

Delivering the Council Plan – Customer Strategy 2012-15

Summary

1. The Council Plan 2011-15 sets out three supporting core capabilities, to become:
 - A confident collaborative organisation
 - Completely in touch with our communities
 - Relentless focus on our priorities.
2. This report sets out the council's new Customer Strategy that sits alongside two other key strategies, the Workforce Strategy and the Procurement and Commissioning Strategy. These were approved by Cabinet on 3rd April 2012 and are part of a suite of strategies to support the delivery of the Council Plan. These strategies will deliver capacity and outcomes to secure each of the three core capabilities. The Customer Strategy 2012-15 is attached at Annex A for consideration and approval.

Background

3. In 2002, the council undertook a best value review of Access to Services which resulted in the establishment of the easy@york Programme. This programme developed a Customer Access Strategy in 2005 which set out a vision for improved customer services through joining up services and offering improved channels and hours of access.
4. The customer service agenda within local government then matured and the following 2009-12 Strategy started to embrace the efficiency, inclusion and engagement agendas, the development of customer insight, the delivery of joined up services with our local partners and the need to reduce 'avoidable contact' for our customers. Work completed under that strategy included the centralisation of city centre reception areas into St. Leonard's place/Library Square, the introduction of community based payment facilities, proposals to centralise the complaints function into the York Customer Centre, streamlining and automation of activities between front and back-office functions, and the development of plans to move more customer activities conducted over the phone and face to face into the central Customer Services function.

5. In the light of a number of challenging financial settlements over recent years, the changing and increasingly diverse populations of York, improved information available about customers (see Annex B for out-of work benefits data as an example), and the demand for increasingly technological and web-based solutions for accessing and providing services, the council has had to re-evaluate its basis for interacting with its customers. In addition, with the localism agenda and co-operative council movement, for the first time in York we are seeing our customers as possible service providers as well as consumers.

The Vision

6. The new Customer Strategy sets out a single vision supported by principles which will provide the foundations for how we will interact with our customers in future.
7. The single vision:

‘To deliver the right services, cost-effectively, at the right time, in the right way for you.’
8. The vision is underpinned by the following principles:
 - We will improve the ways and choices of ways customers can access our services.
 - We will provide a service in a courteous, responsive and timely way.
 - We are committed to working jointly with our customers and other providers of services.
 - We will continually assess the quality of our services to make sure they remain accessible, efficient and include everyone.
 - We will make it easier for our customers and communities to do things for themselves in their own local areas.
9. If we achieve the above then we will achieve our overall ambitions which are to:
 - have a greater understanding of our customers
 - are always open for business
 - are working with and in our communities.

Delivery Plan

10. Plans to deliver this strategy will encompass the move into our new city centre customer facility at West Offices and clear outcomes from the delivery of those plans will be evident before the end of 2014-15.

11. A cross-council Customer Strategy Group chaired by the Chief Executive has been in operation for over a year to develop a cross council approach and culture to customer service. Its work has contributed to the development of the new strategy.
12. The principles outlined above are now informing the detailed action plans for the remainder of 2012-13 onwards and the Customer Strategy Group will continue to ensure that the actions underpinning the new Strategy are delivered.
13. The work of Customer Strategy Group during 2011 and in 2012 has helped to secure and oversee the following:
 - Launch of the Do It Online website enabling customer access to a range of services that customers can now complete online.
 - Active use of mapping and customer data to inform service design and redesign, for example allowing the accurate targeting of benefits take up activity.
 - Housing & Benefits staff are now integrated with other face to face customer services staff in one location.
 - A change to the provision of housing and benefits services in Acomb, improving efficiency and access.
 - Development of transition plans to integrate other council services into Customer Services such as Parking Services.
 - Launch of a mobile application for service requests.
 - Wider accreditation activity for the Customer Service Excellence award programme.
 - The first Extra Factor staff awards to reward and recognise excellence in the provision of customer service.
 - City Centre WiFi pilot.
 - Performance reporting and monitoring of customer service activity.
 - Introduction of face to face and internet customer feedback technology.
 - Development of detailed plans and processes for the new customer centres at West Offices and Hazel Court.

Consultation

14. Over the past 12 months there has been ongoing consultation and engagement with residents, staff groups, businesses, stakeholders and partners, not only in relation to the principles contained in the draft strategy but also in relation to ongoing improvements to accessing the Benefits Service and information in Acomb, and to inform plans for the customer centre in West Offices.

15. Details of all consultation activity informing the strategy are enclosed at Annex C.

Communication Plan

16. If the Strategy is approved a programme of communication with staff and the public will commence in line with communications plans for West Offices and the opening of the new customer centres. The Strategy will be published on the council's website, with alternative versions and languages available upon request. Progress against delivery plans will be reported through the Strategy Board and as part of the council's regular performance management reporting framework, and monitored by the Corporate and Scrutiny Management Committee.

Council Plan

17. This Strategy is essential for the delivery of all of the priorities within the Council Plan and will help to ensure that we understand and keep in touch with our customers and communities to ensure their needs can be met.

Implications

18.
 - a. **Financial** - All activity will be managed within existing budgets and many activities will result in efficiencies which will contribute to the council's budget savings targets. In 2013/14 budget plans show a £40,000 channel shift saving will need to be achieved.
 - b. **Human Resources (HR)** – Contained within the strategy.
 - c. **Equalities** – The Strategy has been consulted upon widely which is key to ensuring that there is equality and fairness ultimately for customers. The Equalities Impact on Communities Assessment is attached to this report at Annex D.
 - d. **Legal** – None.
 - e. **Crime and Disorder** – None.
 - f. **Information Technology (IT)** – Delivery plans will be supported by resourcing plans including any IT developments.
 - g. **Property** - The forthcoming move to West Offices will bring most face to face and telephone activity together in one building. Activity at Hazel Court will be operated in line with the standards, behaviours and principles developed for West Offices.

Risk Management

19. Failure to design and implement a single Customer Services organisation to effectively manage all customer contact presents a risk to a successful customer centre operating in West Offices and Hazel Court.
20. Failure to join up services for and with customers and partner organisations may mean that inefficient, insufficient and or duplicated services exist and fail to meet our customers' needs.
21. If the Customer Strategy is not approved this could negatively affect the council's performance against the Council Plan and the Equalities Framework.

Recommendation

22. Cabinet is asked to agree the Customer Strategy as attached at Annex A.

Reason: To ensure the delivery of the core capabilities that support the Council Plan and improve outcomes for customers in meeting their needs.

Contact Details

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Wards Affected: List wards or tick box to indicate all			All	√
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Background Papers: Annexes

- Annex A Customer Strategy 2012-15
- Annex B Out of Work Benefits Data map
- Annex C Customer Strategy Consultation Undertaken
- Annex D Impact on Communities Assessment (ICA)