

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES – 10 FEBRUARY 2015

EXECUTIVE – 3 MARCH 2015

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND PARTNERSHIP LIAISON

EAST HERTS CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report:

- To propose the Council's Customer Service Strategy for 2015 – 2020.

<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR JOINT MEETING OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES</u>	
That:	
(A)	The Council's proposed Customer Service Strategy detailed in Essential Reference Paper 'B' be reviewed and the Executive be advised of any recommendations.
<u>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EXECUTIVE:</u>	
To recommend to Council that:	
(A)	the Council's Customer Service Strategy be approved as detailed in Essential Reference Paper 'B'; and
(B)	Officers be authorised to progress an outline project plan for its delivery, with any resource requests needed to deliver the Customer Service Strategy being reported to Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee on 26 May 2015 and the Executive on 2 June 2015.

1.0 Background

1.1 The Council established a Customer Service Strategy in August 2008. This established key customer service principles for the organisation:

- Efficiency in dealing with simple enquiries and transactions, releasing professional staff from administration to focus on service.
- More cost effective ways of delivering service and moving those customers that can move, to the least costly methods of service delivery.
- To gain customer insight by capturing, recording and evaluating customer contact, service use and satisfaction.
- To gain knowledge of our customers and their future needs to enhance service delivery and ensure equality of access.

1.2 The Council also ran the programme 'Changing the Way We Work' between 2008 and 2012 which delivered a step change in how Council services were accommodated and provisioned. This included streamlining service delivery and operating costs.

1.3 The Council is committed to a culture of being 'Here to Help' and everyone is engaged in an organisational development project of the same name which commenced in 2013. 'Here to Help' aims to increase organisational effectiveness to deliver high quality services both internally and externally.

1.4 The Council is committed to ensuring the delivery of good quality services that reflect local priorities and resources, stated in our strategic priorities:

- People
Providing fair and accessible services for those that use them and opportunities for everyone to contribute - deliver strong and relevant services.
- Prosperity
Safeguarding and enhancing our unique mix of rural and urban communities, promoting sustainable, economic opportunities and delivering cost effective services - deliver value for money.
- Place
Safe and Clean; a focus on sustainability, the built environment and ensuring our towns and villages are safe and clean.

1.5 The Corporate Strategic Plan 2013/14 – 2016/17 commits the Council to the delivery of the outcomes that local residents and communities want by:

- Providing efficient and joined up services, easily accessible to the customer
- Being a gateway for access. If you don't know who to ask, we will try to help or connect you with someone who can.
- Providing excellent service, ensuring our customers get the services or support they need whether provided directly through us or our partners

We want to understand local issues by:

- Meeting customer and service needs and continuing to develop the skills to deliver them
- Being flexible and resilient in response to change

2.0 Report

2.1 The Council has a number of roles across the district and one of its key roles is providing residents with services and appropriate access to those services. Like most councils, East Herts has been continually looking for ways to improve its services.

2.2 The Council's District Wide Survey in 2013 found that 9 in 10 residents were satisfied with their area as a place to live, 7 in 10 were happy with the way East Herts Council runs things and just over two fifths agreed that the Council provided value for money.

2.3 The pressures of increasing demand driven by the economic downturn, demographic changes and major government initiatives require local authorities to reduce costs still further whilst maintaining quality services. The Council must use a deep understanding of individual services, customers, local needs and technological innovation to offer better demand management, more efficient handling of routine transactions and share more data to make services easier to access or use. This requires service transformation as opposed to incremental improvement.

2.4 Officers have undertaken a systematic analysis to gather knowledge to describe our customer base, understanding their broad preferences and how they access services. This evidence

supporting the strategy is presented in **Essential Reference Paper 'C'**, 'Customer Service Strategy Evidence'.

- 2.5 The proposed Customer Service Strategy for 2015 – 2020 presented in **Essential Reference Paper 'B'** sets out how the Council intends to drive a further step change, as opposed to incremental change in providing services and access to them.
- 2.6 The proposed strategy will require all services to individually consider insight about their customers, local need and how their service is accessed and set out actions, within the Council's medium term financial planning process, to maximise the appropriate digital operation and delivery of services. This will include the requirement to understand the reasons for customer contact and the methods currently used.
- 2.7 The Council's Customer Service Strategy proposes to maintain the principles established in 2008:
- Efficiency in dealing with simple enquiries and transactions, releasing professional staff from administration to focus on service.
 - More cost effective ways of delivering service and moving customers that can move, to the least costly methods of service delivery.
 - To gain customer insight by capturing, recording and evaluating customer contact, service use and satisfaction.
 - To proactively maintain knowledge of our customers and their future needs to inform continuous development of better service delivery and ensure equality of access.
- 2.8 The Customer Service Strategy proposes priority actions to deliver a step change in digital service organisation and delivery:
- 1) Embed Customer Insight in the Service Planning Process
 - Each service to develop evidence based plans using insight about its customers, understand their current methods of accessing services and the reasons why.
 - Each service must use insight to anticipate and mitigate changes in demand.
 - 2) Focus on Channel Shift

- The scope for change must be established using demographic trends and customer profiles with targets and actions being set to develop even more digitally delivered services (including self-service) and encourage more customers to use them where they are able to.
- Growing and promoting the connected digital delivery of services for each service across website, web chat, email, electronic forms and social media.
- Develop entirely digital service (across all access channels) wherever possible/appropriate and cost-efficient; based on efficient and lean digital business processes to deliver high speed, always available, high quality services.
- Develop support to transition customers to digital self-service or enable their supported use, as customers in need will still visit us and we will still need to visit them.

3) Revised Service Standards – Quality and Responsiveness

- Digital Service delivery is ever growing and important. Standards of quality and responsiveness need to be set out and monitored for all digital channels including email, social media and web chat.
- Encouraging customers to use digital self-service and digital access channels with different service standards to promote take up and use.

4) Focus on Minorities

- The minority groups within East Herts need to be better understood by each service and the most effective methods to provide services to those more vulnerable and in need, be identified.
- Alternative models of service delivery, suited to those in minority and high need groups, must be developed.

5) Maintaining Access

- All customer groups must be able to access our services; no-one should be disadvantaged by any actions we take. Equality and Diversity service impact assessments must include a review of the equality of access to services and evaluate any impact of planned changes.

- 2.9 Subject to the endorsement of the proposed strategy, it is recommended that officers prepare an outline project plan and details of resource requirements by the end of May 2015, to achieve the desired step change in digital service provision and delivery to achieve the principles and address the priority actions set out in the Customer Service Strategy 2015 – 2020.
- 2.10 The changes proposed to embed customer insight within the service planning process will be applied to 2016/17 plans and the process will be established with the Senior Management Group before this process starts in May 2015. As 2016/17 will be the first year of the change, a review process will be undertaken to ensure the process is refined.
- 3.0 Implications/Consultations
- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

None

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