

Herefordshire Public Services

Customer Strategy 2009-2011

Putting the citizens of Herefordshire at the heart of everything we do.



Working in partnership for the people of Herefordshire



1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Herefordshire Public Services, the partnership between Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire, is committed to deliver efficient, excellent services and improved outcomes for the citizens of, and visitors to the county.

There are four key commitments for Herefordshire Public Services:

1. Improved outcomes for local people.
2. Excellence in service delivery.
3. Focus on customers' experience.
4. Being efficient and delivering value for money.

In order to meet these commitments, we must put customers at the forefront of all we do – constantly. We therefore need a framework for improvement, which sets out the specific direction for the development of all opportunities for customer contact.

1.2 Across Herefordshire Public Services there are currently many activities, projects and plans that are aimed at improving customer contact in one form or another. These activities are not always coordinated and therefore limited strategic benefit has been gained from them to date. This strategy aims to deliver benefits to the customer and the organisations involved in Herefordshire Public Services. It based on best practice found in the public and private sectors and is designed to take advantage of the local opportunities presented by Herefordshire Public Services.

1.3 It is important to note, however, that Herefordshire Public Services is a partnership and it continues to be two separate organisations with respective governance processes and accountability. This strategy is therefore flexible enough to account for:

- Existing initiatives within either organization should not be replicated or forced into alignment;
- Either organisation may be moving at different speeds in some areas;
- Differing organisation priorities mandated by central government.

2.0 CURRENT PROVISION

- 2.1 Herefordshire Public Services customer services and citizen engagement activities are well established through a variety of mechanisms that exist within either organisation.
- 2.2 NHS Herefordshire is the local National Health Service organisation that plans, provides and purchases health services for people registered with a Herefordshire GP. We are also responsible for improving public health.

Non-clinical customer contacts form a small, but essential part of the overall responsibilities of the PCT. These are managed through *The Involving People Team* – which is a small team, working across health and social care to support the involvement of local people when services are being planned, changed or developed. The *Patient Advice & Liaison Services (PALS)* – is a service for individuals who wish to raise concerns, access support to resolve issues or to provide feedback on their experiences of health services within the county.

- 2.3 Herefordshire Council is responsible for many key services including children and young people's services, highways and planning, adult social care and economic regeneration. As a unitary authority we also manage a large number of additional services – including council tax collection and domestic refuse collection.

Many of these services are provided through dedicated front-office teams. These are currently located in five 'Info shops', which can be found in the surrounding market towns. A larger centre is located within the city of Hereford itself. These are also supplemented by a well-established 'Info by Phone' service. Many council services are also provided online and through multi-agency websites.

3.0 THE CURRENT AGENDA FOR PUBLIC SECTOR CUSTOMERS

- 3.1 The current national economic climate will inevitably affect public sector service provision over the forthcoming period. Future financial settlements will determine the need to make efficiencies across our partnership. Achieving a customer focus across the public sector is one of the fundamental requirements of the modernising government agenda and so making sure that citizens and businesses come first is important.

“Public services should respond to users' needs and shouldn't be arranged for the provider's convenience”

(Department of Communities and Local Government, 2009)

- 3.2 The NHS Act (2006) stated that “each relevant English body must make arrangements, as respects health services for which it is responsible, which secure that users of those services are, whether directly or through representatives, involved (whether by being consulted or provided with information, or in other ways) in the planning of the provision of those services, the development and consideration of proposals for changes in the way those services are provided, and decisions to be made by that body affecting the operation of those services”.
- 3.3 The Service Transformation Agreement (2007) set out The Treasury's vision to re-design public services around the needs of customers. Public services should be tailored to the needs of people and businesses and less to the structures of public service organisations. Public services should be delivered in ways that meet the expectations of citizens and businesses. We should get services 'right first time', so that people do not have to initiate contact for each service that they require. Through integration and closer co-operation people should no longer expect people to 'join up' public services - this should be done for them.
- 3.4 Furthermore, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) said that local authorities and their partners should “manage knowledge and undertake robust and regular needs assessments that establish a full understanding of current and future local health needs and requirements”
- 3.5 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act came into effect on 1 April 2009. It imposes a duty on all local authorities and best value authorities to involve local representatives in many areas of public service delivery.
- 3.6 The NHS constitution was published in January 2009. As well as stating the purpose, principles and values of the NHS, the constitution includes a number of rights, pledges and responsibilities for staff and patients. These rights and responsibilities, such as expected waiting

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times for services, quality commitments etc, are the result of extensive discussions and consultations with staff, patients and public, and it reflects what matters to them.

