



The Coal
Authority



Customer plan 2023 to 2026





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Who we are

The Coal Authority exists to manage the legacy from Great Britain's coal mining past. So much of our 3 nation's history has been shaped by the natural minerals under our soil. None more than coal, which has provided heat, steam and power for hundreds and hundreds of years.

Coal was nationalised in 1947, which is why the UK Government own the majority of underground workings and remaining coal reserves under England, Scotland and Wales, along with the responsibility for many of the associated challenges and hazards.

As domestic coal mining has reduced, and humanity recognises the impacts of burning carbon on our climate, we are seeking alternative ways to maximise low carbon opportunities from closed and abandoned mines such as mine water heat networks. These can provide heat for homes and businesses, across communities whose identity was shaped by coal, while also supporting decarbonisation and levelling up outcomes for communities who could now benefit from low

carbon, social and economic benefits from the warm water in the historic mining assets.

We work with partners, communities and customers to listen, learn and take practical action to support them to create safer, cleaner and greener communities.

We are a 24/7 emergency response organisation, with staff across Great Britain ready to respond and take action to keep people safe and provide peace of mind.

Extensive coalfields exist across Great Britain and it is estimated that 25% of homes and businesses are located above former coal mines. The vast majority of people will never experience any problems from that, but for those who do we are here to provide support and expertise.

The Coal Authority is a non-departmental public body and partner organisation of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. You can read more about us [here](#).





Foreword



Richard Bond
Innovation and
Engagement Director



Bev Smith
Non-Executive
Director

We are pleased to share our Customer Plan for 2023–2026. This builds on the considerable work we have undertaken since the publication of our first Customer Strategy in 2019. It expands our commitment to deliver for the communities we serve in our Business Plan.

The Coal Authority are a practical operational organisation and focus on using our technical expertise and professionalism to keep coalfield communities and environments safe. Listening to our customers and working with partners helps shape how we deliver our mission to ‘make a better future for people and the environment in mining areas’.

Since our original Customer Strategy, the world has changed significantly with more emphasis on using technology and ease of communication. Our plan reflects this. At the Coal Authority we have been developing our “Fit for the Future” programme, using customer feedback to improve our digital services whilst being aware that some customers prefer traditional channels.

Our work with partners such as the Institute of Customer Services has given us greater insight into the needs of our customers. It has also

allowed us to benchmark ourselves against similar bodies. This insight has helped build our plan so we can make changes that will make the best difference for our customers within the framework of responsible use of public money and relevant legislation.

Over the next 3 years, we will continue to learn more about our customers through engagement and adopt external best practice where appropriate. We recognise that every customer is unique and will consider accessibility and inclusivity needs in our thinking and development.

We recognise the importance of our assets and information to coalfield communities. We will continue to work with others to support levelling up and look at ways to help regeneration of coalfield communities.

Our people remain at the heart of delivering this plan. We will always aim to deliver our services effectively and with empathy. We are committed to continuing to invest in our people to develop customer service skills and understanding across the organisation.

Links:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1100396/Coal_Authority_Business_Plan_2022_to_2025.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coal-authority-customer-strategy-2019-to-2023/coal-authority-customer-strategy-2019-to-2023>



Business Plan



Customer Strategy Plan



Our mission, purpose and values



Our values

Trusted:

- we act with integrity
- we are open and transparent
- we deliver on our commitments

Inclusive:

- we promote a culture of mutual respect
- we recognise that our differences make us stronger
- we work with others to achieve our mission

Progressive:

- we are open minded and innovative
- we recognise that the past can help us shape the future
- listen and learn

Our customer priorities

We want to provide simple and straight forward engagement for all customers. We can only do this by working as ‘One Coal Authority’, working together effectively so that the customer receives a positive and consistent customer experience. We will continue to concentrate on 3 key priorities with a focus on Accessibility & Inclusion across all aspects of our customer delivery.

How our customer priorities relate to our business plan

To be successful in every aspect of our work, it is essential for us to consider our customers. It is a key theme in our 2022-25 business plan and is embedded in our 10 year vision.

This three-year plan builds on the work we’ve already undertaken since our 2019 Customer Plan and reflects the changing needs and expectations of customers post-pandemic.

Customer Culture

We will continue to put customers at the heart of our culture. We will share examples of best practice across the organisation and use our assets to create more opportunities to benefit the communities we serve.

Digital Integration

Our “Fit for the Future Programme” will create more opportunities for customers to communicate with us digitally and will give them more opportunities to self-serve. We will continue to streamline and modernise our processes to improve our customer service experience.

Customer Experience

We will build on our learning from the first strategy and continue to use customer feedback to improve our customer experience.

Accessibility and Inclusion

We will ensure we continue to prioritise issues of accessibility and inclusion when working with customers. This might mean developing more than one solution.

Customer culture



Everyone in our organisation plays a key role in helping us to deliver on our customer plan and continuing to develop a culture focusing on customer understanding.

Our people have a wide range of skills which support the breadth of operational work we do. We listen to our customers and aim to do what we say we will do. Over the past 3 years, we have increased our community and customer focus across the organisation and will now build on this.

