

SUBJECT:	CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY UPDATE
DIRECTORATE:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK
REPORT AUTHOR:	JOANNE CROOKES: CUSTOMER SERVICES MANAGER

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on the progress and successes of the Customer Experience Strategy and the underlying Action Plan including key achievements to date.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 A new three year Customer Experience Strategy was agreed by Executive on 20 March 2017. The strategy focuses on improvements to the overall customer experience when accessing council services and reflects the council's Vision 2020.
- 2.2 The strategy reflects our core values and seeks to deliver outcomes across six key strategic areas, three of which are about the customer journey and three which are focussed on transformational change and organisational efficiencies.
- 2.3 This report will highlight what we have achieved to date as well as what we are currently delivering across the council and will summarise our forward plan to complete our programme by 2020 when the strategy will be refreshed.

3. Background – the six strategic areas

- 3.1 **Accessibility:** We will provide equal and easy access to our services. This means that we will meet the needs of all our residents, businesses and service users.
- 3.2 **Value for money:** Cut waste and use resources sensibly. Enable our customers to self-serve wherever possible and where appropriate, by focussing on providing a first rate website.
- 3.3 **Efficiency:** Equip our staff with the skills and knowledge they need to provide an excellent standard of service and minimise customers' repeat or unnecessary contact. A "Right first time" philosophy.
- 3.4 **Engagement:** Listen to our customers and use their contributions to improve our service.
- 3.5 **Improved Standards:** Instil customer care principles throughout the council and work together to deliver high standards of service provision.
- 3.6 **Innovation:** Explore new ways of accessing and delivering services by approaching change as a modern and forward thinking organisation.

4. Delivered Projects

- 4.1 Projects delivered and outcomes achieved in this first year are set out in this section.
- 4.2 Our website has been reviewed and improved. We have promoted www.lincoln.gov.uk with a comprehensive marketing and publicity campaign which has included articles in Your Lincoln and Home. There have been digital posters at bus stops across the city and we have harnessed Facebook and Twitter to raise awareness of what customers can do through our website.
- 4.3 Staff have been encouraged to 'think digital' through an internal communications campaign. We have also set up a group of digital advocates who are enthusiastic about on-line services and represent areas across all directorates. These advocates highlight issues in their service areas and inspire their team to look at self-service solutions and access.
- 4.4 To enable customers to use on-line services even if they do not have access at home, we have provided, in conjunction with our DWP partners, a suite of 20 self-service PCs. These are free to use and readily accessible in our public area.
- 4.5 In addition to this we publicise all free and publicly accessible computers across the City and the surrounding area on our website. Including those in libraries and at Lincoln College where assistance in their use is also available.
- 4.6 Some of our service users have not used computers regularly or need assistance to build their confidence. We trialled a network of digital champions to provide support at the City Hall public PCs. This worked well for the limited number of people who engaged with it but this provision has been superseded by our Universal Credit support team who provide digital assistance.
- 4.7 We have completed a review of our Welfare advice sessions to reflect the changing levels of demand across the City.
- 4.8 Customer Service Staff have benefitted from a programme of awareness sessions and training briefings to ensure that they are aware of all kinds of diversity and equality issues. They have the tools they need to deal with everyone effectively no matter what their issues are.
- 4.9 We have introduced an on-line claim form for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction which has been embraced by the public and very few claims are not made in this way. This has reduced the amount of staff resource required to process a claim and has made savings in printing and postage possible.
- 4.10 On-line forms have been developed to integrate service requests from our website directly into our service delivery software. In many cases this has replaced the need for staff to duplicate information received by email and re-key it into the systems used.
- 4.11 The green waste system has facilitated the collection of £2.7 million with over 55,000 self-serve transactions. This process has been continually developed to be an exemplar self-service transaction for the authority and for the current year, 88% of applications have been completed as a self-serve transaction. This has resulted

in over a 50% reduction in calls to this queue in Customer Services.

- 4.12 We have made City Hall a cash (and cheque) free zone from July 2017. Banking cash and dealing with returned cheques was a drain on our staff resources and our finances. Direct Debit and direct bank transfers are far cheaper for us to collect than all other payment methods.
- 4.13 We have outsourced a large proportion of our outgoing mail. This has delivered financial savings and staffing efficiencies across a number of service areas. We have been able to provide the DWP with a commercial postal service using our existing staffing.
- 4.14 We have developed a call monitoring template which scores staff calls according to set criteria to evaluate the quality of the call handling. It rates their politeness, knowledge, accuracy and their follow-up actions to ensure that we are providing the best service possible.

