1. Details of Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

   a.) Note the improvement plans to tackle the current underperformance in customer services
   b.) Agree the approach in this report for transforming customer services over the next 2 years.
   c.) Agree the Customer Services Strategy for the Council at Appendix A which outlines this transformation.
   d.) Delegate the authority for the delivery of this strategy and any related activities and actions to the Director of Customer Services and Communications, in consultation with the Lead Member for Corporate Performance and Customer Care.
   e.) Agree to receive updates on progress as part of the quarterly performance report presented to and agreed at Cabinet.

2. Report Summary

This report sets out the current performance of customer services. It proposes a Customer Services Strategy to transform our customer services offer to enable the Council to respond to our customers changing expectations in accessing, using and securing services.
3. **Reason for Decision and Options Considered**

3.1 The context within which local services are being commissioned and delivered is facing continual change; not least because of the financial challenge facing local government but also because of the increasing sophistication with the way in which customers choose and wish to interact with the Council.

3.2 The digital revolution over the last 10 years has fundamentally changed the shape of society and how we choose to interact on a personal, organisational and societal level. This has led to significant changes and advances in service delivery and the expectations people have in accessing, using and securing services.

3.3 89% of residents have access to the internet in Hounslow, so it’s important that we champion channel shift so that those who can use online services do so. We need to design and create a seamless customer experience increasing the level of self service, online transactions and engagement so that we can better target our limited and reducing resource to those who most need our support and those customers who are most vulnerable and in need.

3.4 This requires the Council and customer services to adopt a more digital orientated approach to its customer services; whilst transforming and improving the existing customer service experience for our residents so that our customers can get the help they need in the right way for them.

**Current Position and Performance**

3.5 The customer service function is currently split into four key areas:

1. The Reception team provide the first point of contact for our customers who come directly into the council offices.

2. The Hounslow Housing Customer Service Team which deals with tenants, leaseholders and private residents living on council owned estates e.g. rent, ASB issues, estate issues, repairs and maintenance.

3. The Hounslow Contact Centre Team which deals with environmental issues, Highways, Parking, Freedom Passes, Blue Badges and Elections as well as handling all switchboard calls into the council.

4. Responding to all customer contacts (complaints, Children and Adults complaints, FOI, EIRs, Data Protection and Subject Access Requests) through the Customer Satisfaction Team.

**Current Performance**

3.6 Customer Services performance is varied, the majority of key performance indicators are not at the standard that is expected. This is demonstrated in the Quarterly Performance Report (Q4 2015/16) presented for approval at Cabinet on 19th July 2016.
3.7 The perception and reputation of the service with residents is not always positive and there are particular areas that have required immediate attention. These include:

- The telephone experience for residents, particularly answer rates and wait times in the main contact centre (though performance in the housing contact centre has improved since April 16) and the queuing system that when busy will ask residents to call back and end the call.

- The response rate in particular for complaints, freedom of information requests and Member Enquiries where the performance remains below the level expected by the council and residents.

- The lack of opportunities for residents to complete transactions online that by default leads to telephone calls and visits to reception.

- The experience for residents when they visit reception is efficient with wait times reducing over the year, but the high volumes of residents visiting reception can create queues.

- Understanding and managing demand throughout the year more effectively so that resources are appropriately deployed e.g. election.

**Immediate Improvements**

3.8 In light of the experience and performance of customer services throughout 2015/16 a number of workshops were held with the customer services team and a number of immediate improvements have been identified and initiated. This work is underpinned by an operational improvement plan and includes:

- A fundamental review of the resources, processes and systems that underpin delivery in the contact centre. This has seen some immediate improvements in the percentage of calls answered within housing where performance has improved over the last 3 months.

- Outlined a new draft specification for the telephone system with ICT to support the improvements to contact centre delivery and re-prioritised the ICT roadmap to support this investment.

- A review of the processes underpinning our approach to complaints, freedom of information requests and member enquiries. The improvements for freedom of information requests have begun to be implemented with changes to processes, templates and new training. The next phase of work in June/July will focus on complaints and member enquiries.

