

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET – 2 December 2021

CUSTOMER STRATEGY, CUSTOMER SERVICES & DIGITAL PEER CHALLENGE – UPDATE ON ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REPORT OF DIRECTOR: COMMUNITIES, CUSTOMER & COMMERCIAL SERVICES

**LEAD CABINET MEMBER – CLLR RICHARD OVERTON, DEPUTY LEADER AND
ENFORCEMENT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CUSTOMER SERVICES**

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

- 1.1 Our customers are at the heart of everything we do, and we want to ensure that we are delivering the best possible customer experience. Our ‘Everything Speaks’ approach, aims and priorities are set out in our Customer Strategy, and this report provides an update on how this is being embedded across the Council, and highlights examples of positive steps that have been taken to improve our customer experience.
- 1.2 We are also committed to learning from best practice, both from across local government and other sectors. In May 2021, we invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to carry out a Customer Services and Digital Peer Challenge. A report on the findings and recommended actions was previously approved by Cabinet on the 8th July 2021, and Section 5.6 of this report provides an update on progress in delivering the agreed actions.
- 1.3 In order to build on the learning from the LGA Peer Challenge, this report also includes a proposal that the Council becomes a member of the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) in order to access a wide range of benefits as set out in Section 5.5. In particular, this would enable us to benchmark our customer service performance against other organisations within our own sector (and other sectors) on an ongoing basis, and to work towards attaining the ICS Service Mark, an independently and rigorously assessed accreditation of commitment to and achievement of customer service standards.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes progress in delivering actions in the Customer Strategy and in responding to the feedback and recommendations from the Local Government Association Customer Services and Digital Peer Challenge, as set out in Section 5 of this report.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approve the recommendation that we sign up to a three year “Discovery Roadmap” membership of the Institute of Customer Services, the benefits of which are set out in Section 5.5 of this report.

3.0 SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Co-Operative Council priority objective(s)?	
	Yes	A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	All customers of the Council
TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE	See action plan in Section 5	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes	Progress in delivering actions outlined in the action plan in section 5 have mainly been met from existing Council budgets. The cost of developing the MyTelford app has been met from the ICT capital programme. A 3 year membership to the Institute of Customer Services, as referenced in section 5.5 of this report, costs £23.5k in total. This will be funded from Customer Services reserves. MLB 27.10.21
LEGAL ISSUES	No	
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	The peer challenge action plan and the proposal to join the Institute of Customer Services provides an opportunity for the Council to reflect on and further improve its Customer & Digital Services.
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	Borough-wide impact

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In January 2021, we published a new Customer Strategy, which focused on consistent customer service standards, training and development, involving customers and employees in improving services, developing our online services, and removing barriers to ensure we are accessible to all.
- 3.2 Underpinning the strategy is our aim to develop an ‘Everything Speaks’ culture where employees take pride in the services we deliver, act as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the Council to report issues and suggest improvements, and know that every detail of what we do affects our customers’ experience and satisfaction.
- 3.3 The Customer Strategy built on previous work done, including improved telephone call handling performance in our main Contact Centre, a reduction in the time taken to respond to complaints across all Council Directorates, the launch of a customer insight programme and a significantly increased take-up of online services.
- 3.4 To take stock of progress, and to give an independent view of what we were doing well but also how we could improve further, we took part in a Local Government Association (LGA) Customer and Digital Services Peer Challenge in May 2021. Peer challenges are a recognised improvement tool, and are not formal inspections. They involve a

team of officers and councillors spending time at a Council to provide challenge and share learning.

- 3.5 Overall feedback was very positive, with the peer challenge team recognising the Council's focus on good customer service and the commitment of members and staff at all levels to 'get things right for residents'. The team also praised the extensive range of ways we seek feedback from customers and the desire to engage and involve people.
- 3.6 There were however some recommendations for further improvements and developments for consideration. This feedback was reported in detail to Cabinet on the 8th July.
- 3.7 This report is intended to provide an update to Cabinet on progress against delivering the actions in the Customer Strategy and recommendations from the peer challenge report.

