

To: Cabinet
Date: 9 July 2025
Report of: Director of Communities and Citizens' Services
Title of Report: Citizen Experience Strategy Refresh for 2025-27

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To review the Citizen Experience Strategy 2025-27 and seek approval on the updated action plan.
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities and Well-Run Council
Policy Framework:	Citizen Experience Strategy

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:	
1	Approve the Citizen Experience Strategy for 2025-27 and the accompanying Action Plan.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Citizen Experience Strategy 2025-27 and Action Plan
Appendix 2	Stakeholder Engagement Findings
Appendix 3	CEX Readiness Model & Self-Assessment Tool
Appendix 4	Citizen Experience Strategy Risk Register
Appendix 5	Citizen Experience Strategy Equalities Impact Assessment

Introduction and background

1. The Citizen Experience (CEX) Strategy sets out our approach to delivering a positive and consistent experience for everyone accessing City Council services or engaging with us; whether they live, work, or visit Oxford; by working in collaboration with other organisations and community groups to provide the right support.

2. The original CEX Strategy was approved at Cabinet in July 2023 and over the last 2 years we have made significant progress in advancing our core citizen experience. However, there remains much work to be done. To ensure continued progression and improvement, we have refreshed the strategy for the next two years, incorporating minor adjustments, updating data where possible, and revising the action plan.
3. The City's demographic profile continues to show increasing diversity; profound health inequalities, significant parts of the city experiencing extreme poverty and a digital divide where some citizens experience digital disadvantage.
4. As a result, the strategy sets a vision 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 specialist methods for more complex interactions. The Council is equally committed to ensure that no-one gets left behind, utilising a range of contact channels, including face to face options, to make that possible.
5. A comprehensive review of this strategy will take place in 2027, in conjunction with a review of the Council's Thriving Communities Strategy, to assess whether a unified approach would best serve the interests of our communities and citizens.

Integrating our approach with other strategies

6. The CEX 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 overview

7. The Strategy Vision remains 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.'
8. To bring this to life there are four strands that accord with the Customer Service Excellence Standard. They are:
 - Citizen focused:
 - Designing services to meet needs through a variety of contact channels.
 - Developing a learning culture that actively listens, works collaboratively with our communities and uses insights to continually improve our offer to citizens.
 - Positive Citizen Experience (CEX):

- Making access to our services quicker, easier and better, ensuring we get the basics right and setting clear expectations for our citizens.
- 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:
 - We will deliver modern, accessible services that meet the needs of our diverse communities and promote our equalities objectives.
 - 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.

9. Strategy delivery progress 2023-25 - Citizen focused

Key progress in this area includes:

- Retaining Customer Service Excellence accreditation (since 2014) across all areas and achieving “beyond best practice” against 16 specific 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.
- 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.
- Introducing Customer Service Officers into Community Larders on a regular basis to provide relevant information and support for some of our most vulnerable citizens.
- 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.

- Providing a bank of customer satisfaction questions to support more areas of the Council to proactively and regularly seek and utilise feedback.
- Reviewing our Customer Service Standards and updating the relevant webpages so this information is available and clear for citizens.

10. Strategy delivery progress 2023-25 - Positive citizen experience

Key progress in this area includes:

- Launching our new website with improved search functionality, making it easier and quicker for citizens to find the service and support they require.
- Developing webforms to increase the opportunities for citizens to help themselves and reduce the need for unnecessary telephone or face to face contact.
- Reviewing some of our processes to drive efficiencies, create a better experience and set clear expectations in services including Licensing, Building Control, Housing and Waste & Recycling.
- 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.
- Launching our Cultural Maturity self-assessment to help Services understand and review their citizen experience related culture, highlight strengths and agree ways to improve.
- Rolling out training to support teams to improve their communications. This approach will improve the quality of the communication, reduce demand and ensure our citizens get the right message first time.
- Launching our online Tenant Portal to make it quicker and easier for tenants to request repairs, check rent payments and manage their council housing tenancy.
- Improving our staff apprenticeship offer to better meet the needs of staff and the Council; developing in-house skills around transformation, leadership and Artificial Intelligence.