- A review of all practices for managing complaints and requests for information e.g. implementing quality assurance reviews, review of templates, review of information to support staff and residents.
• Started a fundamental review of all key customer journeys to understand the opportunities for moving transactions and services online. This will dovetail with the Web and Digital Strategy and the development of the new website and customer account.

• Outlined an approach for measuring and capturing customer satisfaction across face to face, telephone and web channels and this will be brought in over the next 12 weeks.

• Increased visibility on performance and working to create a strong performance management approach within the team including holding a number of workshops with the team on developing our customer services strategy.

**Foundation for good customer services**

3.9 To build a strong foundation for customer services, it is important to understand our customers (and our future customers) and their confidence and capabilities in finding out information, advice and completing transactions online. Enabling our residents to become more confident in using digital services will enable the council to take a different approach by offering access to services and tasks online, but it also enables our residents to access a wider range of products and services provided outside of the council.

3.10 The Residents Survey found that an estimated 89% of residents had access to the internet whilst, 11% of Hounslow residents did not have home access to the internet. It is important to understand access and usage of the internet, so of the 11%, those who do not have access to the internet tended to be over 55, residents from black or mixed ethnicity backgrounds, people living in socially-rented housing and residents with disabilities and/or longstanding illnesses. This is important to understand as, according to projections from the GLA, Hounslow’s population is expected to grow and become more diverse by 2026. The growth will be highest among over-65s as the borough’s population ages, and lowest among younger adults (ages 18-49).

3.11 Digital skills charity Go On UK produced a “digital exclusion heatmap” showing predicted levels of digital skills and engagement at a local authority level across the UK. Overall Hounslow is rated as being unlikely to have high levels of digital exclusion. It is predicted that only 30% of adults in Hounslow have used all five basic digital skills in the past three months (as defined by Go On UK – managing information, communicating, transacting, creating and problem solving), putting Hounslow in the bottom 20% of local authorities on this metric. This seems to indicate that while Hounslow residents do tend to possess good digital skills, they may not be in the habit of using online services regularly and this is something that the council can play a role in enabling.

3.12 Along with understanding who our customers are, what they can do, we need to understand what customers expect and what good looks like. A recent survey

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identified three key factors for customers in determining whether they have a good customer experience:

- Problem was resolved quickly (69%)
- People who helped me were nice (65%)
- Resolved in one interaction (63%)

3.13 To support this we need to consider, what creates a good customer service experience. If we consider customer expectations today, which are: immediate, seamless, personal and responsive; we need to ensure that these are built into our channels and process, but more importantly our culture and engagement with our customers.

3.14 There are five key factors to this:

1. Strategy
2. Channel (how easy are we to access?)
3. Process (how easy are we to do business with?)
4. Engagement (how did it feel?)
5. Outcomes

3.15 We need to build upon and put in place these five foundations to provide us with the opportunity for the council to be more transformational in how we deliver services to our customers in the future. We need to use the opportunity to move customers online, where they are able, capable and confident of doing so; we need to support those to complete simple transactions online and where its most important to do so we must ensure that our telephone and face to face contact is able to support, triage and assess our vulnerable customers’ needs effectively and efficiently.

4. Transforming Customer Services

4.1 The Customer Services Strategy at Appendix A outlines a clear and simple vision:

_to ensure that our customers are satisfied by their customer experience with the council._

4.2 We want to ensure that our residents:

- Understand what they can expect from our services and that we are clear on what our services offer and the timescales in which we might do something.

- Feel we are easy to access and easy to contact regardless of whether they contact us via the website, the telephone or by coming into reception

- Feel that the people who helped them were knowledgeable, friendly and approachable.
- Feel that their enquiries are dealt with quickly and that more often than not their enquiry is resolved first time.

- Know we are listening to and responding to their feedback and ensuring that, where appropriate, we are changing our services based on those experiences.

