

Part A

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 28 November 2022

Report author: Customer Experience Lead

Title: Customer Experience Strategy

1 Summary

- 1.1 The Customer Experience Strategy, along with the Staff Guide to Delivering Great Customer Experiences and Customer Care Service Standards documents which will support the delivery of the strategy, are being brought to Cabinet for approval.
- 1.2 The Customer Experience Strategy sets out the ambitions of the council for how it intends to deliver services to our customers in the future. The recently adopted Council Plan 2022-26 and associated Delivery Plan 2022-24 confirms the commitment to develop and deliver our Customer Experience Strategy, providing the council with clarity on the future state of customer experience that supports the ambition for Watford to be an outstanding place for everyone - residents, business owners and visitors alike.
- 1.3 The strategy provides a framework based around four key themes to ensure the council provides great experiences to all of its customers.
 - Service design
 - Our people
 - Technology
 - Insight
- 1.4 In the development of the strategy significant work has been undertaken to:
 - Review customer feedback to understand what we currently do well and identify those areas where we need to improve.
 - Engage with key customer groups and partners to understand their expectations and priorities when accessing or delivering council services.
 - Consult with colleagues across the organisation to gather their views on the aims and actions that should form the strategy.
 - Analyse our contact data to understand why, when and how customers contact us.
 - Benchmark our performance with other local councils to see how well we manage and deliver our services in comparison, and to share learning and best practice.
 - Research the latest customer-service industry trends across both the public and private sector to develop our knowledge of how technology and different delivery models are used to support customers.
 - Align the Strategy's key themes and deliverables with wider corporate priorities, plans and strategies.

- 1.5 This report seeks Cabinet’s feedback and endorsement of the Customer Experience Strategy 2022-2026 (attached as an Appendix A) and Customer Experience Strategy Delivery Plan 2022 – 2026 (Appendix C)

2 Risks

2.1

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Customer Experience Strategy is not approved.	Delivery of Council ambitions around services delivery and customer care are not achieved.	Engagement undertaken with key stakeholders to inform the strategy and supporting delivery plan.	Treat	4
Digital services are not continually monitored and improved.	Reduction in transactions through self-service channels impacting the current CSC resource model achievement of KPI’s and delivery of the service within budget as a result.	Approval of the strategy will ensure a focus on the continuous service improvement cycle of all council services.	Treat	6
Digital services are not continually monitored and improved. And new technologies to support the delivery of services to customers are not explored.	Customer expectations are not met, leading to a potential rise in customer complaints, lower levels of satisfaction and reputational damage to the council.	Approval of the strategy will ensure a focus on the continuous service improvement cycle of all council services and development of processes to utilise new technologies.	Treat	4
Withdrawal of traditional service channels such as face-to-face.	Unable to deliver services in ways that suit all sections of our community.	Approval of the strategy will ensure all traditional contact channels retained, whilst promoting digital / self-service channels to those who are able to use them.	Treat	6
Digital services are not developed and improved to maximise take-	Inability to assist our more vulnerable customers within current resourcing.	The strategy will ensure that there is a focus on the development and improvement of digital	Treat	6

up of self-service channels.		services to ensure that there is appropriate resource available to support customers who require in-person support.		
------------------------------	--	---	--	--

3 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- Approves the Customer Experience Strategy 2022 – 2026 attached at appendix A.
- Authorises the Head of Customer Experience to implement the Customer Experience Strategy and supporting Delivery plan.
- Notes the engagement with Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the development and progress of the Customer Experience Strategy Delivery Plan and views on further actions to improve the customer experience.

Further information:

Danielle Negrello, Customer Experience Lead
danielle.negrello@watford.gov.uk

Report approved by: Liam Hornsby, Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Service

4 Detailed proposal

- 4.1 Why we need a Customer Experience Strategy?
- 4.2 Each time a customer uses one of our services, it contributes to how they feel about the council. This is not just about the interaction itself but also the customer’s experience before and after contact that can also contribute to their overall customer experience. One negative interaction with a customer can have an impact on their overall impression of the council. Identifying these incidents and targeting improvements is key to enhancing our services and overall customer experience.
- 4.3 The Strategy details how the council culture should ensure the delivery of excellent customer experience as part of the core values and behaviours of the organisation with every employee, partner and supplier understanding their responsibilities in delivering excellent customer experiences.
- 4.4 With the increasing use of technology, particularly over recent years, there continues to be a significant shift in the way people communicate and interact. Our residents and businesses want access to high quality online services which allow them to transact with the council at a time which is convenient for them. Being responsive to customers is a necessity for any organisation that provides services.
- 4.5 To date, our approach to customer service has seen us move to a digital by design model that reflect this change in technology and our customers’ preferences. The Customer Experience Strategy builds on this, addressing the challenge of meeting increased demand for public services and the expectations of an increasingly digital society all whilst delivering services in a time of decreasing resources.
- 4.6 The strategy has a focus on designing services where customers who can are empowered to help themselves. It sets out how the council will enable new, innovative and efficient ways of interacting with customers, whilst at the same time recognising some customers will still need to use telephone and have access to face to face meetings to interact with the council, especially in more complex matters. It reflects the reality that some customers will not be able to access our services digitally

either by choice, or lack of skills, knowledge or funds, and they will require that services are delivered in other ways, or that they have access to the right support get online.

- 4.7 The Strategy further sets out the council's commitment to provide, high quality services that take customer engagement and feedback to continuously improve how they are delivered. It also acknowledges the need to protect the data held from cyber-crime, in line with the Data Protection Act 2018.

