

# Customer Access Strategy 2022-2026

# Contact Brent





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### Foreword

I am pleased to announce 'Contact Brent', Brent's new Customer Access Strategy.

The strategy sets out our commitment to enhancing the services we provide for our residents and customers.

Importantly, the Strategy provides clarity on the measures the Council is taking to ensure customer service excellence across the Council. In tandem with the Council's Digital Strategy, the Customer Access Strategy paves the way for a better Brent.

Everyone at Brent Council takes pride in the services we provide to the borough's customers and residents. However, we recognise that there is always room for improvement. Moreover, the Customer Access Strategy comes at a time when the Council expects heightened customer and resident demand, increasing the importance of the measures and commitments made in this document.

In addition to those who need to contact us regularly, there will be many people who will need the Council's support for the very first time.

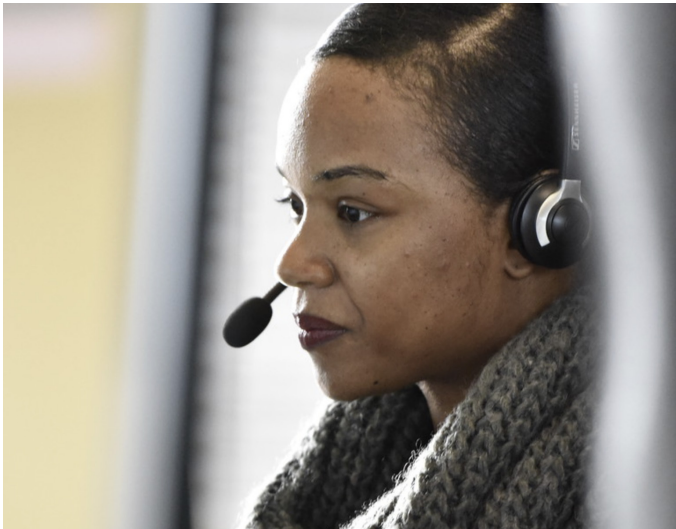
This Strategy sets out ambitious targets and provides a vision for how we will meet the needs of Brent citizens over the next four years. From financial assistance to refuse collection, the Council will work tirelessly to give you the support you need.

### Councillor Eleanor Southwood

Cabinet Member for Jobs,  
Economy & Citizen Experience



## The purpose of the Customer Access Strategy (CAS) is to provide clarity to all staff, residents and customers on the measures Brent Council is taking to ensure widespread excellent customer service.



At Brent, we put customers and residents first all the time, every time, striving for customer satisfaction. We aim to achieve this by ensuring that all services are:

- Easy to use and understand - This is of vital importance to online services, as simplifying processes can maximise the number of customers and residents that can be self-sufficient, freeing up staff to deal with customers and residents with complex needs. It is also key to staff-customer interactions, as jargon and complex language can confuse customers and residents leading to prolonged interactions, reducing the amount of customers and residents we can help.
- Flexible to the particular needs of each customer and accessible through all devices and channels - Staff should have the required knowledge, training and flexibility to go above and beyond for customers and residents, meaning all needs are catered for. Additionally, our services are digital by design – online will be the first choice for those who are able. Staff, and all those accessing our services, will be clear of the digital offer and services will be responsive. Moving customers and residents online reduces the demand on staff, freeing them up to help those who may not have a device or have more complex needs.

- Of the highest standard - Meeting customer and residents expectations and, when possible, resolving enquiries at the first point of contact in a timely manner is of the utmost importance. There is nothing more frustrating for a customer or resident than to leave without a resolution or no clear next step. Brent strives to resolve queries the first time a customer or resident contacts us, and where this is not possible, we will signpost to a trusted service that can support them.
- We want to emphasise that this strategy embodies a 'whole organisation' approach to delivering customer and resident services. Whether our staff interact with customers and residents on a daily-basis or intermittently, we want to hold our entire organisation to the same standard when it comes to delivering the services we offer. The customer experience is everybody's business. It is only by breaking down barriers and working together that we can meet the needs of every single customer and resident.

### Our Mission

This section outlines our initial plans to achieve our vision of customer service excellence. From infrastructure changes to achieving digital inclusion, we are doing all we can to constantly improve our customer service offer and experience.

### Digital Inclusion

More customers and residents are accessing everyday services online. Consequently, the Council's digital offer has become imperative to the satisfaction of the majority of our customers. Thus, we strive to make the online customer journey accessible, user-friendly and straightforward.

Our Digital Strategy 2022-26 is an important foundation for the Customer Access Strategy. We have set ambitious goals to transform into a digital Council by investing in our digital processes and improving residents' access to devices, information and services.

Today our customers and residents can benefit from an improved online self-service portal, called 'My Account', where users can access essential services such as housing, housing benefit and Council Tax

anytime, anywhere and through any device. The Brent 'My Account' has also simplified the customer journey, providing a single access-point for a range of services.

On the Brent website, visitors can interact with virtual agents (chat bots and web chats) which can instantaneously answer questions about Council services or connect them with the relevant information and forms.

However, we understand that not everyone can get online. We will continue to deliver vital services face-to-face to digitally excluded customers and residents. We will continue to improve the support we provide to customers and residents who cannot get online by investing in digital skills training (to support customers to confidently access services through digital means), increasing the number of Digital Champions at the Council (500 by 2025) and delivering face-to-face support at the Civic Centre, Family Wellbeing Centres and Brent Hubs.