4.3 A key focus of the strategy is to ensure that those residents who can use online and digital channels do so and champion the introduction of a customer account for all residents. We will support those who are less confident with using online tools and offer a supported and assisted approach to reporting, applying and paying for services through our website.

4.4 Making improvements to the customer experience will take time and our ambition is to move over 50% of our customer contact to online services by 2018. As part of this, we want to ensure that all simple enquiries are automated and that we have in place effective triage and assessment to effectively support our residents to get the support they need in the right way and the right time. By looking at the initial point of contact for residents, the way in which they are triaged and assessed, will provide us with opportunities to improve the customers’ pathway and experience. We need to think about the delivery of services from a whole customer perspective, or a whole family or parent perspective, when it’s appropriate to do so. If we do this, it opens up opportunities to look at delivering services to our customers in very different and potentially transformational ways.

4.5 We have a clear commitment through our customer charter to deliver good quality customer services and this strategy sets our direction for the next two years.

1. Getting it right and going the extra mile
2. Innovating and learning from experience
3. Spending wisely, making every penny count
4. Many talents, one aim
5. Listening and responding

4.6 To deliver against this vision, the strategy is based around four key themes:

1. Creating One Front Door; this recognises that our residents will contact the council in many different ways and recognises that we need to improve the telephone experience, increase the first point of contact resolution so that when residents do contact us we are able, for the majority of enquiries, to deal with them in full the first time we are contact and simplify our processes for our residents. We should also use this as the opportunity to join up services to provide a better customer pathway for our residents at the first point of contact and to ensure effective and efficient triaging and assessment; with complex enquiries being dealt with by the service.
2. **Getting it Right**: this recognises that our residents expect a single point of contact for the council and that we are being consistent and standard in our customer services approach. It is also about ensuring we are being clear about what our residents can expect from our services.

3. **Digital First**: we need to increase the range of services available online and offer our residents increased flexibility and choice; but it is also about ensuring that we can then target our telephone and face to face contact to those who most need it. The Web and Digital Strategy agreed by Cabinet in November 2015 presents a significant opportunity to develop our channel shift and to increase residents’ opportunities to self-serve and the ambition is to move 50% of contact online by 2018 to support the move to the new civic building.

4. **Learning from Experience**: our residents expect us to learn from the feedback that they provide us and that we then use this feedback to prevent problems from recurring and to help us increase residents’ satisfaction with the service they receive.

**Channel and Model**

4.7 To support a digital first approach, the organisational model for customer services needs to change. Channel shift provides us with an opportunity to provide a better customer experience by delivering better customer outcomes in the most cost effective manner. It is not about delivering customer contact at any means through the cheapest channel possible; it is about understanding the appropriate channel mix for each service. However, there is a financial advantage to moving the appropriate customer contact online. SOGITM published figures on the estimated cost per transaction by channel: face to face £8.62, telephone: £2.83 and web £0.15. The ambition is to move 50% of the current contact online, with an ultimate ambition to achieve 80% of customer contact online, with 15% through the telephone and 5% through face to face methods.

4.8 From a digital perspective, 67% of people would prefer to self-serve than to contact an organisation directly, so we need to develop our channel shift significantly over the next 2 years. There are a range of techniques that we can use to encourage customers to use online e.g. incentive, disincentive. Therefore, the principles for the renewal of our digital infrastructure support are:

- An opportunity to make better use of shrinking resources by reducing costs and by providing and delivering digital services to the majority of our residents.

- Improving accessibility, simplifying and streamlining our processes, systems, and our services and being more resident focused. Thereby ensuring our telephone and face to face engagement is with those residents who most need our help and support.

- More targeted customer service (in turn reducing costs) with a focus on

2 The Effortless Experience insert full reference
creating the right channel mix for each service, redesigning how services are delivered, creating strong customer outcomes by using intelligent information and a consistent quality and tailored customer experience.

