

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL
RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET

Decision Made: 10 April 2013

CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY 2013-16

Issue for Decision

This strategy sets out the Council's vision and objectives for delivering sustainable and more customer focussed services for the future. It also details the work that will be undertaken to deliver the new model of customer service delivery.

Decision Made

1. That the Customer Service Improvement Strategy 2013-16 be adopted, subject to delegation to the Chief Executive to make minor amendments in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services as required.
2. That the recommendations made by Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee at their meeting held on 9 April 2013 be agreed, subject to the approval of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services.
3. That the Equalities Impact Assessment, as attached at Appendix B to the report of the Head of Business Improvement, be noted.

Reasons for Decision

In 2012 the Council undertook a review of the way it delivers customer access to and engagement for services across the authority and how well our current arrangements meet current customer needs and expectations. The project had 6 workstreams:

1. Who are our customers? – Analysis of the type of people who use the council's services, how frequently and in what way.
2. How do we manage customer data and information?
3. What do our customers want? – Consultation with residents and businesses on their preferences for how they access services, how this compares with the way they currently access council services and what is important to them when they contact the Council.
4. What is the optimum customer delivery model? – Assessment how we currently deliver customer services and development of the optimum

model for customer service delivery based upon findings from work streams 1, 3 and 6.

5. How do we engage with customers? – Review of existing channels of engagement and development of new channels.
6. What is the local, regional and national context? - Consider the position of other authorities, government and what opportunities are available.

A range of internal and external exercises were undertaken as part of each of the above work streams. This included an extensive consultation exercise with local residents as part of work stream 3 – what do our customers want?

Focus groups with a cross-section of different people from across the borough and face to face interviews with business at the Town Centre Management meeting were held at the beginning of the project in July 2012 and followed up in August 2012 by a survey sent to 3000 residents (506 returned) and an online survey sent to 1000 businesses (68 returned) to more widely test findings from the focus groups and interviews.

Other work included best practice research and visits to other councils, analysis of customer data, collation of transactional data and information on how the council manages information and interviews with officers.

The main aim of the Customer Focussed Services project was to make recommendations on how the Council should be delivering customer services for the future (workstream 4). In order to ensure these recommendations were customer focussed and fitted with wider priorities, workstreams looking at the people who contact us (workstream 1), what our customers want (workstream 3) and what is happening at a local, regional and national context (workstream 6) fed into the recommendations on the optimum model of customer service delivery. Recommendations were also made on how to improve engagement with customers (workstream 5); this is being managed by the Head of Communications as part of a separate project. Key principles for designing the optimum model of customer service delivery were agreed with key officers and members, with the starting point and overarching principle being one of the service design principles detailed in the Strategic Plan:

Residents and businesses are the starting point for services; every service must be considered from the perspective of the citizen and delivered at the lowest possible level – a bottom-up approach.

Any future model of customer service delivery must meet the following principles:

1. Enable as many customers as possible to be self sufficient
2. Be affordable
3. Ensure services are accessible to the most vulnerable

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Have high quality service standards consistently applied5. Be sustainable and adaptable for the future |
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The Customer Service Improvement (CSI) Strategy sets out the proposed new model for customer service delivery, which meets the principles above, and what actions we plan to take to deliver this. Essentially the new model is:

- Digital first with a full range of services provided via the website and/or through apps
- Reduced desire for person to person calls and increased automated telephone service
- Face to face available through appointments at our offices and partners supporting transactions
- Possibility of online and telephone points throughout the borough and hosted by partners

Residents have been asked their opinions through focus groups on some of the new model of service delivery, and feedback was positive. For example, they believed the format of the new website would make it easier to transact with the Council online and agreed that more services needed to be available online. They also thought that longer Contact Centre hours in the evening would be positive, although most agreed they would not use this facility even if it was available. They had mixed feelings about face to face, telephone and online contact points being offered through partners across the borough: they could understand in principle some people might use them, but had concerns about privacy and believed that a better website and the growth in people using smart phones to access the internet meant these things could be an unnecessary expense. They did not like the suggestion of moving to an appointment system in the Gateway as they thought it might be like a doctor's surgery where you can have to wait a long time even if you have an appointment.

The feedback has been considered and reflected in the planned CSI programme of work e.g. more work is planned with partners to see if additional face to face, telephone and online access points are required in certain areas of the borough and, if they are, where they should and can be situated. In addition, as recommended by residents at the focus groups, this year the option for residents to sign up to receive their Council Tax bills by email rather than by paper letter has been promoted on the website and on Council Tax letters.

The Budget Consultation carried out between January and February 2013 showed that 51% of respondents wanted to transact with the Council via the website and by email.

