

Corporate Policy Committee

5 October 2023

Customer Experience Strategy Update

Report of: Alex Thompson, Director Finance and Customer Services

Report Reference No: CP/19/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides an update on achievements in relation to the Council's Customer Experience Strategy. Improving the customer experience is a key priority contained within the Council's Corporate Plan and supports the Council's aims of being "open" and "fair".

Executive Summary

- 2 The Customer Experience Strategy was approved in March 2021. This has led to a substantial amount of work to further embed a customer focussed culture across the Council and to develop the policies, procedures and technology to underpin this including:
 - (i) Training and awareness for all staff led by the Chief Executive, Executive Directors and Directors
 - (ii) Revisions to our complaints process to focus this on lessons learned and to drive service improvements
 - (iii) New technology supporting our Corporate Contact Centre and front of house services
 - (iv) New technology supporting our online services and an enhanced corporate website
 - (v) Detailed service reviews and improvements made to the Highways Service and Planning Service

- (vi) Enhanced data collection and analysis to support a better understanding of our customers and the quality of service we provide and to inform service improvements.
- 3 Appendix One provides further details on these customer focused activities across Council services.
- 4 Appendix Two provides details of the performance measures used to assess progress against the Strategy. These demonstrate that real progress that has been made in transforming the culture of the Council and in customer's perceptions of the Council. Since 2021 there has been an 11% increase in customer satisfaction with the overall service they received from the Council and an 11% increase in staff understanding of the customer experience and their role in contributing to that.
- 5 The number of customers engaged with our digital services has also increased with 45,000 residents now signed up to digital newsletters and over 126,000 signed up to on line accounts.
- 6 The improvement in customer experience is also a factor in driving down the volume of complaints received with a 12% reduction in overall numbers of complaints.
- 7 The progress to date indicates the strategy is working and that activity should continue to further embed the strategy across Council services. Work is already progressing to enhance the technology which supports our Contact Centres and our digital offering for customers. This recognises the increasing demand for digital services but also improving services for those who cannot or choose not to use digital options.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress made in respect to the aims of the Customer Experience Strategy contained within the briefing material in this report.
2. Note the improved performance of the Council's approach to and delivery of an improved customer experience.
3. Approve the proposed future focus for the Customer Experience Programme as contained within the briefing material in this report at Para 13 (a to c).

Background

- 8 The Council's Customer Experience Strategy was approved by Members in March 2021. It sets out a vision of the customer experience we wish to offer, 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.
- 9 Development of the aims of the Strategy has been governed through the Brighter Futures Transformation Programme (chaired by the Executive Director Corporate Services) and a Customer Experience Programme Board led by the Director of Finance and Customer Services.
- 10 Development was built around five main themes:
- (a) Culture – developing a Culture across all levels of the Council where the needs of customers are understood and considered in all decision making and service delivery.
 - (b) Insight and consultation – developing procedures to help us understand our customers and their needs, improving our use of data to inform decision making, learn lessons and drive service improvement.
 - (c) Customer focused policies and procedures – developing or revising policies and procedures to ensure these support the aims of the programme
 - (d) Service Re-design – re-designing services around the customer and developing end-to-end customer journeys which are seamless and effortless for the customer.
 - (e) Technology – Improving the technology that helps customers to help themselves and supports our staff to deliver quality customer services.

Appendix One provides details of the activities undertaken to develop each of these themes.

- 11 Progress against the aims of the Strategy has been measured using a range of performance metrics which provide assurance against progress and/or areas for further focus.

Appendix Two provides details of performance against these metrics and progress since the launch of the Strategy.

- 12 Future focus: Most of the activities required to underpin the Customer Experience Strategy have now been completed and the work will move to “business as usual” to provide ongoing monitoring and assurance.

- 13 The Customer Experience Programme will now focus on three areas as follows:
- (a) Ongoing development of the technology to support customers, in particular the drive to improve our digital services, enabling customers who wish to do so to self-serve and driving efficiencies across the Council.
 - (b) A review of our “Target Operating Model” for the delivery of front-line customer services across the Council which enables us to meet the needs of customers now and in the future in the most efficient and cost-effective manner
 - (c) A review of the Customer Experience Strategy (due for revision in 2024) which will align with the work to develop a new Corporate Plan for the Council. As such the customer experience programme will no longer report against the current customer experience strategy.

Consultation and Engagement

- 14 The Customer Experience Strategy was developed in consultation with customers, partners, staff, and members and was based on analysis of customer feedback from Residents Surveys, complaints, compliments and contact data.
- 15 Progress within the Insight and Consultation workstream now enables us to gather ongoing customer feedback through several mechanisms including short surveys following customer contact with the Council, “sentiment analysis” of conversations, analysis of complaints and their root causes, website and online forms feedback and service specific surveys.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 16 The report allows members to note ongoing activity to implement the approved Customer Experience Strategy. This ensures that the Committee is provided with assurances of progress towards the aims of the Customer Experience Strategy and the objectives of the Corporate Plan to become an “open and enabling” Council.
- 17 Recommendation 3 supports an ongoing focus on high impact activities that will continue to put customers at the heart of what the Council does.

Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	The Council would not deliver the standards of	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor reputation• Rise in complaints

	customer experience expected by our customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inefficient processes leading to higher costs • Vulnerable customers not identified and supported
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Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 18 Progress against the aims of the Customer Experience Strategy is driving improvements in the management of complaints. Poor complaints Management can lead to reports from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman with the potential for fines to be imposed or public reports to be issued.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

Activities associated with the development of the aims of the Strategy have been included within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy as part of the transformation work programme. Where required, a business case has been completed to access funding via the Transformation Earmarked Reserve. Efficiency savings associated with the activities of the Customer Experience Project have also been identified and included within the MTFS.

Policy

- 19 The Customer Experience Strategy directly supports the aims of an "open and enabling Council":

An open and enabling organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen, learn, and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation • Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement, and transformation • Support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient, and empowered • Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents 	A council which empowers and cares about people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient 	A thriving and sustainable place (Include which aim and priority)
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 20 The Customer Experience Strategy aims to improve the experience of all customers when interacting with the Council and ensures that the Council recognises and addresses individual needs and/or barriers to accessing services.

Human Resources

- 21 The Customer Experience Team have worked closely with the Council's HR teams to deliver support, training and development on customer experience to all staff.

Risk Management

- 22 There are no direct implications for risk management arising from this report.

Rural Communities

- 23 The Customer Experience Strategy commits us to recognising the individual needs of all customers and communities which includes the specific needs of rural communities particularly in respect of access to digital technologies.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 24 There are no direct implications for Children and Young People arising from this report.

Public Health

- 25 There are no direct implications for public health arising from this report.

Climate Change

- 26 There are no direct implications for climate change arising from this report.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	Appendix One: Customer Experience Activities Appendix Two: Customer Experience Performance
Background Papers:	Customer Experience Strategy (cheshireeast.gov.uk)