- Simplified and integrated technology architecture for both front and back office providing a single view of the customer.
- Decisions informed by business intelligence and predictive analytics providing early intervention, prevention and demand management.
- Building our people capabilities in the use of IT and digital skills for both our customers and for our staff.

4.9 There are a number of developments that are being undertaken to support this and are identified in the strategy at Appendix A. A particularly important aspect will be completing an analysis of our current customer contact e.g. visits to reception and telephone contact, to understand what we could transition contact online and where across the council there are further opportunities to take advantage of our digital capabilities.

4.10 The development of the customer account over the next 6 months will be an important tool in this journey and provide us with an opportunity to create a single view of our customer, understand their profile and interests so that we can better personalise communications and services e.g. Freedom Pass renewals, school admissions, apply and pay for Garden Waste.

4.11 This will increase the volume of self-serve and then provides an opportunity to revisit and reform how the council triages enquiries through the telephone contact centres, reception and the back office. This will provide opportunities to increase the level of first point of contact resolution by increasing both the breadth and depth of the contact centre.

Process

4.12 The exercise to understand the key customer journeys and look at opportunities to increase online transactions, will also support the development of the future model for customer services and thereby increase the ease in which it is to do business with the council. Any future developments for the future operating model for the council’s approach to customer services will be based on the following design principles:

- Self-service through digital
- Consolidation (removal of fragmented and duplicate processes, bringing customer focused functions together where it makes sense to do so)
- Simplification and standardisation
- Informing decision making, relates to understanding our customers and having greater customer insight
- Agility, anticipating and managing demand
- Skills based approach
- Always within reach
- Holistic customer journeys and experience
4.13 From a council-wide perspective, the vision could be:

4.14 To explain, the diagram in more detail the focus for digital self-serve is that we move high volume and simple transactions online and the website and customer portal is where the majority of access to council services for the majority of residents takes place. This would lead into initial contact and triage thereby allowing vulnerable residents the opportunity to be guided and supported. The focus would be on transactions and automated assessments, very much led by predetermined rules and procedures. The assessment level would undertake and consolidate assessment activity and would provide a function to support core cross cutting assessments internally and with our partners. This would be a significant change to our current model but has the opportunity to deliver savings as part of the wider customer services and digital strategy.

4.15 The model described above is not static nor prescriptive and it is not about creating a ‘one size fits all’ approach to customer services. It is about recognising that the channel mix and approach for each service will vary depending on who their customers are, their level of need and the level of engagement and support required from the council. There has to be flexibility in how the approach is applied and this will require the close engagement and interface with services from across the council.

4.16 This provides an opportunity to revisit and reform practices and processes that would assist in increasing the efficiency of the customer journey and reduce, for example, multiple handling or reduce the different routes into the council. Generally speaking these types of changes will contribute to saving staff time, managing demand and improving the percentage of transactions resolved at first contact, which may result in savings but will help to maintain resident satisfaction. Furthermore, the application of demand management techniques can continue to help us reduce budgetary pressures and efficiently provide services e.g. a focus on appointments.

Operational Delivery
In practical terms, this will lead to changes to how the customer services team operates over the next few years and will ensure that we are fit for purpose, size and scale for the new civic building. For example, the future vision for those customers visiting the council could include:

- Meet and greet by floorwalkers who support and signpost residents to complete their transactions online or provide opportunities for residents to have their enquiry dealt with over the telephone by the contact centre.

- Opportunities developed for residents to use other council sites e.g. libraries to self-serve, particularly ‘scanning’ or taking photographs of key documents for benefits assessments

- Provide an appointment based system so that more complex enquiries from residents can be managed more effectively through an appointment. This means residents can come back at a suitable time for them with all the documentation they may need to reach a suitable resolution.

- Have flexibility to deal with those residents in crisis and who present unexpectedly at the council and who require immediate assistance.

For the telephone contact centre a future vision could include:

- A strong telephone offer for our residents where we have a range of different services being triaged at the first point of contact for services across a range of different specialisms. This will be focused on skills based routing.

