

**Report of the Executive Director of Communities &
the Director of Human Resources,
Performance & Communications,
to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC)
on 4th October 2016**

**Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council's (BMB's) Customer Service Strategy
2015-18**

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report is submitted at the request of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) to provide an update on the work being undertaken to implement the Council's Customer Service Strategy.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The Customer Service Strategy published in autumn 2015 sets out the Council's vision and objectives for change in the way the Council engages with its customers, our commitment to getting customer service right and to 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.
- 2.2 A Member Task & Finish Group (TFG), established by the OSC, reviewed the strategy and produced a number of suggestions and recommendations regarding the work being undertaken to implement it. The findings of this review and subsequent officer feedback were the subject of reports to Cabinet in March and May respectively (Cab.9.3.2016/9 and Cab.18.5.2016/20).
- 2.3 It was agreed that a further update on the continuing work to implement the Customer Service Strategy would be provided to OSC after 6 months and this report aims to provide this.

3.0 Progress Update

- 3.1 The activities to implement the strategy are being managed through a programme of work governed by a senior officer group and reporting into the Future Council Improvement and Growth Board. As part of the initial phases of work we have introduced new computer systems for customer contact management, launched the Council's new look website and introduced a customer service focused social media presence.
- 3.2 Future plans, outlined at section 4 below, are being developed in collaboration with front line services and with the support of our IT colleagues to help us to use technology to improve the way we deliver services. The aim is to produce smarter more efficient services to benefit both the customer and the organisation.
- 3.3 With reference to the previous review undertaken by TFG, a number of recommendations were made by the group which are outlined below along with the most recent update:

Recommendation 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.

Free WiFi is now available in all of our libraries together with free to use internet ready devices. In collaboration with partner agencies we're working to develop a borough-wide map of IT provision and training support at publicly accessible locations.

The 'Device Doctor' sessions provided by our Digital Champions are targeting gaps in digital skills and areas of low online take up. The sessions are forward planned in various community venues and are free to book: <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/community-and-volunteering/device-doctor-sessions/>

The sessions are delivered in conjunction with Berneslai Homes (their Digital Inclusion Officer) and our own Adult Learning team. We are also recruiting the help of community volunteers so that our reach can be extended and some local capacity for this kind of support developed.

Recommendation 2: Seek feedback from both internal and external customers regarding customer feedback processes

The Customer Feedback and Improvement team manages customer complaints, compliments and comments. The team also routinely asks for feedback from Customers on their experience of contacting us and uses this to improve the way we do things.

On the Council website (www.Barnsley.gov.uk) we have recently introduced a simple feedback option which customers can use to give us their views on our website. We also plan to introduce a customer satisfaction survey for all of our access channels, including face to face and telephone. This should be in place by Q4 and will enable us to learn from customer experiences and shape the way we deliver services in the future.

Recommendation 3: Facilitate feedback from Members regarding frequently asked questions (FAQs) they receive

The refresh of our website is well underway and with over 3,500 pages of information this will take several months to complete. Emphasis is placed on ensuring our online information is easy to access, accurate and written in simple language.

As always, feedback from Elected Members on any shortcomings or ideas for improvement is especially welcomed so that we can learn and improve our online offer. It is proposed to arrange a session with the Member Development Working Party (MDWP) so that we can undertake a focused piece on this in the near future.

Recommendation 4: Need to make sure all types of customer access channels are maintained

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.

As outlined above our Digital Champions are providing essential support in our communities to enable many more people to gain the confidence and skills to get online. They are also working with our staff and Members to support them in improving their digital confidence so that we can all support our customers to choose online options wherever possible.

Of course our strategy recognises that some of our customers will need more help than others and Customer Service teams are providing this support via our telephone contact centre and for the most complex enquiries a face to face appointment is made.

Earlier this year we also launched a dedicated social media presence for customer service enquiries on Facebook and Twitter called 'Barnsley Help' which is becoming more popular as a trusted source of advice and information and quick and easy route to use.