- 3.7 There is an expectation within the Comprehensive Area Assessment process for local authorities and their partners to know and understand all of the customers who use their services. They should know and understand customers and what services they need or require. Similarly, World Class Commissioning organisations are not only expected to understand their customer requirements, they should also develop regular engagement and dialogue, in order that they should be at the centre of customer-led service provision.
- 3.8 It is also true that services should also be better for employees. Front line public sector staff – not just those in front line offices but those answering calls in contact centres and developing services for the web should have a strong culture of service. These employees have a significant contribution to make regarding the design and delivery of front line services. It is therefore crucial to use this knowledge and expertise whenever services require re-designing.
- 3.9 So, a key aim of service transformation within the public sector is to reduce the unnecessary contacts that people need to have with our organisations. Achieving this will require innovation in the delivery and design of services. More widely, the relationships between public, private and third sectors will need to be reviewed through initiatives such as the ‘Total Place’ approach.
- 3.10 A people-centered, responsive culture will make sure that our organisations are locally accountable and shaped by the people who use it. We will then be able to:
 - Establish new ways of working
 - Forge new relationships both internally and externally
 - Ensure that user involvement is moved from the margins into the mainstream of our organisations – in relation to the planning, design and commissioning of services.
 - Focus on personalisation

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3.11 Therefore, if services are to be 'better for customers' they should be more streamlined and offer choice, be more accessible and convenient. Customers should find whenever they deal with public sector organisations each contact is easy and joined-up. In this way each contact will fulfil a need, add value and will be trusted.

4.0 The Herefordshire Public Services Customer Strategy

The HPS strategy has 4 key aims:

- 4.1 **Informed Services:** By better use of the wealth of customer-related information we already have, we will develop a comprehensive, evidence-based picture of the people we serve. This picture will be easy to understand and meaningful to everyone. It will also enable services to be designed and delivered in a way that will reflect the different communities who live and work across the county of Herefordshire.
- 4.2 **Accessible Services:** Modernising our customer-facing services will mean more integration across the whole public sector as well as within our own organisations. We will make it easy for citizens to access services, or find the information they require – designing services on customer needs, not service structure. These improvements will be built on an effective, efficient and integrated customer relation management system. We will establish tests of quality in all our contracts or service level agreements, establishing clear standards of service delivery. We will ensure that our employees have the appropriate skills, knowledge and authority to deliver quality services directly to our customers. We will also ensure fair access to services across the County taking into consideration rural isolation and other barriers to accessing services
- 4.3 **Listening Services:** Through regular, systematic and co-ordinated consultation and engagement with current and potential users, we will learn what our citizens need and want from their public services. Customer consultation, complaints and other ‘post contact’ feedback are a very important, sensitive and valuable source of learning. The current provision of these feedback opportunities will be brought together and streamlined as we strive to improve the quality of our customer contact.
- 4.4 **Trusted Services:** Together, Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire play a crucial role within communities fostering a sense of place and wellbeing. We will treat customers equally and fairly at all times. Through effective listening, engagement and open communication, we will strive to become trusted by citizens and business alike.

Aim 1: Informed Services – Use all available customer-related information to build a meaningful picture of the people who use our services.

Modern public services are required to demonstrate that they understand their communities - service delivery, design and commissioning decisions should be based on sound knowledge and evidence. By identifying current needs and anticipating future trends, we will ensure that current and future services address and respond to the needs of the whole population - especially those whose needs are greatest. Although Joint Strategic Needs Assessment will be important part of our intelligence, we will need to use a broader range of information and knowledge, which reflects all of our customers.

We will:

- Bring together intelligence from the many different sources across Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire to enable more effective, efficient utilisation of the data to support intelligent service delivery.
- Develop a detailed and joint strategic picture of different customer needs and wants that will influence service provision across the county.
- Develop a standardised picture of Herefordshire residents, using customer segmentation techniques. This will be an essential tool in service planning design and provide a common language for all service providers.
- Establish a unified geographic footprint of the localities within Herefordshire – removing differing locality boundaries for Health, Social Care and all other public services, wherever possible.

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Aim 2: Accessible Services – Delivered at a time and in a way that is convenient to our customers. Reliable, flexible and responsive services, which are continuously improved and provide value for money.

The convenience, accessibility and quality of customer service provided through Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire’s front line services will be important factors in satisfying customer needs. In order to do this, we will deliver services that are efficient and effective – based on a culture of continuous improvement.

Providing choice and convenience for all our customers is an important priority for us. We will provide the right services for the right people at the right times.

The need to provide value for money whilst maintaining appropriate quality of service is paramount. Through integration of information systems we will reduce the need for citizens to repeatedly provide personal information and therefore reduce unavoidable contact with our organisations.