- All staff are able to deal with a range of simple and general enquiries and that the process of dealing with these mirror the customer experience online. This could be represented as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Enquiries e.g. Elections, Waste, Tenancy Enquiries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
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<tr>
<td>e.g. housing, repairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. environment, highways</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revenues and Benefits</td>
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<td>(operated by Liberata)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Options to expand the offer provided from the telephone contact to suit the needs and demands of residents and to release pressure on the back office, where it’s appropriate to do so, thereby supporting the different channel mix for services.
• Well trained and knowledgeable team who are able to signpost and deal with a range of simple and medium complexity of enquiries; whilst being able to judge when those residents need further specialist support from the services directly.

Customer Insight

4.19 Related to this is how we manage and use customer insight. We have many touch points with our customers: web, mobile, radio, press, Facebook, reception, telephone, email, Twitter and it is important how we message and brand placing our customer values at the heart of our approach. We need to firstly articulate our expectations and then manage those expectations with the people who interact with the council.

4.20 We then need to consolidate these touchpoints, the experience with garden waste has brought into sharp focus the challenge of generic inboxes and raises the question of their value when residents can then access the council in multiple ways. This can lead to high levels of duplicate effort, confusion and frustration for the resident and increased effort in responding to different points of entry into the council.

4.21 We need to be able to manage our performance and understand how satisfied our customers are, how easy we were to contact, whether their query could be resolved in the first point of contact and therefore, we need to be able to provide customer services staff, service managers and leaders with timely and relevant performance information.

4.22 Finally, this has to be closely aligned to how services articulate their offer but also the communications, brand and marketing that we undertake. These are after all, only other channels in which we engage people (our customers) on. Being consistent and coherent in brand and values is particularly important in developing and delivering good customer service.

Engagement

4.23 There is a strong sense that we are not always as responsive to our customers as we should be, this is backed up by our current performance statistics and there is a strong sense that the added value from the customer services needs further improvement.

4.24 We need to develop our culture so that it reinforces our customer service values and is relentless in its execution. This requires a shift in behaviours to improve accountability, personal ownership and frontline innovation, which will reduce failure demand and could lead to solutions that reduce costs.

4.25 In order to respond to this culture and behavioural change there are a number of key activities we need to undertake:

• Define; all good organisations can define what their organisation wants to be in terms of personality and behaviours for both customers and staff. For example, for Britvic its: dynamic, creative and admired, for O2 it’s about ‘open technology
for all'. This must be the first step in the journey and it must be our customer charter.

- **Lead**: this journey will need the relentless support of the senior leadership team to support, promote and challenge to ensure exceptional customer experience.

- **Measure**: having defined the experience, it will be vital to measure it. This will make our approach tangible, ensures accountability and tracks our progress. This will lead to the development of a set of employee and customer based measures that will ensure the defined attitudes and behaviours are being achieved and where corrective action is required.

- **Communicate**: to communicate the customer charter and behaviour across the council. To do this, an internal communications programme will be developed along with a training programme for customer services staff, staff, managers and Members.

- **Reward, recognition and appraisal**: to support the measurement and accountability, a review of how we recognise and reward strong customer experience. We should consider the Staff Awards, reviewing our behavioural competencies and the inclusion of customer service in our appraisals.

- **Recruitment, induction and training**: ensure our definitions of attitude and behaviour related to customer services is incorporated into our recruitment and induction processes.

**Outcomes**

4.26 We will know when we have been successful when our residents are:

- Satisfied with the customer experience from the council. The expectation is that over 85% of residents will be satisfied with their experience with the council.

- Able to access our services in the right way and at the right time.

- Get the services they need the first time and with their enquiry responded to at the first point of contact in the majority of instances.

- Able to use online and self-serve for the majority of their needs. The expectation that we can move 50% of our customer contact online and ultimately achieve 80% of contact online, 15% through the telephone and 5% through face to face contact.

- Can have a single account to report, request, apply and pay for services from the council.