Recommendation 5: Services to increasingly use videos to explain how to use services

The first of our explanatory videos was launched a few weeks ago for the Waste and Recycling Service and can be accessed from our website here:

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/bins-rubbish-and-recycling/what-goes-in-your-bin/>

There's a spoken version together with a BSL signed version produced with the kind support of members of the Deaf Engagement Action Party.

As we continue the refresh of information on our website we are exploring the need for videos to support written information. However, there are inevitably additional costs involved here and as a result we will need to prioritise the services which our customers' access most and where greatest need exists.

4.0 Future Plans

4.1 An ambitious programme of change and improvement in customer service delivery has been defined which will realise significant improvements over the next two years in the lead up to 2020. This will include:

- Making further improvements to our digital offer to include more self-service options, enabling customers to apply, book or pay for more services online.
- Introducing live webchat to our website so that customers can get help from an advisor whilst they're online;
- Routinely asking our customers to tell us about their experience of contacting us through customer satisfaction surveys;
- Working with partner agencies to deliver a joined up approach to the provision of 'universal' information and advice – 'No wrong door', i.e. help our customers to get to the information they need regardless of where they choose to access it;
- Simplifying telephone access by reducing to four key customer contact numbers.

5.0 Challenges

- 5.1 One of our corporate performance targets is to increase the proportion of customer self-service contacts, i.e. those that are done online by the customer with no officer intervention. The target we've set for 2020 is 70% when measured against telephone and face to face contacts. We're currently achieving around 37% so we have a challenge in front of us and our future delivery plans specifically include activities to enable and support many more of our customers to contact us using online options.
- 5.2 The Customer Service Strategy sets out the Council's overall vision for future delivery of customer service. This is relevant to all front-facing Council services not just the Customer Services Business Unit. Our challenge here is to work collaboratively across all internal services and with partners to co-produce better, more cost-effective services for the benefit of all our customers.

6.0 Invited Witnesses

- 6.1 The following witnesses have been invited to today's meeting to answer questions from the OSC regarding this work:

- Ann O'Flynn, Service Director, Customer Services, BMBC
- Hazel Shaw, Head of Customer Support & Development, BMBC
- Cllr Jenny Platts, Cabinet Spokesperson - Communities, BMBC

7.0 Possible Areas for Investigation

- 7.1 Members may wish to ask questions around the following areas:

- To what extent have we seen channel shift of customers self-serving online?
- What do our customers think to the changes in access to services and our digital offer?
- Are we learning from best practice in other areas and is this being integrated into our service planning, design and delivery?
- How will you ensure our services are accessible to all our communities, particularly our most vulnerable?
- To what extent have the Digital Champions had a positive impact in enabling more people to get online? What evidence is there to support this?
- What is being done to ensure that all services effectively implement the Customer Services Strategy?
- Are key stakeholders engaged and supportive in delivering this strategy to ensure a joined up approach, enabling our customer to access the information they need?
- How can Members support the effective delivery of the Customer Services Strategy?

8.0 Background Papers and Useful Links

- Scrutiny Task and Finish Group (TFG) report on 'BMBC's Customer Service Strategy 2015-18' (Cab.9.3.2016/9):
<http://barnsleymbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s9798/Appendix%201.pdf>
- Response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Task & Finish Group (TFG) regarding 'BMBC's Customer Service Strategy 2015-18' (Cab.18.5.2016/20):
<http://barnsleymbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s9797/Response%20to%20the%20Scrutiny%20Task%20and%20Finish%20Group%20Report%20on%20Custo%20mer%20Services%20Strategy.pdf>
- BMBC's Customer Service Strategy 2015-18 (Cab.9.9.2015/12):
<http://barnsleymbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s3531/Customer%20Services%20Strategy%20Appendix%201.pdf>
- BMBC's Customer Service Strategy 2015-18 Equality Impact Assessment (Cab.9.9.2015/12):
<http://barnsleymbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s3532/Customer%20Services%20Strategy%20Appendix%202.pdf>

9.0 Glossary

BMBC - Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions
OSC - Overview and Scrutiny Committee
TFG - Task and Finish Group
WiFi - Wireless Fidelity (wireless internet access)

10.0 Officer Contact

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26th September 2016