### **Sustaining Face to Face Services – For Customers and Residents with Complex Needs**

The Council has a variety of face-face offers, each meeting a different need. Firstly, we have the Customer Service Centre, located in Brent Civic Centre. This is for customers and residents who need general advice, cannot resolve their issue online or need help with accessing a device.

Secondly, our Community Hubs provide a unique service within the Council. There are currently seven sites across the borough all providing tailored support for those with more complex needs, in addition to providing outreach work in their respective communities. The service is free and operates on a walk in basis, supporting customers and residents with housing enquiries, money and debt issues, digital literacy and employment opportunities. The Hubs work with a wide range of partners providing specialist legal and welfare advice. Therefore, in the rare case that the Council cannot directly support a customer, we will always point them in the direction of a trusted partner.

Lastly, our eight Family Wellbeing Centres (FWC) provide tailored support for families with a child under the age of 18 (or 25 with SEND). The FWC's provide much of the same services that Hubs provide, however, they specialise in supporting children meaning they are best placed to deal with families with complex needs. The FWC's can be

accessed on a walk-in basis or specific appointments can be booked via 'My Account'.

### **Service Innovation**

In order to maintain high-quality customer service, it is necessary to seek frequent improvements where possible. An important source of ideas for improvements is customer and resident feedback. Thus, we will implement an avenue for customers and residents to leave feedback that will fall out of the scope of formal complaints. This will allow customers and residents to leave positive or negative feedback, without going through the process of leaving a formal complaint. We are also exploring the possibility of having quick feedback options after phone, email and face-face interactions.

We frequently look for ways to improve the channels of communication that we have with residents and customers. This could be through phone, email, online or face-face. Streamlining these services results in us being able to help more customers, improving overall customer satisfaction. For example, we recently implemented improvements to our interactive voice response (IVR) system. The IVR system allows residents calling the Council to access popular and important information via pre-recorded messages, which may resolve their enquiry without speaking to an officer. It also enables customers and residents to utilise menu options via touch-tone keypad selection or speech recognition to have their call routed to specific departments or specialists, simplifying the navigation process. All of these innovations are implemented with the goal of freeing up more staff to deal with your enquiries.



## Ensuring Accessibility

We want Brent to be a place of diversity, equality and inclusion for all. In order to meet the needs of every single customer and resident, it is crucial that our services are accessible for all, no matter their circumstances. We will ensure that all of our services adhere to the Accessible Information Standard, through service flexibility and staff training.

Neurodivergent people make up approximately 15-20% of the UK population, representing a significant proportion of existing staff, job applicants, customers and residents. In order to create a neuro-inclusive environment, we will equip our staff with the training to effectively support neurodivergent customers and residents.

Physical space is also key to ensuring accessibility. As such, we are in the process of redesigning our Customer Service Centre in the Civic Centre. We strive to ensure that all customer and resident-serving buildings are accessible to all.

### Help Us to Help You

To make sure that we can provide customers and residents with the best service possible, as part of the Brent Promise, we have set out the following expectations for our customers and residents:

- Work with us to get the information required to help you.
- Let us know if you have any specific needs.
- Treat Council staff courteously and with respect.
- Ask us if you are unsure, or we are not as clear as we can be.
- Tell us if you have been having problems so that we can resolve them together.



## What Customers and Residents Can Expect From Us

This section sets out the response times that customers and residents can expect depending on the channel of communication. These timeframes need to be clearly communicated to customers and residents after their initial enquiry to reduce failure demand. It also outlines what customers and residents can expect from Council staff.

### Digital:

- Ensure automated online forms are used more widely for all service areas.
- Increase the number of 'My Account' users to maximise self-sufficiency and reduce demand on staff.
- Increase total number of payment transactions online, reducing the number of cheques and cash payments.

### Phones:

- Exceed the target to answer 90% of phone calls within 5 minutes, and aim to answer all phone calls within 5 minutes
- Reduce waiting times on the phones (measure average times/set benchmark based on this)
- Respond to voicemails and messages within 1 working day
- Make our online offer more accessible resulting in 25% less telephone calls by 2026 (507,879 calls received or less).

## Written Correspondence:

- Acknowledge all emails and letters within 24 hours, and inform you about the estimated time in which your query can be resolved
- Respond to written enquiries (by email or post) within 10 working days or sooner where possible, or let you know if resolving your query will take longer giving the reasons why
- Investigate and respond to stage 1 corporate complaints within 20 working days
- Investigate and respond to stage 2 corporate complaints within 30 working days

## Face-to-Face:

- Welcome you at any of our customer and resident-serving buildings within 10 minutes of arrival.
- Ensure your enquiry is resolved in a timely manner and you are frequently updated if anything changes or there is an unexpected delay.

## Customer and resident satisfaction:

- Introduce a customer and resident satisfaction score for all of our services.
- Exceed an 80% customer and resident satisfaction score for Customer Services.
- Make sure that 100% of our services are accessible online.



- We will resolve as many enquiries as possible at the first point of contact. When this cannot be done, we will direct you to known support or a trusted partner.
- Record the number of queries resolved at the first point of contact within all areas of the Council, with a target of resolving 90% of queries at the first point of contact.
- Enable all customers and residents the ability to provide feedback on our services and processes via automated email or follow up text.



## Staff:

- All staff to attend an awareness raising session about the Brent Promise, which will highlight the expectations of all staff members.
- All new staff to undertake customer service training within their first 6 months at Brent, equipping all colleagues with the skills to confidently resolve customer and resident enquiries.