- Able to have their queries answered within stated timescales. The following key targets for customer services:
  - Fewer complaints at:
Further targets related to customer satisfaction will be implemented from 2017/18.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are financial opportunities for the Council through pursuing a model for customer services that is ‘digital first’. SOCITM published figures on the estimated cost per transaction by channel: face to face £8.62, telephone: £2.83 and web £0.15. Therefore, there are potential opportunities to reduce the cost of providing customer services if more residents moved to using digital information and online transactions.

5.2 The overall delivery of the customer services strategy will be contained within existing budgets and the funding agreed for the Web and Digital strategy. The ICT roadmap for customer services has been re-prioritised to prioritise the improvements to the telephone experience for residents and to capture customer satisfaction.

5.3 Support has been brought in through a small amount of improvement monies to help deliver the required improvements across customer services, with a particular focus on reviewing our face to face and telephone interactions to identify online delivery opportunities. The in-house service improvement team will be supporting this and the process reviews across all functions within Customer Services.

Comments of the Director, Finance and Corporate Services

5.4 The implementation of the Customer Services Strategy is an enabler for delivery of savings through moving customers to online services. The Strategy for face to face customer services seeks to change our service offer to reflect the facilities available in the reception area of the new Civic Offices.

5.5 The costs implementation of the Customer Services Strategy will need to be met from within the budgets allocated for the Web and Digital Strategy (which will provide the technology for online services), customer services within the ICT roadmaps and approved revenue budgets.

6. Legal Details/Comments of the Head of Governance

6.1 The Head of Governance had no comments.
7. **Value for Money**

7.1 The opportunities by transforming customer services and implementing a customer services strategy have been outlined in the main body of the report.

8. **Sustainability Impact Appraisal**

8.1 Not applicable.

9. **Risk Management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risks</th>
<th>Uncontrolled Risk</th>
<th>Controls</th>
<th>Controlled Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No risks at this stage. Individual risks will be identified with each project delivered as part of the strategy.</td>
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</table>

10. **Links to Council Priorities**

10.1 The recommendations within this report link to theme 7: an ambitious council delivering quality services and value for money.

11. **Equalities, Human Rights and Community Cohesion**

11.1 The Council is required to have due regard to its Equalities Duties and in particular that set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and eliminate any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act, advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

11.2 The development of the customer services strategy has at its heart ensuring a positive and satisfactory customer experience for all our residents. There are specific proposals within the strategy that will ensure that our more vulnerable residents have the appropriate customer services support required. Throughout the delivery of the strategy, the equality impact will be assessed and steps taken to minimise any adverse impact on anyone with one or more protected characteristics, namely age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

12. **Staffing/Workforce and Accommodation implications:**

12.1 Any proposed changes to the staffing or workforce as a result of this strategy will be completed in line with the appropriate HR policies.

13. **Property and Assets**

13.1 This is not applicable.

14. **Any Other Implications**

14.1 There are no other implications
15. **Consultation**

15.1 Workshops were held with all customer services staff in the development of the Customer Services Strategy.

16. **Timetable for Implementation**

16.1 An improvement programme has been initiated and structured in to five key areas: strategy, structure, systems, skills and culture. This will oversee the delivery of the customer services strategy and improvements over the next two years.

16.2 The interface with the services across the council is crucial in developing the right customer engagement and channel mix for their service (now and in the future). A process for taking forward this strategy with services will be developed to ensure they are at the heart of the delivery of this strategy.

17. **Appendices**

Appendix A: Customer Services Strategy

18. **Background Information**

Web and Digital Strategy agreed at Cabinet in November 2015.
Appendix A: Customer Services Strategy for London Borough of Hounslow, 2016 to 2018

Introduction

We are an ambitious council and we are ambitious in delivering quality services and value for money for our residents.

The context within which services are being delivered is facing continual change; not least because of the financial challenge facing the council but also because of the increasing sophistication with the way in which our residents choose and wish to interact with us.

