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Draft Customer Contact Strategy for Consultation

2013 - 2016

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This draft Strategy is intended for extensive consultation with users and stakeholders who access information and advice on the services delivered by Oxford City Council. The customer insight gathered throughout the consultation will then be used to inform the final Customer Contact Strategy which will be reported to the City's Executive Board for approval in February 2014.
- 1.2 In developing this strategy we have analysed who our communities are and what they might need from the City Council in order to make their experience of using our services positive; because their interaction with us has been quick and easy. We have also assessed the backdrop of other external drivers that will help to drive up service performance to deliver right first time value for money services. We have used the 2011 census to provide an initial outline of our potential customer base.
- 1.3 We already receive customer feedback via focus groups and customer feedback mechanisms such as GovMetric (satisfaction survey) complaints, comments and compliments. However, to inform the final Strategy we propose to undertake further targeted consultation with our customers and stakeholders. In summary we will consult on the following:
- What good customer service looks like for our customers.
 - What service standards our customers find acceptable
 - How we can encourage the takeup of online services;
 - Which services voice automated messaging could be used for (if any); and
 - How we can improve our current telephony service.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Oxford City Council has an aspiration to create a world-class city for everyone, delivering world-class services.

World class customer service for Oxford City means:

- Consistent; right first time service delivery.
 - Proactively seeking customer feedback to inform service delivery.
 - Customer service being at the heart of our values and behaviours.
 - Working in partnership with complementary organisations to provide added value to our customers
 - Enabling as many customers as possible to access our services using the most efficient and cost effective channels (web and contact centre), whilst ensuring our face-to-face service is available for those customers who most need it.
 - Ensuring our end to end processes are as efficient as possible and that the customer journey and contact can be tracked.
- 2.2 'Customers First' is one of the Council's transformation themes, focusing on putting customer needs at the forefront of its work and improving customer service. The Customer Contact Strategy sets out where we are now, what areas we believe we need to develop, how we will consult and work with our customers and stakeholders to inform how we develop future service delivery. The Strategy is built upon the key values of the City Council which are:
- Excellent public service at the heart of everything we do
 - Putting communities and customers first
 - Taking personal responsibility
 - Embracing innovation
 - Valuing diversity

3. INSIGHT INTO OXFORD CITY CUSTOMERS

3.1 The demographics of Oxford's population dictate to some extent the nature of the service needs. The 2011 Census had the following key headlines:

- Rapid population growth over the last decade with large increases in the number of children and young people
- International migration has driven population growth and ethnic diversity has increased and is expected to get increasingly diverse
- Large increase in the number of students
- Large increase in the number of people in the labour market
- More households live in flats, and more rent their home
- Growth in households has been driven by families with children, single adults and 'other' households (e.g. houses in multiple occupation)

3.2 Oxford's population in 2011 was estimated to be 151,900, an increase of 12% since 2001 and is deemed to be one of the fastest growing local authority areas in England. The council itself has approximately 7,800 tenants. Because of the very large university student population (which has increased by 6,000 over the last decade), Oxford's population is very young. 35% of the population is aged between 15 and 29 years (compared to a UK average of 20%). Although the UK is experiencing an ageing population, Oxford's population is expected to get younger in the future, with most population growth coming from the working age population.

3.3 The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 ranks Oxford 131st out of 354, placing it in the top half most deprived local authority areas in England. Of 85 areas in Oxford, 12 are among the 20% most deprived areas in England. These areas are in the Leys, Barton, Littlemore and Rose Hill areas of the city, and experience multiple levels of deprivation - low skills, low incomes and high levels of crime; the majority of the council's 7,800 tenants live in these areas. Men and women from the least deprived areas can expect to live six years longer than those in the most deprived areas.

3.4 In 2012, 80% of all UK households had internet access. 93 per cent of households with Internet access used a fixed broadband connection, of which 30 per cent used a cable or fibre optic connection. In 2012, 67 per cent of adults in Great Britain used a computer every day, rising to over 80% amongst people under 45 years of age. Access to the Internet using a mobile phone more than doubled between 2010 and 2012, from 24% to 51%. In 2012, 32% of adults accessed the Internet using a mobile phone every day.

