

Part A

Report to: *Overview and Scrutiny Committee*

Date of meeting: *21 June 2023*

Report author: *Customer Services Operations Manager*

Report title: *Customer Experience Strategy Update*

Nature of report: *Information and noting*

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Customer Experience Strategy, approved by cabinet in November 2022, sets out the ambitions of the council for how it intends to deliver services to our customers in the future. At the time of approval, it was agreed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be provided with a summary of the strategy and an update on delivery progress.
- 1.2 The 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 continues to provide great experiences to all of its customers.
- Service design
 - Our people
 - Technology
 - Insight
- 1.4 In the development of the strategy significant work was undertaken to:
- Engage with key customer groups and partners to understand their expectations and priorities when accessing or delivering council services.
 - Review customer feedback to understand what we currently do well and identify those areas where we need to improve.
 - 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 The strategy links with other core corporate strategies and plans including:

- Council's values and behaviours
- Procurement Strategy
- Business Intelligence Strategy
- Organisational Development Strategy
- Community Engagement and Participation Strategy

1.6 This report is to provide progress updates of the Customer Experience Strategy, since its approval in November 2022.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the update in relation to the Customer Experience Strategy and provide any comment on progress to date.

3.0 Report Pathway

3.1 Next review body: *Not applicable:*

3.1.1 Indicative date: *Not applicable*

3.2 Final review body: *Not applicable*

3.2.1 Indicative date: *Not applicable*

Contact Officer:

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Reviewed and signed off by: *Liam Hornsby Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services*

4.0 Detailed Proposal

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 Our Customer Experience 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.
- 4.3 With the increasing use of technology, particularly over recent years, there continues to be a significant shift in the way people communicate and interact. Many of 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.
- 4.4 To date, our approach to customer service has seen the council move to a digital by design model that reflect this change in technology and our customers' preferences. This does not mean that customers **must** transact with us online but recognises that online services provide extra flexibility for our customers to transact with us at a time that is convenient and so services should be digitised where possible and provide the same quality of service as a face to face or telephone transaction. 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.
- 4.5 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 the 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 to get online. The council's Customer Service Centre will signpost any customers who are digitally isolated to the 'Staying Connected' scheme managed by Watford and Three Rivers Trust.

4.6 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.

5.0 Delivery

5.1 Ensuring that the Customer Experience Strategy is vital to continued improved customer experiences across the council. As such, the strategy is accompanied by a Delivery Plan (shown at Appendix 2) setting out specific actions. Delivery of the strategy, and tracking of the associated actions, is governed by a Programme Board, chaired by the Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services, and attended by key representatives from services across the council, including Community Protection, Housing and Revenues and Benefits. The Programme Board track delivery of the Strategy which also reports into the council's Projects Assurance Group, designed to provide internal assurance of project delivery.

6.0 Progress to date

6.1 Significant progress has been made since the approval of the Customer Experience Strategy. Progress updates are detailed in Appendix 3- the Customer Experience Strategy Delivery Progress Updates. Key highlights include:

- Drafting of our Customer Care Standards and Staff Guide to Delivering Great Customer Experiences, ready for launch in early July
- Review of the corporate complaints process to ensure customer complaints are resolved at the earliest opportunity and services are improved based on feedback received. The arrangements for handling complaints received about our partners who deliver services on our behalf are also reflected in the corporate complaints policy. Quarterly complaints meetings are held with all services.
- Monthly meetings held with all service areas to identify and deliver continuous service improvements.
- Implementation of a 'Contact Us' form on our website, which is heavily used by our customers.
- Development of complaints reporting functionality on the Business Intelligence platform. This function is now live.
- Reporting annually and quarterly to Corporate Management Board on complaints received and performance against KPIs.
- Updated Procurement Strategy to include a customer care method statement.

- Key online services have been identified and aligned to key events to promote to our customers and encourage uptake of our digital services. A Communications Plan is being developed for roll out.
- Work has commenced on automating customer satisfaction surveys, giving customers the opportunity to provide feedback at key points of the customer processes.
- A refreshed website and digital review process has been developed to ensure that both contact channels are regular updated.
- The online 'Report It' function has been updated and improved following feedback from customers and engagement with members.

7.0 Implications

7.1 Financial

7.1.1 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. Funding may be required to deliver the following elements of the delivery plan but will be subject to a full business case:

- CES10- Investigating the opportunities to expand the channels through which we deliver our services.
- CES11- Fully exploiting the capabilities of our existing technology to deliver excellent customer processes.
- CES14- Investigating the opportunities to issue proactive service specific customer alerts.

7.2 Legal issues (Monitoring Officer)

7.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications as a result of this report.

7.3 Risks

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Digital Services are not continually monitored and improved	Reduction in transactions through self-service channels impacting the current CSC resource model achievement of KPIs and delivery of the service within budget as a result	The strategy, in addition to a recent enhancement to the council's Digital Improvement team and delivery governance, has helped to retain a focus on continuous service improvement	Treat	6
Lack of engagement with and from service areas.	Unable to meet stakeholder expectations	Ongoing engagement with service areas for delivery of the strategy with a governance scheme which includes service areas	Treat	6
Technology not compatible with proposed solutions.	Unable to deliver commitments as anticipated.	A representative is now on the Project Board to provide IT oversight.	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 ensured that traditional contact channels have been retained, whilst promoting digital services to those who want and are able to use them	Treat	6
Training element of Strategy will be delayed.	Staff do not have sufficient support and skills to deliver the strategy	It has been agreed to deliver this workstream via the Values & Behaviours project. The Project Lead for this is now a Project Board member.	Treat	4

7.4 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

7.4.1 Equalities

Having had regard to the council's obligations under s149, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was 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.

Officers are mindful that further EIAs may be required to deliver the following elements of the delivery plan:

- CES5 - Address digital isolation.
- CES11- Fully exploit the capabilities of our existing technology to deliver excellent customer processes.

7.4.2 Data Protection Impact Assessment

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. However, officers are mindful that DPIAs may be required to deliver some elements of the Delivery Plan as they come forward.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Customer Experience Strategy
- Appendix 2 - Customer Experience Strategy Delivery Plan
- Appendix 3 - Customer Experience Strategy Delivery Progress Updates