

Subject: Improving the Customer Experience
Date of Meeting: 22 April 2010
Report of: Director of Finance & Resources
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Key Decision: No
Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 Understanding our residents and providing a good experience for customers is fundamental to the provision of quality public services. Working towards this and focusing on the customer will become more important as the council moves forward over the next few years to achieving 'A Council the City Deserves'.
- 1.2 'A Council the City Deserves' will change the focus of the council to one that focuses upon outcomes for residents. The vision looks to Improve the Customer Experience and achieve Value for Money through a model of Intelligent Commissioning. This report presents the first key steps of the work to improve the customer experience and introduces a set of recommendations that embrace the vision.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the actions proposed to improve the customer experience be approved (see paragraph 3.4 - 3.12).
- 2.3 That Cabinet endorses the Customer Charter (Appendix 2) and the next steps to develop it with customer feedback (see paragraph 3.13).

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 Members agreed the Access Vision in November 2007 which initiated the work in the authority on improving the customer experience. It was an overarching policy vision for how our citizens will access our services in the future, linking to service transformation aspirations in relation to the Varney Report.
- 3.2 Over the last year, Heads of Service and Managers have volunteered their time to meet as a work stream with an Assistant Director under the name 'Improving the Customer Experience' (ICE). Arrangements are now in place for this group to feed directly into 'A Council the City Deserves'.

- 3.3 The work stream continues to meet to steer and deliver the ICE Programme informed by a Sounding Board made up of a cross section of staff, and customer insight data and information.
- 3.4 The ICE Programme's vision is:
- "To transform the customer experience so they see excellent council services paid for by public money and know they will be served in a timely, efficient, professional and consistent manner, no matter whether they are on line, on the telephone or talking to someone in person."*
- 3.5 The council deals with a vast amount of customer traffic, 460,000 yearly contacts or transactions have been estimated through different access channels for Housing Management, Parking, and Benefits alone. Added to this are 300,000 contacts to switchboard and 1.7 million physical visits and over 2 million online visits to Libraries.
- 3.6 When the Brighton & Hove resident population is profiled using Mosaic groupings (Appendix 1), we can see that face to face contact is not the main preference of the largest segment of customers (those with high levels of contact). Although personal contact is evident for the second largest group (those with infrequent contact) there is an openness to other access channels.
- 3.7 This insight and segmentation shows opportunities for council services to move to other channels and forms of delivery which should be embraced as services are redesigned with the customer at the centre. The analysis we have done allows some key aspirations for the future of customer contact:
- The way that services are publicised is extremely important and there needs to be clear access routes to services through the web or telephone for residents that have infrequent contact with the council.
 - Services involving assessments form a big part of contact which can be repetitive and complex, especially if the service falls between departments generating a significant amount of contact and we need to strive for full resolution of queries, bringing the back office to front.
 - Over half of residents in Brighton & Hove would use the Internet now to access services; this will only increase over time. Web enabling services will not alienate any one group completely and coupling it with an efficient telephone service will meet all needs.
- 3.8 40 key actions are being recommended within the ICE Programme. They include simple short term actions that can make a difference to customers now and longer term actions that will change the way that access to services is organised.
- 3.8 The recommendations are framed by the following 4 principles which will bring benefits to customers and increase efficiency within services:

Principles	Benefits	
	External	Internal
That we move towards self service as the primary access channel for transactional services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More convenient for customers ▪ Empowering the customer giving them greater control over the transaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More efficiency in high volume services ▪ Leaner processes ▪ Fewer overheads
That we create transparent services offering quality services and inspire confidence from residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clearer signposting, more direct routes for customers ▪ Trust in what us being offered ▪ Support during the transition to self service ▪ Transparency about what the council delivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduction in avoidable contact and failure demand ▪ Greater ownership of enquiries by staff ▪ Easier for services to join up / work together ▪ Avoidance of a front office / back office split
That the customer focus within the organisation is reinvigorated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better service delivery and outcomes ▪ Improved individual customer experience ▪ A clear and concise promise of what to expect from council services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A pride in what we do that will lead to first contact resolution ▪ Clear and well publicised customer service standards that are upheld and delivered by all parts of the council ▪ A clear and concise customer service charter
That we build on our Customer Insight and use this knowledge to regularly review how services are delivered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting customer's different needs and demands ▪ Personalised services ▪ Convenient services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appreciating our customer's differences ▪ Positive impact on satisfaction rates ▪ Better strategic planning ▪ Customer centred service design

3.9 In the long term it is recommended that the council move to a position where quick transaction based services are offered through the website so customers can self serve. The web front end has to be fully integrated with back office ICT systems to ensure the success and efficiency and end to end processes for the customer. To achieve this a corporate solution should be found using 'Middleware' to support services to web enable. This will create links between ICT systems and a platform for services to develop and pursue opportunities for web access. High volume transactional services will be prioritised and inform a rolling programme of web enablement based on the needs and preferences of customers. It is believed that that the web enabling of services is a greater priority than having a council wide Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System and will bring more value for money and benefits to the customer. Some funding for this has been provisionally earmarked from the ICT Fund in 2011/12 and 2012/13, however no expenditure will be incurred until a full a business case has been developed. This piece of work will be undertaken during 2010/11.