Empathy

We seek to have empathy with our customers and to really understand the help they need. We will use feedback to improve our understanding of situations and work to be as reflective of these as we can.

Diversity and Wellbeing

Our Business Plan's great place to work theme highlights the importance of safety, wellbeing and inclusion. We have developed three plans Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan; Anti-racism Plan, and Health, Safety and Wellbeing Plan to help our people understand what this means both for them and our customers. You can use the QR codes to see these plans.

Links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coal-authority-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2021-2024>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coal-authority-antiracism-plan-2022-to-2025/coal-authority-antiracism-plan-2022-to-2025>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coal-authority-health-safety-and-wellbeing-plan-2022-to-2025/coal-authority-health-safety-and-wellbeing-plan-2022-to-2025>



Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy



Antiracism Plan



Health, Safety & Wellbeing Plan

Training

To promote our customer culture we deliver customer support training for all new starters and refresher training for all our people. We will continue to develop this based on customer feedback and experience. We will also make our communications easier to understand by using plain English.

Collaborative Working

We will continue to build on existing relationships and build new ones with external partners and stakeholders. We'll operate as "One Coal Authority" and recognise the importance of internal customer work to improve the service we can provide to everyone

By 2026 we will:

- Evolve our customer service training for new starters and provide regular refresher training to help our teams adapt to best practise and changing customer circumstances
- Use customer feedback from across the organisation to help our people understand the difference they make and highlight areas for continued improvement
- Embed our “One Coal Authority” approach to make customer journeys as simple as possible
- Adopt Plain English as standard in all our communications



Streamlining our customer correspondence journey

Historically, customer correspondence was dealt with by various teams, which could lead to inefficiency and differing approaches and styles across the organisation.

In 2021, we created a specialised correspondence team to streamline and manage a consistent approach to our written customer communications.

The team have developed a modern Coal Authority correspondence tone and style, reflective of our values and have trained this across the organisation.

The team have also established response deadlines and track progress of customer correspondence against these.

This new way of working means we can provide clearer, timely responses to customer requests and can easily monitor our correspondence service levels across the organisation.





Digital integration

Our digital infrastructure is essential to **delivering services for our customers. It enables our people to meet the range of customer needs and expectations in the most efficient ways.**

We are already using customer feedback to design easier ways for our customers to access our information, data and services. We will continue to ensure our systems are accessible and create more opportunities for customers to self-serve in an increasingly IT proficient world.

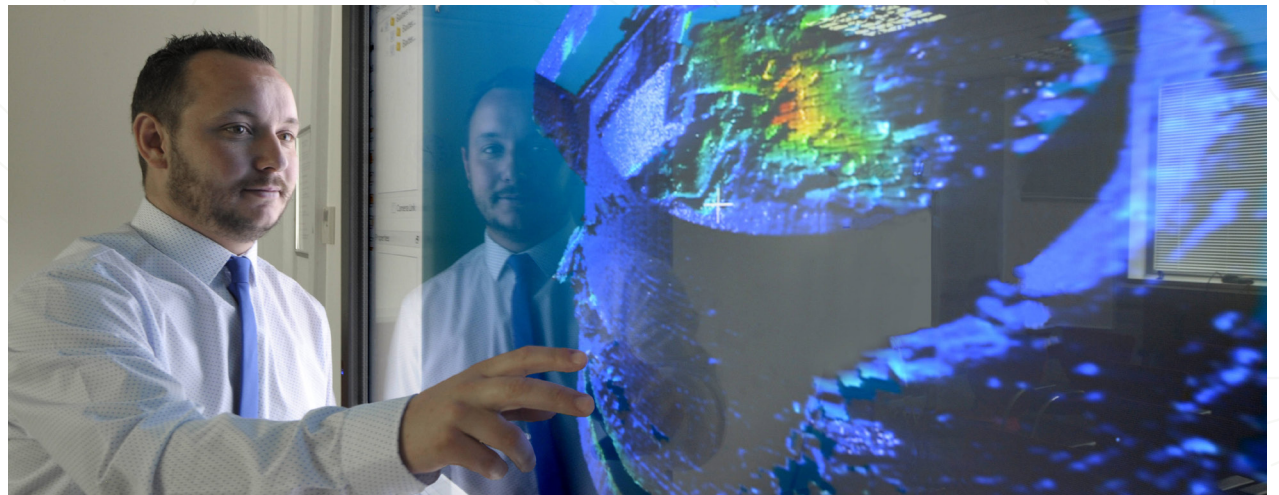
At the same time we recognise some customers may not use digital technology and will continue to provide traditional ways to reach us.

We will work with others to review processes to make them as simple and effective as we can.

We will listen and make improvements across our customer experience wherever we can, making it as easy as possible to contact and to work with us.