11. Strategy delivery progress 2023-25 - Inclusive access

Key progress in this area 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.
- Setting up a Digital Cafe at Westgate Library in partnership with the local Integrated Care Board to provide digital skills training and advice.

- 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.
- Re-launching our 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.
- Updating our policy for how the Council engages with citizens and communities to develop a greater understanding of their needs and facilitate meaningful involvement in the decisions that affect them.
- Rolling out more Chip n Pin devices for citizens to be able to make payments quicker and easier at some of our Community Centres and for some services provided by Oxford Direct Services.
- Adding a 'Translations' page to our website which uses Google Translate to translate the site into dozens of languages.

12. Strategy delivery progress 2023-25 - Getting it right first time

Key progress in this area 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 shared 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.
- Delivering three pilots to improve communications with citizens and reduce unnecessary contact, leading to the development of a toolkit for use within the organisation.
- Developing a Channel Management Plan to rationalise the number of contact channels we have to interact with our citizens, provide a consistent and improved citizen experience and create efficiencies through better demand management.

- Training staff on the Local Insight platform to enable better use of local data to make informed decisions about improving our services.
- Launching our new staff intranet with improved content, search functionality and a better staff directory.
- Engaging a Data Management Consultant to help us understand the options for cleansing our citizen contact data to support increased utilisation of digital contact channels.

Stakeholder engagement 2025 summary

13. Refreshing the CEX Strategy for 2025-2027 has been led by the CEX Delivery Board, which is made up of Emma Jackman (Director of Law, Governance and Strategy), as Strategic Lead, Helen Bishop (Director of Communities and Citizens' Services), as Delivery Lead, Vicki Galvin as CEX Programme Manager and colleagues from Customer Services, ICT, the Change Support Team and our Change Agent Network.
14. As the core elements of the strategy remain unchanged, the CEX Delivery Board determined that a full consultation with staff, partners and citizens would not be appropriate. As a more balanced approach, we instead sought valuable input by sharing the refreshed strategy with the following key groups:
 - Policy Officers Group
 - Artificial Intelligence Working Group
 - Website Working Group
 - Change Agents Network
 - Tenant Ambassadors
 - Community Champions
15. The main feedback from these groups included:
 - Strong support for translation services and simple access tools, though highlighted the need to better promote these.
 - While digital improvements were supported, there were calls for simpler online processes, mobile-friendly options, and continued human support.
 - Suggestions to improve the structure, language, and visual presentation of the document.
 - Other suggestions included broader staff training, improved visibility in community spaces beyond traditional community centres, and clearer communication of City vs. County Council responsibilities.
16. Recommendations regarding the readability of the strategy were welcomed, and adjustments have been made to enhance accessibility and understanding.
17. All feedback will inform improvements. The full responses from these groups can be found at Appendix 2.

18. A full consultation with staff, partners and citizens will take place when the CEX Strategy is fully reviewed in 2027.

How we have updated the Action Plan

19. In refreshing our Citizen Experience Strategy, we have revisited the data and insights that originally helped shape our approach. We have also reviewed the latest versions of these datasets, where applicable, and drawn-out key findings that are now incorporated into our updated action plan. This ensures our strategy remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of our citizens. The key updates and findings are as follows:

20. Population Growth and Changing Demographics

- The expected population growth, particularly the increase in our ageing population, those in social housing, and residents where English is not their first language, will place increasing demands on the Council. Meeting these needs will require ongoing investment in effective systems, processes, and partnerships to manage these demands efficiently.
- We remain committed to keeping face-to-face and telephone services available, as they are vital for residents with complex queries and those who are most vulnerable. Our focus will be on optimising our contact channels to ensure that in-person or telephone support is available promptly to those who need it, while strongly encouraging and supporting those able, to use our online services.
- In addition, we will strengthen our efforts to raise awareness of available translation services, ensuring that all citizens can access the information and support they need.

21. Resident Feedback and Online Service Usage

- The latest results from our Residents Survey show a positive trend in the use of online services, alongside a significant reduction in residents reporting uncertainty about how to access these services. However, barriers to access still exist for some residents. Insights from the survey have provided valuable information about these barriers, and we will take action based on this feedback.