3.5 Whilst we do not have statistics about the level and type of Internet use in Oxford, as the city has a very young population due to the large number of university students, we can expect that internet usage in Oxford is higher than the national average. Education is also an important determinant of whether people have internet access at home. Almost all adults (93%) who had a degree-level qualification are estimated to have internet access at home – compared to 56% of people with no formal qualifications. Oxford has a higher than average proportion of the population with degree-level qualifications, and a lower than average proportion of the population with no qualifications. This is another reason why we can expect internet usage in Oxford to be higher than the national average. However in the deprived areas of the city very high proportions of the population have no qualifications, so in these areas there may be lower than average rates of internet usage.

3.6 Further demographic information can be found at Appendix A.

4. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

4.1 Since writing the original Customer Contact Strategy in 2009, the Council's Customer First Programme has delivered the following outcomes:

- Constant measuring of customer satisfaction, which is monitored and benchmarked with over 100 other local authorities. The corporate target for customer satisfaction is set at 75% (and is being achieved), and covers the service experienced in our contact centre, customer service centres and website. Customer satisfaction with the telephone contact centre specifically is at 91%, putting us just outside top ten performances with our benchmark peers. More work needs to be done to improve satisfaction levels with our face-to-face service and the Council's website.
- Single customer contact centre with one telephone number for the organisation, providing access to a wide range of council services. Over 90% of all customers get through first time using this number.
- A modern walk in customer service centre providing access to officers via appointment or "drop in" alongside self-service facilities. The customer service centre is also available for partner surgeries and is being effectively used by Carers Oxfordshire and Shelter to introduce a one-stop-shop of local services.
- Multi skilled Customer Service Officers who are able to deal with a wide range of customer enquiries; Housing Repairs, Tenancy Services, Rents and Homeless, Housing Benefits and Council tax, Waste recycling and Garden waste. Environmental Development – Pest and Dog warden services and Planning enquiries. Over 90% of all enquiries handled either face-to-face or over the telephone are resolved at point of contact and without hand off to the back office.
- The implementation of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which has enabled service delivery and resolution at the first point of contact in the majority of cases in our customer service centres and contact centre.
- Consistency of business processes associated with customer contact and simultaneously improvements in service levels and consequently customer satisfaction.
- Provision of more self-service opportunities e.g. online application forms, payments, service requests and improved website information.
- 24/7 automated payment telephone line.
- Out of hours duty officer service, to handle urgent customer enquiries.
- Customer Service Excellence accreditation, achieving full compliance with all 57 parts of the standard.
- New telephony software is currently being implemented, which will offer a reduced number of service options for customers to select. The system provides a range of increased functionality to the contact centre to be implemented during the financial year, including:
 - Improved management information
 - 'Queue Buster' technology
 - Message facilities
 - Voice recognition
 - Home working opportunities
 - Workforce management and planning
 - Website 'Call me Back' function

4.2 Customers currently resolve their enquiries by visiting one of our Customer Service Centres at St Aldates or Templar Square, Cowley; telephoning our customer contact centre; or visiting our website. The customer enquiry numbers per year for each channel are as follows:

Channel	Enquiries Per Annum
Face-to-face	15,600
Telephone	261,850
Web – on line form usage	25,000
Total	302,450

In the contact centre the call volume per service area is as follows:

Service area	Enquiry Volumes
Waste	40,000
Elections	2,050
Housing repairs	37,000
Tenancy and rent	22,000
Housing benefit	29,000
Council tax	38,000
Business rates	3,400
Planning	8,900
Pest and dogs	5,500
No option selected by customer *	76,000
Total	261,850

* This data is taken from the telephone system and denotes customers who do not select a particular option from the automated options presented

4.3 The unit costs associated with each channel compared to the benchmark average are as follows:

Access Channel	Current Unit Cost £	Benchmark Unit Cost £
Face-to-face	£30	£10 - £14
Telephone	£5.80	£3 – £5
Web		£0.08

- Benchmarks sourced from SOCITM and PWC

5. CUSTOMER CONSULTATION AND THE WAY FORWARD

5.1 To date customer feedback has been collated through focus groups and customer feedback mechanisms such as GovMetric (satisfaction survey) complaints, comments and compliments. A high level summary report on what our customers have been telling us is at Appendix B.

