

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject: Customer Service Strategy 2015 - 2018
Committee: Cabinet
Date: 11 November 2014
Cabinet Member: Councillor Peter Smith
CMT Member: Kelechi Nnoaham, Director of Public Health
Author: Ross Johnston, Project Manager (Practitioner)
Contact details: Tel: 01752 307990
Email: ross.johnston@plymouth.gov.uk
Ref: N/A
Key Decision: Yes
Part: I

Purpose of the report:

The report presents Plymouth City Council's Customer Service Strategy 2015 – 2018 which will act as the framework for all future customer service initiatives to be delivered as part of the Customer and Service Transformation Programme.

The strategy presents the case for change in delivering customer services to Plymouth's large and varied customer base. The main drivers for the change can be summarised as follows:

- Inconsistent customer service standards across departments.
- A failure to adapt to changes in technology (e.g. the growth in mobile computing).
 - The failure to capitalise on the national trend of customers tending to self-serve, meaning that people are still mainly using more costly channels such as face-to-face and telephone to interact with the authority.
- A failure to use existing self-service channels to their full potential e.g. not integrating these systems with back office systems.
- A failure to promote self-service options effectively to customers.
 - A tendency for services to exist in silos and not share information about customers with each other. This has resulted in customers needing to contact different services within the authority separately to relate the same information (e.g. a change in address).

The strategy outlines the core customer service principles by which all customer service activities and improvements will be delivered. These include:

- 1 We will have a view of our customers across all services of our Council.
- 2 We will manage our customer experience across all services provided by our Council.
- 3 We will own the relationship with our customers.
- 4 Customer experience will be defined by the Council even where the service is delivered by a supplier or partner.
- 5 We will provide easy and convenient assistance in helping customers' access or get to the services that they need.
- 6 We will have a single view of customers and interactions.
- 7 There will be transparency for the supplier and the Council in transactions and interactions (where this legal and desirable).
- 8 As customer needs change we will be flexible enough to change to meet them.
- 9 We will minimise the number of interactions with our customers without compromising the service or the 'brilliant' experience.
- 10 All non-specialist customer service will be brought together in a single logical organisation.
- 11 We are committed to demonstrating the benefits of self-service options for customers so that they choose to use them – digital by preference.
- 12 We will provide the appropriate tools, training and support to enable staff to deliver a "brilliant" customer service.

The strategy presents a framework within which Plymouth City Council will deliver and develop its customer services going forward. It presents three key aims:

- 1 Improve our understanding of customers;
- 2 Improve the way we serve customers;
- 3 Improve the way we listen and respond to customers.

The strategy will form a key framework for all activities outlined in the Customer and Service Transformation Outline Business Case agreed by [Cabinet on 25 March 2014](#) and will be utilised by the CST Programme for development of all future projects in line with the suggested approach in the Customer and Service Blueprint (Appendix A) and the Implementation Plan (Appendix B).

The CST Programme's main aims in adopting this strategy will be to deliver:

- 80% of service delivered through single front office.
- 80% resolution at first contact across all contact channels.
- Single published number for most services.
- "My Account" citizen portal on the web site.
- Channel shift achieved through digital channel innovations.
- The customer review programme creating service bundling opportunities.
- Savings from customer service reviews.

The Brilliant Co-operative Council Corporate Plan 2013/14 -2016/17:

The following has been summarised from the Customer Service Strategy 2015 – 2018 demonstrating the alignment of the Customer and Service Transformation Programme and all future projects with the Corporate Plan 2013 - 2016.

Pioneering Plymouth

Strive to implement changes to customer service through reviews of services, engaging with customers, partners, staff and members to ensure that the designs emerging are innovative and fit for purpose in meeting the demands of self-service and customer needs.

Growing Plymouth

Support the customers of Plymouth through delivering improved automation in the provision of services to customers, this will allow the Council to support increased customer demands for services without significant budget increases being required.

Caring Plymouth

Ensure that customer needs are understood and incorporated into the way in which services are provided in future. The programme will support this outcome through the use of surveys and customer panels ensuring that customers are at the heart of decision making and working closely with our partners in health, housing and the voluntary sector to provide consistent information, advice and guidance.

Confident Plymouth

Increase the skills and abilities of staff working with customers by empowering them to design and deliver services that meet customer needs. The satisfaction with the service provided to customers by the Council will become a vital measurement of success for the Customer Transformation Programme and the Council.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land:

There are no new financial implications for the CST Programme or Transformation as a result of this strategy being adopted.

