

## **Maidstone Borough Council**

### **Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Tuesday 5 February 2013**

#### **Customer Focused Services**

**Report of:** The Head of Business Improvement

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1. During 2012 a review of the way the council delivers customer services was undertaken with the purpose of identifying the most appropriate customer service delivery and engagement model and delivering the following key outcomes.

- Improved understanding of customers
- Service redesign
- Increased engagement and participation with customers
- Increased satisfaction from customers
- Greater feeling of influence for customers
- Cost reduction

1.2. Following completion of the project the findings and recommendations have been presented to Cabinet, Leaders, and Heads of Service

1.3. The final work is currently underway; once completed the customer service model, Customer Service Improvement Strategy and programme of work will be agreed by Cabinet.

#### **2. Recommendation**

2.1. The Committee is recommended to consider the presentation of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, The Head of Business Improvement and the Efficiency and Improvement Officer on 5 February 2013.

2.2. The Cabinet Member and Officers ask that the committee consider the model and whether it fits the principles for customer service alongside any other comments and suggestions they may have.

#### **3. Background**

##### Customer Focused Services

3.1. The project had six work streams.

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 access council services and what is important to them when they contact the .
  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.
- 3.2. 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?
  - 3.3. 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. Key findings from the engagement with residents and businesses are shown at Appendix A. The responses given by residents and businesses were taken into account in the recommendations from the project that will be discussed in the presentation to the Committee.
  - 3.4. 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.
  - 3.5. Once the research and consultation stage was completed, a set of criteria was needed around which to ensure the new customer service model would need to be developed. Starting with the overarching design principle stated 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.*

- 3.6. A set of principles were set and agreed for the development of the customer service delivery model, that it should;
- Enable as many customers as possible to be self sufficient
  - Be affordable
  - Ensure services are accessible to the most vulnerable
  - Have high quality service standards consistently applied
  - Be sustainable and adaptable for the future
- 3.7. Additional focus groups with a cross-section of residents have recently been held to some of the recommendations for the future model for customer service delivery. The proposed model and the results of these focus groups will be explored in the presentation.

#### **4. Impact on Corporate Objectives**

- 4.1. This project and its recommendations support the Council to achieve its priority of Corporate and Customer Excellence.
- 4.2. The recommendations were also developed with consideration of the following service design principle

*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.*

- 4.3. The Council's service design principles are set out within the strategic plan and set the principles by which services should be developed.

## APPENDIX A

### Key findings from surveys and focus groups

- Residents highlighted frustrations around red tape and lack of communication between departments when dealing with the Council
- Resident respondents like to use different ways of interacting with organisations for doing different things e.g.
  - 67% use the internet for finding out information and 62% for setting up and managing accounts – for speed, convenience, for a communications trail
  - 85% would use either face to face (42%) or telephone (43%) to deal with a problem – for reassurance, instant action, human interaction
  - 45% would use the telephone when making a complaint – for reassurance, instant action, to feel listened to
- Five out of six residents surveyed (85%) access the internet, with most (71%) accessing it daily. Families with children under 18 are significantly more likely to do things on line than those with children under 18
- Four out of ten respondents own a smart phone and 93% of those with a smart phone access the internet daily
- Both residents and businesses tend to use the telephone more than other channels
- More residents and businesses would prefer to interact with the Council by email in the future than the current numbers
- Fewer residents and businesses would prefer to interact with the Council by telephone in the future than currently do
- One in four residents and one in six businesses value face to face transactions with the Council and residents report receiving a good service in the Gateway
- Urban residents are significantly more likely than rural residents to interact with the Council face to face
- Residents and businesses criticised the Council's current website as hard to use and not focused enough on transactions