

REPORT TO: CABINET

DATE: 1 DECEMBER 2022

TITLE: CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR ALASTAIR GUNN, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR GOVERNANCE

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This is not a Key Decision
It is on the Forward Plan as Decision Number I014386
Call-in Procedures may apply
This decision will affect no ward specifically.

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** Cabinet adopts the Customer Service Strategy, and associated action plan (attached as appendices A and B to the report).

REASON FOR DECISION

- A** Implementation of the strategy will ensure our services remain accessible to all users, whilst also looking to make optimal use of digital channels. The strategy takes a whole Council approach to ensuring standards of customer service are consistently high, and will include those of other organisations we work with such as HTS Group Ltd.
- B** In order to support the changes in technology available to the Council to ensure we develop and deliver our services in a way that meet resident's needs and expectations.

BACKGROUND

1. The previous Customer Services Strategy and associated action plan ran from July 2016 to November 2019. The vast majority of the actions were completed with closure of the cash office incorporated into the Council's accommodation work.
2. Whilst the previous strategy covered one part of how we interact with our customers, namely the activities of Contact Harlow's customer advisors, it was

clear that we needed a new customer service strategy aligned with the corporate strategy and associated other strategies to set out how we will provide services to our customers in the coming years.

3. The global pandemic catalysed significant development to IT systems to ensure that customers can fully interact with the Council online. There has also been considerable development on the website and processes are continually being refined to ensure customers can access information easily and in a fully accessible format.
4. There are very few processes that can't be achieved online and this has greatly improved the customer experience for our customers who wish to interact with us in this way, moving the Council on by at least two years in our plan provide all processes and services in an online format. It is important that we continue to develop the way the Council interacts with customers alongside this to ensure that our service provision meet both our needs and theirs in terms of use of channel and quality of service.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

5. Good customer service for residents is linked to everything the Council does and therefore a whole council approach is imperative to ensuring that residents receive what they need from us. Linked to the aims of the Community Engagement Strategy the Council's customer service approach will involve listening to active feedback residents provide; as well as reviewing our performance data and processes to drive developments in services provided.
6. A focus on reducing avoidable contact will mean that resources can be concentrated on areas of enhancing services provided and developing new routes of communication so that residents can make use of council services at the time and via route that most suits them.
7. Use of digital channels should not be at the detriment of the user and should always match or improve upon services offered in other ways previously. Through continued investment of time in improving and building upon the council's website and integrated systems, residents will be provided with increased amounts of live data by way of updates to enquiries and requests. This will extend to work with HTS Group Ltd to provide live updates into council systems on works they are undertaking, in line with their own digital improvements.
8. Alongside the strategy is an associated action plan that takes all the outcomes from the strategy and feeds them into around 11 key work streams. These will be reviewed and monitored quarterly via the Wider Leadership Team.
9. It is likely that some of the outcomes will require funding, particularly the customer care programme. If the strategy is adopted, this will require further scoping work to be undertaken to understand costs and other resources required.

10. The Customer Service Strategy and initial action plan is set out at Appendix A to the report.

IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Growth and Regeneration

The proposals in the Customer Strategy are consistent with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement and will help to improve communication with residents and businesses.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance

As contained within the report.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Housing

As outlined in the report.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Communities and Environment

The Customer Service Strategy will be a key link to the Community Engagement strategy to ensure effective engagement with residents, businesses, the community and voluntary sector.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance and Corporate Services

The strategy is based on our statutory requirements to allow equality of access to the public, the need for clear and unambiguous communication and addressing channel shift for future service provision.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support

Appendices

Appendix A – Customer Service Strategy

Appendix B – Customer Service Strategy Action Plan

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.