



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

22 September 2022

Customer Strategy Update including Town and Parish Council Partnership Agreement

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Rae Evans - Cabinet Member: Finance, Governance and Customer Services
Lead Director:	Felicity Mercer – Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services
Service Area:	Customer Relationships and Welfare Services
Report Author:	Lee Higgins - Service Delivery Manager for Customer Relationships and Welfare Services
Officer Contact Details:	Tel: 01952 383835 Email: lee.higgins@telford.gov.uk
Wards Affected:	Borough-wide impact
Key Decision:	Non-Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Not applicable
Report considered by:	Cabinet – 22 September 2022

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

- 1.1 That Cabinet approve the update to the Customer Strategy, noting the progress delivered to date and endorse the refreshed action plan through to 2024.
- 1.2 That Cabinet grant delegated authority to the Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, Governance and Customer Services to take the necessary steps to implement these recommendations.
- 1.3 That Cabinet approves the new Town & Parish Council/Borough Council Partnership Agreement and pledges.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To provide a mid-point update to the Customer Strategy launched in January 2021, including achievements since its launch and a refresh of the priority actions to be undertaken over the next 18 months.
- 2.2 Alongside the Customer Strategy update the Council will be launching the new Town and Parish Council/Borough Council Partnership agreement, which was one of the priority actions in the original Customer Strategy.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 In January 2021, the council 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 The strategy, called “Improving Our Customer Experience - Our Journey to Excellence by 2025” contained several priority actions to be delivered in the first 18 months of the strategy. As we are now at that mid-way point, we have taken the opportunity refresh the strategy to reflect progress and achievements made to date, and to prioritise the actions to be delivered in the next 18 months.
- 3.3 Underpinning the strategy remains 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.
- 3.4 One of the key actions in the strategy was to develop a new Town & Parish Council/Borough Council Partnership agreement as a replacement to the previous Parish Charter, which all parties agreed needed a significant overhaul and simplification. This new agreement is being recommended to Cabinet for approval and adoption.

4.0 Summary of main proposals

- 4.1 Since the publication of the Customer Strategy, we have implemented a range of actions to further improve and develop the experience that customers have when engaging with council services. Some key highlights of our achievements to date include:
 - Launched a new digital assistant “Ask-Tom” which is available 24/7 to respond to the most frequently asked customer questions. In the first year over 10,000 enquires were resolved by the assistant with a >99% customer success rate. 33% of these enquiries were made outside of main Council opening hours. In the last month, the knowledge base has been expended to include Leisure and Theatre enquiries.

- Migrated call handling for Registration Services and Housing into the corporate contact centre, significantly reducing the barriers to customers being able to access these services.
- Extended the opening hours of the corporate contact centre to 8am-7pm by 3 hours each day from Monday to Friday to assess customer demand particularly during this cost-of-living crisis, which is leading to more complex enquiries now being received.
- Took part in an LGA peer review of our Customer & Digital services which resulted in very positive feedback and some recommendations now implemented which has helped to strengthen our customer experience.
- Improved the signposting of enquiries to external organisations by providing contact information in our call centre messaging.
- Produced guidance for staff on what is expected from them to ensure a consistently excellent customer experience across the whole organisation, including some practical examples of how to apply our culture of **“Everything Speaks”** in our workplace.
- Launched a new online “customer service essentials” training course for all staff, with an emphasis on “everything speaks,” with 300 front line staff completing it in the first few months of it going live. The course is shortly to be made mandatory for all front-line staff.
- Captured real-time feedback from customers by introducing satisfaction surveys at the end of contact centre phone calls and satisfaction surveys accessed in our physical locations by scanning QR codes on mobile devices. Customers using our contact centres have given a 92% satisfaction rating.
- We refreshed and relaunched the Community Panel during the Summer of 2021 and now have over 350 panel members.
- Launched our new “My Telford” app to replace “Everyday Telford” with improved functionality and ease of use. To date it has been downloaded by over 6,100 individuals.
- Launched our new digital Telford Loyalty Card, the MyTLC app.
- Added a new digital directory to the Live Well Telford website to assist people to get online and develop their digital skills. Alongside this we have delivered a number of digital inclusion projects in partnership with voluntary and community sector. This has included providing 68 devices to support activities ranging from homework clubs to dementia cafes. We have also launched ‘loan a device scheme’ at Southwater library with 20 devices available for residents to borrow free of charge.
- Developed a new branding, signage, and style guide to be applied consistently across the organisation and by partner and grant-funded projects.

