
Meeting: Executive
Date: 15 July 2014
Subject: Customer Strategy
Report of: Cllr Maurice Jones, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources
Summary: The purpose of this report is to seek Executive agreement to the Customer Strategy of Central Bedfordshire Council.

Advising Officer: Deb Clarke, Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
Contact Officer: Deb Clarke, Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Executive
Key Decision Yes
**Reason for urgency/
exemption from call-in
(if appropriate)** N/A

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

1. The Council's Customer Strategy is relevant to everything the Council does - and is essential for the delivery of all of the priorities within the Medium Term 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.

Financial:

2. That part of the strategy which is most relevant financially is the part which refers to channel shift and optimisation, and fuller details of this are set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy of the Council which details the capital investment and revenue savings which are related to the Customer First programme, which falls within this strategy.
3. If the Strategy is agreed, each workstream will involve a full assessment of current and planned projects and the associated costs and future savings so these can be reflected in the forthcoming 2015/16 budget proposals to inform the development of the Medium Term Financial Plan.
4. The revenue and capital implications associated with new activities will then be detailed in business cases for approval.

Legal:

5. None identified.

Risk Management:

6. If the Customer Strategy is not approved this could negatively affect the Council's performance against the Medium Term Plan and the Equalities Framework as failure to:
- implement a Customer Strategy may impede our ability to effectively manage customer contact and so present a risk to sustaining and improving our service performance and satisfaction levels; and
 - 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.
7. The risks associated with affordability will be managed through the presentation of business cases where needed. Communications and engagement plans for each workstream will be put in place.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

8. A commitment to cultural change and the quality of Customer Service will be driven from the top of the organisation through performance monitoring, challenge and strategic direction.
9. We will work to ensure that an ethos of good service is part of everything we do for customers and colleagues. We will deliver services based on the needs of customers, not the organisation and work to ensure customers feel as if they're dealing with one organisation by designing services around customers' needs and preferences. Services will take an active role in customer engagement through existing and new channels.
10. As this will impact on all employees and a full range of consultation activities will be put in place to explain the strategy. Good customer service is core behaviour expected of all staff and will be considered as part of a future Performance Review and Development framework and underpinned by the Council's training offer. Where specific work programme activities affect the terms and conditions of specific groups of employees, those employees and their representatives will be appropriately consulted.

Equalities/Human Rights:

11. The aim of the Strategy is to enhance customer experience and communications and engagement will be at the heart of planning and delivery of the Strategy. The Strategy will provide focus for delivering our Equalities and Diversity commitments through its commitment to:
 - resident profiling;
 - delivering an extended offer for vulnerable residents through coordinated front-line support; and
 - analysing our performance in a structured way and acting upon the outcomes to narrow the satisfaction gap of BME residents.
12. EIAs will be prepared for individual workstreams if the Strategy is agreed. An equal opportunities assessment will also be carried out for significant changes to existing services. This will be when there are changes to frontline services or there are potential changes that affect specific areas of the population.

Public Health:

13. Implementation may have a positive impact on public health and wellbeing particularly as a result of increased accessibility and integration of service provision.

Community Safety:

13. Implementation may have a positive impact on crime and disorder, particularly as a result of increased accessibility and integration of service provision.

Sustainability:

14. The Strategy implementation will have a positive impact as a result of the move to more self service and integration of service provision. Business cases will detail where activities can reduce carbon emissions and these will be quantified at the end of the programme

Procurement:

15. Not applicable.

Overview and Scrutiny:

16. Overview and Scrutiny were provided with the opportunity to comment on the key deliverables of the emerging strategy at their meetings on 8 April 2014, where the draft strategy was supported, and on 24 June 2014 where there was feedback that the revised draft should be made more succinct. The strategy appended to this report has been amended to reflect this feedback.

RECOMMENDATION:**The Executive is asked to:**

1. **approve the Customer Strategy, as set out at Appendix A, and require officers to make arrangements for its implementation.**

<i>Reason for Recommendation:</i>	<i>It is intended that the Customer Strategy will be implemented by a governance structure overseen by the Chief Executive and involving cross directorate work. The Customer Strategy is primarily an internal document, intended to inform the workstream plans, service plans and other Council documents and procedures.</i>
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BACKGROUND

