

Report title	Customer Experience Strategy	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Obaida Ahmed Resources and Digital City	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Charlotte Johns, Director of Strategy	
Originating service	Customer Engagement and Registrars	
Accountable employee	Lamour Gayle	Head of Customer Engagement and Registrars
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Report to has been considered by	Directorate Leadership Team	15 December 2022
	Resources and Equality Scrutiny	2 February 2023
	Strategic Executive Board	7 February 2023

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the new City of Wolverhampton Council Customer Experience Strategy, setting out how we will work as one council to deliver first class customer services to our communities.
2. Approve the new City of Wolverhampton Council Customer Promise, included on page 7 of the strategy which defines how we will work with all customers, whether they are residents, businesses, partners or suppliers.

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to note:

1. That the Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Promise priorities have been developed following consultation with over 770 people and pre-decision scrutiny.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council has developed a new Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Promise informed by the feedback from local people. The Strategy and Customer Promise sets out a framework for how we will work as one council to deliver first class customer services to our communities.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Promise (see Appendix 1), places our customers and residents at the heart of all we do, and aligns with our City: Our Plan the Council's strategic framework for levelling up. The Customer Experience Strategy outlines our aims, principles and objectives and has been subject to co-production, consultation and engagement with local people and key stakeholders.
- 2.2 Between the 7 November 2022 and 9 January 2023, the Council engaged with residents and key stakeholders including the voluntary and community sector and equalities groups. A variety of methods were used to ensure a wide response, including online surveys, telephone surveys, in person surveys at reception points and specific workshops with key stakeholder groups. In total 777 residents were engaged which included 479 telephone responses, 46 online surveys, 129 in person surveys and 123 people attending focus groups.
- 2.3 This item was considered as pre-decision scrutiny on 2 February 2023 by the Resources and Equality Scrutiny Panel and will therefore not be available to call in once a decision is made at Cabinet.

3.0 Customer Experience Strategy

- 3.1 The Customer Experience Strategy sets out how we will provide a 'Positive Customer Experience' which is accessible, consistent, efficient and simple. The strategy includes five key strategic priorities which have been developed through engagement with local people (see Appendix 1). They are:
- Provide a seamless customer journey
 - Design customer centred services
 - Unlock the power of data and digital
 - Deliver value for money
 - Provide inclusive, accessible services for all
- 3.2 The consultation process on the draft strategy closed on 9 January 2023. There was strong support for the direction of travel, with 92% of respondents to telephone surveys in support of the Customer Promise, and 93% of those who responded in person. For those people who responded in person in particularly being able to access customer services in a location closer to home was important. 47% said they would find it helpful if they could attend a library or community hub nearer their home to access customer services, compared to 34% who responded via telephone, and 28% online. A summary

of feedback received and actions taken from consultation, engagement and pre-decision scrutiny is included at Appendix 2.

3.3 In summary the key issues and themes which have emerged and have been reflected in the strategy or already addressed by Customer Services include:

- The ability to access customer services nearer home, for example in libraries and community hubs;
- Live chat/web chat functionality;
- Improving accessibility and translation services, including speech to text telephone technology;
- Providing more support for residents to access services online;
- Reduce hold times when contacting the council via telephone;
- Provide clearer communication with residents explaining the progress on their enquiry.

4.0 Delivering the Strategy and Key Projects

4.1 The Customer Experience Strategy is a living document, and it is vital that we continue to engage with local people, businesses and partners going forward to ensure we listen and learn from feedback, check and challenge our priorities and be transparent about performance.

4.2 An action plan will underpin the strategy and will be monitored alongside key performance indicators which will include customer satisfaction. Overall performance will also be monitored through the corporate performance framework, which is reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis alongside financial performance and risk management.

4.3 A key project to deliver the strategy relates to a new contact centre and telephony solution. Our customers currently utilise the different contact channels currently available to them which are face to face, phone and email. To improve the customer experience and align with the strategy and Customer Promise, the Council will need to offer additional channels of communication such as Live Chat and Web Chat to meet the needs of our customers. This will be achieved by replacing the current telephony solution with an omni-channel solution.

