5
Our staff feel that their role is making a positive impact on the community	Percentage employees who feel that, in their role, they are contributing to making West Lothian a better place to live, work and learn	WLC average of 85%

* The data for this indicator is collected at functional (WLAM) unit level

Outcome 2

Services are designed to meet customer needs

The period of this strategy will be one of substantial change in the council, as we work to reduce the cost of delivering services, whilst retaining the same council-wide focus on high quality service provision and innovation.

To ensure that we continue to address needs, the council will have to examine the value and impact of key council services from the perspective of the customer, which will require review of the different touchpoints and channels that customers will experience. We will also consider the views and inputs of staff, partners and suppliers in order to create a holistic and seamless design.

In order to ensure that our services are designed to meet the needs of customers, the council will:

- ▼ **Seamless customer service:** processes should be as simple as possible, with a focus on reducing steps and having clear ownership and accountability at every stage. The council will review key processes to remove barriers, reduce unnecessary steps and deliver seamless progression across different stages, from request through to fulfilment (see [Action 4](#)).
- ▼ **Retain local connection:** the council recognises that some of our customers prefer or need more traditional channels, such as face to face contact and telephone. The council will continue to provide choice to customers in the way that they access services, wherever possible.
- ▼ **Personalisation:** council services, such as schools, social care, housing and financial advice and support, are person-centred and tailored to meet individual needs. Personalisation recognises individuals will have different needs and preferences and it often empowers customers to make choices about the way that they receive services. In addition, the council extends choice and personalisation to other areas of provision, such as offering different access channels and communication methods.
- ▼ **Autonomy:** our staff will be supported and empowered to make appropriate decisions that will help them timeously resolve requests and enquiries to customers' satisfaction and remove barriers to access.
- ▼ **Anticipate needs and respond quickly to change:** the council will scan the external environment, identifying societal trends and innovations that may directly influence service user needs and expectations and identify how to respond to new opportunities. This will be led by a corporate board.

Performance will be monitored in this objective through:

Key Output	Key Indicator	Target
WLC resolve frontline enquiries at the first point of contact, where possible – Contact Centre	Percentage of Customer Service Centre enquiries resolved at first point of contact	90%
WLC resolve frontline enquiries at the first point of contact, where possible – frontline customer service offices	Percentage of Customer and Communities enquiries resolved at the first point of contact	75%
Our customers are satisfied with the timeliness of services	Percentage of customers who rated the timeliness of response as good or excellent*	WLC average of 85%
Our customers are satisfied with communication and the information provided during transactions	Percentage of customers who rated the services performance in keeping them informed as good or excellent*	WLC average of 85%

* The data for this indicator is collected at functional (WLAM) unit level

Outcome 3

Enhancing our digital offer

The council will continue to maintain local connections and access to council services via more traditional methods, where it is required. Much of council provision is delivered in a community setting and the council will continue to look for ways to strengthen our provision through the use of technology, where it can improve the service or increase our efficiency.

A key part of the council's approach to transformation is the expansion of digital innovation in our ways of working. As well as increasing flexibility and choice to customers, extending our use of technology and automation will help to make services more sustainable.

The council will investigate opportunities that will allow the organisation to harness the potential of technologies and improve customer experiences, including:

- ▼ **Digitising transactions and automation:** digital services can harness the power and convenience of the web to make interactions quicker, simpler and more secure for customers. The council will continue to identify processes that can be partly or wholly automated in order to increase flexibility and reduce costs (see [Action 5](#)).
- ▼ **Increasing customer empowerment through self-service and process automation:** the council will utilise technologies that allow customers the option to self-serve, via portals and webforms, as this is often a more convenient option for the service user. Customers can use self-service options to submit queries, request services or make payments without the time and cost of visiting an office or calling a contact centre.
- ▼ **Channel digitisation:** the council will consider its use of social media platforms during the period of this strategy (see [Action 6](#)), exploring opportunities to extend use in line with customer demand in order to increase our reach and improve the customer experience.
- ▼ **Developing digital skills and knowledge:** the council will identify skills gaps in respect to digital and technical skills and will build our capacity and knowledge in key areas of automation and service design.
- ▼ **Supporting customers to make the transition to digital services:** we will ensure our web services are easy to use in order to support those who want to transact this way to shift to online services.

Performance will be monitored in this outcome through:

Key Output	Key Indicator	Target
Increasing our use of technology	Number of customer-facing processes with improved digital access (per year)	10
Improving access to online services	Percentage of customers accessing the website as a percentage of West Lothian population	60%
Our customers are satisfied with digital channels	Percentage of customers who rated the web services as good or excellent*	85%
Implementation of the Service Design in the council, promoting customer focus in change processes	Improved Service Design Maturity (Service Design Maturity Assessment)	Level 4
Embedding the “digital mindset” in the council, ensuring our services are designed to meet customer needs	Improved Digital Maturity (Digital Maturity Assessment)	Level 3

* New indicator

Outcome 4

Improving the customer experience

Good customer experience requires understanding of what people need and value and requires the council to think about service provision from the customers' perspective. This means every stage, from how the customer accesses a service to make a request, to how the service communicates with the customer and through to delivery of the request. At each stage the customer should feel like their request is being handled with care and professionalism and importantly, that they are being listened to by the council.