3.10 As not all services lend themselves to web enabling and not all residents have a preference to access services on line, steps can be taken in the medium term to develop Community Contact Points. They are proposed information hubs for customers, easing navigation between services and offering face to

face support during the general shift to self serve options. Libraries that can host community hubs have been identified in areas of the city where personal contact is favoured by residents. Where appropriate and where it makes financial sense opportunities will be looked for to co-locate services in community locations. Community Contact Points can also support social inclusion agendas and be a focus for residents to 'Get Involved' with the local council and democracy.

- 3.11 Community Contact Points will offer a visible council presence and help to create a greater transparency about council services. The move to a new Customer Service Centre in Bartholomew House gives an opportunity to rebrand central reception points so that they reflect their purpose for the customer. Likewise, greater consistency across public telephone lines will offer clarity to the customer journey and increase confidence. Specific options for locations for other Community Contact Points will be developed during 2010/11.
- 3.12 Short term actions are being progressed and implemented within the ICE Programme, these include:
- Performance Framework on Customer Experience – high level data on customer volumes and access channels from services will now be reported centrally. This will contribute to the organisation's customer insight and ability to plan more strategically.
 - Customer Satisfaction Questions – Services are starting to use three questions to gauge customer satisfaction in a standard way. Results will be collated centrally to give us a better understanding of the variations between services.
 - Guide to Services – an up to date Guide to key services has been developed for the Council Tax booklet included with the 2010 bills.
 - Minimum Standards and Guidance (for receptions, telephones, voicemail, and email signatories) have been finalised and publicised internally.
 - Proposals have been made for better arrangements for public offices during times of emergencies (e.g. adverse weather)
- 3.13 Fundamental to putting the customer at the centre of what we do, is agreeing and adopting a Customer Charter setting out the council's promise and commitment to them. A Customer Charter has been drafted with the ICE Sounding Board to state the experience that we want our customers to have, based on their needs (Appendix 2). When finalised and after a period of customer feedback this will replace the current council charter and standards.

4. CONSULTATION

Internal Consultation with Officers

- 4.1 There has been consistent consultation with Delivery Services throughout the council. The ICE recommendations have been directed by Service Managers to reflect what is required so improvements can be made to the immediate customer experience and along side the long term vision and future direction of access to services.

- 4.2 A Sounding Board made up of frontline officers and supervisory staff, have been feeding into the ICE Programme and the recommendations include suggestions from them.
- 4.3 A campaign page for ICE has been launched on the Intranet to raise awareness of the programme and invites contributions and comments in an open discussion forum.
- 4.4 The consultation to be undertaken with the public on the Customer Charter have been agreed by the council's Research Guidance and Consultative Panel (RGCP).

External Consultation

- 4.5 Customer consultation will be sought in relation to specific projects and initiatives within the programme as appropriate.
- 4.6 Feedback will be sought on the Customer Charter (in line with steps agreed by RGCP) and comments will be invited on the website, in reception areas and by officers asking customers on the street. Interest groups will also be advised how they can comment and feedback.
- 4.7 The Programme will make use of the Stronger Communities Partnership on specific projects where relevant and will observe the Community Engagement Framework.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The majority of the recommendations contained within the Improving the Customer Experience Report can be contained within existing budgets. Some of the recommendations will have financial implications, however, it is expected that the efficiencies generated by the improvements will exceed these.

Finance Officer Consulted: Patrick Rice Date: 17/03/10

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 Cabinet is entitled to give effect to the report recommendations at paragraph 2 above, as one of their roles is to ensure the development of effective policies and high quality services to Brighton & Hove, in this instance in relation to customer access, which has corporate importance.

Part 4.1, paragraphs 8 and 9 of the constitution refer.

Lawyer Consulted: Oliver Dixon Date: 22/03/10

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out for specific projects and policies as appropriate within the programme.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 The recommendations require a corporate buy in and commitment so their delivery achieves corporate and long lasting change.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 None

Risk & Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 Full risk and opportunity appraisals will be undertaken for each project as part of the project management.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 This programme is key to the success of 'A Council the City Deserves' and an improvement in the customer experience will be the visible outcome of the proposals. The recommendations will have implications throughout the organisation and at service level.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 Options on the governance of the ICE have been discussed at a senior level and with members. Having the programme within 'A Council the City Deserves' is the best mechanism to move the programme forward to achieve meaningful outcomes.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Approval is sought on the governance for the Improving the Customer Experience Programme to bring it within the arrangements for 'A Council the City Deserves'. The 'customer' is a key principle and component required to achieve the vision and national initiatives like Total Place. The Comprehensive Area Assessment also views customer insight highly and authorities that have been doing this well are consistently rated higher. Therefore ICE requires a leadership and accountability at the highest level to move the programme forward and sustain changes.
- 7.2 There has been a great deal of work to improve the customer experience during the last 12 months to establish the way forward and as a result, real and achievable actions are being recommended. This has been a direct result of a group of committed volunteers.
- 7.3 Endorsement is being sought on the principles of adopting a Customer Charter. This is a fundamental building block that will underline our customer focus in the organisation. The wording of the Charter will be finalised in light of the customer feedback and this will be shared with Members in due course.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Broad Customer Segments
2. Draft Customer Charter

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

1. Improving the Customer Experience Report (plus Appendices)