4. FEEDBACK, RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTION PLAN

- 4.1 Since the publication of the Customer Strategy, we have implemented a range of actions to further improve our customer service. Some key highlights include:
- Launch of our Customer Contract and guidance for staff
 - Our Web chat facility has been expanded to a wider range of service areas
 - The new 'Ask Tom' chatbot was launched and has seen an average of 1,100 enquiries being answered each month, along with extremely positive user feedback
 - Launch of the new MyTelford app which saw 1,500 new registrations in its first month.
 - Recognition of customer service excellence by the inclusion of a Customer Care category in the recent employee awards,
 - Launch of a new online Customer Service Excellence training course for all staff, with a particular focus on the principles of "Everything Speaks"
 - Increased performance monitoring – monthly at SMT, publication of info @ [Statistics - Customer Service Performance - Telford & Wrekin Council](#)
 - Introduction of real-time satisfaction monitoring in the corporate contact centre, that shows a 95% customer satisfaction score
 - Introduction of real-time feedback at our physical locations through the roll-out of QR code surveys that allow service users to give instant feedback of their experience to service areas
 - Introduction of a new ward member enquiry process
 - New corporate branding guidelines due to be presented later this month
 - Mapping and promotion of all facilities and tools that can assist a customer to bridge the accessibility gap to council services
 - Invested £120k to help local residents to get online. We are now working with local community organisations and partners on a range of projects, looking at both access to technology and digital skills. Projects include:
 - Developing a new Digital Directory, a one-stop shop of information, such as where you can access computers and public Wi-Fi for free
 - Courses and 1:1 support available to develop skills and confidence.
 - We are also aiming to extend a number of schemes already being piloted, including a device loan scheme, drop-in support sessions and recruiting more digital volunteers.
- 4.2 We have also been focusing on following up the peer challenge team recommendations, which are set out below at 5.6, along with our proposed actions and current progress position.

- 4.3 One area that the peer challenge team raised was the number of different Channels we were offering to customers. Whilst they recognised the advantages of providing a range of channels for customers, including maintaining more traditional channels for people that need them, they queried whether we could deliver consistency across a large number of channels, and recommended that we develop a longer-term channel strategy. Having considered this recommendation further, we have concluded that the existing Customer Strategy already provides sufficient clarity on our vision and ambitions for providing access to Council services, and that we believe it is best for residents to continue to offer a wide choice of channels.
- 4.4 Having experienced the peer challenge process, we want to continue to benchmark what we do, and to learn and seek challenge from others, in order to continue to improve. Therefore this report also seeks approval for the Council to become members of the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) for a period of 3 years, benefits include:-
- **Information, advice and guidance, Performance benchmarking** – including access to the UK Customer Satisfaction index report, enabling us to compare our service performance to other organisations in our sector from perspectives of both customers and employees.
 - **use of the CSI logo highlighting our commitment to customer service;**
 - **Customer and employee feedback** – including surveys to assess customer satisfaction, identify strengths and areas for development, and an annual survey of employees to assess engagement with our Customer Strategy;
 - **training programmes** available for staff including webinars,
 - **publications on breakthrough research** on key topics publications to ensure we are up to date with the latest innovations and thinking on customer service;
 - **Accreditation (Service Mark)** - independent accreditation of our commitment to and achievements in customer service.
- 4.5 It is proposed that we join the ICS for 3 years, as this is the length of time that most organisations take to gain Service Mark accreditation. The Service Mark provides a rigorous and structured framework that would help to drive further improvement and is synonymous with customer service excellence.
- 4.6 The table overleaf provide a progress update on the actions approved following the Customer & Digital Review and implementation of our Customer Services Strategy :-

