

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
14 SEPTEMBER 2021**

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY 2021-2026

REPORT OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR ELIZABETH DENNIS-HARBURG

COUNCIL PRIORITY: BE A MORE WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE AND EFFICIENT COUNCIL / PEOPLE FIRST

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report proposes a new customer service strategy covering 2021-2026. The strategy sets out how we will put customers at the heart of everything we do.
- 1.2 We've taken on board feedback from the 2020 Peer Challenge Review and have incorporated a target operating model to ensure a consistent approach to customer service across all our business areas.
- 1.3 We've adopted the following Customer Care Standards:
- Make it easy to access services, 24/7, thinking digital first
 - Continue to offer traditional contact methods for those unable to interact online
 - Take responsibility or find the right person to help
 - Put customers first
 - Be courteous and helpful
 - Treat customers with fairness and respect

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the Committee note the following documents:
- Customer Service Strategy 2021-2026
 - Appendix B - Customer Care Standards
- 2.2. That the Committee note that the Strategy pre-emptively refers to the new People First Priority set out in the draft Council Plan due to be considered by Cabinet and approved by Council in September.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The Council has a Customer Service Centre (CSC) where most customer contacts are handled by a dedicated team of Customer Service Assistants (CSA's). However, some initial contacts and more complex enquiries go directly into teams across the Council.
- 3.2. We understand the pandemic has changed how people shop, do business, and generally interact with organisations, including the Council. This means that even more has shifted to online and the way in which customers choose to access services is continuously evolving.
- 3.3. As such, we recognise that technology and newer channels are becoming more popular, such as social media and interactions with the chatbot on the website, however we also recognise the continuing need to ensure that traditional contact methods remain available to those who need them so that our services are accessible to all.
- 3.4. Reflecting the new Council priorities in the Council Plan, we want to ensure a consistent approach to customer service across the Council.
- 3.5. While recognising the need for better digital services, we also know it's important to communicate with our people in the way which best meets their needs. This strategy continues to commit us to high standards of face to face and telephone interaction.

4. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1. The Customer Service Strategy clearly aligns with the updated Council Plan and sets out our corporate approach to customer service that pre-emptively reflects the new 'People First' Priority set out in the draft Council Plan due to be considered by Cabinet and approved by Council in September for 2022-2027.
- 4.2. Based on feedback from the 2020 Peer Challenge Review, the Strategy defines a new Target Operating Model (TOM) which will ensure a consistent approach towards customer service throughout the authority.
- 4.3. The operating model ensures customers know what to expect when they contact the Council, and that all staff, councillors, and contractors know what is expected. This is displayed in a user-friendly infographic within the Strategy, as well as within the Customer Care Standards (Appendix A). Simply put, we will:
 - Make it easy to access services, 24/7, thinking digital first
 - Continue to offer traditional contact methods for those unable to interact online
 - Take responsibility or find the right person to help
 - Put customers first
 - Be courteous and helpful
 - Treat customers with fairness and respect
- 4.4. The Strategy defines the future aims to enable the Council to exceed customer expectations, by providing services quickly, efficiently, and effectively.
- 4.5. The Strategy clearly sets out relevant actions between 2021-2026 to achieve these future aims.

- 4.6. The Strategy is underpinned by the Council's Priorities and shows how future aims can be achieved by seeking out innovative ways to make services better and deliver long-term sustainability.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. Consultation has taken place with the following:

- The Leader (Executive Member for the Customer Service Centre)
- The Leadership Team (comprising of Managing Director, Service Directors and Communications Manager)
- Political Liaison Board (PLB)

- 5.2. The Strategy has also been assessed throughout the draft phase by the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS), who acted as a 'critical friend' to ensure it is in line with the Council's Priorities and other relevant strategies the Council has adopted. SIAS also considered this in line with other Council's customer service strategies.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 30th April 2021.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Cabinet's Terms of Reference include at 5.6.1 of the Constitution: 'to prepare and agree to implement policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council'

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The impact of the new Customer Service Strategy and ways of working should, over time, increase efficiencies and generate savings. These will be monitored over time as the Strategy is implemented and reported through budget monitoring reports and the annual budget setting process.

9. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There is a potential risk that we design digital services but the uptake of them is low. To mitigate against this, we will need to ensure that the design stage is robust and focussed on providing a benefit our customers.

10. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 10.2 The Strategy sets out an increase in customer service and recognises that customers are interacting differently because of the pandemic. It also recognises that not all customers will be digitally enabled, so includes a commitment that no one is left behind.

11. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report as this is not a procurement exercise or contract.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the Customer Service strategy.

13. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 A communication and updated training plan will be developed to ensure that all staff are familiar with the new strategy and expectations within it, in order to deliver the key areas of customer service the strategy sets out.
- 13.2 The corporate values and behaviours are also being updated through the Shaping our Future Steering Group to reflect the skills and values needed to deliver the customer service strategy.

14. APPENDICES

- 14.1 Appendix A – Customer Service Strategy
- 14.2 Appendix B – Customer Care Standards

15. CONTACT OFFICERS

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16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 16.1 None.