



Report for: Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	29 th June 2023
Subject:	Improving the Customer Experience including the Council's Customer Service commitments
Key Decision:	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Jonathan Milbourn - Head of Customer Services & Business Support
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Stephen Greek - Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communications and Customer Experience
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Wards affected:	All Wards.
Enclosures:	Customer Commitments (Appendix A)

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the Council’s Customer Service commitments alongside an update of the customer experience action plan.

Recommendations: Cabinet is requested to:

1. Approve the Customer Service commitments within Appendix A to this report
2. Note the progress to date

Reason (for the recommendations): On the 18 July 2022 Cabinet agreed the vision and principles to improve the customer experience of residents interacting with the Council.

This is the next step to ensure delivery against that vision

Section 2 – Report

Options considered

1. Develop corporate commitments to clarify what residents should expect when contacting the Council to help improve the customer experience.
2. Continue with the existing measures and priorities in place.

Option 1 is seen as the most beneficial as it addresses the current situation and will improve the customer experience.

Progress to date

A new vision for the Council has been agreed to restore the pride in Harrow along with three priorities and these reflect the status of putting residents at the heart of what we do.

On the 18 July 2022 Cabinet agreed a set of principles to underpin the strategy to improve the Customer Experience and an action plan put in place to improve over the next 18 months.

A significant amount of work is underway, across the council, to take forward this strategy and deliver the customer experience improvements that our residents deserve. An update against the action plan agreed at Cabinet in December 2022 is as follows with the themes of action plan bolded below:

To **create a positive experience**, we wanted to be clear as to what our service standards are and to publish them on our website along with setting expectations through our email acknowledgements. Our “customer

commitments” are attached as an appendix and outline the standards to which we aim to deliver against. These commitments will be measured and monitored through our performance boards.

A training programme has been developed for our staff to ensure that they are equipped to deliver high quality and customer-focussed services. This is being rolled out from June 2023 and is aimed at all staff across the Council.

We have reviewed over 250 resident-facing email accounts to ensure that an appropriate bounce back message is sent after an email has been received. The bounce back will acknowledge receipt, provide any relevant information and advice including helpful links to our website and outline relevant service standards.

In order to be an efficient Council, we understand the importance of **reducing the need for residents to make contact** with the Council where unnecessary. The common causes of failure demand (where activity is created by a failure to do something or do something right) are being identified so that improvements and solutions are being found. For example, this includes ensuring that our correspondence is clear and easily understood; and checking areas where bins are sometimes not picked up to improve collection rates.

We have increased the training for a number of our front line staff so that they are able to resolve more enquiries at the first point of contact. As a result, there is less follow up contact to chase updates.

Using our Social Media channels we have improved the sharing of information such as forthcoming roadworks, updates to service provision, incidents within the Borough and changes to bin collections to ensure that residents are kept up to date.

The Council is undertaking a review on how its computer infrastructure is managed and how underlying technology links to our website to ensure our **residents have a seamless customer journey** however they contact us. IT system improvements will be made over the next twelve months with our Housing, Planning, Parking and Public Protection services which will ultimately make it easier to interact with us and improve the customer experience.

Contact with the Council is predominantly handled through self-service which accounts for over 95% of interactions showing that **digital is the channel of choice**. Work is ongoing to create a personalised website which will also allow residents to track the fulfilment of their requests by March 2024. This will make it easier to access the services important to them and check on progress made.

Many residents have left online feedback on how to improve our website and changes have been made as a result to make content clearer and web forms easier to use. For example, changes to appointments for the Recycling Centre have allowed more than one booking to be each day and fly tip reports can automatically identify where the land is owned privately (rather than by the Council) to ensure that unnecessary reports are not made.

We introduced the option for our residents to transfer their bin dates directly to their personal calendars allowing them to receive a reminder to put their bin out the day before and more than 9,500 people have downloaded the calendar to date.

Overall, 750,000 online forms were completed over the last twelve months pushing information directly to the right teams to speed up service delivery and more than 3.4 million visits were made to our website

We understand that interacting with the Council through our website isn't right for everybody, so we **provide alternative channels where appropriate**.

The Council provides advice and guidance through supported self-service at Greenhill library with more than 2,500 people helped within the first month of opening. We are looking at ways to improve the face-to-face service further both through the physical infrastructure and by increasing the number of enquiries that we can resolve.

More than 43,000 people received their Council Tax bill electronically this year and the increase in people using the MyHarrow account and website to make a payment or update their details meant that we were able to answer more of the telephone calls made to us. More than 35,000 calls were made to our Council Tax team in March/April and 94% of these were answered by somebody who could assist them.

We are reviewing key services to ensure that our **Services are the best that they can be**. Changes were made to improve the subscription method for Garden Waste and nearly 25,000 households have already signed up surpassing the total for last year.

The **After Care** experience is also important once a service has been delivered. This helps us understand where we can make further improvements.

We have started to capture feedback across our channels to understand the customer experience including whether we resolved the enquiry, responded in a timely manner and explained everything clearly. These opinions are reviewed and help drive change.