Agreed Actions	Progress update November 2021
Continue the planned migration of more services into the corporate contact centre in order to rationalise the number of published telephone numbers and further improve the consistency of the customer experience.	We have reviewed call volume data and identified Leisure Services as the service that receives the highest volume of calls which are not currently managed through a contact centre. Leisure are introducing a new suite of Websites in November 2021, along with >100 chat-bot questions, which will enable a greater level of channel shift to online services. Once this has been implemented we will review the impact this has had on call volumes and bring forward a proposal regarding the best options for Leisure call handling.
Continue our customer insight programme, including capturing instant feedback from customers, to monitor the quality of the service provided and drive improvement;	Customer feedback surveys are now located in all of our front facing public buildings and many of our public spaces which can be accessed via QR codes that can be scanned by a mobile device. We have also introduced end of call satisfaction feedback at the end of all calls into the Corporate Contact Centre. This feedback is reported to the lead Cabinet Member on a monthly basis and will be included in the annual customer feedback report from 2022.
Review opportunities to resolve more enquiries at the first point of contact, with a particular focus on more complex services where a higher proportion of issues are currently passed on to case-workers;	<p>We are using call handling performance data to target this to specific service areas, for example we are currently working with The Place to deal with more complex theatre enquiries in the contact centre.</p> <p>We have introduced a regular staff development and service improvement session for contact centre staff, which will allow team members to have a greater input into the shaping of service delivery, as well as ensuring we upskill them to undertake more enhanced and complex enquiry types</p>
Explore becoming a member of the Institute for Customer Service (ICS) in order to benchmark our customer service against other organisations, and work towards Service Mark accreditation;	This report is recommending that we sign up to the Institute of Customer Service 'Discovery Roadmap' service for a period of 3 years so that we can work towards Service Mark accreditation;
Launch the new MyTelford app	The new MyTelford app launched in early 27 th September 2021 following a period of user testing, with very positive initial feedback and which also saw 1,500 new registrations in the first month;
Ensure web editors regularly check all web links to ensure these are functioning and up to date;	Further clarity has been sort from the peer review team who have confirm that there was just one specific webpage where they found broken links. This page has now been rectified and reminders have been sent to all of the Council's web editors;
Review our approach to managing life events to consider how things could be	It is proposed that a project group is set up in Spring 2022 to investigate this specific issue whether there is a need to

made simpler for customers, for example following a bereavement.	enhance the current processes that are in place through the existing 'Tell Us Once' scheme
Continue work to replace PDF forms on the Council's Website with online forms that link into back office systems where possible	The new Tascomi system going live in Public Protection will address the remaining 16 PDFs on the Website live by the end of the year
Develop and implement a Customer Relationship Management roadmap to reduce the number of separate systems used by the contact centre team and further streamline online services for customers.	ICT have engaged a 3 rd party CRM specialist to conduct an independent review of our current position which will inform the development of this road map. This will be concluded by the end of December 2021.
Enable people to report complaints anonymously online;	Online complaints forms have been amended from 22 nd September 2021 to allow for anonymous complaints to be submitted;
Build on existing feedback mechanisms to mystery customers, such as the annual newsletter, by providing more immediate feedback after an assignment has been completed, for example through a 'we said, you did' thank you event;	2 nd Annual newsletter to Mystery Customers will be issued in November 2021. Specific feedback will be provided to those customers who undertook user testing of the MyTelford and MyTLC apps on the changes that were made to the products based on their feedback. As standard practice whenever we use Mystery Customers to test or review Council services we will update them on any 'quick wins' that we implement. A thank you event is in development for active Mystery Customers which is scheduled to take place before March 2022 (subject to Covid restrictions);
Involve engagement forums, such as the new Community Panel and Making it Real Board more regularly in the planning of services and carry out more user testing to co-design new services, such as the new MyTelford app.	Extensive user testing and feedback was incorporated into the project planning for the MyTelford app, and AskTom chatbot. Feedback received led to changes to be made to the final products before launch;
Update the key actions in the Customer and Digital Strategies to not only reflect timescale for delivery, but also the relative priority of each action, ensuring that this also links through into relevant business plans.	A clear set of priorities were agreed for actions to be completed up until 2022/23. It is proposed that a report be brought to Cabinet in June 2022 to provide updated priorities for the Customer & Digital Strategies until 2024/25.
Build evaluation of key projects into Customer Relationship Board meetings	Take-up and user satisfaction data is now included in the monthly performance reporting to the lead Cabinet member

and performance reviews with lead Cabinet member	in relation to the recently launched new customer service initiatives;
Work with Corporate Communications to: Develop a simple and concise definition of 'Everything Speaks' and communicate this through internal channels and refreshed customer service training.	A new "Customer Experience Awareness" online course has been developed that will become part of the essential learning for all Council employees. A significant focus of this training is on the concept of 'Everything Speaks' with lots of examples of how this can be applied to real life scenarios. This new course will be launched in November 2021.
Create new brand guidelines and review sub-brands in order to ensure branding of council services is clear and consistent.	New brand guidelines developed and will shortly be presented to SMT and Cabinet In November.

5 PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 5.5 CAB-42 Cabinet report of the 7th January 2021
- 5.6 CAB-91 Cabinet report of the 8th July 2021

6 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 None

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