

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 9 March 2021

Report Title: Customer Experience Strategy

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Stott, Portfolio Holder, Finance, IT & Communication

Senior Officer: Jane Burns, Executive Director Corporate Services

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The Customer Experience Strategy sets out the Council's vision to become an organisation which places the customer at the centre of everything we do. Where our customers' needs are central to the services we deliver and the way we deliver them and where every interaction a customer has with us is of a consistently high quality.
- 1.2. The Customer Experience Strategy supports the Council vision of an open, fairer, greener Cheshire East, set out in the new Corporate Plan. In particular the Strategy supports the "open" vision through increased transparency, listening, learning and responding to our residents, supporting and developing our workforce, promoting services through regular communication and engagement and delivering service development, improvement and transformation.
- 1.3. The Customer Experience Strategy is built around 7 key themes:-
 - Understanding what our customers need
 - Designing and delivering services to meet that need
 - Providing a consistent and high quality of service

- Working as one organisation and with our partners to provide a joined-up experience for customers;
 - Ensuring staff have the knowledge, skills, capability and tools to deliver a quality experience
 - Maximising the use of digital technology
 - Providing value for money
- 1.4. The Strategy has been developed in consultation with customers, partners, staff and members and is based on analysis of customer feedback from Residents Surveys, complaints, compliments and contact data. The draft Strategy has undergone internal consultation across the organisation and with partners and external consultation with residents and has been well received.
- 1.5. The Customer Experience Project, within the Brighter Futures Transformation Programme is responsible for implementing the changes required to achieve the commitments contained within the Strategy. Progress will be monitored through the Brighter Futures Transformation Strategic Board

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That Cabinet adopt the Customer Experience Strategy as attached at Appendix 1.

3. Reason for Recommendation

To provide a clear vision for customer experience and to enable the Council to deliver against its commitments as set out in the Corporate Plan.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. The Strategy has been developed through consultation and considered many options to refine the final strategy. The option to not have a strategy is not considered reasonable based on feedback to date and was not therefore considered.

5. Background

- 5.1. Improving the customer experience is one of the priority transformational aims of the Council as established within the Brighter Futures Transformation Programme. The overarching aim is to become a “customer centric” organisation, where our customers’ needs are central to the services we deliver and the way we deliver them and where every interaction a customer has with us is of a consistently high quality.

- 5.2. An external review conducted in 2019 into the extent to which the Council is “customer centric” identified a common desire across the Council to deliver excellent customer experience but a lack of a common approach to what that means in practice, leading to differing perceptions across the Council of “good” customer service.
- 5.3. The review also identified a number of opportunities to improve the customer experience across the Council including:-
- Listening to our customers, using that information to gain a better understanding of our customer needs (now and in the future) and designing and delivering services that meet that need.
 - Developing a cross Council view of our customers, understanding that customers have a relationship with the Council as a single organisation rather than with individual services.
 - Adapting the way in which we review our services to consider this from the customers perspective. Improving the full “end to end” journey for customers including any handovers within the Council or with partners.
 - Setting consistent standards of service across the organisation, being transparent about our performance against those standards and learning from our mistakes.
 - Improving the technology that supports our staff in delivering customer service and the technology that supports our customers to self-serve
- 5.4. Feedback from the customer data, surveys and consultations confirms that customer perceptions of the service the Council currently provides requires significant improvement. **Appendix 2** provides a summary of this feedback from both internal and external consultation.
- 5.5. The Customer Experience Strategy provides the common vision of the standard of service we expect to be delivered to all customers. A programme of activity, monitored through the Brighter Futures Transformation Programme, will build on this Strategy and deliver against its commitments. Much of this work is already underway with improvements to our training, technology and use of customer data all progressing and the drafting of a consistent charter of standards under development.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1. Legal Implications

There is no legal requirement to produce a Customer Experience Strategy. However, it is helpful to have a clear articulation of the priority in the Council's Corporate Plan.

6.2. Finance Implications

Activities associated with the development of the aims of the Strategy have been included within the Brighter Futures Transformation work programme. Where required, a business case has been completed to access funding via the Brighter Futures Transformation Reserve.

Efficiency savings associated with the activities of the Customer Experience Project have also been identified and included within the MTFS.

Adoption of the strategy, in accordance with the recommendations of this report will help to realise the benefits expected within the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021 to 2025.

6.3. Policy Implications

The Customer Experience Strategy will support the Council's "Open, Fairer, Greener Cheshire East. It supports the "open" vision through increased transparency, listening, learning and responding to our residents, supporting and developing our workforce, promoting services through regular communication and engagement and delivering service development, improvement and transformation

6.4. Equality Implications

The Customer Experience Strategy aims to improve the experience of all customers when interacting with the Council and will ensure that the Council recognise, and address individuals needs and any barriers to accessing services. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached

6.5. Human Resources Implications

The Customer Experience Transformation Programme is working closely with the Council's Organisational Development Team to improve the customer experience training provided to all staff

6.6. Risk Management Implications

None

6.7. Rural Communities Implications

There are no direct implications for rural communities.

6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

There are no direct implications for children and young people.

6.9. Public Health Implications

There are no direct implications for public health.

6.10. Climate Change Implications

None

7. Ward Members Affected

All

8. Consultation & Engagement

The Strategy was submitted for internal consultation between 9th and 30th October 2020 and for external consultation between 27th November and 15th January. Workshops were held with our Brighter Futures Champions and feedback was sought directly from partner organisations including Hidden Carers, Belong, Cheshire Equality Leads Forum and South and East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce

9. Access to Information

N/a

10. Contact Information

Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Helen Gerrard

Job Title: Head of Customer Service

Email: helen.gerrard@cheshireeast.gov.uk