

Meeting: Executive
Date: 13 October 2009
Subject: Customer Services Strategy
Report of: Councillor Richard Stay - Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation

Summary: The report proposes the attached Customer Services Strategy be agreed and recommended to Council for approval. The strategy provides an overview of customer contact development for Central Bedfordshire Council and its ambition to deliver services jointly to our customers with other public sector partners. The Customer Service Strategy plays a key role in how the Council responds to local challenges and aligns fully with the Community Engagement Strategy, our Local Strategic Partnership and our role in national projects such as "Total Place" and "Tell Us Once", and our overall Business Transformation Strategy.

Advising Officer: Richard Ellis – Director of Business Transformation
Contact Officer: Clive Jones – Assistant Director of Business Transformation and Customer Service.
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council
Key Decision: Yes
Reason for urgency/ exemption from call-in (if appropriate): N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. That the Customer Services Strategy for Central Bedfordshire Council as set out in Appendix A of the report be agreed and recommended to Council for approval.**
- 2. That the Executive notes that progress against this strategy will be monitored via the Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 3. That the Executive notes that this strategy will take at least two years to fully enact and progress will be overseen by the Portfolio holder for Business Transformation in conjunction with the Director of Business Transformation.**

Reason for Recommendations: So that the Council is able to effectively implement Customer Services in line with its and its public sector partners strategic priorities. The recommendations above were agreed by Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28th September 2009.

Introduction to the Customer Services Strategy for Central Bedfordshire

1. Central Bedfordshire Council as a new Unitary Authority is ambitious in its vision for delivery of Customer Service Excellence for all those it serves in its communities
2. The Customer Services Strategy represents the Council's ambitions to meet our customers' needs. To do this the Council has to gain a better understanding of those needs, develop appropriate solutions and ensure they are delivered. The Council recognises that the authority working alone only provides part of the solution in some instances.
3. This strategy commits the council to working closely with our partners in the public sector, to deliver fully joined up, cohesive and efficient services. The Council will focus on what it does best and will work with others to provide comprehensive solutions.
4. Fundamentally this approach will enable Central Bedfordshire Council to deliver on the promises and aspirations that the authority has clearly articulated about enhancing customer services.
5. The Customer Services Strategy in the attached appendix was developed by officers and Members of the Customer Services Strategy Task Force who met on 14 August and 8 September 2009. The strategy was presented to the Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 29th September 2009.
6. The capital funding schemes for the projects proposed in this strategy are documented in the Capital Programme which is going forward for adoption by Members of the Executive at the same October Executive meeting. There are no additional revenue consequences as a result of adopting this strategy. By adopting a partnership approach to service delivery it is expected to reduce the overall public sector expenditure not increase it.
7. The Executive are requested to adopt the attached Customer Services Strategy for Central Bedfordshire Council geographic area; and note that progress will be monitored by the Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

This Strategy supports the vision of Central Bedfordshire Council, to improve the quality of life for all. It contributes to all Council priorities through delivery of quality customer solutions, releasing specialist officers to deliver against the specific priorities

Financial:

If this strategy does not deliver improved customer service at a reduced public expenditure for the citizens of Central Bedfordshire then this strategy will have failed.

Therefore, there are no direct costs obligations for the Council by adopting this strategy. Provision has been made in the capital programme for 2010 / 2011 with the inclusion of proposed schemes to support the strategy totalling £260,000. These provide infrastructure to support telephony channel speech recognition, web chat and text messaging. (CRM already has an existing provision in the "T-Government Partnership" and "Partnership of Mid and South Beds District Councils" capital schemes). Each proposed capital scheme will individually go through the normal Capital approval processes.

The revenue consequences as a result of the Customer Services Strategy are harder to estimate and will require solutions to be developed based on customer requirements and partners capabilities. The two strategic goals of the strategy are to:

Achieving upper quartile customer satisfaction within the Unitary and County Council comparison group

Delivering an efficient, quality value for money service in partnership with others

The first goal implies that more resources may be required to achieve upper quartile performance whilst the latter implies an improved value for money delivery.

In reality this strategy must deliver an improved service to the citizens of Central Bedfordshire at a reduced cost. Therefore, there are no revenue budgetary consequences as a direct result of this strategy. Resources required to progress initiatives will either be found from efficiency savings from existing budgets and/or a suitable business case will be produced to access invest to save funding which requires a minimum of a two to one return on investment.

Legal:

Any partnership or contractual arrangements will be conducted in consultation with legal colleagues.

Risk Management:

A risk analysis is included within the Strategy and each work theme will develop its own risk register in line with corporate Risk Management guidance.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

Consultation has been undertaken with staff and Trade Unions in respect of harmonised opening hours and will take place as appropriate for each work theme detailed in the Strategy.

Equalities/Human Rights:

An equality impact assessment is being completed to ensure compliance with the Equality Framework adopted by the Council.

Community Development/Safety:

The Customer Insight Programme will shape the nature of partnership working, delivery of services through the Customer Access Network, ensuring communities are supported in the most appropriate way.

Sustainability:

All activities will ensure they are sustainable during implementation planning before any activity is commenced.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Customer Services Strategy

Background Papers (open to public inspection):

None