We also need to ensure that all our employees are providing the highest levels of service and will therefore need to continue to develop and implement effective training programmes in relation to customer service standards. As we develop our role as commissioners, and third party organisations become more involved in the delivery of services, there will be an increasing need to develop the skills of those employees who manage relationships.

As we commission more of our services from third-party organisations, we will ensure the quality of services through a detailed governance framework, which requires all public service providers to meet minimum, world-class standards of service.

We will:

- Develop information and signposting to services based on the “key life events” principle, making information about services meaningful to all services users
- Offer a choice of access channels (in person, by telephone, internet based, written, self serve, third party organisations) to all service users, enabling convenient access to whatever services they need.
- Continue to transform service delivery across all areas of NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council. Transferring functions away from the back and to the front office, wherever appropriate.

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- Using a 'One Stop' approach, we will continue to develop integrated front offices for services provided by Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire. Wherever possible, we will develop opportunities to work with other partners and will continue to lead the development of the "Herefordshire Centre" on the Edgar Street Grid.
- Treat customers equitably and fairly at all times.
- Improved liaison between the front and back office functions and will create a framework and environment in which the customer service function will lead constructive partnerships with all areas of the Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire. At the core of this framework will be continuous improvement of service provision.
- Review the services currently provided through the front office and improve them wherever we can.
- With our partners, develop the "Herefordshire Signposting Service", making this nationally recognised project even more effective.
- Develop customer charter that will empower Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire employees in order to provide the highest levels of customer service.
- Develop a comprehensive quality framework, which all commissioners will use to ensure that the appropriate standards of service are attained from all provider organisations.
- Work across Herefordshire Public Services and with external organisations specifically to break down barriers to accessing services.

Aim 3: Listening Services: Engage with customers to enable regular and meaningful dialogue.

Public sector organisations have a duty to involve and engage with the public regarding the delivery, design and changes to services.

The experiences that patients and citizens have when they encounter public services are important measures of the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery. It is important, therefore, that we monitor these experiences and use what we learn to improve wherever we can.

Also, by understanding how our customers use services and what kind of services they need and want, we will ensure that our citizens have the quality and choice of services that they expect.

Employees in all parts of our organisations need to be clear about what involvement means, have a shared understanding of its purpose and be clear about the difference between working for and working with our citizens.

Local knowledge of the community is essential, as is understanding the way different groups like to communicate. Some people will prefer direct contact with the council and PCT, either face-to-face or over the phone. Others may prefer to engage with us through modern media such as the web, text messaging and blogs. Some may need very directly targeted engagement because of disability; culture, language or other issues.

The value of post-contact feedback is enormous, as customers can often have a very different picture of their local services at such times. It is important to capture these views at a time and in a manner, which is effective to both the customer and the organisation.

When things go wrong people want to be able to complain effectively and for their issue to be resolved quickly and fairly. There should be a consistent approach to the management of complaints, compliments and other post-contact feedback across Herefordshire Public Services.

We will:

- Develop a systematic and integrated approach across NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council to obtaining feedback from customers.
- Have effective and co-ordinated engagement processes at appropriate levels across the county, enabling the service users to access decision makers and have meaningful, effective dialogue.

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- Use all appropriate methods of engagement, including social media, in order that we can develop meaningful, regular and joined up engagement with all sections of Herefordshire society.
- Develop an integrated Customer Insight Team, who will provide a Corporate Service across Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire managing customer feedback.
- Provide an effective means for customers to make positive suggestions about how services could be improved in the future and to provide an effective means for a customer to compliment a service or employee.
- Develop effective means for customers and their representatives to complain if they are dissatisfied with the service they receive
- Ensure complaints and suggestions are dealt with in a courteous and efficient manner and are resolved or feedback without avoidable delay.
- Train our employees to have proactive listening and communication skills to address the needs of all relevant stakeholders, including using third sector and community partners to seek and engage the voice of those who are seldom heard.

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Aim 4: Trusted Services: Developing and maintaining the reputation of Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire within the county and beyond.

Despite increases in funding for the public sector over the past decade some public services continue to be regarded as ineffective by their local communities. An important part of the relationship that public services have with the people they service is the need to improve their reputation and build trust among their residents. Public services that have a good reputation help local residents find a sense of place and wellbeing, it is therefore important to be seen as leaders in the community, facilitating and developing this sense of place.

Where people distrust local public services, this can be the result of ineffective communication with them.

NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire council will lead and steer the public service agenda in our community. We will be the natural first stop for local political and community leaders and through partnership we will seek to stimulate discussion on wider community matters.