4.4 There are a number of contact centres outside of Customer Services, operating across the Council, the Hub, Revenues & Benefits, Wolverhampton Homes and West Midlands Pension Fund. All of which utilise different Customer Relationship Management solutions and manage email traffic in different ways.

4.5 We have worked collaboratively with key stakeholders across the Council and partners (including Wolverhampton Homes and the Pensions Service) to collate requirements and identify solutions which will expand our customer contact channels whilst also providing a consistent approach to the management and resolution of enquiries across all Council services.

- 4.6 Solutions which include having separate systems to manage calls, emails, chat, and social media messaging have been considered however, these would require multiple system implementations alongside complex integrations which is both risky and costly and does not align with the Strategy and Customer Promise. Separate solutions will not offer any support for resource and demand management of overall customer contact which is required to enable the service to provide a better face to face service provision to those customers who need it.
- 4.7 An omni-channel solution has a customer-centric approach in which all channels are integrated so that the customer has a unified and consistent experience whether they are at a Customer Access Point, contacting us by phone or using a website (webchat, email etc.). The solution will provide improved management information, as well as improved queue management and integration across communication channels to deliver a more seamless customer journey. This type of solution will ensure that customer contact revolves around the customer and not the channel used, and will have a positive impact on customer experience.

5.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 5.1 Option one is to agree the new Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Service Promise, which would ensure the Council is responding to the feedback of local people and support the Our City: Our Plan outcome of 'Wulfrunians living longer, healthier lives'.
- 5.2 Option two is to not agree the new Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Service Promise, and continue as is, without a strategic framework for customer service delivery.

6.0 Reasons for decision

- 6.1 Option one is recommended, to approve the Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Promise. These were co-designed with local people to ensure they are reflective of what our customers need most.

7.0 Financial implications

- 7.1 All costs associated with consultation and preparation of the Customer Experience Strategy will be accommodated within existing budgets.
- 7.2 The estimated capital expenditure of an Omni-channel of £80,000 is included in the medium-term General Revenue Account capital programme approved by Council on 1 March 2023.
- 7.3 The estimated net annual revenue expenditure of £200,000 will be met by the existing Digital & IT revenue budget.
[RJ/13032023/N]

8.0 Legal implications

- 8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

8.2 The procurement of the omni-channel solution will be an above threshold procedure in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

[SZ/14032023/P]

9.0 Equalities implications

9.1 The Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Promise are relevant to all residents of Wolverhampton. Consideration was given to the engagement and consultation process to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. Equality Diversity and Inclusion focus groups were invited to feedback and make recommendations on the draft strategy as part of the consultation process (see Appendix 2).

9.2 A full EIA will be completed for the omni-channel solution once the vendor has been identified. The solution will impact on how customers engage with the Council and therefore will provide support for non-English speaking customers along with those affected by hearing and visual impairments. The solution will increase available contact channels whilst improving existing ones to ensure that any digitally excluded or vulnerable customers will retain access to their preferred channel of communication but with a higher standard of service.

10.0 All other implications

10.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report. All Council projects/activities will consider environmental implications as a key priority throughout the planning and delivery process. It is anticipated that improved use of digital could support the Council's climate change commitments.

10.2 There are no direct human resource implications arising from this report. The Our People Council Programme and any HR policies and procedures will address human resource implications.

10.3 The Customer Experience Strategy aims to deliver the long-term outcome: 'Wulfrunians will live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives', delivered through the five Customer Experience Strategy priorities:

- Provide a seamless customer journey
- Design customer centred services
- Unlock the power of data and digital
- Deliver value for money
- Provide inclusive accessible services for all

11.0 Schedule of background papers.

11.1 None.

12.0 Appendices

12.1 Appendix 1: Customer Experience Strategy

12.2 Appendix 2: Consultation Report