5.2 Following a restructure in Customer Contact, two Quality and Customer Insight roles have been created so that we continue to collate customer data and feedback to ensure services are developed and our commissioning strategy informed to meet customer need. They will work with customers to identify opportunities for service improvement. The roles will also continue to develop partnerships with other like-minded organisations to ensure we provide a relevant and complementary range of services to our customers.

5.3 As part of the consultation on the Draft Strategy we will seek to engage with customers to understand how they wish to access services and how we can proactively encourage access via the web and promote the advantages of self-service. This will include where appropriate turning off other, traditional, access channels for certain customers e.g. paper invoices for business customers.

Encouraging customers to 'channel shift' is a key element of the strategy, and implemented well it can lower costs, build reputation, empower the citizen and improve the overall service proposition. However, to change customer behaviour it is important to understand what is important to them and what barriers they experience in accessing services. Oxford City Council will seek to enable and encourage customers to access our services using the most cost effective channels whilst ensuring a face-to-face service is available for those customers who most need it.

5.4 The key themes we will focus on in delivering the Strategy are listed below. Action Plans to establish the detailed milestones can be found in Appendix C.

- Accessible User friendly Services
- Use customer insight to inform service design
- Embedding Customer Service Excellence across the Council.

5.5 The current targets for delivering Customer Service in 2013/14 are:

- Increase the level of online transactions incrementally from 12/13 base. 18% in 13/14; 23% in 14/15.
- Increase net customer satisfaction rating to 91% for telephones and 45% for face-to-face (net satisfaction)
- 95% of customers getting through first time on the Council's main telephone number
- 85% of telephone customers answered within 20 seconds
- 90% of enquiries answered at first point of contact
- Improve numbers of customers self-serving to 5%

6. KEY MILESTONES IN 2013/14

6.1 The detailed work to be undertaken is in Appendix C. Using demographic data, consultation will be carried out using a number of methods to ensure we offer varied opportunities for customers to give their feedback. Consultation methods will include:

- Customer Focus Groups – Groups will be representative of the community and be used to discuss and agree service improvements
- Surveys – surveys will be carried out to ensure customers unable to attend groups are able to be involved in the consultation process. Surveys may be carried out on the web or in paper form to ensure all customers are able to access them.

Summarised below are the key milestones for the financial year 13/14 and the estimated dates for delivery. The milestones beyond this period will be established as the outcomes from work undertaken are realised.

- Customer Contact Strategy for Consultation agreed by City Executive Board. (September 13)
- Ensure we have accessible, user friendly access channels. We will ask customers whether there are additional ways they would prefer to access our services, for example using social media or mobile applications. We will also ask them what they believe great customer service is, including what our customer service standards should be and how they would like to be able to provide customer feedback. We will use our demographic data to identify hard to reach groups and investigate how we can reach them. We will also use our demographic data to analyse who our partner organisations should be. (September to December 13)
- Involve customers in service design to remove avoidable contact, help design the new telephony system, understand the needs to encourage self-service generally and more specifically for housing repair requests. (August 13 to January 14)
- Customer Contact Strategy agreed by City Executive Board. Having undertaken an analysis of the available demographic data, and full consultation with customers and stakeholders as per our plan, we will then evaluate the insight gathered to set out the vision for customer contact for the City Council to take us to 2016. The Strategy will contain high level actions plans for delivery of the strategy. (February 14)