5. Projects currently in Progress

- 5.1 Current projects which are being worked on are set out in this section.
- 5.2 We are currently working on the installation of our new telephony system which will bring us enhanced functionality. Testing is currently being undertaken and we expect the system to be installed during the summer. This system will enable us to deal with emails more effectively by sending them automatically to free agents.
- 5.3 On-line forms are being rolled out across new service areas. They are currently working well in environmental services and council tax and further development, across services, will be achieved in the coming year.
- 5.4 We are working on a review of our customer service standards which will be corporate. The vision in the strategy is that the whole organisation will work together to deliver an improved customer experience. This means that from the point of first contact through to the final point of delivery all elements will be accessible and proficient. This principle will be outlined in our refreshed Customer Charter which is in the final stages of development.
- 5.5 My Info – Our self-service portal which gives Individuals access to their Council Tax and rent accounts – is currently being updated to a new version which will offer more functions. It will allow us to extend the information included to a wider range of service areas as well as being a more user-friendly and reliable platform.
- 5.6 Customer Care Training has been identified as mandatory for all staff. We had engaged an external company to deliver a one-day course but this training was expensive and many staff felt that it was too long for roles which are not predominantly front-facing. We have developed an in-house programme which is currently being rolled out. These sessions are less than two hours and are tailored to the staff involved. The feedback from the courses delivered to date has been very positive.
- 5.7. E-billing is a very efficient way of invoicing our charges. The number of residents registered for paperless billing has steadily increased from 2952 in June 2017 to 4300 in April 2018.

5.8 The continued promotion of Direct Debits will bring us considerable savings in transaction charges. Housing rents is an area where we have a number of customers paying weekly at the post office resulting in inflated transaction charges. We are currently developing paperless direct debits with the Housing admin team.

6. Forward Projects

6.1 Future projects which we will tackle in the next financial year are outlined below.

6.2 We will explore new and innovative ways to measure customer satisfaction levels.

6.3 We will consider the use of live-chat following the installation of the new telephony system. We will do this if customer demand for this service exists at a level which makes the investment feasible.

6.4 Social media responses are currently handled by the Comms Team. We will develop a procedure to enable service requests to be handled quickly and efficiently within Customer Services, whilst key corporate messages and other publicity will remain in Communications.

6.5 Further development of quality call monitoring will be considered. There are a number of service areas who currently take their own calls but who do not measure or report on their performance.

6.6 We will continue to explore opportunities to share City Hall with other public sector and voluntary sector bodies who provide services to the same individuals. This improves convenience and accessibility for customers and is a potential source of income for the council.

6.7 Once more routine transactions are moved to self-service there will be an opportunity for staff development. Customer Service Agents will have the time to become 'customer advocates' and act on behalf of customers who are experiencing problems or having difficulties to resolve their issues and provide a superior level of service.

6.8 We will develop self-service web-enabled, on-line booking for areas such as Hartsholme County Park, community centres and sports pitches.

6.9 We will explore ideas and opportunities for the commercialisation of our existing services and new ones.

7. Strategic Priorities

7.1 Let's reduce inequality

The Customer Experience Strategy supports equal access to all services for all individuals. On-line services are available 24 hours a day & 7 days a week and can make access easier for people with mobility difficulties, impaired communication skills and people with mental health difficulties. For people who cannot access services on line we still offer an accessible telephone answering service and face to face options.

7.2 High performing services

The core aim of the strategy is to improve our services across all areas to meet the needs of our customers. It highlights the fact that we are all responsible for increasing customer satisfaction and seeking opportunities to deliver efficiencies.

8. **Organisational Impacts**

8.1 Finance (including whole life costs where applicable)

This wide-reaching programme of projects and mini projects will be individually costed along with estimated savings as the Programme is rolled out.

8.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules:

These will be applied to individual projects as required.

8.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights

Equality Impact Assessments are carried out on each individual project if appropriate at the project planning stage.

9. **Risk Implications**

9.1 This is a programme of multiple projects each will have an individual risk assessment as appropriate. There is a high level risk register for the whole programme which has been subject to audit.

10. **Recommendation**

10.1 Members to note the content of the report and provide questions and comments as appropriate.

Is this a key decision? No

Do the exempt information categories apply? No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply? No

How many appendices does the report contain? None

List of Background Papers:

Lead Officer:

Joanne Crookes
Telephone (01522) 873407