www.oxford.gov.uk

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

To:	**Cabinet**
Date:	**10 July 2024**
Report of:	**Executive Director (Corporate Resources)**
Title of Report:	**Citizen Experience Strategy Progress report**

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To provide a comprehensive update on the delivery of the Citizen Experience (CEX) Strategy
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities and Well-Run Council
Policy Framework:	Citizen Experience Strategy 2023-25

Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to:
1. **Note** the positive progress which has been made; and
2. **Agree** the revised action plan (Appendix 2).

Appendices	
Appendix 1	CEX Strategy 2023-25
Appendix 2	CEX Revised Action Plan 2024-25
Appendix 3	CEX Readiness Review Model and Assessment tool
Appendix 4	CEX Culture Maturity Assessment
Appendix 5	CEX Strategy Risk Register
Appendix 6	CEX Strategy Equalities Impact Assessment

Introduction and background

1. The Citizen Experience Strategy (the Strategy) was approved by Cabinet in July 2023. It is more wide-ranging than previous strategies, ensuring that all of the City Council Services are aligned with its principles, and it also embraces other organisations and community groups so that together we provide the right support

for anyone living, working or visiting Oxford. The Counci's response to the Covid pandemic has also informed the ways the Council can interact with citizens; the strategy recognises the growing impact of digital technology enabling access to services.

2. The City's demographic profile shows increasing diversity; profound health inequalities, significant parts of the city experiencing extreme poverty and a digital divide where over a quarter of Oxford residents lack internet access.

3. As a result, the Strategy sets a vison for modern, inclusive and accessible services. It embraces the benefits of digital technology and automation to make the experience quicker and easier whilst also meeting the needs of Oxford's diverse communities, with access to the appropriate specialisms for more complex interactions. The Council is equally committed to ensure that no-one gets left behind, utilising a range of access channels including face to face options to make that possible.

4. This report is in response to the commitment made last year when the Strategy was first approved to update on progress annually. The Strategy is due to be refreshed in 2025 and therefore will be presented to Cabinet together with an update on this year's progress.

Strategy Overview

5. The Strategy Vision is to:

'Put communities and citizens at the heart of how we work, ensuring they actively shape our services and that the right support is available for anyone living, working or visiting Oxford.'

6. To bring this to life there are 4 strands that accord with the Customer Service Excellence Standard. They are:

- Citizen focused:
    - o Developing a learning culture that actively listens, works collaboratively with our communities and uses insight to continually improve our offer to citizens.
    - o Designing services to meet needs through a variety of contact channels.

- Positive Citizen Experience (CEX):
    - o Making access to our services quicker, easier and better, ensuring we get the basics right and setting clear expectations for our citizens.
    - o Ensuring our staff are supported to give a professional and helpful experience with access to the right tools and technologies and empowered to embrace the CEX culture.

- Inclusive Access:
    - o We will deliver modern, accessible services that meet the needs of our diverse communities and promote our equalities objectives.
    - o We will deliver face to face and other assisted support and help the most vulnerable people to ensure their complex needs are met and no one gets left behind.

- Get it right first time:
  - We will work collaboratively with partners, agencies and community groups to ensure early intervention.
  - We will ensure our systems and processes reduce unnecessary contact, so our citizen's needs are resolved at the first point of contact where possible.

Integrating our approach with the Thriving Communities Strategy

7. The Strategy is strongly aligned with the Council's Equalities, Inclusive Economy and People Strategies. It also supports the Thriving Communities Strategy, particularly as the Citizen Experience Strategy aims to strengthen support within communities and work collaboratively with partners, agencies and community groups giving 'right first-time' solutions and advice. This is not just about solving short term day to day issues but ensuring early intervention, improving resident outcomes overall and reducing the call on council services, so it can focus on the most complex needs.

Strategy Delivery Progress – Citizen Focused

8. Key progress against this strand includes:

   - Retaining Customer Service Excellence accreditation (since 2014) and achieving "beyond best practice" against 13 criteria, which is a key part of our learning culture and continuous improvement.

   - Launching our new Comments, Complaints and Compliments system with improved automation and reporting. This will ensure we can monitor feedback, use it to improve our processes and utilise our collective insight to track trends.