Demographic Information

1. Oxford is a relatively diverse population in terms of people's ethnicity. In 2011, 22% of the population were from black or minority ethnic backgrounds, compared to an England average of 13%. An additional 14% of residents were of white but non-British backgrounds. This is partly a result of the large number of people born outside the UK - in 2011, 28% of Oxford residents had been born outside the UK compared to 19% in 2001. The largest non-white ethnic groups represented are Pakistani, Indian, Black African, 'other Asian' and Chinese ethnic groups. The diversity of the population varies considerably by age. The child population is considerably more ethnically diverse than the older population and as a result the population is expected to get more ethnically diverse in the future.
2. In 2011, 23,700 Oxford residents said they had a main language which was not English. At 16% of the population, this is twice the 8% national average. Of those residents whose main language was not English, the vast majority reported that they could speak English well or very well. 1.8% of residents (2,600 people) said they could not speak English or could not speak it well. This is similar to the 1.7% national average. After English, the most common main languages were Polish and Chinese languages, followed by French, Portuguese and Spanish. South Asian languages - Urdu, Bengali and Panjabi - made up a large proportion too.
3. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 ranks Oxford 131st out of 354, placing it in the top half most deprived local authority areas in England. Of 85 areas in Oxford, 12 are among the 20% most deprived areas in England. These areas are in the Leys, Barton, Littlemore and Rose Hill areas of the city, and experience multiple levels of deprivation - low skills, low incomes and high levels of crime; the majority of the council's 7,800 tenants live in these areas. Men and women from the least deprived areas can expect to live six years longer than those in the most deprived areas
4. A large proportion of the population – 43% has degree-level qualifications or above. At the other end of the spectrum, 14% (17,000 people) have no qualifications at all. This is strongly age-related – older people are more likely than younger people to have no formal qualifications.
5. Oxford's high housing prices – both in the property market and the rental sector – make it one of the least affordable places in the country. The percentage of households who own their home is relatively low in Oxford - 47% compared to 63% in England. The percentage of households renting their home in the private sector is high - 28% in Oxford compared with 17% in England. Over the last decade the number of households renting their home in the private sector rose by almost 50%, from nearly 11,000 households in 2001 to nearly 16,000 households in 2011. We have approximately 12,000 benefits claimants. The number of households who owned their house declined.
6. 144 households were living in temporary accommodation we provide in the city as of December 2011. At the same time our waiting list figures exceeded 6,000 households. This is a much higher rate than those of neighbouring districts and the South East region.
7. Unemployment rates for Oxford City are presently at 5.7%, compared to an average for Great Britain of 7.9% (2012 estimate). The large universities and hospitals mean that Oxford has a larger than average number of jobs in the service sector – most notably, 46% of all employee jobs are in the public administration, education or health sectors. The second largest employment sector is financial and business services, accounting for 24% of jobs. Manufacturing accounts for 9% of jobs, half of which are at the BMW car plant. Retail employment accounts for around one-tenth of jobs in Oxford. There has been steady

growth in the number of businesses registered in Oxford over the past decade, from 2,600 in 1995 to 4,000 in 2011.

8. In 2012, 80% of all UK households had internet access. This has grown from 57% of households in 2006. 93 per cent of households with Internet access used a fixed broadband connection, of which 30 per cent used a cable or fibre optic connection. In 2012, 67 per cent of adults in Great Britain used a computer every day, rising to over 80% amongst people under 45 years of age. Access to the Internet using a mobile phone more than doubled between 2010 and 2012, from 24% to 51%. In 2012, 32% of adults accessed the Internet using a mobile phone every day.
9. We do not have statistics about the level and type of Internet use in Oxford. However, as the city a very young population due to the large number of university students, we can expect that internet usage in Oxford is higher than the national average. Education is also an important determinant of whether people have internet access at home. Almost all adults (93%) who had a degree-level qualification are estimated to have internet access at home – compared to 56% of people with no formal qualifications. Oxford has a higher than average proportion of the population with degree-level qualifications, and a lower than average proportion of the population with no qualifications. This is another reason why we can expect internet usage in Oxford to be higher than the national average. However in the deprived areas of the city very high proportions of the population have no qualifications, so in these areas there may be lower than average rates of internet usage.

Customer Consultation Report Jan-Apr '13: High Level Summary

1. Consultation activities were held between Jan-Apr '13 to:

- Provide information on overall satisfaction with services provided by and via Customer Contact
- Identify customer use, views, and preferences regarding channels of communication
- Identify issues with service provision and channels as identified by customers
- Inform & support the review of the Customer Contact Strategy
- Understand issues influencing customer satisfaction
- Understand customers awareness and view of channel shift options
- Develop Customer insight for future service improvement

2. The following consultation methods were used:

- Focus Groups: January – March 2013
 - specific groups in the community, targeting customers that might not normally participate in surveys or accept invitations to focus groups in the Town Hall
 - 8 groups involving approximately 66 people (group size ranged from 3 to almost 20)
- Mystery Shopping: January - February 2013
 - Ten residents were trained, and carried out a total of 65 shops
 - 40 telephone
 - 19 visits to SAC or TSQ
 - 5 email
 - 1 website
- Survey: February – April 2013
 - On-line
 - Face to face
 - 129 in total
- GovMetric: ongoing, year round, feedback
 - Compare themes and satisfaction levels with those from the other sources above

