

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14 JULY 2015

THE EXECUTIVE – 4 AUGUST 2015

REPORT BY HEAD OF INFORMATION, CUSTOMER AND PARKING SERVICES

IMPLEMENTING THE CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To set out how the Council will implement the Customer Service Strategy (**Essential Reference Paper 'B'**).
- To invite the Committee to comment on the planned approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: That:

(A)	the approach set out to implement the Council's Customer Service Strategy be noted; and
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(B)	the Executive be advised of any recommendations regarding the approach presented.
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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE: That:

(A)	the recommendations from Corporate Business Scrutiny be noted; and
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(B)	the outline plan presented be approved.
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1.0 Background

1.1 The Executive approved the Council's updated Customer Service (CS) Strategy on 4th March 2015 set out in **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**.

1.2 The Council continues to be under pressure due to increased

demand driven by demographic changes, economic challenges and major government initiatives such as Welfare Reform combined with the financial pressures of reduced government grant and the currently fixed (or reduced) Council Tax. The Council has to reduce costs and increase efficiency in order to maintain quality services in the future and prioritise the provision of services.

1.3 The strategy is built upon a systematic analysis of knowledge to describe our customer base, understand their broad preferences and how they access services.

1.4 The updated strategy commits all services to developing a deep understanding of their customers, local needs and technological innovation to offer better demand management, more efficient handling of routine transactions and share information to make services easier to access or use.

1.5 Corporate Business Scrutiny and the Executive requested an outline plan (**Essential Reference Paper 'C'**) of how the Council intends to deliver the approved CS strategy, recognising that it was critical for the Council's continued success in delivering successful outcomes and services.

2.0 Customer Service Strategy

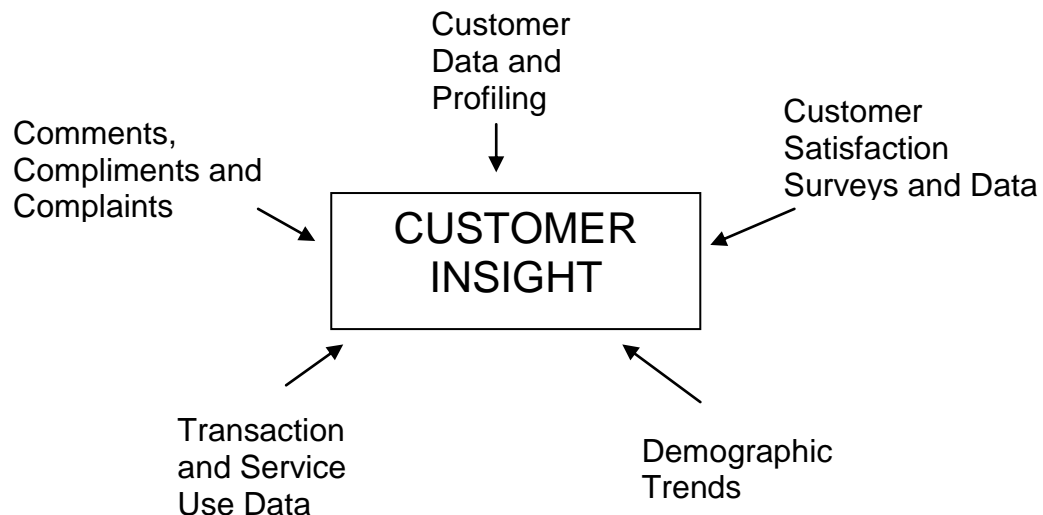
2.1 Priority Actions

The priority actions established in the CS strategy for all services 2015-2020 are set out in full in **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**. The high level actions are:

- Embed Customer Insight in the service planning process
- Focus on Channel Shift
- Revised Service Standards – Quality and Responsiveness
- Focus on Minorities
- Maintaining Access

2.2 Embed Customer Insight

Customer Insight is made up of a range of data regarding a service:



2.2.1 Within the Financial and Business Planning (FBP) process 2015-16, as set out in the paper 'CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN 2016/17 – 2019/20 – THE PROCESS' a pack of evidence with all the information available to generate insight about customers will be collated for each service. This will be used with other information including financial analysis, statutory service description, workforce planning and benchmarking data.

2.2.2 The initial process will establish where gaps exist within the information that services have. Service plan actions will be based upon the evidence available and further actions will be agreed to enhance the information available in the future.

2.2.3 This embeds customer insight within service planning as one of the key dimensions upon which the Council may assess priorities, investments and demands for change.