By October 2026 we will:

- We will make our digital services and information more accessible, relevant and with increased self-serve options – 100% of services will be digital by default and 100% of our new transactional systems will follow GOV.UK service and design standards
- We will make demonstrable progress on implementing systems that allow simpler, improved collaboration within the organisation and with partners
- Better track and report on customer information to help us provide better service
- Keep communities more informed of our work using relevant systems and approaches such as our Community Website





Using customer feedback to inform system design

In 2022-23 we issued 1,709 permits allowing access to coal in Great Britain. Permit applications require specific details from customers to confirm appropriate safety and remediation measures are being undertaken. The ability to communicate with customers quickly and easily is essential.

In 2021, we redesigned our online permit application, based on customer feedback. The upgraded system is fully accessible, is easier to navigate, and clearly explains what information is needed. Customers can also now save an application part way through and come back to it later, allowing more flexibility and providing better ease of use.

The system is also more efficient for our staff as customers are asked to provide the exact information that's required, and this is received in a consistent format.

Customer experience

We want to ensure a consistent, empathetic and positive experience for all our customers. We can only do this by listening to our customers to make improvements in areas that make the biggest difference.

We recognise people and communities have differing contexts and perspectives and treat every case as unique. We always aim to achieve the best outcomes, using the legislation and public money guidance that we have to work within. We will also continue to develop our estate and information to benefit coalfield communities. To help us achieve this we are focusing on the following areas:

Measuring customer experience

We are members of the Institute of Customer Services and use their customer surveys to benchmark our customer satisfaction scores against similar organisations. Our scores have risen to 85 out of 100 since the launch of our customer standards. This is 10% higher than the Public Sector National Average Score. We will build on feedback from these surveys to achieve ServiceMark accreditation for our customer service excellence over the next three years.

Using customer feedback

We will continue to use customer feedback to understand how we can improve their experience. Over the next three years we will simplify our processes, provide easier access to our information and services and make ways to contact us as simple and timely as possible.

Customer empathy

We understand every customer is unique, recognising their different cultures and contexts wherever we can. Our work on Customer Culture underpins our commitment to provide an effective and empathetic experience. We will continue to develop our customer standards to reflect our customers' changing needs.

Social and economic value

We are creating greater social and economic value by considering ways to use our land

and infrastructure to benefit coalmining communities. We know the environment in which our customers live is extremely important to their wellbeing. Our Sustainability Plan has highlighted the ways we intend to provide more safe local access to nature across our sites. We are also continuing to develop innovative uses of our infrastructure and by-products (such as mine water heat) to directly benefit coalmining communities.

Complaints

When customers feel unhappy with our service, we want to act quickly to resolve issues. To do this we will ensure they can contact the right people first time and will continue to make our complaints procedure as efficient as possible



By 2026 we will:

- Design simpler and easier customer journeys
- Simplify contact methods, so customers can access the right person faster
- We will achieve ServiceMark accreditation for our service standards from the Institute of Customer Service

Links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coal-authority-customer-standards/coal-authority-customer-standards>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/the-coal-authority/about/complaints-procedure>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1155387/Coal_Authority_Sustainability_Report_2023_to_2026.pdf



Customer Standards



Complaints Procedure



Sustainability Plan

Focusing on customer needs

In August 2022, we supported emergency partners at a site in Barnsley following a report of hot ground and smoke. The cause was a burning coal seam, following a fire on materials at a nearby development site. The coal seam fire was spreading underground beneath several gardens and towards a residential property.

We worked with the family affected to arrange temporary accommodation and support and to discuss the works needed to stop the fire and keep their home safe. This involved invasive drilling and grouting around the home and the virtual removal of the landscaped garden during the works. The family needed to be close to local schools and family so we worked with them to understand and support their needs and to keep them updated as works continued. We worked together to redesign the new garden and on the restoration and decoration of their home following the successful works to extinguish the fire.

To provide reassurance we provide a detailed information pack of the work undertaken which can be used with financial lenders and insurers and for potential future owners of the property.



Progress against our previous customer plan



Our previous [Customer Strategy](#) covered the period 2019 to 2023. Our organisation has made significant strides in this area (reflected in the case studies in this plan) and it is appropriate to deliver our new plan now to reflect this. That strategy has given us the foundations that we are now building on. You can find more information about our previous work with customers and more generally in our [Annual Report and Accounts](#). Some of our key achievements include:

Creating a better understanding of who our customers are



- Delivered training to help colleagues understand who their customers are and how to put them at the centre of our work

Implemented customer-focused culture



- Job descriptions and new starter training have a focus on the customer
- The Customer Service team supports the organisation to focus on customer during our communications with them
- Good Customer service is celebrated internally

Establishing best practice



- Updated our online services to meet best practice accessibility requirements
- Used learnings and feedback to develop a fully customer focused incident support approach
- Developed and published customer standards and a complaints process to provide consistency in our services to customers
- Centralised Customer Correspondence & Complaint Handling to ensure consistent approaches in line with response targets
- Became active members of the Institute of Customer Service (ICS)

Establishing and measuring key targets



- Established and met customer service targets - responding to 90% of customer enquiries within 10 days and resolving 80% of complaints at the first stage
- Completed two Institute of Customer Service Surveys establishing our customer satisfaction levels are 10% higher than the Public Sector average



Making a better future for people
and the environment in mining areas