   - Rolling out training and a toolkit to support teams to improve their communications. This approach will improve the quality of the communication, reduce demand and ensure our customers get the right message first time.

   - Re-launching our Residents Panel of up to 1,000 residents who have agreed to provide feedback on Council initiatives, policies, and services through online surveys and engagement exercises.

   - Delivery of a cross-service project between Community Services and Business Improvement that explored how the organisation could support citizens to have better access to digital technology and skills. This included surveying local citizens about their technology and digital needs and then working with Activate Learning to use this insight to design digital skills training in Blackbird Leys to support citizens to access online services.

   - Adding a Citizen Engagement section into the corporate Horizon Scan for services to share planned citizen engagement activities so to encourage collaboration and to avoid duplication.

Strategy Delivery Progress – Positive Citizen Experience

9.   Key progress against this strand includes:

- Launching our new website with improved search functionality, making it easier and quicker for citizens to find the service and support they require.

- Working with Locality Managers to introduce Customer Service Officers into Community Larders on a regular basis to provide relevant information and support for some of our more vulnerable citizens.

- Development of webforms to increase the opportunities for citizens to help themselves and reduce the need for unnecessary contact.

- Process reviews to drive efficiencies, create a better experience and set clear expectations in Taxi Licensing, Housing Needs, Successions, Voids, Building Control, Garden Waste and Bulky Waste.

- Developing a template for Services to use when launching a new digital solution to ensure information, advice and guidance are provided to citizens in a timely and appropriate manner so to deliver a positive experience.

Strategy Delivery Progress – Inclusive Access

10. Key progress against this strand includes:

- Delivery of a forum with Community Services for 60+ partners at Rose Hill Community Centre to explore how we can work better together to ensure no one gets left behind. One of the outcomes from this session was the idea to link up our CSOs with the Community Larders.

- Setting up a Digital Cafe at Westgate Library in partnership with the local Integrated Care Board to provide digital skills training and advice. If successful, this model will then hopefully be taken into other localities.

- Delivery of a cross-service project between Community Services and Business Improvement that explored how the organisation's workforce and culture could be more representative and engaging of the communities we serve. This included developing case studies to provide a better understanding of the range of opportunities within the Council and engaging young people in the community to understand how the application process could be made more accessible.

- Youth Ambition are re-launching a Youth Panel to improve opportunities for young people to provide their feedback and help shape our services.

- Delivery of a new Freedom of Information (FOI) requests system with 98% of FOI requests now responded to within time compared to 71% from the same time last year.

Strategy Delivery Progress – Getting it right first time

11. Key progress against this strand includes:

- Workshops held with the city's Advice Agencies to make sure we work better together to resolve citizen's queries at the point of first contact.

- Delivery of Digital Skills training for staff to increase confidence and capabilities that will allow us to better support citizens.

- A database has been developed and rolled out across the Council, capturing key external agency information and updates on community projects helping staff to signpost citizens to key support services as appropriate.

- In the Contact Centre a dedicated 'Vulnerable Resident' line has been implemented to support those citizens more in need and calls are triaged to ensure the appropriate support is provided by the officers.

- Delivered three pilots to improve communications with citizens and reduce unnecessary contact, leading to the development of a toolkit for use within the organisation.

CEX benefits and performance

12. The Organisational Change Benefits tracker monitors and measures the benefits realised from the changes made across the organisation.

13. To date we have identified over 2,276 officer hours saved across various process reviews with a further 1,416 so far identified for 2024-25.

14. There is a report set up to identify when we have reached a realisable amount in each Service Team to enable conversion to cashable savings. Savings from services including the Contact Centre have been made across the board as different workstreams around CEX are rolled out. These have totalled around £200k for the two-year period 2022-23 and 2023-24 with a further reduction of £62k in the Contact Centre in 2025-26 and the expectation of a further £200k from services included in the MTFP in later years.

15. For 2023-24 there were three Corporate KPIs which can be seen in the table below to help measure the transition of our citizens from requiring our face-to-face or telephone customer services to more actively utilising our digital services instead; specifically in Housing and Revenues & Benefits as these were the focus of much of our development work. These KPIs remain for 2024-25 with the addition of Waste & Recycling forms, calls and visits.