The CST programme aims to realise financial benefits as outlined in the table below:

Customer and Service Transformation Programme Indicative savings £K	FY 14/15	FY 15/16	FY16/17
	£000's	£000's	£000's
Customer Service Restructure	144	150	0
Debt Recovery	130	0	0
Customer Services Management Restructure	0	250	0
Additional Staff Reduction	0	510	370
Public Protection (inc. Cems and Crems)	0	100	100
Other Services	0	0	200
Total	274	1,010	670

To achieve these financial projections, the CST Programme will be developed to deliver future projects in line with the Customer and Service Blueprint and against the principles and frameworks presented in the Customer Service Strategy. To ensure successful delivery of years two and three financial projections, the CST Programme will require specialist investment over the next six month period (Tranche 2) to put in place all strategic requirements to effectively deliver against the main aims of the programme.

Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management:

N/A

Equality and Diversity:

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? Yes

Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:

It is recommended that:

- 1 Cabinet agree the adoption of Customer Service Strategy attached as the framework for the development of customer service improvements.

Reason:

Plymouth City Council needs to have strategic direction for the effective delivery of improvements to customer services. This strategy provides a strong platform for all customer service improvements to be delivered. This will put Plymouth City Council in a stronger position to make effective change to customer service for both staff and customers.

- 2 Cabinet agree the Customer and Service Transformation Programme's plans as outlined in the implementation plan for Tranche 2 (Appendix B).

Reason:

The Customer and Service Transformation Programme have yet to develop a full business case as it is awaiting input from Enterprise Architecture. This tranche will provide the architectural requirements that the programme needs to complete its three year case for change, whilst at the same time continuing to improve customer service through tactical initiatives with financial and operational benefits.

- 3 Cabinet agree that the CST Programme Full Business Case is submitted to the Cabinet meeting on 10 March 2014 outlining a full cost / benefit analysis and tranches 3 and beyond in more detail.

Reason:

The strategy's full detailed plans for its three-year lifecycle are still in development meaning that a detailed and robust benefit plan could not be provided at this stage. Full details are outlined for Tranche 2, up until June 2015, with the remainder of the strategy's lifecycle and the tranches for delivery set to be completed and included in the CST Programme's Full Business Case.

- 4 The Deputy Leader of the Council and officers from the Customer and Service Transformation Programme work with members of the Your Plymouth scrutiny panel to scrutinise the CST Full Business Case ahead of its submission to Cabinet on 10 March 2015.

Reason:

As requested by the Your Plymouth Co-operative Review Group on 10 October 2014 to ensure that the Customer Service Strategy's goals and objectives are fully aligned to the CST Programmes deliverables and that all cost / benefit analysis has been subjected to robust scrutiny ahead of any executive decision.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

Option 1: Do nothing

This was rejected as continuing to progress the Customer and Service Transformation Programme without a strategic approach would not ensure the most effective and beneficial process for customer service improvements to be achieved.

Option 2: Delay Service Review projects until Architecture design has been developed and Full Business Case approved.

This was rejected because delaying further service review work until all design work was in place will not enable the Customer Programme to deliver the benefits outlined in the Outline Business Case. There are many operational and financial benefits that can be accrued through streamlining and standardising current processes prior to implementing future architectural and technical design initiatives.

Option 3: Proceed as proposed.

Published work / information:

[Cabinet report 25 March 2014: Customer and Service Transformation OBC Forward Plan](#)

Background papers:

None

Sign off:

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Originating SMT Member: Faye Batchelor-Hambleton													
Has the Cabinet Member(s) agreed the content of the report? Yes													

Annex I

Scrutiny – Your Plymouth Cooperative Scrutiny Review Customer Services Strategy

Friday 10 October 2014

PRESENT:

Councillor Kate Taylor, in the Chair.
Councillors Sparling and Tuohy.

Apology for absence: Councillors Sam Leaves.

Also in attendance: Kelechi Nnoaham, Director for Public Health (Transformation Programme Senior Responsible Officer for Customer Services), Faye Batchelor-Hambleton, Assistant Director for Customer Services (Transformation Project Executive), Peter Honeywell, Transformation Programme Manager, Ross Johnston, Transformation Project Manager, Di Charlton, Service Development and Partnership Manager (Scrutiny Lead Officer) and Katey Johns, Democratic Support Officer.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

3. CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

With regard to the Draft Customer Services Strategy 2014-2017, Members were informed that -

- (a) customer services was one of the areas that had been identified as needing significant change in order to realise the Council's goals of meeting ongoing budgetary pressures and achieving its aspiration of becoming a 'Brilliant Co-operative Council';
- (b) understanding customers, their needs and behaviour patterns in interacting with the Council would ensure that funds were spent effectively in areas of value and that services were relevant and easy to use. Following a comprehensive review of customer services across the Council it had become clear that there was –
 - inconsistent service standards across departments
 - a failure to adapt to changes in technology (e.g. growth in mobile computing)