3. The overall findings of the consultations were as follows:

- The good levels of satisfaction with the telephone service expressed in focus groups and mystery shopping is consistent with satisfaction levels from GovMetric
- The service delivered via the phones is generally regarded as having improved overall during the past 18 months. CSOs are seen as pro-active, polite and helpful
- Customers are aware of the changes made to St Aldates Customer Service Centre and feel the refurbishment has helped to improve the atmosphere and service
- There is a willingness to channel shift, or to consider channel shift.
- There is a willingness to do more online self-service (survey and focus groups)
- 64% in the survey were happy to receive statutory information, for example Council Tax mailing, by email.
- Only 20% of customers in the survey would not consider using a single-sign on customer account on the website
- 43% in the survey access the internet using a mobile phone
- Email and telephone were the top preferences in the survey for contact between the customer and Council.

4. The focus groups revealed some additional information

- Self-service needs to be pro-actively supported to encourage inexperienced customers to use the website more
- Printing facilities would make self-service more attractive
- Low income communities find web-based transactions attractive. They are effectively 'free' (either because a fixed subscription is paid, or access is via community facilities). This is better than running out of credit on the phone.
- Concerns were expressed about replacing emails with web forms (no record of input; quality of information in automated response).
- A strong preference was expressed for receiving a phone call rather than a letter, especially about debts, so that the issue could be understood and resolved quickly, perhaps avoiding court costs

The full version of this report is available as a background paper.

Customer Contact Strategy – Action Plan**Consultation Methodology**

Using the demographic data, consultation will be carried out using a number of methods to ensure we offer varied opportunities for customers to give their feedback. Consultation methods will include:

- Customer Focus Groups – Groups will be representative of the community and be used to discuss and agree service improvements
- Surveys – surveys will be carried out to ensure customers unable to attend groups are able to be involved in the consultation process. Surveys may be carried out on the web or in paper form to ensure all customers are able to access them.

Aim	Key miles stones	Target Date
	Verify our 'hard to reach' groups or customers who do not make contact with us	September 13
Accessible User Friendly Services	Using the data analysed, identify additional access channels that customers would use to access Council services, to include the use of social media and mobile phone applications. To also identify the preferred range of devices that are used. This could include getting self-service terminals, or access to the contact centre in the community. To also understand customer need for single sign-on to the Council's website.	November 13
	Using the data analysed, identify changes to existing access channels that would enable customers to access Council services better, including what we can turn off	December 13
	Using the data analysed, identify relevant partners and consult customers on how we could work together	September 13
	Develop partnerships with appropriate partners and analyse opportunities for service delivery	December 13
	Ask customers what great customer service looks like, including customer contact service standards and how they can provide feedback on an ongoing basis to the whole Council	December 13

Key outcomes from consultation:

- Definition of who the hard to reach groups are in Oxford and how we can access them.
- The access channels to be used to engage with our customers, together with any improvements to existing channels
- Definitive list of partner organisations we should seek to engage with as an organisation in order to deliver relevant joined-up customer services (this to also inform the Local Support Services Framework)

- Definition of great customer service (including customer contact service standards and providing customer feedback) that could be translated into an organisation-wide promise to all customers

Use Customer Insight to inform Service Design	Use demographics to understand customer segments with propensity to embrace self-service across entire customer database and particularly with City Council's tenants	September 13
	Customer consultation on requirements to embrace self-service	November 13
	Customer consultation with City Council tenants regarding online housing repair requests	December 13
	Customer Consultation on voice recognition services	December 13
	Carry out customer journey mapping	Jan 14
	Identify avoidable contact	Jan 14
	Identify opportunities for service redesign	Jan 14

Key outcomes from consultation:

- Specification of what customers need to embrace self-service generally
- Specification of how we can encourage our tenants to book their housing repairs and appointments online
- Specification of how we can proactively remind customers about our services
- Development of the telephone voice recognition services

Embedding Customer Excellence across the Council	Review lessons learnt from implementation in Customer Contact	Sep 13
	Agree areas where City Council can apply for Compliance Plus standard – as an exemplar of best practice in those areas	Oct 13
	Develop a strategy for rolling out CSE lessons learned across organisation where appropriate	Jan 14

Key outcomes from internal & external consultation:

- Customer Service Excellence Strategy and Implementation Plan