

Report for: **Cabinet**

Date of Meeting:	8 th December 2022
Subject:	Improving the Customer Experience
Key Decision:	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Alex Dewsnap - Acting Corporate Director of Resources
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Stephen Greek - Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communications and Customer Experience
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	Appendix A - Customer Experience Action Plan

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the plans to improve the customer experience.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to agree to:

1. Approve the Customer Experience Action Plan found at Appendix A to this report; and
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 action plan outlines how this priority will be achieved and brings together current activity with future proposed direction.

Section 2 – Report

Options considered

1. Develop a focussed action plan to help improve the customer experience through considering future customer needs, modern customer service delivery models and technology and the best outcomes for the Borough.
2. Continue with the existing measures and plans in place.

Option 1 is seen as the most beneficial as it tackles the current issues and sets out a plan to improve the customer experience.

Current situation

On the 18 July Cabinet agreed a set of principles to underpin the strategy to improve the Customer Experience

- Reduce the need for contact – be upfront and proactive when there is a problem and eliminate avoidable contacts through reducing the need to make contact in the first place through well run services.
- When a resident interacts with the Council, it will be a positive customer experience
- Ensure customers have a seamless journey through the Council for all their needs through joined-up technology, processes and information The IT infrastructure should be centrally controlled and effectively utilised by staff to the benefit of the residents.
- ensure self-service is engaging and simple to use so that digital is the channel that residents actively choose.
- Provide alternative channels where required to support people to self-serve or provide an alternative means of contact for more complex issues
- Follow up with the customer either for a progress update and to set expectations or to confirm that the request has been resolved
- Ensure that Council services are the best that they can be; focussed around the customer and built on efficient processes.

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.

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. An action plan has been developed to improve these areas, with continuous improvement over the next 18 months:

To **create a positive experience**, we will be clear as to what our service standards are and publish them on our website and set expectations through our email acknowledgements. A training programme will be developed for our staff to ensure that they can deliver against these, and champions will be identified across the Council to support the organisation.

To be an efficient Council it is important to **reduce the need for residents to contact** the Council where unnecessary. This means understanding where the customer 'pain points' are and the causes of failure demand. [Failure demand is defined as demand caused by a failure to do something or do something right for the customer]. Further work will be done to be more proactive with our communications alerting residents to potential problems in advance and by using more modern communication tools to help provide useful web links. There will be additional training provided to our staff to ensure that we can handle requests at the first point of contact reducing wait times for enquiries to be resolved.

The Council is reviewing how its computer infrastructure is managed and links to our website to ensure our **residents have a seamless customer journey** through integrated technology. Council staff will have a greater awareness of services provided so that residents see how we operate as 'One Council.

With over 95% of enquiries being handled through self-service, **digital is the channel of choice**. Our residents will be treated as valued customers through the provision of a personalised website with a consistent look and feel across our digital estate and we will be clearer where services are only available online. We are looking for all Council services to be delivered through the website in a friction-free way to reduce the need to use the telephone where demand is high, such as Council Tax, and user feedback will be integral to this. We will investigate the use of 'app' technology to provide more intuitive access utilising technical abilities of smartphones.

We appreciate that digital access isn't appropriate for everybody, and we will **provide alternative channels where required**. Work is underway to better understand digital exclusion and those affected by it. The Council will provide advice and guidance through supported self-service at Greenhill library and 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.

To ensure that our **Services are the best that they can be** we will review both how services are delivered as a whole (such as the front door to Adult Social care and Council Tax) along with key customer journeys (such as subscribing to Garden Waste, reporting bin issues and ordering a parking permit

Once a service has been delivered it is important that we follow up with our **after care**. Along with checking that the issue is resolved we will capture resident feedback across all our channels so that we can further develop our service delivery. We will also review our complaints process to ensure that we better improve what we do and look at how we best interact with our elected representatives – both Councillors and MPs.

These actions will be managed within the current budget envelope and the detailed plan is attached as an appendix to this report.

These activities are closely linked with one of the Administration’s three priorities – A Council that puts residents first

In treating residents and businesses as valued customers, the Council will prioritise the improvements in the customer experience. We will aim to put the pride back into Harrow Council by offering a high standard of service delivery, accepting that we won’t get everything right first time. Where residents do need to contact the Council (either to request a service or on the basis that we haven’t delivered to expectations) they will be treated with respect by an organisation that cares and wants to provide a positive response. We will ensure that we reduce bureaucracy, make processes simple and straight forward, and when we say we will do something we will do it in a timely, quality manner.

We will look to get the basics right and improve services where we can within financial constraints, with a keener eye on quality as well as improved planning and good financial management. Value for money will be critical as we look to minimise the cost of the Councils’ services on our residents, and where we do make an additional specific charge, we will deliver a premium service.

Through improved and streamlined communications and clarity of service standards, we will throughout the next four years reduce the need for residents to contact the council but when a resident does contact us, we will: Listen, Act and Deliver. Individual staff will treat residents as they themselves would wish to be treated.

All our services will be accessible and responsive, be they front line or back-office services, and we will innovatively use technology to improve the customer experience, ensuring residents are first satisfied, and then delighted, with our service offer and the way we treat them.

This aim of the strategy is to lay out the Council’s direction to improve the customer experience by putting residents first and treating both residents and businesses as valued customers.