Our complaints policy has been reviewed and is the subject of a separate report to Cabinet for approval. This is intended to make it easier to understand and as outlined in our flagship actions, we will monitor our performance to ensure that at least 90% are answered within the timescales published. We have modified our website to ensure that complaints are directed to the right team so that they can be resolved more quickly.

The action plan will continue to be rolled out over the year to improve the customer experience by putting residents first and treating both residents and businesses as valued customers.

Implications of the Recommendation

Considerations

The structure and governance arrangements of how the customer experience is led across the Council has been agreed as part of this process.

Resources, costs

Although there is no additional cost of implementing the new customer commitments, capacity to deliver against the performance standards will be monitored

Staffing/workforce

The Whole Service Review process will introduce a mindset of continuous improvement to actively improve Council services.

The modular training programme around Customer Service and the Customer Experience will be put in place to develop staff skills.

Ward Councillors' comments

Not Applicable

Performance Issues

A Customer Experience paper has been introduced to the Performance Board process and additional measures are monitored throughout the year

Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications associated with this report

Data Protection Implications

There are no data protection implications associated with this report.

There is an active Privacy Impact Assessment for Digital

Risk Management Implications

Risks included on corporate or directorate risk register? **NO**

Separate risk register in place? **NO**

Are the relevant risks contained in the register are attached/summarised below? **N/A**

The following key risks should be taken onto account when agreeing the recommendations in this report:

Risk Description	Mitigations	RAG Status
The Customer Commitments are not achieved and do not improve the customer experience	The commitments have been agreed in consultation with service areas taking into consideration capacity to deliver Performance against the commitments will be measured on a quarterly basis and remedial action taken where required	GREEN

Risk Description	Mitigations	RAG Status
	<p>There are baseline measurements to understand the current position including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wait times • Satisfaction • Failure demand <p>These will be measured throughout the duration of the Action Plan so that any necessary restorative actions can take place</p>	
<p>The Action Plan does not achieve its aim in improving the customer experience</p>	<p>The Action Plan will be monitored and measured so that any additional measures can take place</p> <p>Commencement of Whole Service Reviews to improve service quality, reduce failure demand and generate efficiencies to ensure no additional strain on the MTFS.</p> <p>Creation of Senior Level task force to drive improvements</p> <p>Roll out of detailed plans to improve customer service for specific services that have high levels of complaints</p> <p>Redesigning the current complaints process covering how the Council handles complaints</p> <p>Design of a staff training programme to improve customer service and complaint handling</p>	GREEN
<p>The customer experience of digitally excluded residents is not improved</p>	<p>Residents are able to discuss Council matters at Greenhill library where there is a face-to-face service.</p> <p>There are telephone numbers available for residents for a number of key services including Council Tax, Benefits, Housing, Adult Social Care and Childrens' Services</p>	GREEN
<p>The cost of the Action Plan cannot be met within current budgets</p>	<p>The cost of delivering the action plan will be managed within existing budgets however some actions arising from the action plan may incur cost which will be reviewed on a business case basis through the MTFS.</p> <p>This will be monitored through the existing financial processes</p>	AMBER

Procurement Implications

There are no procurement implications associated with this report

Legal Implications

The Council provides a range of services in accordance with its statutory functions. It has a best value duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. By focusing on service delivery from resident, service users and taxpayers' perspectives, the Council can continuously improve its services and deliver financial efficiency.

Financial Implications

The cost of the action plan can be funded from within existing budgets.

There is no specific budget provision to support the Customer Experience Strategy. Within the strategy, it is envisaged that there will be individual business cases which will have to identify efficiencies to cover any associated costs to ensure there is no additional strain on the MTFs. Even though the business cases will be cost neutral, they need to still be considered as part of the annual budget setting process for governance purposes.

Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

The equality implications will be reviewed including considering what monitoring data to collect, reviewing impact on specific groups and listening to feedback on any changes implemented.

For those groups that may struggle with accessing services online the Council will provide advice and guidance through supported self-service at Greenhill library. We are reviewing how to best use the staff resources working in the Council's contact centre to provide telephone support alongside the functionality that the telephone system provides.

Council Priorities

Please identify how the decision sought delivers this priority.

- 1. A council that puts residents first**
- 2. A borough that is clean and safe**
- 3. A place where those in need are supported**

The report and action plan are designed to improve the customer experience to ensure that residents are at the heart of service delivery.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Statutory Officer: Sharon Daniels

Signed on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Date: 14th June 2023

Statutory Officer: Sarah Wilson

Signed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 9th June 2023

Chief Officer: Alex Dewsnap

Signed off by the Managing Director

Date: 9th June 2023

Head of Procurement: Nimesh Mehta

Signed by the Head of Procurement

Date: 9th June 2023

Head of Internal Audit: Neale Burns

Signed by the Head of Internal Audit

Date: 14th June 2023

Mandatory Checks

Ward Councillors notified: NO, as it impacts on all Wards

EqIA carried out: NO

A full Equality Impacts Assessment will be conducted in tandem with the options scoped out through the feasibility study.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Jonathan Milbourn, Head of Customer Services & Business Support, jonathan.milbourn@harrow.gov.uk , 020 8736 6711

Background Papers: None

Call-in waived by the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee - NO