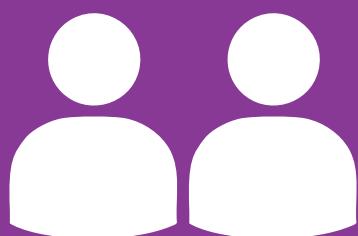




Customer Access Strategy

2026 - 2029



Introduction

Ipswich Borough Council defines customers as those who live, work, or visit the borough. We are committed to making it as simple and convenient as possible for our customers to get in touch with us in the way that works best for them.

The Council's previous Customer Access Strategy 2022-25 focused on strengthening customer relationships, improving the customer experience and increasing satisfaction through the following aims:

- Ensuring customers are at the centre of everything we do, with their requirements shaping the design and delivery of our services
- Ensuring our services are flexible and can adapt to the changing needs of our customers in the future
- Aiming to provide a consistent and high quality of service wherever and however customers interact with us
- Adopting a digital first approach

Positive progress has been made on delivering against these priorities. The Council has been committed to delivering a customer-centric approach with the introduction of new customer feedback channels, such as tenant focus groups and enhanced satisfaction surveys, to better understand and address customer needs.

The rebranded website delivers a consistent, user-friendly experience with improved content and search functionality. Further automation of services now means there is a total of 195 online services available for customers to self-serve 24/7, providing enhanced accessibility and convenience. Feedback from the new online satisfaction survey is actively reviewed and acted upon to ensure continuous improvements are made to the customer experience.

The Customer Service Centre has been supporting housing tenants to sign up for an online housing repairs account, enabling repairs to be reported at any time, night or day, as well as providing the ability to see a status update on the repair online. The portal for housing has been made more user friendly with simplification of password resets, the ability to leave feedback and ensuring wording is in plain English.

Customers requiring a face-to-face service have benefited from an increase in the opening hours for the Customer Service Centre, moving from two days a week to five days.



Customers have been at the core heart of discussions when identifying potential forthcoming changes with customer impacts. Through forward planning there has been a focus on pre-empting customer requirements and resource planning to accommodate peak demands across the year to enable the best possible service for those customers who need to contact us.

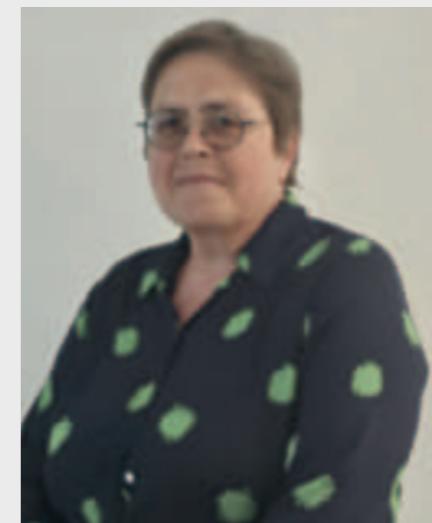
The key priorities from the Customer Access Strategy 2022 to 2025 strategy remain highly relevant, as the Council continues to engage with customers to design services that meet their needs while implementing improvements based on their feedback.

The new Customer Access Strategy 2026 to 2029 recognises that in the post-COVID landscape, emerging digital advancements offer significant opportunities for the Council, and it is understood that customers' preferences and behaviours in how they engage with us are evolving. To meet these changing needs, the Council are committed to embracing advancing digital technologies, accelerating service access and supporting the greater desire for flexibility in customers' busy lives. Whilst we are dedicated to leveraging technology to transform service delivery, making it simpler and more accessible for customers, we acknowledge that digital is not for everyone.

Improving our online offerings will help reduce the need for many to call us, which means that our phone lines will be freed up for those who prefer non-digital channels or have a more complex query.

The Customer Access Strategy 2026 to 2029 reflects our pledge to put our customers at the heart of everything we do. Despite increasing budget pressures, we will remain focused on listening to customer feedback and delivering services that meet their needs effectively and efficiently.

Councillor Jane Riley



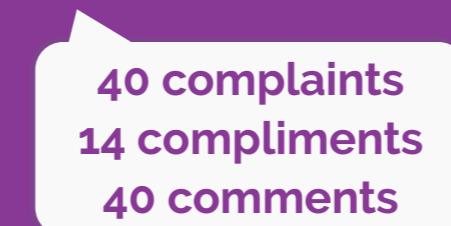
The current Customer experience



The volume of online interactions by customers each month



The number of My Ipswich portal sign-ups to date



The average number of customer compliments, complaints and comments received each month



The number of calls received to the Customer Contact Centre on average per year



96% of payment transactions are online/automated and 4% are telephone calls managed by advisors

Aims of this strategy



The 2026 to 2029 Customer Access Strategy focuses on the whole organisation, outlining how the Council will continue to transform service delivery; providing excellent service to customers and delivering value for money to the taxpayer.

