

To: City Executive Board

Date: 12th March 2014

Report of: Head of Customer Services

Title of Report: CUSTOMER CONTACT STRATEGY

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To advise the City Executive Board of the outcome of the consultation on the Draft Customer Contract Strategy agreed in September 2013 and to agree the Council's Customer Contract Strategy as set out at Appendix 2.

Key decision? No

Executive lead member: Cllr Susan Brown

Policy Framework:

Recommendation(s): To approve the Customer Contact Strategy as attached at Appendix 2.

Appendix 1: Findings of the Consultation

Appendix 2: Customer Contact Strategy

Appendix 3: Risk Assessment

Appendix 4: Equalities Impact Assessment

Background

1. Oxford City Council has an aspiration to create a world-class city for everyone and deliver 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. A revised draft strategy was agreed for consultation by CEB in September 2013. Attached at Appendix 2 is the final proposed Customer Contract Strategy which has been informed by the outcome of consultation. The three themes for delivering the Strategy are:
 - Accessible User Friendly Services
 - Using Customer Insight to Inform Service Design
 - Embedding Customer Excellence Across the Council

Consultation on the Customer Contact Strategy

3. The consultation took place between September 2013 and January 2014 and aimed to find out what is important to our customers when they contact us and what issues may affect their experience. We sought to understand in particular:

- How they wish to access our services.
- How we can encourage the take up of online services.
- How we can encourage self-service.
- What good customer service looks like.
- What service standards our customers find acceptable.
- How we can improve our current telephony service.
- What partner organisations we should also be working with to provide complementary services.

We used the following methods to reach the widest number of customers we could:

- An online survey advertised on the front page of the Council's website.
- A paper survey made available to all customers who used our offices in St Aldates Chambers and Templars Square and other community buildings.

- The survey was sent to all relevant stakeholders and businesses that we hold on our database.
- Some of the questions in our survey were included in the 2013 Autumn Talkback survey.

4. We received a total of 332 responses either via the online survey, through our reception points or in the post. On evaluation we were pleased to note that we had a representative sample of the residents that make up our customers when compared against our demographic information from the Census 2011. We had less success getting responses from other stakeholders and businesses with just 29 taking part. We received 323 responses from the Talkback Panel. However, although the 900 plus members of the Talkback Panel are representative of Oxford; the responses we received were not representative in respect of age and ethnicity when compared against our demographic information from the Census 2011.

Outcomes of the Consultation and Impact on the Customer Contact Strategy

5. The main findings from the consultation with residents can be found at Appendix 1. The report from the consultation with businesses and stakeholders and an extract from the Talkback Survey Autumn 2013 that concerned Customer Contact are available as background papers.

6. We sought 9 key outcomes from the consultation. These are listed below together with a summary of what we learnt from the consultation and where applicable an explanation of where we have changed the Strategy as a result. The final Customer Contact Strategy for approval is attached at Appendix 2.

- Outcome 1.
Identification of who the hard to reach groups are in Oxford, and how we can access them.

In our main survey we were broadly able to reach a small but representative sample of our customer base by gender, age, ethnicity and postcode when compared to the Census 2011. We have amended the Strategy to introduce a regular programme of reaching all groups through the lifetime of the strategy.

- Outcome 2.
The access channels to be used to engage with customers, together with any improvements to existing channels.

Our consultation confirmed that telephony and face-to-face are still very popular channels for customers to access us. The website also scored highly as a way of accessing the Council. We were able to confirm that a significant proportion of our customers were open to using online services and email as a means to both send and receive information and services. We have amended the Strategy to ensure we pursue how we can use email better as an access channel and plan improvements to the current website and online services and electronic forms to ensure consistency and ease of use. A majority said they would not use video conferencing if it was available.

- Outcome 3.

Definitive list of partner organisations we should seek to engage with in order to deliver relevant joined-up customer services.

In general, the surveys did not highlight specific partnership organisations for us to engage with. However, the demographic analysis has identified a number of customer groups, for which we will find relevant organisations to work with. We have also established that the over 50's age group were people we needed more feedback from in 2014. These actions have been captured in the strategy.

- Outcome 4.

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.

Being polite, professional and efficient came out across all the surveys as the most important elements of customer service. Responding quickly scored a close second. Customers told us that having multi-skilled staff was one of the most important improvements to telephony followed closely by receiving a call back rather than being put on hold. We have therefore been able to reinforce the current approach to training contact centre staff. Our new telephony system allows for us to offer customers a call back and/or "park" their place in the queue. In the Strategy we have committed to closely monitoring the success of these new services to ensure that customers expectations are met and further improvements are made where necessary.

- Outcome 5.

Specification of what customers need to embrace self-service.

Just under half of customers who responded to the main survey indicated they would use self-serve terminals if available. A further breakdown of results revealed that respondents from more deprived areas were much more likely to use self-serve terminals that were placed in community buildings. The Strategy has been amended to reflect this customer need. Respondents also reinforced the need for further improvements to the website to include simple online forms with as few clicks as possible and automatic email acknowledgement.

- Outcome 6.

Specification of how we can encourage Council tenants to book their housing repairs and appointments online.

The majority of respondents who were tenants of the Council indicated they would definitely; or probably; use a repairs online facility if available. A simple online process with as few clicks as possible together with an opportunity for a representative group of tenants involved in the design of the new service is already planned.

- Outcome 7.

Specification of how we can proactively remind customers about services

The consultation revealed that customers do access the Council's website regularly for information and services but were unaware of the range of activity they could access. Business customers for example have not embraced online billing. The Strategy has therefore been updated to include investment in a rolling promotional campaign for new and existing services as

well as targeted marketing for specific groups of customers, i.e. business customers.

- Outcome 8.

Development of the telephone voice recognition services

The consultation confirmed contact by telephone is still the preferred method of contact for the majority of customers. To meet this need, the Strategy will ensure the continuing development of voice recognition services. From February, customers will be able to report missed bins using this functionality.

- Outcome 9

To inform the Customer Service Excellence Strategy and Implementation Plan

The consultation has enabled us to establish what service standards are important to customers and the importance of ensuring we have consistent customer contact standards across services. The Strategy has been amended to reflect the roll-out of a project across the Council to embed the principles of customer service excellence and where it is appropriate seek Customer Service Excellence accreditation (in some areas another accreditation may be more applicable).

Risk

7. A risk assessment is attached at Appendix 3.

Climate Change/Environmental Impact

8. There will be no impact on climate change or the environment.

Equalities Impact

9. An equalities impact assessment has been is attached at Appendix 4.

Financial Implications

10. The costs of implementing the Strategy and any continued consultation with the customer base are contained within the Customer Services and Business Improvement & Technology budgets for 14/15. The efficiencies in the Customer Contact budget scheduled in the medium term financial plan come from the multi-skilling of contact centre staff, process improvements and the telephony system, all of which are part of the existing operation and supported by this strategy.
11. There is a growth bid for two years contained within the budget proposals from 2014-15 for a Customer Services Excellence Manager. This post will coordinate the implementation of Customer Service Excellence across the authority, and will deliver an essential part of the Customer Contact Strategy.

Legal Implications

12. There are no legal implications.

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List of background papers: nil

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