

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

**Report of the Executive
Director - Communities**

Response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Task & Finish Group (TFG) regarding 'BMBC's Customer Service Strategy 2015-18' (Cab.9.3.2016/9)

1. Purpose of report

1.1. This report is submitted in response to the report of the Scrutiny TFG report (Cab.9.3.2016/9) on the Customer Service Strategy 2015-18 and the associated work being undertaken to implement it which outlined a number of recommendations to be considered to support successful delivery.

2. Recommendations

2.1. That Cabinet considers the officer response to the recommendations made by the TFG in the above mentioned report.

3. Introduction

3.1. The TFG was established to consider the Council's Customer Service Strategy 2015-18 and the Council's aspiration to become a customer focused organisation. The strategy sets out the vision and objectives for change in the way the Council engages with its customers, our commitment to getting customer service right and continually improving the customer experience. This includes enhancing our online offer to enable customers to access services 24/7; promoting self-reliance whilst continuing to offer support to those who need our help.

3.2. Officers responsible for the development and delivery of the Customer Service Strategy met with Members of the TFG on a number of occasions to discuss key lines of enquiry identified by the group. In particular Members were keen to explore how officers were consulting with key stakeholders to understand the impact of the strategy on our customers. In this regard the report acknowledges the comprehensive equality impact assessment undertaken and the consultations with equality forums.

3.3. The TFG also referenced the work of the Customer Feedback and Improvement Team established as part of the Future Council reorganisation in April 2015 which established a corporate approach to the management of customer complaints, comments and compliments. The group acknowledged the need to fully embed the new processes established here in order that opportunities to learn and improve from customer feedback are fully realised.

3.4. The TFG acknowledged that the implementation of the strategy would be ongoing and that there would be some key challenges to its implementation, not least of which being the behaviour change required from officers, Elected Members and customers in terms of moving to online self-service contact.

4. Officer response to Recommendations of the TFG

4.1. The table below sets out the officer response to each of the six recommendations made in the TFG report (Cab 9.3.2016/9):

TFG Recommendation		Officer Response
1	To undertake a mapping exercise of IT provision across the Borough including computer and WiFi access as well as training support.	Providing opportunities for customers to access our services online is recognised as a key enabler to the successful delivery of the Customer Services Strategy. A borough-wide map of IT provision and training support at publicly accessible locations will be created which will detail the availability of free to use public access IT devices and free to use Wifi for those who have their own device. We will also include information on the free support provided by the Council's Digital Champions (2 officers) through the 'device doctor' sessions and also support offered by Berneslai homes Digital inclusion officer and our own Adult Learning provision.
2	Seek feedback from both internal and external customers regarding customer feedback processes.	<p>It's really important that the way we manage and deliver our services is regularly reviewed to ensure they are efficient and fit for purpose. To achieve this we must pro-actively seek the views of those involved in or impacted by our services.</p> <p>The Customer Feedback and Improvement team recently hosted review sessions with officer representatives from all services. The feedback gathered at these events will be used to shape improvements to feedback processes.</p> <p>Feedback is sought from customers who make a complaint about how well we have managed their contact with us.</p> <p>Additionally the opportunity to invite customer feedback will also be used when we publish the 2015/16 annual report for customer feedback. This report, to be presented to Cabinet in June, provides details of the volume and nature of customer feedback (complaints, compliments, comments) received during the year and also our performance in relation to responding within agreed timescales. When the report is published this time a short customer survey will</p>