The CSI Strategy has 4 priorities and 10 objectives for achieving the new way of delivering customer services:

1. Efficient, accessible and customer focussed services
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By 2016:

- Our website will be our main service channel and we will have shifted at least 50,000 contacts from face to face and

telephone channels to online

- We will have reviewed all our customer facing services, taking into account what our customers tell us is important to them, and made efficiencies in the way we deliver services equivalent to at least 23,400 hours of officer time (or 18 full time staff)¹
- Our services will be more easily accessible and we will respond to the needs and preferences of our most vulnerable customers

2. Secure and well managed information

- By 2016 we will have refreshed our standards and procedures for the collection, use, and secure storage of information we hold, including customer data to ensure the information management arrangements we have are appropriate and robust

By 2014, we will have identified whether it is value for money to introduce a single account for every customer. We will have implemented any solution to achieve this that we decide upon by 2016

3. Enabling people to do more for themselves

By 2016:

- We will have supported our partners, particularly Kent County Council, in ensuring that as many people in the borough as possible have access to super fast broadband so local residents and businesses are able to access the Internet, including our website, and transact online
- We will have worked with private, public and third sector partners to increase the level of digital skills in the borough and get more people transacting online

4. Affordable and sustainable customer service delivery

By 2016:

- We will have reduced the numbers of items of post we send out and receive by at least 30%, saving us approximately £50,000 in postage costs
- We will have re-designed our face to face customer service arrangements, making the optimum use of our accommodation to ensure value for money
- Staff numbers will be reduced where appropriate to make cashable savings

A programme board consisting of all members of Corporate Leadership team, key heads of service and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services will lead, monitor and be accountable for delivery of the CSI programme of work. It is proposed that the CSI Strategy is refreshed and progress reported to Cabinet on an annual basis.

¹ 18 full time staff assuming 1 full time staff member is productive for 1,300 hours

Alternatives considered and why rejected

Cabinet could decide not to adopt the CSI Strategy and either continue to deliver services as the Council does currently, or follow the approach to increasing online transactions originally set out in the Channel Shift Strategy adopted in 2011, which the CSI Strategy incorporates and supersedes. This is not recommended as a lot of research has been carried out to determine the proposed strategic direction and it is believed that the customer service delivery model, the priorities, the objectives and the work of work are the Council's best option for delivering cost effective customer focussed services for the future.

Background Papers

Channel Shift Strategy 2011-2015

<p>Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Change and Scrutiny by: 19 April 2013</p>

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WORKFORCE STRATEGY

Issue for Decision

This strategy sets out the key work force issues that will need to be addressed in the future to enable the Council to deliver the organisations priorities.

Decision Made

1. That the Workforce Strategy be agreed.
2. That the action plan be reviewed annually through the service planning process.

Reasons for Decision

The Workforce Strategy has been developed through the integration of the views of senior officers, trade unions and Members and therefore represents a balanced approach to the key issues in the future.

The current Workforce information systems have been in place for some time which has given robust data from which the longer term trends have been identified and are reflected in the strategy.

The council has significantly developed its approach to people management and has more recently embarked on an engagement journey which has not been reflected to date in the over-arching strategy documents; it is important that this work is reflected in the Workforce Strategy and that progress is monitored against the associated action plan.

The proposed strategy reflects the national Workforce Strategy.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

The council could choose not to have a Workforce Strategy but this was not felt appropriate as it would mean that it was not meeting its national commitment to have a strategy and it may not optimise its work force as a resource.

The council could choose to construct the Workforce Strategy in a different way to that proposed as there are many options available; however the proposed document follows consultation and agreement with stakeholders and offers significant scope for development and change in the way it is structured.

Background Papers

None

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VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE REVIEW

Issue for Decision

To consider the recommendations in the report of the Regeneration & Economic Development OSC regarding the Visitor Information Centre Review.

Decision Made

1. That the use of technological tools for engaging with and providing information for visitors be investigated.
2. That staff members providing visitor information receive customer services training and undertake the Visitor England on-line training programme.
3. That a consistent methodology for logging visitor numbers to the VIC at the Museum and the Town Hall is put in place to monitor the use of the service.
4. That a visitor information presence in the gateway be investigated.
5. That the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive revisit the way portfolios are arranged and officer duties allocated to create more cohesion and improved clarity of purpose.
6. That there should be a Visitor Information Centre presence at the Town Hall;
7. That a Visitor Information Centre presence at the Town Hall be supported through Visitor Economy Business Unit resources;
8. That no arrangement should be entered into that would compromise this; and
9. That, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, the Council clarifies the value of visitors to the borough by putting in place a visitor strategy setting out how Maidstone's offer can be enhanced and publicised.
10. That the Cabinet Members for Economic and Commercial Development and Corporate Services agree the details responses to the SCRAIP.

Reasons for Decision

At its meeting in May 2012 the Regeneration & Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee agreed that they would review the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) to determine if there was an economically viable and/or beneficial scenario to return the visitor information centre or part of the VIC to the town hall.

The Committee has undertaken site visits to Bexley and Rochester's Visitor Information Centres to understand the different delivery models for visitor information. They have also held select committee style interviews in formal and informal settings and considered other research on the topic such as visitor information data.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

The Cabinet could decide not to endorse any of the recommendations within the "Visitor Information Centre Review" report, however the recommendations are based on evidence from a range of sources and support the Council's objectives with regard to being a decent place to live and having a growing economy.

Background Papers

Visitor Information Centre Review Evidence Pack

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