The new **Customer Access Strategy 2026 to 2029** is built around five core aims:

- 1. Customers at the Heart of Everything We Do** - We design and deliver services shaped by customer feedback and needs, ensuring relevance, responsiveness, and high-quality outcomes.
- 2. Resolving Queries at First Point of Contact** - We strive to resolve queries promptly and effectively at the first point of contact, delivering a seamless and professional experience that reflects our commitment to service quality.
- 3. Flexible Services That Adapt to Changing Needs** - We provide enhanced access and availability to services 24/7, ensuring they remain inclusive, reliable, and responsive to evolving customer expectations.
- 4. Digital First Approach** - We offer intuitive, user-friendly digital services as the first choice – designed to meet high standards of accessibility, accuracy, and ease of use.
- 5. Maximising the Use of Technology** - We harness innovative technology to elevate the customer experience, improve service delivery, and maintain consistent quality across all channels.

► We will measure our customer experience and ensure customers are at the heart of everything we do, with customer feedback and requirements shaping the design and delivery of our services

We will ensure that we have effective engagement championing the needs of our customers as dedicated ambassadors. Feedback is vital to us and helps us to fully understand customer needs and desires, we will use the outcomes of engagement to design our services around our customers' needs. We will re-engineer processes to improve the customer experience, eliminating inefficiency and reducing costs through meaningful enhancements in service delivery.

► We will resolve queries at the first point of contact striving to promptly and effectively address as many queries as possible at the first port of contact

Our Customer Service Centre handles queries for fifteen service areas across the Council. To meet service demands efficiently we will promote and develop multi-skilled expertise. We will continue to collaborate across the Council to anticipate upcoming customer impacts and peaks in service, ensuring we are well-prepared to address queries with confidence and accuracy and resolve as many queries at first contact as possible.

► We will ensure that our services are flexible, adapting to the changing needs of our customers and providing more services online with availability 24/7

Our customers and their needs, preferences and behaviours are changing in the post-COVID landscape, emerging digital advancements offer significant opportunities for the Council, and we will evolve to meet these changing needs, accelerating service access and supporting the desire for flexibility.

Customer feedback plays a vital role in refining our online services, helping us pinpoint areas for enhancement. Alongside improving our current offerings, we remain committed to exploring new opportunities for automation, ensuring greater accessibility and convenience with 24/7 self-service options.

► We will offer a digital first approach

The continual development of technology means that we can explore additional methods for customer contact to improve accessibility and offer speedier assistance for common queries, freeing up our phone lines for those customers who need to speak to us.

As a result we are striving to provide a convenient digital first approach for those who do use digital through fast easy access to services. We will always ensure that our online services are user friendly, no matter what device our customers are using to access our services. We appreciate digital isn't for everyone, we will always ensure our services are accessible by other means; ensuring customers can still contact us by phone and where necessary a face-to-face appointment can be arranged.

► We will maximise the use of technology

Technology will be leveraged to optimise customer experiences by simplifying interactions, reducing access barriers and enabling quicker responses to frequently asked questions. This will allow staff to focus on complex or high-priority needs, enhancing the quality of service. By embracing technology, the Council will create a more efficient, accessible, and customer-centric environment while maintaining a focus on quality and satisfaction.

Delivering services based on our customers' needs

We will engage with customers to understand what they need, we will use what they tell us and the data we hold on their interactions with us to: -

- Define who our customers are and what they want
- Review our existing services so we fully understand the customer journey from the perspective of the customer
- Define our primary customer journeys – 35% of calls are based upon general frequently asked questions
- Consider how the Council needs to be organised to optimise and streamline these journeys and processes so that they require as little effort from the customer as possible to get what they want
- Provide customers with the support they need at the first point of contact
- Redesign services to make them simpler and easier for the customer to access
- Re- engineer processes to improve the customer experience and eliminate inefficiency and reduce costs

We will review our Customer Contact provision to: -

- Ensure systems are user friendly with the customer at the heart
- Maintain integration with redesigned services, supporting cross-channel communications and leveraging leading-edge IT
- Ensure the provision is sector leading through being multichannel, multi-disciplined and multi-tooled, with a focus on high quality
- Operate at optimal efficiency against a backdrop of the conflicting demands of a need to reduce costs whilst delivering an effective customer service



When customers contact us we will: -

- Listen to what they are saying
- Demonstrate empathy and understanding
- Respond quickly and accurately
- Be open and transparent about what we can deliver
- Take ownership of enquiries
- Provide the opportunity for feedback on the services delivered
- Provide a consistent high-quality customer experience, delivering first time resolutions with confidence