We are facing increasing demands with reducing resources so it’s important that we design and transform our services so that we are placing our residents at the heart of what we do. We will not compromise on creating a good customer experience for our residents.

We need to increase our digital services so that residents can report, pay and apply for services online. We want our residents to have their own account that will keep a record of the services they have used online and to ensure that our residents only need to call or visit us when it’s absolutely necessary to do so.

This customer services strategy supports this vision and is about ensuring we find new, ambitious ways to improve our customer care for our residents and deliver even better value for money.

We want our residents experience to be positive and we want them to feel satisfied when dealing with us and as such as we want to ensure their customer experience is personal, responsive and seamless.

This strategy sets out how we want to achieve this.

Cllr Ed Mayne
Lead Member for Performance and Customer Care
Our Vision

We want our residents to have a positive experience when dealing with us and our vision is simple, we want:

\textit{to ensure that our customers are satisfied by their customer experience with the council}

We want to ensure that our residents:

- Understand what can be expected from our services and that we are clear on what our services offer and the timescales in which we might do something.

- Feel we are easy to access and easy to contact regardless of whether we are contacted via the website, the telephone or by coming into reception

- Feel that the staff who helped them were knowledgeable, friendly and approachable.

- Feel that their enquiries are dealt with quickly and that more often than not their enquiry is resolved first time.

- Know we are listening to and responding to their feedback and ensuring that, where appropriate, we are changing our services based on those experiences.

We want those residents who can use online and digital channels to do so and to champion our development of a customer account for all residents. We will support those residents who are less confident with using online tools and offer a supported approach to reporting, applying and paying for services through our website. Making improvements to the customer experience will take time and our ambition is to move over 50% of our customer contact to online services by 2018.

We have a clear commitment through our customer charter to deliver good quality customer services and this strategy sets our direction for the next two years.

1. Getting it right and going the extra mile
2. Innovating and learning from experience
3. Spending wisely, making every penny count
4. Many talents, one aim
5. Listening and responding

Delivering our ambition

We have developed four key themes to ensure that we are delivering against our ambition for customer services. These are explained in more detail below.
A single front door

Our residents access the council in a number of different ways. This includes face to face, telephone, email, letter, e-forms, Facebook, Twitter and other digital routes. We need to improve the current experience of our residents and to simplify some of our processes for our residents when accessing the council. It is important that we increase the first point of contact resolution so that when residents do contact us we are able, for the majority of enquiries, to deal with their enquiry, in full, the first time we are contacted.

To do this, we will:

- Improve the telephone experience for our residents by updating our telephone system, better directing our customers to services and reducing the number of options to get through to a service or customer services advisor.

- Increase the number of calls answered and reduce the number of calls abandoned and using the telephone system to direct residents to online services, where it’s appropriate to do so.

- Explore developing a single telephone number for our residents ensuring our residents can access the services in a single call. This will only be undertaken if the customers’ telephone experience has improved and if it suits the requirements of the council at that time.

- Explore options to bring other enquiries into the telephone contact centre thereby reducing the calls taken by other services.

- Develop a single main reception for the council so that when residents do visit the civic offices they can access all the services needed in a single visit (and be signposted to other relevant services). This does not replace the delivery of services within communities or different locations, where this is critical to do so e.g. Registrars.

- Rationalise other avenues into the council to reduce confusion, duplication and double handling for our residents e.g. inboxes.

- Explore the use of text messaging to inform residents about our services, consultations and to provide reminders for appointments.

Getting it Right

Our residents expect a high quality customer experience when dealing with us and a single point of contact. We must ensure that we do not unnecessarily redirect our residents and that in the majority of instances we are able to deal with enquiries at the first point of contact.
To do this, we will:

- Provide a **consistent and standard approach** to dealing with our customers so that this is applied right across the council and is the same regardless of whether a resident contacts the council online, by telephone or by visiting us.

- Ensure that our **services are clear** in determining what residents can expect from them and when.