- a failure to capitalise on the national trend of customers wishing to self-serve
- (c) the approach to this Strategy had been one which would build the capability to meet the city's needs and improve the customer experience by providing facilities for customers to 'self-serve' and services which were designed to get it right first time. Getting it right first time prevented avoidable/duplicate contact which was an added cost to both the customer and the council;
- (d) the Council acknowledged that not all services could be delivered via digital channels and customers would have the choice to 'go digital' or retain 'face-to-face'/human contact. The new First Stop Shop would enable customers to make that choice, as well as provide assistance to those who hadn't previously been able to use, or had access to, on-line services. In addition, the self-serve option would be available in many of the City's libraries thereby increasing access to council services and transactions to many customers who would no longer need to come into the City Centre;
- (e) in order to enable (d) above, significant improvements were being made to the Council's web pages with some being totally redesigned to be more customer friendly and interactive;
- (f) additionally, early improvements were also planned for the Customer Contact Centre. Currently, customers telephoning the Council did so through the customer contact centre where calls were put into queues until an agent was available. Installation of the new IVR system would result in customer requests for information being handled through automated messages allowing calls to be dealt with faster and more efficiently. At all times customers would retain the option to speak to an agent where preferred or where the automated service could not resolve their requirement;
- (g) the new First Stop Shop had been designed around staff and customer feedback and would enable greater staff/customer interaction with the aim being to either resolve customer enquiries there and then, sign-post them to the relevant agency, assist them to self-serve or make an appointment for them so that they can leave as quickly as possible feeling satisfied that their enquiry has been dealt with. In addition, a trial of extended opening hours on a Thursday evening and on a Saturday morning would allow greater customer access to Council services;
- (h) development of the Strategy was only one element of a five-step programme of change which included –
 - planning and policy formulation (understanding the customer)
 - Customer Service Strategy
 - Blueprint – description of the vision defined in the Strategy, looking at what currently existed compared to what was required
 - Roadmap – an outline of the key initiatives required and

timescales for delivery, dependent on ordering and procurement restrictions. The roadmap was also designed to maximise delivery of benefits by prioritising those service areas that delivered most benefits;

- Implementation – currently identified as between November 2014 and December 2017

In response to questions raised, it was further reported that –

- (i) with regard to the First Stop Shop, discussions had taken place with both staff and the Trade Unions over the proposed changes to working conditions and staff had now been asked to sign new contracts which would allow a greater degree of flexibility to the opening hours should future changes be considered appropriate to meet customer needs. Some staff had concerns over the new terms and conditions and had refused to sign new contracts. Whilst efforts were being made to resolve the situation, those staff who did not sign would effectively be making themselves redundant;
- (j) the Strategy should state clearly that staff would be adequately supported and engaged throughout in order to help them best achieve delivery of the principles;
- (k) the automation of services and move toward customer self-serve would not necessarily mean a need for less staff. It was hoped that these measures would free up staff time to more effectively deal with an increasing number of vulnerable customers with more complex needs who often take longer to deal with and require face-to-face contact;
- (l) the self-serve facilities in libraries would be additional to those computers already provided and would be dedicated for the use of self-serve customers only. Library staff would be trained to assist customers in using the facilities and in sign-posting customers to other agencies where appropriate. In addition, with the roll-out of free wi-fi across libraries, customers will be able to use their own mobile devices to access council services and make transactions on-line;
- (m) customers who had been assisted in using the self-serve system could be provided with a simple 'how-to' guide containing the council's web address to remind them how to do it next time;
- (n) models of good practice had been explored with other local authorities prior to the review taking place as well as extensive research into the standards of service being applied across the Council by different departments;
- (o) two areas of risk had been identified as having potential to delay the project's implementation were staffing and IT issues not being resolved.

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to visit the new First Stop Shop premises and to scrutinise the Customer Services Strategy. It recommends that –

- (1) the Customer Services Strategy is supported and endorsed by Cabinet;
- (2) the Customer and Services Transformation Programme Full Business Case is considered by the Your Plymouth Scrutiny Panel prior to its submission to Cabinet in March 2015;
- (3) the Your Plymouth Scrutiny Panel is kept updated on progress with the customer services programme, particularly in regard to –
 - the Customer Services Management Restructure
 - Library Services Review
 - Debt Collection and Prioritisation (Housing Benefit payments)
- (4) with regard to the Customer Services ‘principles’ –
 - the Strategy should state clearly that staff will be adequately supported and engaged throughout in order to help them best achieve delivery of the principles;
 - consideration should be given to putting them on display in the new First Stop Shop.