17. Our purpose is to create an excellent experience of the Council for all our residents by putting the customer at the heart of everything we do and to be ‘best in class’ on customer focus.
18. As customers’ expectations of the quality, reliability and accessibility of Council services continue to increase, an authority such as Central Bedfordshire Council must work hard and across all customer access methods (or ‘channels’) to meet and exceed customer expectations.
19. Key drivers for change also include:
 - The developing ‘community leadership’ role of the Council which requires that we use all means available to engage with and inform residents.
 - Ensuring customers can make contact with the Council easily and access services through a range of channels that are convenient for them including face to face, telephone, the web and other mobile technologies.
 - Ensuring that our customers have a positive experience and consistently report that their experiences of customer care are excellent, due to ease of access, high levels of resolution at first point of contact and professional, polite and knowledgeable employees.
 - Getting things right first time, which means by understanding and tackling the reasons our customers have to re-contact the Council because something has not been done first time - processes, systems and training needs to improve, with technology embraced.
 - Reducing the costs of what we do through investing in technology and promoting ‘channel shift’, so more people contact the Council through ‘cheaper’ access channels such as the web, and through embedding and encouraging self-service throughout all our access channels.
 - Streamlining systems and re-engineering processes so that customer needs and expectations are at the heart of design and delivery.
 - Ensuring that all Council employees and those delivering services on our behalf know they are collectively responsible for delivering excellent service first time round, and are empowered to make improvements for customers on a daily basis and proactively act as ambassadors for the Council.
 - Ensuring that equalities are considered planned for and delivered effectively.

- Implementing effective engagement and customer feedback activities and systems, so we use the intelligence we are already gathering, and gather subsequently, to substantially improve what we do and plan for the service provision our customers are likely to need in the future.
- Implementing a strong communications and marketing programme that 'drives the business' and build relationships of trust with customers through informing them about how to access services, the standards of service they should receive and what's on offer from the Council and our delivery partners.

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE'S CUSTOMER STRATEGY

20. To respond to these drivers and ensure we are working collectively to achieve the Council's vision, the Council needs to put in place a clear strategy for change and take action to ensure that it is implemented. This is the case whether services are delivered directly, commissioned or delivered in partnership with others, as the Council's local leadership role means that it needs to clearly articulate what customers can expect.
21. Benchmarking shows that organisations which take customer service seriously achieve success through stronger satisfaction ratings and an enhanced reputation.
22. Putting in place key customer service building blocks will bring our performance into line with the expectations that people have of transactional relationships with organisations they make contact and do business with on a daily basis e.g. Amazon, their bank.
23. However, this is only one aspect of the journey we need to go on with respect to customers. As a Council, with a leadership role to improve the areas' wellbeing, health economic prospects, we also need to ensure that this Strategy helps us to build strong bonds of loyalty and trust so all our employees and those living, visiting and working promote the Central Bedfordshire in a positive way as a great place to work, invest, visit and live.
24. How the Council does business needs to change to achieve this. We should be thinking about customers as partners, rather than as 'end users'. Customers need to be at the heart of our organisational culture so they know that we are anticipating their needs, doing the best that we can with their money, and, most importantly, supporting them and Central Bedfordshire to be the best it can be.
25. The whole organisation needs to act in a way that reinforces this message on a daily basis so that customers feel our values and behaviours are aligned with theirs, particularly with respect to their strength of feeling and pride.
26. The development of the Customer Strategy has been shaped and informed by the Executive Member and Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources, Cllr Maurice Jones and Cllr Richard Wenham; the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Council's Corporate Management Team and Senior Management Group.

27. This Strategy outlines what Central Bedfordshire Council will do over the period 2014 – 16 to meet and exceed customers' expectations, find efficiencies, improve services and introduce new access channels, whilst improving and modernising others, and shows the priority outcomes as well as the ways we will measure their impact.

STRATEGY WORKSTREAMS AND PRIORITY OUTCOMES

28. The proposed Strategy sets out four workstreams;
- Knowledge and Insight
 - Culture and Capability
 - Channel Optimisation and Shift
 - Incentivising Behavioural Change.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

29. Where more detailed programmes of activity are already underway to deliver aspects of the Strategy these will continue, for example the Channel Optimisation and Shift workstream will encompass the Customer First programme. Phase 2 of this programme of activity is in development and delivery which involves improving technology and changing how we work 'behind the scenes' so that customers can do more online.
30. The Strategy document alone will not ensure that the vision and its intentions are delivered; its effectiveness depends on the determined and sustained efforts at the levels of the organisation. It has to be enlivened by Executive, all Members, Directors, Service Heads and Managers, who must visibly show their commitment and determination to create a customer-focused organisation. This can only be achieved via the transmission of a clear, frequent and consistent message throughout the organisation. Heads of Service and managers will have specific responsibility for promoting customer care initiatives and leading by example.
31. In view of the breadth and depth of this Strategy it will also be appropriate to establish a Customer Strategy Board comprising CMT to ensure there is buy in from across the organisation.
32. This Board will oversee and monitor the delivery plans for each of the four workstreams of the Strategy which are being produced. Each workstream plan will support the organisation to change its approach to customers in specific areas of work and these plans will include timelines for delivery, prioritisation, investment (if required) and benefits and those activities and programmes which will be assessed on an individual basis before implementation.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Customer Strategy

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)