A complete list of all the actions delivered to date can be found within the refreshed strategy.

- 4.2. 2021/22 has also shown a significant shift in the channels that customers are using to contact the Council. Most noticeably we have seen a 30% reduction in

calls to the corporate contact centre whilst at the same time seeing a 21% increase in the use of online transactions using our webforms and the app.

- 4.3 Earlier in the year, the Council became members of the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) with the aim of working towards attaining Service Mark accreditation. The Service Mark provides a rigorous and structured framework that will help to drive further improvements and is synonymous with customer service excellence. Initial benchmarking results from ICS are very positive, with Telford & Wrekin Council receiving a Customer Satisfaction Index score of 71.2%, compared against the 64.4% average score for other Councils. We have also scored well for Customer Effort, with a rating of 4.2 against an average score for all UK organisations of 5.2 (the lower the score, the easier customers found it to transact with the organisation).
- 4.4 The second part of the accreditation process, which is currently underway, is a survey of the work force to understand how well employees understand the customer strategy and the vision of the organisation.
- 4.5 Once all initial benchmarking is completed, ICS will provide us with a road map of recommended actions that will need to be completed to achieve Service Mark. These actions will take priority alongside the high priority actions from the refreshed strategy to be delivered by 2024 which include a review of our First Point function in Libraries and further consideration of services to be migrated to the corporate contact centre and work to further embed our Everything Speaks culture.

5.0 New Town & Parish Council Partnership Agreement

- 5.1 The new Town & Parish Council /Borough Council Partnership replaces the previous Parish Charter, which it was widely agreed needed a significant overhaul and simplification to reflect the current working relationship between the Town & Parish Councils and the Borough Council.
- 5.2 This draft agreement was developed in partnership with members of the Parish Charter Monitoring Group, and officers and members from Telford & Wrekin Council, before going out to consultation with all our Town and Parish Council's earlier in the year. Feedback received has been used to create the final agreement that is being presented to Cabinet for ratification. 27 Town or Parish Councils have agreed to sign up to the new agreement.

6. Alternative Options

- 6.1 Not applicable

7 Key Risks

- 7.1 Not applicable

8.0 Council Priorities

- 8.1 A community- focussed, innovative Council providing efficient, effective, and quality services

Key outcome: Our customer experience is the best possible and facilities are accessible to all.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 The actions detailed in the report to improve and develop the customer experience are funded from a combination of existing budgets and the use of specific reserves.

PT 16/8/22

10.0 Legal and HR Implications

- 10.1 Although there is no statutory requirement for a local authority to have a customer strategy, it is good practice to set out how the Council intends to interact with its customers in the provision of services, and in terms of the methods to be applied section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides the power for the Council to do anything, including the spending of money, to facilitate the delivery of its primary functions.

The Customer Strategy has been assessed in accordance with the Council's duties under the Equalities Act 2010 and in particular section 149, the public sector equality duty. All forms of customer interaction and strategic engagement must be delivered in accordance with these duties and the need to deliver services having due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. To these ends, the strategy recognises the requirement to consult and seeks to engage different customer groups at various stages of process development to ensure that our services are fit for purpose.

11.0 Ward Implications

- 11.1 Not applicable

12.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

- 12.1 Not applicable

13.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 13.1 All of the borough's customers and stakeholders will be impacted by the Customer Strategy and Customer Contract. The strategy will particularly benefit those customers who have protected characteristics for example, those with disabilities, older people and those where English is not their first language.

The needs of our customers have been considered throughout the development of this Customer Strategy and its associated actions. We have incorporated outcomes identified through our ongoing integrated equality analysis into the Customer Strategy and supporting action plan.

14.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

14.1 Not applicable

15.0 Background Papers

Not applicable

16.0 Appendices

- A Customer Strategy 2022 update
- B Town and Parish Council/Borough Council Partnership Agreement

17.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal	12/08/2022	15/08/2022	RP
Finance	12/08/2022	16/08/2022	PT