We will:

- Develop a pro-active approach to reputation management issues across Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire.
- Have well-developed contingency plans regarding the management of incidents which will lead to a deterioration of reputation for either NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council
- A 'customer-friendly' approach to communicating information about public services, which entails structuring information in terms of what makes sense to the resident, customer or patient, rather than to the organisation.
- Promote our own employees, elected members and service contractors in order to foster a better understanding of services and how they can work together to benefit residents, customers and patients.
- Promote to the professional media, to government and to other local authorities and trusts, that Herefordshire has an innovative approach to customer services and is in the forefront of structuring information around customer needs.
- Have clear communications policy and ability to respond to individual, organisational and media enquiries regarding Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire.

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1	Informed		
	What Does It Mean?	What We Will Deliver	When and by who
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Customers' needs should be understood in depth. ▪ HPS managers should know and understand their customers in detail ▪ There should be a common picture of the customers across public service boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved use and reporting of information relating to customers to HPS managers. ▪ A segmented picture of typical service user types at locality level across the county of Herefordshire. ▪ A single view of Health and Local Government locality boundaries ▪ Regular Customer insight analysis and reporting ▪ Key life events mapping (Signposting scheme project) ▪ "Circles of Need" maps for key customer types (Signposting scheme project) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council Research team (March 2010) Council Research team (March 2011) Public Health/ Research team (March 2011) Head of customer Services/Customer Insight Unit (March 2010) Head of Customer Services (March 2010) Head of Customer Services (March 2010)

2	Accessible		
	What Does It Mean?	What We Will Deliver	When and by who
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Customers should be offered choice of access through multiple access channels to allow them to seek information, guidance or service delivery. ▪ HPS should have integrated contact points wherever possible and appropriate ▪ Services should be shaped and integrated so that they can be delivered responsively, with a minimum of barriers, accurately and cost effectively ▪ Services should be effective and efficient in terms of quality cost and delivery. ▪ Services should continually review practices and technological requirements to improve value for money ▪ Efficient quality services appropriate to our citizen's requirements. ▪ A customer focused culture should be embedded across Herefordshire Public Services 	Option appraisal of current Customer Relationship Management System	Head of Customer Services/Head of ICT (Nov 2009)
		Further integration of HPS front and back office ICT systems.	Connects Programme (2011)
		Further HPS integrated front office facilities (Ross, Ledbury)	2010-2011
		Integrated public sector wide front office (Hereford Centre)	Director of Regeneration (2011)
		Web Strategy - Improved access through a choice of one-stop access channels. Emphasising self-serve and electronic access.	Web and Knowledge Manager (tbd)
		Review and revise NI14 Action Plan	Head of Customer Services (Nov 2009)
		Develop and publish a Customer Service Charter	Head of Customer Services (Dec 2009)

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	Review of current services provided through front office	Head of customer Services (Summer 2010)
	Quality framework for all commissioners	Director of Clinical Leadership and Quality
	Herefordshire Signposting Service Project	Head of customer Services (March 2010)

3 Listening		
What Does It Mean?	What We Will Deliver	When and by who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Services should ascertain feedback from customer contact wherever possible ▪ A standard approach to service-level feedback should be implemented across HPS ▪ There should be a single integrated complaints policy for HPS. ▪ An integrated approach to customer feedback should be adopted. ▪ Community engagement activities should be fit for purpose ▪ We should meet our obligations regarding the Duty to involve and other engagement requirements 	Forward plan of engagement activities across HPS	Head of Customer Experience/ Herefordshire Partnership Manager (tbd)
	<p>Programme of engagement opportunities – meeting the preferences of all sections of the community</p> <p>Range of engagement mechanisms – including social media</p>	Head of customer Experience/ Herefordshire Partnership Manager (tbd)
	HPS Customer Insight unit	Head of Customer Services (Jan 2010)
	HPS Customer Insight policy	Head of Customer Services (Jan 2010)
	System to feed customer experience information/data into the commissioning process	Head of Customer Experience (tbd)
	Publish customer experience information/ data to HPS managers	

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	A process for feedback, evaluation and review should be built into the planning of any engagement activities	Head of customer Experience/ Herefordshire Partnership Manager (tbd)
	Regular feedback to the public the improvements they have influenced as a result of their engagement	Head of Communications (March 2010)

4	Trusted		
	What Does It Mean?	What We Will Deliver	When and by who
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪HPS has a positive reputation for leading public services within the country. ▪HPS has a national reputation for leading public services ▪HPS is seen as a value for money organisation 	Qualitative research into the causes of negative views of Herefordshire public services.	Director of Environment and Culture/ Head of Communications (Oct 2009)
		HPS communications strategy	Head of Communications (tbd)
		A resident's guide, based on the 'Key Life Principle.	Head of Communications (March 2010)
		Contingency plan to address adverse publicity	Head of Communications (March 2010)