Progress to date

In order to improve the customer experience a number of projects have already commenced

Project	Theme	Progress
Service standards	Create a positive customer experience	Discussions taking place to understand which service standards are required in which areas, reaffirming these and then performance managing them
Email bounce backs	Create a positive customer experience	Customer-facing email accounts have been identified and the structure and content of these are being reviewed

Staff training	Create a positive customer experience	A modular training plan is being developed for all staff to attend
Reducing failure demand	Reducing the need to contact	A definition of failure demand has been agreed and work to understand the sources is underway
Reducing the need to call	Reducing the need to contact	Work is underway with our Unified Communication Platform provider to assess the capabilities of managing channels via WhatsApp
Resolution at the first point of contact	Reducing the need to contact	A common understanding of resolution has been agreed and a common way of measurement is being investigated.
Integrated IT applications	Residents have a seamless customer journey	A discovery piece of work is underway to assess how the Council's IT infrastructure is managed.
Digital feedback	Digital – the channel of choice	Resident feedback on our digital channels is captured on the website, MyHarrow account on web forms and this is reviewed and acted upon each month.
Investigate a Harrow App	Digital – the channel of choice	Work has started to investigate the requirements for an App including resident engagement
Planning service online	Digital – the channel of choice	The Planning system replacement project has commenced, and the Digital team are assessing the Planning Portal capabilities to improve how residents access the service through the website
Revenues online	Digital – the channel of choice	Initial scoping sessions have taken place to review Revenues and Benefits with the objective to improve the resident journeys associated with the service.
Digital Exclusion	Providing alternative channels where required	An understanding of digital exclusion has been agreed and work has started to assess the extent of those impacted
Improve the face-to-face service	Providing alternative channels where required	The Council will create a new supported self-service model at Greenhill library in the New Year.
Optimise the contact centre	Providing alternative channels where required	Work has begun to change the messaging on the voice recognition system to make it clearer on how to best access Council services when calling. The technology to provide the voice has already been changed to make it clearer and more human.
Whole Service Review process	Services are the best that they can be	Service Reviews have been agreed with Revenues and Benefits to understand and reduce the causes of contact in order to reduce Access Harrow telephony resources as previously agreed by Cabinet. Service Review agreed to assess access to Adult Social Care
Improve customer journeys	Services are the best that they can be	A review of the Garden Waste service is underway to improve its operation in 2023

Develop feedback mechanisms	After care	Mechanisms are in place to capture and act upon resident feedback across digital platforms
Review Member and MP enquiry process	After care	Changes have been made to the Member and MP enquiry process to improve the timeliness and quality of responses

The initial cabinet paper committed to a number of documents being produced as the strategy is rolled out.

- The programme of work required to implement the strategy (the action plan) is attached to this report.
- The governance arrangements for the action plan are covered as a separate tab within the action plan
- The assessment of the IT infrastructure to support the proposals is being developed as part of the seamless customer journey section
- The business analysis will be documented as relevant sections of the action plan are progressed
- The Equality Impact Assessment will be completed in tandem with the relevant projects within the action plan
- There are no additional financial costs as the current action plan is being developed within existing budgets

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

The cost of delivering the action plan will be met within existing budgets.

Staffing/workforce

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

A 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 will be 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? **YES**

“The Council provides a poor customer service” is included on the corporate risk register and rated at C3 (medium likelihood/moderate impact)

Separate risk register in place? **NO**

Are the relevant risks contained in the register are attached/summarised below? **NO**

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

Risk Description	Mitigations	RAG Status
The Action Plan does not achieve its aim in improving the customer experience	Commencement of Whole Service Reviews to improve service quality reduce failure demand and generate efficiencies to ensure no additional strain on the MTFS. Creation of Senior Level task force to drive improvements Roll out of detailed plans to improve customer service for specific services that have high levels of complaints Redesigning the current complaints process covering how the Council handles complaints Design of a staff training programme to improve customer service and complaint handling	Green
The cost to introduce the strategy cannot be met within current budgets	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. This will be monitored through the existing financial processes	Amber
The Action Plan is not SMART	Each of the projects within the Action Plan are mapped with further details prior to commencement to ensure that the outcomes are SMART	Green
The Action Plan does not improve the customer experience	There are baseline measurements to understand the current position including <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wait times• Satisfaction	Green

Risk Description	Mitigations	RAG Status
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure demand <p>These will be measured throughout the duration of the Action Plan so that any necessary restorative actions can take place</p>	

Procurement Implications

There are no procurement implications associated with this report

Legal Implications

Development of this strategy falls within the terms of reference of Cabinet.

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

An initial equality impact assessment will be produced and updated as the project is 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, and 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

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: Dawn Calvert

Signed by the Chief Financial Officer

Date: 22 November 2022

Statutory Officer: Jessica Farmer

Signed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 24 November 2022

Chief Officer: Alex Dewsnap

Signed off by the Corporate Director

Date: 16 November 2022

Head of Procurement: Nimesh Mehta

Signed by the Head of Procurement

Date: 15 November 2022

Head of Internal Audit: Susan Dixon

Signed by the Head of Internal Audit

Date: 24 November 2022

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 & Modernisation, jonathan.milbourn@harrow.gov.uk, tel. 020 8736 6711

Background Papers: None

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