

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

**CABINET – 8 JULY 2021**

**CUSTOMER SERVICES & DIGITAL PEER CHALLENGE**

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR: COMMUNITIES, CUSTOMER AND 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 This report summarises the feedback from a Customer Services and Digital Peer Challenge that was carried out by the Local Government Association (LGA) in May 2021.
- 1.2 Following the development of new Customer and Digital Strategies, and delivery of a range of key actions to improve the customer experience (summarised in Appendix 1), the Council invited the LGA to review our current approach and suggest how we could make further progress.
- 1.3 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, with the suggestion that we could go even further in co-designing services with customers, partners and staff.
- 1.4 The advantages of offering a wide range of channels, including maintaining more traditional channels for people that need them, were recognised, as was the progress we have made to improve digital access and connectivity, for example through the roll-out of superfast broadband and schemes such as Kindle Kindness and Laptops for Learners. However, the peer challenge team also highlighted feedback that the consistency of service across different channels varied, and recommended developing a longer-term channel strategy.
- 1.5 The peer challenge team also noted the Council's ambition and the range of actions underway, whilst stressing the importance of prioritising and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of these.
- 1.6 The peer challenge recommendations and proposed actions to respond to these are summarised in Section 5, and the full feedback is set out in Appendix 2.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet notes the feedback and recommendations from the Local Government Association Customer Services and Digital Peer Challenge and approves the proposed actions to respond to these, as set out in Section 5 of this report.

## 3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

<b>COMMUNITY IMPACT</b>	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.
<b>TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE</b>	See action plan in Section 5.	
<b>FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT</b>	Yes	The capital programme for 2021/22 includes £400k for Customer Services which will support the further development of the My Telford app which is already in progress. Proposed actions outlined below will need to be met from existing budgets and resources available to Customer Services. MLB – 28.06.2021
<b>LEGAL ISSUES</b>	No	There are no direct legal implications associated with this report. Where, required, legal advice will be provided in relation to the steps taken to implement the actions outlined in this report. ACL – 25 June 2021
<b>OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS &amp; OPPORTUNITIES</b>	Yes	The peer challenge provides an opportunity for the Council to reflect on and further improve its Customer & Digital Services.
<b>IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS</b>	No	Borough-wide impact.

## **PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The Council recognises that Customer and Digital Services are an essential part of delivering our vision to 'Protect, Care and Invest to create a better borough'. In October 2020, we refreshed our Council Plan to include a focus on ensuring that our customer experience is the best possible.
- 4.2 This has driven the development of a new Customer Strategy and Contract (January 2021) and an updated Digital Strategy (June 2021), which set out our vision for Customer and Digital Services, and how we will deliver this.
- 4.3 These strategies build on work done over a number of years to improve the experience for our customers. In order to take stock of progress, we invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to carry out a Peer Challenge, to give an independent view of what we do well, but also how we could improve in the future.
- 4.4 Peer challenges are a recognised improvement tool, and are not formal inspections. They involve a small team of officers and councillors spending time at a council to provide challenge and share learning. The peer challenge team involved representatives from the London Borough of Brent, Sevenoaks District Council, Plymouth City Council and Sunderland City Council.
- 4.5 In advance of the peer challenge, we prepared a position statement for the team (Appendix 1), which summarises key performance and customer satisfaction data, progress to date and planned future actions.
- 4.6 Due to the challenges of meeting on site due to the Covid pandemic, the peer challenge team carried out a virtual review on 26 and 27 May 2021. This involved interviews and focus groups with Cabinet and ward members, members of the Senior Management Team, front-line staff, partner organisations, Town & Parish Councils and customers.

### **5. FEEDBACK, RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTION PLAN**

- 5.1 The full feedback and recommendations from the peer challenge team are set out in Appendix 2.
- 5.2 Positive feedback from the peer challenge team included:
  - “The council is very ambitious and top-performing in key areas”;
  - “The people working for (the council) show tremendous commitment, enthusiasm and creativity. This applies at all levels of the organisation”;
  - “Elected members and staff are extremely passionate about striving to do both their best and the right thing for local people”;
  - “The focus is all about providing good customer service and enabling people to engage with the Council through whichever means best suit them”;