Measure	Baseline 2022/23	Target 2023/24	End of year performance
% increase of online forms completed and submitted for Housing, Revenues and Benefits only	26,303	+5%	+6%
% reduction of call volume into Customer Contact Centre for Housing, Revenues and Benefits only	138,419	-5%	-1.9%
% reduction of number of face-to-face enquiries for Housing, Revenues and Benefits only	4,190	-5%	-1.6%

16. In summary the direction of travel is positive with an overall increase in online form submissions for these services and 2,652 less Contact Centre calls and 69 less face-to-face Customer Services visits in March 2024 than the previous year. This is despite spikes in demand because of letters regarding Single Person Discount changes and Council Tax bills being issued and without the expected implementation of two customer portals.

17. We expect to see a further rise in online form submissions and the eventual subsequent reduction in call and face-to-face visits with the roll out of the new QL Tenant Portal, online General Register Housing application form and full promotion of the Revenues and Benefits forms, the usage of which is expected to increase in 2024.

18. Customer satisfaction has generally improved over the last year with a marked improvement seen in our website scores:

2022 - 23	2023 - 24
Telephone: 81.6%	Telephone: 83.4%
Face to Face: 97.2%	Face to Face: 97.4%
Webchat: 100%	Webchat: 98.9%
Website: 42.1%	Website: 54.8%

The percentages are calculated based on ratings of Good and Average scores added together with Poor scores deducted. Please note that volumes of webchat responses are very low.

19. Gov-Metric benchmarks telephone and website satisfaction scores across thirty councils and produces a top ten list each month. Our latest placings are below. It should be noted that although the website satisfaction appears lower than face-to-face and telephone, this score is comparable to other websites within our benchmark group and is now regularly making the top ten.

	Telephone	Web
Jan 24	9th	6th
Feb 24	-	8th
March 24	9th	9th

Revised Action Plan for 2024/25 – See Appendix 2

20. The areas of focus for 2024/25 action plan will be:

- improving digital access and automation of our services; to include a consistent approach for payment of services

- optimising customer insight and business intelligence to improve services, spot trends and inform decision making;

- maximising our opportunities for more "joined-up" access in our localities e.g. taking more information into our Community Larders; and

- supporting the organisation to embrace a culture where communities and citizens are at the heart of how we work.

21. To make this a co-ordinated programme of work and to ensure engagement across the business, four focus areas have been highlighted to inform the corporate-wide programme strands that are needed and to ensure services are committed to what they need to specifically achieve within their own areas of work.

22. This is encapsulated in the Citizen Experience Readiness Model, which has been used to simply describe the focus areas for the programme moving forwards which can be found at Appendix 3.

23. We have also devised our own assessment tool to help services improve their current CEX culture, highlight areas of strength and identify where they need to improve. The assessment sits against our five Corporate Values (One Team, Inclusion & Respect, Service Excellence, Stepping Up and Amazing Outcomes) and covers aspects such as collaboration, feedback and insight and continuous improvement. The maturity assessment template can be found at Appendix 4.

Financial implications

24. Implementing this strategy contributes savings already included in the medium-term financial plan (MTFP) and currently requires no additional funding beyond that already identified in the MTFP. Should any additional requirements or savings surface over time, they will be included in the budget process in the usual manner.

Legal issues

25. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. In delivering services the Council must be mindful of the public sector equality duty to consider how its policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act 2010. The duty requires organisations to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected into the design of policies and the delivery of services, including internal policies, and for these issues to be kept under review.

Level of risk

26. See Appendix 5.

Equalities impact

27. On advice of the Equalities Steering Group an overarching Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was developed for the Strategy (See Appendix 6) which highlights the EDI implications under each strand, but each of the individual high level workstreams (where appropriate) are required to develop their own EqIAs so the specific impacts can be thought through, assessed and mitigated as far as possible.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

28. One of the central themes of the Citizen Experience Strategy encourages citizens that can, to access services using digital channels. It also promotes early intervention by using our locality networks. This all helps to minimise travel and printing which reduces the impact on the environment.

Report author	Helen Bishop
Job title	Head of Business Improvement
Service area or department	Business Improvement
Telephone	01865 252233
e-mail	hbishop@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None