- Ensure that our customer services team are **well trained**, with a strong customer orientated approach and with a good grasp of the council services to ensure they can respond or signpost our residents.

- Improve the way we **collect, collate and use information** to understand our customers to better inform the changes to services.

- Review our **correspondence** to ensure that we are communicating with our customers in a **simple and easily understood** manner and that we are directing our customers to the use of online services, where it’s appropriate to do so.

**Digital First**

In Hounslow, we have around 89% of residents who have some form of access to the Internet and given the digital revolution over the last 10 years, we need to ensure that we are increasing the range of services available online and offering our residents increased flexibility and choice. By doing this, we will allow customers to be in control and reduce our costs. Channel shift provides us with an opportunity to provide a better customer experience by delivering better customer outcomes in the most cost effective manner. It is not about delivering customer contact at any means through the cheapest channel possible; it is about understanding the appropriate channel mix for each service.

To do this, we will:

- Implement a **new council website** for our residents that is easy to use and easy to navigate. We will ensure residents can use it on their computer, tablet or mobile.

- Create the **Hounslow Account** where customers can report, request apply and pay for a range of services online, ensuring our residents can access a range of services regardless of the date or time. This will provide residents with a single place for their enquiries into the council to be held.

- **Target** our telephone and face to face contact to those who most need it ensuring access and implement a supported and assisted approach to using the digital services available for our vulnerable residents.

- **Promote** the use of **online services** so that over time more customers are accessing services online than using the telephone or visiting us. We want to see at least 50% of all our customer contact being completed online reducing the number of people visiting us to have their enquiries dealt with by 2018.
- Pilot options for **floor walking** in reception to help residents quickly when they do visit us, so that we are triaging enquiries quickly and directing residents to the website, the telephone or to a customer services advisor.

- Pilot an approach for residents to make **appointments** for key services e.g. revenues and benefits.

- Use the opportunity to **review and streamline** our processes, **join up** activities where it’s sensible to do so and manage demand for our different services.

- **Introduce** email newsletters providing the residents with choices on the information and subjects they want to hear about.

- Implement a number of **customer services campaigns** to promote the online services available to residents as and when they are developed.

**Learning from Experience**

Customer feedback is important. It tells us when our services are working well, when they are not working well and when we may need to make changes to how we are delivering a service. Our residents expect us to learn from the feedback that they provide us and that we are using this feedback to prevent problems being repeated and to help us increase customer satisfaction.

We need to continually reinforce our customer service values to improve accountability, personal ownership and frontline innovation, which will reduce failure demand and could lead to solutions that reduce costs.

To do this, we will:

- **Implement** customer surveys through our website, telephone and face to face services and use the results to implement changes and make improvements.

- **Keep our promises** and respond to customer feedback in line with our service standards. This will ensure we are responding to complaints or other customer feedback in line with the timescales we promote.

- To support this we will develop and promote a clear set of **customer care standards** that outlines when we will deal with different enquiries e.g. acknowledging an email within 48 hours.

- **We will measure our customer service performance against the Customer Services Excellence standard** and continually make improvements to the benefit of the customer.

- We will develop a programme of **mystery shopping** with residents so that we can understand where we can make improvements to the customer experience.
• **Share our learning** across the council so that we can use the experience and feedback to improve their services.

• **Tell** our residents what changes we have made as a result of their feedback so that they know we are listening to them.

**Being Successful**

We have some ambitious plans for our customer services to ensure that our residents are satisfied with their experience from the council.

We will know when we have been successful when our residents are:

• Satisfied with the customer experience from the council

• Able to access our services in the right way and at the right time.

• Get the services they need the first time and with their enquiry responded to at the first point of contact in the majority of instances.

• Able to use online and self-serve for the majority of their needs.

• Can have a single account to report, request, apply and pay for services from the council.

• Able to have their queries answered within stated timescales.

**Contact**

For more information on our customer services strategy, please contact: feedback@hounslow.gov.uk.