2.3 Channel Shift

2.3.1 The CS strategy requires services to establish the current pattern channel use and/or delivery for each service, the service delivery model. The drivers for the demand from customers will also be established to understand why customers opt to use a particular method of contact.

2.3.2 The CS strategy established a current base line of expected customer use of different access channels:

- Email = 32%
- Internet = 26%
- Telephone = 34%
- Face to Face = 8%

This will be used as a baseline expectation for all services to assess themselves against. However, where more information exists about a service's customers a more accurate service delivery profile may be determined. For example Development Management customers will have a different profile to those using our Benefits services.

2.3.3 The model of current contact will be established in the FBP process and gaps will be identified between the way in which services are delivered/accessed compared to profile, services will be supported by the Business Development, Customer Service and Shared IT teams to look for opportunities to enhance the digital delivery of services and self-service opportunities.

2.3.4 A key part of understanding the level of service access/delivery by channel will be to identify failure demand and the drivers of it e.g. repeated contacts such as status updates and checking progress; caused by a failure to do something or do something right.

2.3.5 This will be challenging within the 2015-16 service planning process as the data available regarding the volume of access by channel, type and customers will be incomplete. Actions will therefore be established for each service within the FBP process to improve the information available, set more informed targets and actions to achieve the optimum delivery of a service by each channel. This may include looking at policies, procedures, processes, core Council and line of business IT applications. In each case actions proposed will be based on evidence available and the recognised reasons for change for each service.

2.4 Service Standards

2.4.1 The Council is committed to running an effective Comment Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) procedure alongside a customer satisfaction monitoring system called 'Gov Metric'. Opportunities to exploit the use of these existing systems will be progressed in 2015 and an action plan established to run

from April 2016. However these provide an incomplete view of satisfaction with services and service delivery on their own.

- 2.4.2 A review of all customer satisfaction monitoring including the District Wide survey and ad-hoc surveys will be completed in 2015/16 to establish a co-ordinated plan. This will enable satisfaction data to be fully exploited for service development and within the FBP process from 2016/17.
- 2.4.3 Establishing service delivery models for each service will show the extent of channel use and enable a council wide channel model to be established with targets by service for optimal channel shift. Methods of evaluating the success and customer satisfaction with channels will be reviewed to propose revised customer driven service standards in 2016/17. The service standards may then also reflect the length of time different channels take to deliver services and responsiveness may even be managed across channels to encourage and incentivise channel shift to self-service and assisted service.

2.5 Vulnerable Customer Groups

- 2.5.1 Given the initial focus on evidence based customer insight to inform the service planning process detailed work to focus on alternative models for service delivery will be part of the focus within the 2016/17 service planning process.
- 2.5.2 This does not mean that services will not be considering this within the current 2015/16 process, but that in the first year services will necessarily be identifying their own vulnerable customer groups and how best to offer and deliver services to those groups. This knowledge can then be used within the following year to establish whether there may be opportunities and business cases for alternative ways of delivering services to vulnerable groups across East Herts.

2.6 Access

- 2.6.1 Throughout all our plans to optimise service delivery suited to customer preferences and the Council's priorities all service actions and projects will continue to require Equality Impact Assessments.
- 2.6.2 An annual impact assessment of access channels will be undertaken to ensure no customer groups are disadvantaged by

the implementation of service plan actions arising from the CS strategy.

2.6.3 Specific work to enhance the delivery of self-service and assisted service will be undertaken with the Council's Customer Service Centres in Herford and Bishop's Stortford to develop the shape of these facilities over the life of the strategy.

2.6.4 Customer profiling will also be utilised to assess the needs of any vulnerable service users and linked to the minorities work theme will ensure services tailored to best meet the needs and demands of vulnerable groups are developed where required.

2.7 Resources

2.7.1 The implementation of an evidence based FBP process requires the evidence to be available. Members supported the establishment of an Information Analyst to support the development of the CS strategy and other business case led projects for a period of 2 years.

2.7.2 In order to achieve the change to the customer led elements of the FBP process it will be necessary to divert the resources of the Customer Services Manager and more significantly the Digital Media and Information Manager for the next three months. During this accelerated period it will become apparent if a further level of transitional resources is required over the next 2-3 years to support the establishment of systems and process to maintain the revised FBP process. However, it is important to note that the implementation of a customer management platform, customer self-service platform and enhanced website and intranet services will place demands upon the same resource over the same time period.

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

EAST HERTS CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY –
Corporate Business Scrutiny 10th February 2015.

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