There are many touch points in the council, where a customer can interact with different services across different channels. The council must identify the ways it can track that experience and how it can collect, analyse and share customer insights for action.

In order to improve the customer experience across all services, the council will:

- ▼ **Improve engagement and consultation:** the council will review our approach to consultation and engagement, ensuring that we focus on collecting data that offers better customer insight for target groups (see [Action 7](#)). This will include reviewing our utilisation of the Citizens Panel and how we can maximise participation.
- ▼ **Promoting the Voice of the Customer / Customer Experience:** we will use the learning from customers to inform investment decisions and improve internal systems of communication, staff development (see [Action 3](#)).
- ▼ **Increasing learning and knowledge:** we will analyse customer feedback, user behaviours, access data, undertake research and benchmarking and monitor trends and other datasets to identify potential improvements and innovations.
- ▼ **Customer participation in review:** we will review services and processes with the involvement of customers, using their views to improve services and performance (see [Action 2](#)).

Performance will be monitored in this outcome through:

Key Output	Key Indicator	Target
Customer satisfaction with experience	Percentage of customers who feel they had a positive experience**	WLC average of 85%
Customer satisfaction with experience	Percentage of customers who rated the service delivered as good or excellent *	WLC average of 90%
Customer participation	Percentage of services rated as good or excellent in our citizen inspection process	80%

Key Output	Key Indicator	Target
Maintaining a representative group of citizens for engagement and consultation	Number of engagement exercises per annum involving the Citizens Panel	3

* The data for this indicator is collected at functional (WLAM) unit level

** this indicator has been suggested by the Customer Champions – not currently measured by services

6. Performance and Transformation – Actions

The council will undertake a number of actions in support of the Corporate Plan, Budget Strategy and other Council strategies. We will focus on actions that will improve the customer experience, increase the efficiency and effectiveness of services and advance or use of technologies that will increase choice and/or reduce costs.

Key This action should have the following intended impact:



Improve services for customers



Improve performance and/or process efficiency








Reduce the cost of delivering our services



Increase the use of technology

Action	Description	Planned Outcome	Responsible Officer	Start	End	Links
Action 1 Developing the corporate identity and WLC brand	The council will develop a new brand and identity that helps customers and staff understand the purpose, vision and strategic priorities.	People feel connected with council and its purpose and vision. People understand the long-term strategic direction of the council and consequently, the prioritisation of resources.	Corporate Communications Manager	Jan-2024	Dec-2024	Outcome 1
Action 2 Extending the use of Service Design approach in council services	The council has adopted the Service Design approach to manage the review of service processes. This ensures that customer insight is integral to the change process and that re-designed services meet needs.	Improved customer experience and accessibility of council services.	Corporate Transformation Manager	Jan-2024	Mar-2028	Outcome 1, 2, 3 and 4

Action	Description	Planned Outcome	Responsible Officer	Start	End	Links
Action 3 Review of performance management information relating to the customer experience	Review of the current measures and collection methods used to capture customer satisfaction, increasing the relevance and usability of this management information.	Better prioritisation of customer results and data in the management system.	Improvement Manager	Jan-2024	Mar-2025	Outcome 1 and 4 
Action 4 Seamless customer services	The council will undertake a review of end-to-end customer journeys in key processes to improve the standard of customer service that is delivered. The council will review and reconfigure the customer service channels, utilising technology to improve the reach and engagement with customers.	A better customer journey in key processes, focusing on high volume transactions and the processes attracting higher levels of complaint/ dissatisfaction.	Depute Chief Executive (Corporate, Housing and Operational Services)	Jan-2024	Mar-2028	Outcome 2, 3 and 4 
Action 5 Increasing digital and automated processes	Digitisation of transactions, including back-end processes, can generate savings whilst maintaining and ultimately improving service quality.	Reducing unit cost and increasing staff productivity and customer convenience.	Depute Chief Executive (Corporate, Housing and Operational Services)	Jan-2024	Mar-2028	Outcome 3 

Action	Description	Planned Outcome	Responsible Officer	Start	End	Links
Action 6 Development of a social media plan	The council will review its usage of social media platforms, inline with external trends and changing customer requirements.	The council will operate in line with good practice, offering customers choice and flexibility in the way that they connect and transact with the council.	Corporate Communications Manager	Jan-2024	Mar-2025	Outcome 3  
Action 7 Review of the corporate approach to customer experience	Identifying ways to capture the customer experience of key council services and processes and utilising that information to improve service provision.	A better understanding of customers and improved services.	Customer and Communities Manager Improvement Manager	Jan-2024	Mar-2026	Outcome 4 