5 Links to other Council Strategies and Plans

- 5.1 The Council Plan 2022 – 2026 and Council Delivery Plan 2022 – 2024 forms the foundation for the Customer Experience Strategy, providing the council with clarity on the future state of customer experience that supports achieving the ambition for Watford to be an outstanding place for everyone: residents, business owners and visitors alike.

- 5.2 The Strategy will link with core strategies and plans including:

- Council Plan / Delivery Plan
- Council's values and behaviours
- Procurement Strategy
- Business Intelligence Strategy
- Organisational Development Strategy
- Community Engagement Strategy

6 How the Strategy has been developed

- 6.1 To develop this strategy we have:

- Reviewed customer feedback (such as complaints information, satisfaction surveys and feedback about our website) helping us to understand what we currently do well and identify those areas where we need to improve.
- Analysed our contact data to understand why, when and how customers contact us, so we can identify the key areas where we should focus on improvement.
- Engaged with key customer groups to understand their contact preferences and the alignment of the proposals outlines in this strategy with their expectations and priorities.
- Engaged with key delivery partners and partner organisations to ensure they are aligned with the aims of the strategy.
- Benchmarked our performance with other local councils, to see how well we manage and deliver our services in comparison, and to share learning and best practice wherever we can.
- Researched the latest customer-service industry trends across both the public and private sector to develop our knowledge of how technology and different delivery models are used to support customers.
- The Strategy has been informed by discussion across the organisation including Associate Directors, elected members and key colleagues across all services.

- 6.2 Subject to approval, the strategy sets out that there is an ongoing process of engagement with key stakeholders and customers to develop and continuously improve key council services and ensure that the Strategy and Delivery Plan remains relevant to delivering excellent customer experiences.

7 How the Strategy is structured

- 7.1 The Strategy sets out the council's vision for the delivery of customer experience. It sits beneath the overarching Council Plan and the themes and commitments it sets out.

- 7.2 Beneath this, in the Council Delivery Plan 2022 – 2024, are interdependent and connected themes, many with links to customer experience and the ambitions of the Strategy, upon which the Strategy will be delivered.

- 7.3 To deliver on the above, the strategy is designed around four key themes:

1. Services designed with people at the heart of everything we do

We will design and deliver services with our customers in mind, using customer insight and feedback to design and improve our services. We will develop our digital channels to allow customers more flexible access to our services, and ensure they are simple and easy to use.

2. Our people

We will make sure that everyone working for the council, our partners and suppliers, understand their role at every stage of the customer journey and how their behaviours and actions are key to creating a positive or negative customer experience.

3. Technology

We will make the most of new technology to help deliver simple and convenient services, whilst being mindful of those who may require a more bespoke approach. We will work with our partners, volunteers and community groups to support residents who do not have access to technology, or who lack digital confidence, to help equalise opportunities in our town.

4. Insight

We will use data to understand how customers use our services and how they feel about them. We will act on this information to continuously improve our services and approach. We know our customers' needs change, so we will continually review our services, to ensure we are planning and developing our services, based on their needs.

- 7.4 The Customer Experience Strategy, including the Delivery Plan, Risk Register and Equality Impact Assessment, can be found in the appendices.

8 Delivering the Strategy

- 8.1 This strategy is a cross-council framework and will be supported by an ambitious delivery plan covering the four-year strategy period. It will be reviewed annually by the Customer Experience Lead to review progress and to ensure it continues to be relevant and deliverable.

- 8.2 Where discrete projects are detailed within the delivery plan these will be fully scoped in accordance with the council's project management framework. This will include the development of a business

case in the first instance to identify the resource and budgetary requirements for organisational approval and then ongoing reporting against the project plan once the project is in the delivery phase.

- 8.3 It is proposed that progress of the overall Customer Experience Strategy Delivery Plan is monitored through quarterly updates on the Council Plan made to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

9 Implications

9.1 Financial

The Shared Director of Finance comments that the Customer Experience Strategy will be delivered within existing budgets. Should additional resources be required a bid will be brought forward as part of the annual budget setting process.

9.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications in this report.

9.3 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

Having had regard to the council's obligations under s149, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed for this strategy.

Key potential positive impacts of the strategy are:

- The Council will support customers who need additional support when accessing Council Services through the Customer Service Centre. Offering services across all traditional contact channels with supported and mediated self-service offered to customers as they require.
- Providing additional support for those who are digitally excluded.
- Disabled customers, including those with visual or hearing impairments, who may find it difficult to attend the Town Hall in person will also benefit from the enhanced digital capability.
- The strategy details the requirement that key services are designed and tested in collaboration with those customers who use / will be using the service. Services will also be continuously improved using customer feedback and insight.
- The website should be simple and clear to use for all customers and assist customers with a wide range of disabilities.
- People who prefer to self-serve will benefit from this policy. This may include younger people.

Key potential negative impacts of the strategy are:

- Older residents and those on low incomes are more likely to be digitally excluded so the increased emphasis on digital channels, is likely to impact older people and those on low incomes more than other residents.
- Some people who do not speak English as a first language may have difficulty understanding and/or following online or automated instructions.

Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

9.4 **Staffing**

There are no staffing implications from the proposals in this report.

9.5 **Accommodation**

It is acknowledged that the Customer Experience Strategy will be aligned to and delivered in the context of the changes planned through the redevelopment of the Town Hall building.

9.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

There are no community safety / crime and disorder implications from the proposals in this report.

9.7 **Sustainability**

There are no sustainability implications from the proposals in this report.

Appendices

Appendix A - Customer Experience Strategy

Appendix B - Customer Experience Strategy - on a page

Appendix C - Customer Experience Strategy - Delivery Plan

Appendix D - Customer Experience Strategy - EIA

Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.