When things go wrong, we will: -

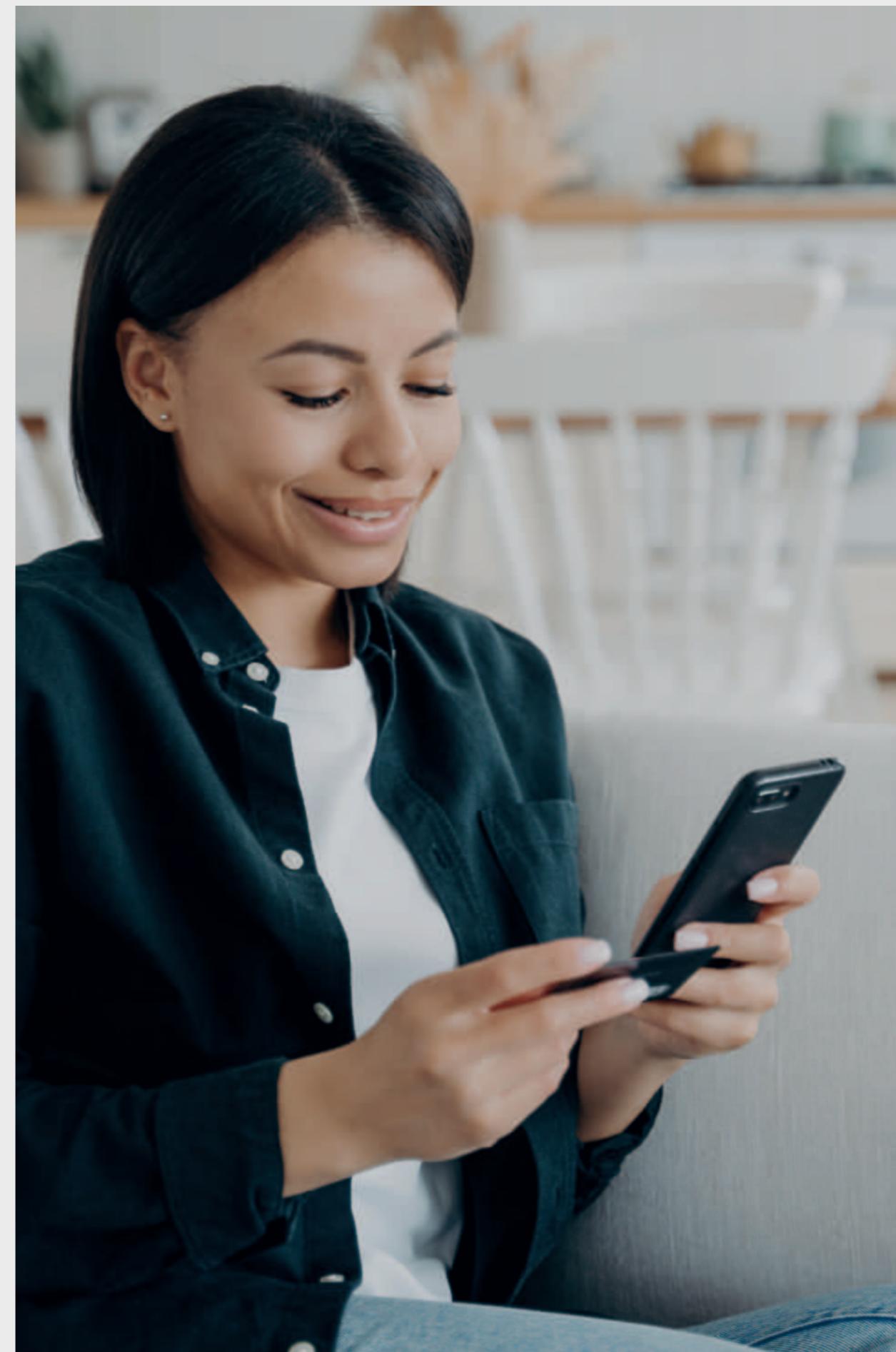
- Put things right where we can and apologise
- Learn lessons, identify the root cause of any complaint and make any required improvements to prevent a re-occurrence
- Track issues and measure the effect of improvements
- Where necessary review our approach to the management of complaints, adhering to the complaint handling code, in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's good practice guidance

Summary

To implement this strategy the Council must remain customer focused, placing customer needs and expectations at the core of our actions. A proactive, agile culture is essential to adapt to evolving community demands and leverage advancing digital technology effectively.

Collaboration, commitment, and a customer-centric approach are critical to achieving this vision. The Council is dedicated to integrity and transparency, valuing customer feedback as a vital tool for progress.

We encourage customers to share their thoughts via the Council's website to help refine our services. By embracing customer input and staying current with technological advancements, we aim to create a responsive, innovative, and customer-focused organisation that excels in service delivery.





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