- “Staff feel empowered and welcome the clear leadership provided by the Leader, Chief Executive and their political and managerial colleagues”;
- “There is a very wide range of channels for people accessing services and customer services”;
- “The council has an extensive set of mechanisms through which it seeks to obtain citizen and customer perspectives and insights. This demonstrates a real desire to draw in learning and to involve and engage people”;
- “There are lots of actions and initiatives underway in the council in relation to customer service”;
- “There is a desire to drive the digital offer...enhancing connectivity, with superfast broadband provision already to 98.5% of the borough and free public Wi-Fi in a wide range of council and community buildings, is a crucial part of this. Another key aspect is focusing on people’s ability to access digital, as seen with the provision of free access to computers (with nearly 96,000 hours of usage in 2019/20) and the provision of free devices to help vulnerable adults and children during the pandemic under the ‘Kindle Kindness’ and ‘Laptops for Learners’ initiatives”.

5.3 The peer challenge team also made a number of recommendations of areas that we could consider or improve on. These are set out in the table below, along with our proposed actions.

<b>Recommendation:</b>	<b>Proposed actions:</b>
<p>Consider the issues of fragmentation, inconsistency and quality we have highlighted around customer service – recognising this is about enhancing things for citizens rather than anything around addressing fundamental problems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As set out in our existing Customer Strategy, 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 – the contact centre migration plan will be prioritised based on call volume and handling data;</li> <li>• Continue our customer insight programme, including capturing instant feedback from customers, to monitor the quality of the service provided and drive improvement;</li> <li>• In conjunction with the corporate contact centre team, 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;</li> <li>• Explore becoming a member of the Institute for Customer Service in order to benchmark our customer service against other organisations, and work towards Service Mark accreditation;</li> <li>• Launch the new MyTelford app (currently in testing) to improve the range of issues that can be reported and feedback to customers;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure web editors regularly check all web links to ensure these are functioning and up to date;</li> <li>• Review our approach to managing life events to consider how things could be made simpler for customers, for example following a bereavement.</li> </ul>
<p>Continuing the streamlining of processes 'behind the scenes' in order to secure further customer service advantages and likely financial benefits through the continued digitalisation or automation of processes and systems from start to finish</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete the final phase of work to replace PDF forms on the Council's Website with online forms that link into back office systems where possible (we have been systematically replacing PDFs over a number of years, there are now only 16 PDFs remaining to convert, with a further 25 in progress);</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
<p>Consider making it more straightforward for people to raise a complaint, including being able to do so anonymously, in a context of this being an organisation that is clearly keen to learn and deliver improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable people to report complaints anonymously online.</li> </ul> <p>(We have considered the suggestion to widen our definition of complaints, however we feel that badging what we see as a service request as a complaint will not add value to the customer experience. This is because the target response time for complaints would typically be longer than if the issue was logged as a service request. We also feel that keeping our definition consistent enables us to better monitor trends over time).</p>
<p>Continue the work to enhance the citizen and community engagement elements that are not yet working to best effect, including responding to the desire on the part of staff and partners to be involved in the co-design of services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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;</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
<p>Develop a greater sense of prioritisation and increased co-ordination around the customer service actions and initiatives that get taken forward in the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>

<p>Establish greater rigour around evaluating the effectiveness of customer service actions and initiatives that have been launched.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build evaluation of key projects into Customer Relationship Board meetings and performance reviews with lead Cabinet member.</li> </ul>
<p>Ensure intelligence is drawn out from data more in order to inform channel shift and the development of alternative or additional customer service approaches. Develop a 'channel roadmap' and sit the emerging digital strategy within this, enabling thinking and planning around future 'channel shift' to be considered fully 'in the round'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement a channel road map, informed by current and likely future usage of different channels, in order to plan future channel shift and actions needed to support this (acknowledging that whilst there may be greater take-up of digital channels over time, maintaining a wide range of channels and ensuring no-one is left behind will remain a key part of our strategy).</li> </ul>
<p>Develop a shared narrative around 'Everything Speaks' so that the overall concept and the principles and beliefs that sit at the heart of it are made easily understandable and can be clearly conveyed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Corporate Communications to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a simple and concise definition of 'Everything Speaks' and communicate this through internal channels and refreshed customer service training;</li> <li>- Create and apply new brand guidelines and review sub-brands in order to ensure branding of council services is clear and consistent.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**6. PREVIOUS MINUTES**

6.1 None.

**7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

7.1 None.

**Report prepared by Fliss Mercer, Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services, Telephone: 01952 384300**