

Brighton & Hove City Council

SFCR Committee

Agenda Item 67

Subject: Customer Experience Strategy

Date of meeting: 7 December 2023

Report of: Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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Ward(s) affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek approval from the Committee for the Customer Experience Strategy which has been refreshed based on feedback received from our customers and in consultation with the council's Customer Experience Steering Group and Customer Experience Ambassadors.

1.2 The overarching aim of this strategy is to drive improvement of the customer experience across the organisation and deliver our Council Plan commitment of being 'a responsive council with well-run services'.

1.3 Our customers include everyone who lives, works, visits or does business in Brighton & Hove. Customers include those who need to interact with the council as well as those the council has to interact with, such as where we have a duty of care.

1.4 We have developed this strategy as a means to:

- Ensure a shared understanding across the organisation of what a good customer experience feels like
- Plan the actions needed to achieve good customer experience, learning from best practice both internally and externally
- Embed a consistently good standard of service delivery with resilience and efficiency, in a fair and inclusive way

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the Committee approves the Customer Experience Strategy as set out in Appendix 1.

3. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1** Overall customer satisfaction with services provided by the council stands at 59% which falls slightly shy of our target of 60% which is the national benchmark for satisfaction with local authorities (Source: LGA Polling on resident satisfaction with councils.) 30% of respondents to the 2022/23 annual customer satisfaction survey indicated they were fairly or very dissatisfied with the level of customer service they received from the council. This is a reduction of 6% compared to those who indicated they were dissatisfied in 2021/22.
- 3.2** The Customer Experience Steering Group (CESG) will own the implementation of this strategy. This group has representatives from all key services across the council.
- 3.3** The strategy will provide clarity and coherence of communication given the wide range of services and stakeholders involved.
- 3.4** The Customer Promise and Customer Vision have been refreshed by the Customer Experience Steering Group, and an action plan has been developed to help achieve this vision.
- 3.5** The Customer Experience Ambassador network includes staff from key frontline services across the organisation. The Ambassadors work alongside their Customer Experience Steering Group lead and the Customer Experience team to promote and embed key messages within their service related to customer experience including the 'One Council' approach.
A One Council approach means working together collaboratively for the benefit of our customers, being explicitly aware that the customer is a customer of the council as a whole, and not of an individual service and being explicitly aware that as staff we work for the council and not for an individual service.

4. ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1** We have conducted research of other local authorities in their delivery of customer service:
- We have spoken to other councils including other unitary councils regarding their approach to customer experience as well as their digital inclusion strategies
 - We have reviewed the customer experience strategies of other local authorities
 - We have reviewed the response time commitments of other local authorities as part of a benchmarking exercise to establish whether our response times to customer communications are comparable with other local authorities. It was acknowledged that waiting times varied considerably depending on the local authority's customer service delivery model
- 4.2** The strategy has been developed based on feedback from customers, engagement with the Customer Experience Steering Group and Customer Experience Ambassadors and research of other local authorities' customer experience strategies and response metrics. Business cases will be developed

for the Committee's approval as required to further enhance customer experience.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

5.1 To inform the update of this strategy and to ensure customers remain at its heart, we have reviewed and analysed feedback received from customers on their experience of our services. We have outlined some of these key sources below:

- Corporate Customer Experience Survey results (including those who completed the survey in paper format at council Customer Service Centres and Libraries) between April 2022-March 2023 (**Total number of respondents: 5803.**) These results provide us with an indication of customer satisfaction levels with the council and service accessibility. The majority of respondents also provided free text comments outlining what they liked or disliked about the provision of council services which have been analysed to identify priority areas of focus.
- Councillor enquiries data: since the councillor enquiries case management system was relaunched on the 16th of May 2023 following the elections, councillors have received a total of **2547 enquiries** through the system as of the 8th of November 2023. This system provides us with vital intelligence on why customers are contacting their councillor and identifies potential areas of 'failure demand' (caused by a failure on the part of the council to do something for a customer or to do it right for the customer and they have had to escalate the issue.)
- Corporate complaints and compliments – a total of **2201 complaints** were received in 2022/23. Feedback helps us learn when we make mistakes and we've used this complaints data in the refresh of this strategy to understand where improvements need to be made for our customers. A total of **1477 compliments** were received in 2022/23, identifying where things have gone well for customers helps inform best practice.
- A mystery shopping programme was conducted by an independent company between May and June of our council services. **73 'shops' were conducted in total, including 18 visits, 41 calls and 14 emails.** Shoppers were provided with different scenarios to follow, simulating typical enquiries from real customers. The aim was to evaluate how effectively and efficiently these queries were handled and responded to by the service. The feedback provided by the mystery shoppers of their interaction with the council and the recommendations provided by the mystery shopping company on areas of improvement have also been embedded in this updated strategy.
- We've also considered the **feedback received by Customer Service Centre advisors** from customers when visiting the Customer Service Centres at Hove Town Hall and Bartholomew's House, specifically the reason for their visit and any difficulties they experienced in accessing our services.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Customer Experience Strategy will enable the council to deliver consistent, resilient and efficient services across the organisation, which in turn is expected to improve levels of customer satisfaction.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any costs associated with the Customer Experience Strategy will be met from existing resources or future business cases will be developed.

Finance Officer Consulted: James Hengeveld Date: 06/11/2023

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The proposals contained in the strategy are within the Council's powers to implement and will help the Council in discharging its function regarding the promotion of the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area. In addition to improving the customer experience, they will contribute to the achievement of the Council's duties under the Best Value Act 1999,

Lawyer Consulted: Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis Date: 06/11/2023

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Our customer satisfaction survey captures equalities monitoring data that we analyse to make our organisation as inclusive and accessible as possible for all our customers and to meet our legal duties on how our work and the services we deliver affect people with different protected characteristics.
- 9.2 Equalities implications are a standard agenda item at all Customer Experience Steering Group meetings, this group is responsible for developing and implementing this strategy and includes members from the Equalities team.
- 9.3 Equalities implications are also a standard agenda item at the Customer Experience Ambassador network events and Ambassadors are encouraged to share best practice and any barriers around equality issues with the Customer Experience team and with each other.
- 9.4 Equalities implications are also a core part of the mandatory Customer Experience induction training sessions for all new starters to the organisation.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 Increased use of digital services means customers do not have to travel to our Customer Service Centres or other access points across the city to access our services thereby reducing carbon emissions.

11. Other Implications

11.1 Social Value and procurement implications

No further significant implications arising from this report.

11.2 Crime & disorder implications

No further significant implications arising from this report.

11.3 Public health implications

No further significant implications arising from this report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Customer Experience Strategy