TFG Recommendation		Officer Response
		be included to invite comment and the service will work with the Communications team to promote take up.
3	Facilitate feedback from Members regarding frequently asked questions (FAQs) they receive.	<p>The TFG report recognises that one of the key challenges to overcome in delivering the Council's Customer Service Strategy is the behaviour change needed in customers, Officers and Elected Members towards self-reliance and self-service.</p> <p>A programme of review and refresh of information made available on the Council's public facing website is on-going and feedback from Members on gaps or deficiencies is welcomed. Work to progress this will start with a focused session with the Members Development Working Party (MDWP).</p>
4	Need to make sure all types of customer access channels are maintained.	<p>The Customer Service Strategy is clear about our intention to provide a range of customer contact options supported by clear information, advice and guidance. The development of our online digital offer is a crucial part of this and the aim is to support and encourage as many people as possible to contact us using self-service options. Our policy aim is for all appropriate services to become digital by default accepting that some people will need more help to access services in this way than others. Telephone access will focus on providing that help with face to face appointments being made for the most complex service requests and those individuals who are in most need of our support.</p>
5	Services to increasingly use videos to explain how to use services.	<p>Work is ongoing with the Equalities and Inclusion team to define a set of minimum customer access standards with the aim of implementing these across all of our services. The use of explanatory video content to supplement the written information on our website is recognised through these standards. Work to identify the scope of the requirement and associated costs will be gathered as the standards are discussed with each service area. Funding sources to enable the development of video content will need to be identified through this work.</p>
6	An update on this work is provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group in 6 months.	The service will work with HR Scrutiny colleagues to agree the timeline for an update to be provided to TFG.

5. Implications for local people / service users

5.1. The Customer Service Strategy identifies the range of contact options made available to our customers. The associated equality impact assessment (EIA) recognises potential barriers to access together with appropriate mitigations and solutions to offset and overcome these barriers.

5.2. The Council's reducing financial resources means that we must design smarter, more efficient and cost effective ways of delivering services. Add to this the expectation from customers that they can contact the Council 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, then it is crucially important that we develop our digital service offer and we encourage and support our customers to increasingly choose self-service options.

6. Financial implications

6.1. There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

6.2. The cost of producing information videos for our website to support those individuals with communications difficulties will be assessed and funding sources considered as part of the in progress activity to develop Council wide customer minimum access standards.

7. Employee implications

7.1. The Customer Service Strategy recognises that developing our workforce and investing in skills and knowledge is a key challenge. A customer service training programme, developed by the Council's Work force Development Team, is now being offered to all services with the aim of ensuring consistently high quality provision of customer service.

7.2. Consultation with employees who deal directly with our customers on a daily basis is invariably a rich source of information and advice as we work to design and develop new ways of working and delivering service.

8. Communications implications

8.1. A communications plan is in place and managed through the Customer Services Programme Board; the promotion of online contact options to our customers is a key theme of this plan.

8.2. Additionally, the Customer Services Business Unit has recently launched social media accounts on facebook and twitter called 'Barnsley Help' which are specifically focused on responding to customers questions about Council services.

9. Consultations

9.1. In preparing this response to the TFG report on the review of the Customer Service Strategy consultations have included the senior managers of the Communities directorate via Directorate management and operational managers.

10. The Corporate Plan and the Council's Performance Management Framework

10.1. The Customer Service Strategy is aligned to the Council's strategic priority to develop 'Strong and Resilient Communities'. In particular outcome 12 focuses on ensuring 'customers can contact us easily and use more services online'. Implementation of the Customer Service Strategy, learning from customer feedback, designing intuitive online contact options and supporting our customers to use them will help to reduce dependency on the Council as it operates with reduced resources.

11. Risk Management Issues

11.1. The Council's strategic risk register (SRR) includes a risk associated with the ambitions to deliver digital contact options and realise customer 'channel shift' to self-service. It is acknowledged that the risk will be reviewed through the bi-annual review process of the SRR.

12. Promoting equality, diversity, and social inclusion

12.1. The strategy and accompanying EIA recognise the range of channels by which our customers can access Council services. As outlined at para. 5.1 of this report the EIA identifies the appropriate mitigations and solutions to overcome barriers to access experienced by those with communication difficulties.

20. Glossary

BMBC	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
IT	Information Technology
SRR	Strategic Risk Register
TFG	Task and Finish Group
WiFi	Wireless Fidelity (wireless internet access)

21. Background Papers (available on request)

- Scrutiny Task and Finish Group (TFG) report on 'BMBC's Customer Service Strategy 2015-18' (Cab.9.3.2016/9).
- Customer Service Strategy 2015-18.

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Date: 27th April 2016