22. Citizen Experience Cultural Maturity and Service Standards

- Insights from the Citizen Experience Cultural Maturity self-assessments completed by various services within the Council indicate the need for teams to clearly define their own Citizen Experience Standards. Establishing clear ambitions and expectations for what constitutes an outstanding citizen experience will ensure that services align their delivery to a shared vision, enhancing consistency and impact across the Council.

23. Enhancing Self-Service Options

- We will continue to increase the availability of webforms, online booking systems, and online payment options. This will empower citizens to self-serve at

any time, improving convenience and accessibility when applying for, booking, or paying for services.

24. Data-Driven Service Improvement

- We will make better use of existing data and insight, strengthening the mechanisms for collecting, utilising, and sharing citizen feedback. This will enable us to co-create services with the people who use them, ensuring that their voices shape our improvements.

25. Consistent Measurement of Customer Satisfaction

- Consistently measuring customer satisfaction across all services will be a key focus. We will leverage this feedback to inform continuous service improvements, ensuring we consistently meet the evolving needs of our citizens.

26. Building a Citizen-Focused Culture

- Fostering a culture within the Council that is deeply focused on the citizen experience and continuous improvement will remain a priority. Every individual in the organisation plays a role in delivering excellent citizen experience, and we will continue to support this with ongoing staff training and development.

27. Integrated Local Support Services

- We will maximise opportunities to provide 'joined up' access to services within local communities. This ensures citizens receive the best possible support and advice.

28. Leveraging Artificial Intelligence

- Exploring and implementing Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions will be essential in enhancing our citizen experience, managing demand, and driving efficiency. We will seek out AI technologies that help streamline processes and create more responsive services.

29. Transparent Communication and Updates

- Ensuring transparency in how we are progressing with the delivery of this strategy will be crucial. We will share updates, lessons learned, and success stories with staff, partners, and citizens, fostering a collaborative approach to achieving our ambitions.

Monitoring and reporting

30. Delivery of the Citizen Experience Strategy action plan is overseen by the Citizen Experience Delivery Board and reported on to the Organisational Change Board. Annual updates on progress will continue to be drawn up for the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to share more widely.

31. We will be continuing to measure how successfully citizens use our new digital services and their satisfaction with our web, contact centre and face to face services. These will be stretching targets that sit alongside clear plans for improvement.

32. The action plan is maintained as a live document on Smart sheet where it is updated regularly and where it will be added to as needed across the next two years.
33. To ensure a coordinated approach to delivering this strategy and to drive engagement across the entire organisation, a Citizen Experience Readiness Model and self-assessment tool were developed last year. These resources, which centred around four key focus areas, were used by several Service Areas to guide their efforts and identify relevant service-level actions.
34. We have updated the Citizen Experience Readiness Model with four new focus areas for 2025-27 (see Appendix 3) and we will again encourage Service Areas to utilise these resources to determine what actions they need to specifically achieve within their own areas of work. These actions, where appropriate, will be added to the main Citizen Experience Strategy action plan.
35. The focus areas for 2025-27 will be:
- Enhancing citizen experience through consistent service standards
 - This means ensuring all service areas align with a clear, high standard of citizen experience, underpinned by measurable performance and feedback loops.
 - Digital inclusion and access for all
 - This means bridging the digital divide and ensuring inclusive access to services, information, and support for all communities and citizens.
 - Smart use of data and technology to improve services
 - This means using data and technology to proactively meet needs, streamline services, and personalise citizen engagement.
 - Seamless and efficient service delivery
 - This means optimising processes and contact channels to reduce friction, increase efficiency, and improve the end-to-end citizen journey.

Financial implications

36. 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

37. 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

38. See Appendix 4.

Equalities impact

39. On advice of the Equalities Steering Group an overarching Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was developed for the strategy (see Appendix 5) 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

40. 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	Director of Communities and Citizens' Services
Service area or department	Communities and Citizens' Services
Telephone	01865 252233
e-mail	hbishop@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers:	
1	Citizen Experience Strategy 2023-25