

**TO: EXECUTIVE
14 MARCH 2017**

**CUSTOMER CONTACT STRATEGY 2017-2020
Director of Corporate Services**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Executive with a new Customer Contact Strategy, proposing a new direction of travel for the management of customer contact through to December 2020.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That the Executive endorses the new Customer Contact Strategy, the Action Plans for delivery and the governance arrangements.**
- 2.2 **That the delivery of the Strategy is driven through the Implementation phase of the Citizen & Customer Contact Transformation Programme**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Good progress has been achieved in the delivery of the Customer Contact and Channel Strategies, since their introduction in 2011. Some of this work is still ongoing, in particular the delivery of new contact channels.
- 3.2 The 'new narrative' published in the Council Plan, acknowledges the significant financial pressures faced by the Council, and the development of the Borough and the local population. It is vital that the new Customer Contact Strategy should reflect this new narrative. A new approach to how we deal with customers is being designed by staff through the Citizen and Customer Contact Transformation Programme, and the Strategy has been written on this basis.
- 3.3 Significant developments in the digital world since the earlier strategy was written have given us an opportunity to rethink how we enable customers to interact with the Council. To establish the right strategy for the future required some considerable research into best practice elsewhere and the art of the possible, as well as consultation with Elected Members and Officers across the Council. This has been undertaken through 2015 – 2016, along with some qualitative research with borough residents to better understand their drivers for contacting the Council, and their preferred channels.
- 3.4 The outcomes of this research and consultation have resulted in a strong focus on delivering more digitally, and on developing a whole systems approach to dealing with customers with high level and complex needs. The means by which these aims will be delivered will develop as part of the implementation planning of the Citizen & Customer Contact Transformation Programme over the coming weeks.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Significant progress has been made through the existing strategy, and the Council could leave it in place as it is. However this is likely to miss opportunities

that arise from developments in the digital world and new systems / technologies, and would not reflect the Council's new narrative.

- 4.2 The Council could decide to abandon a strategic approach to the management of customer contact, but this is likely to result in increasingly fragmented service design and delivery, and therefore increased cost.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

5.1 Background

The Council has taken a corporate approach to managing customer contact since September 2003, with the adoption of the original Customer Contact Strategy. This original strategy had the following aims:

- Residents would have a larger proportion of their enquiries resolved by the first person within the Council that they talk to,
- Residents would be directed to the right expert, should their enquiry not be able to be resolved by the first person within the Council that they talk to,
- Residents would be more able to get through to the Council on the telephone,
- Residents with several enquiries, that span many existing departments, would be able to have them resolved by the first person who offers them service,
- Residents would receive consistent levels of service,
- Residents would not need to know the organisation structure of the Council to know where to call for their enquiry,
- Residents would be able to make contact with the Council by the method that most suits them,
- Allow the council to take advantage of economies of scale and provide improved service with fewer resources,
- Release scarce "expert" staff from simple enquiries and tasks, thereby allowing them to focus their time on complex or sensitive issues,
- Management information would provide valuable insight into customer demand.

- 5.2 Prior to the introduction of this strategy, contact with the Council was fragmented, with customers experiencing difficulties finding the right number to call, and many calls going unanswered, 'bouncing' from one phone to another in hunt groups, and voicemail messages going unreturned, sometimes for weeks. There were many more complaints from customers about the poor experience they were having, and satisfaction rates were significantly lower than is currently being reported by customers.

- 5.3 Since the introduction of the first Corporate Customer Contact Strategy, savings have been made as a result, both in the customer services team and in other departments. The Customer Services team was reduced by one FTE following the introduction of the automated operator service, and a management post of one FTE was removed when the team relocated to Time Square. In the last four years, a total of four FTE posts have been removed from the operational team, enabling investment in the CRM Development Team and the Digital Services Team. These teams are focused on increasing the ability of customers to self-serve, thereby delivering further savings and efficiencies in the future.

- 5.4 The implementation of the Customer Contact Strategy has resulted in the introduction of new access channels. The automated telephone channel ensures customers are able to contact the person or department they need to speak with, without the need for a switchboard operator. The automated payments line enables customers to make payments to the Council, for a range of services, at any time of the day. The key focus for the team at the moment is to improve digital access, integrating the CRM and customer portal into the website redevelopment, designing customer journeys that are simple and easy to use, and that work well on any digital device. Again, this will continue to deliver efficiencies, as customers increasingly choose digital, self-service channels to access the service they need.
- 5.5 Since the introduction of the Customer Contact Strategy, many improvements in the customer experience have been implemented, including:
- new access channels,
 - one main contact number,
 - implementation of a CRM system for logging customer enquiries,
 - reduced contact time from approximately 3.8 minutes to 2.5 minutes,
 - a wide range of services have been redesigned so that their first point of contact can be managed through Corporate Customer Services, including high volume services such as Registrars', School Admissions, Licensing, Highways, Trees, Landscaping and Street Cleansing, Waste and Recycling. This has allowed these teams to improve their service delivery capacity, or reduce their staffing numbers.
- 5.6 The service has a number of Performance Indicators, including the rate of abandoned calls and customer satisfaction. These targets are performing consistently well. In particular, customer satisfaction is consistently above 90% (against a target of 75%), indicating that the quality of service delivered by the Corporate Customer Services team is meeting the requirements of residents.
- 5.7 The most recent Customer Contact Strategy was adopted in 2011, and describes the Council's approach to dealing with customer contact. A key recommendation of the Strategy was the creation of a Channel Strategy. This was developed and an Action Plan combining all actions from both strategies was adopted, covering the following areas:
- Avoidable contact
 - Channel shift
 - Digital inclusion
 - Accessibility
 - Telephony
 - New media
 - Face to face
 - Post and paper communication
 - Payments
- 5.8 A significant amount of work has been undertaken in each of these areas, resulting in much improved customer access over recent years. This is reflected

in the high level of customer satisfaction reported through the Quarterly Service Reports, and also in the level of resident satisfaction reported through the Residents' Survey. Some of this work is continuing, and will be carried forward into the delivery of the new Strategy.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

6.1

Borough Treasurer

6.2

Equalities Impact Assessment

6.3 EIA screenings will be carried out for each new project in the Strategy as it is implemented.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.4 A risk log will be created and maintained for each project arising from this Strategy.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

7.1 Members, Senior Officers, Representative group of residents, customer facing staff

Method of Consultation

7.2 Discussions with Members' ICT working group, interviews with individual members; workshops and discussions at Senior Leadership Group, CMT, DMTs; Telephone survey with residents; Blueprint design workshops with customer-facing staff.

Representations Received

7.3 Outputs from the interviews with Members, workshops with SLG and with staff are maintained as part of the Transformation Programme records.

Background Papers

Customer Contact Strategy 2011-2014

Channel Strategy 2011-2014

Contact for further information

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