

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

10 APRIL 2013

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT

Report prepared by Georgia Hawkes

1. CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY 2013-16

1.1 Consideration

1.1.1 To consider adopting the Customer Service Improvement Strategy 2013-16 (Appendix A).

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Business Improvement

1.2.1 That Cabinet adopts the Customer Service Improvement Strategy 2013-16, subject to delegation to the Chief Executive to make minor amendments in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services as required.

1.2.2 That Cabinet considers any recommendations made by Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on 9 April 2013.

1.2.3 That Cabinet notes the Equalities Impact Assessment at Appendix B.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 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.

1.3.2 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?

1.3.3 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.

1.3.4 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.

1.3.5 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
4. Have high quality service standards consistently applied
5. Be sustainable and adaptable for the future

1.3.6 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

1.3.7 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.

1.3.8 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.

1.3.9 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.

1.3.10 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

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. **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

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

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

1.3.11A 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.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 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.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The Customer Service Improvement Strategy is a corporate strategy and is key to delivering the corporate priority of 'Corporate and Customer Excellence'. To a lesser extent, it will also help meet the outcomes of assisting vulnerable people and for Maidstone to have a growing economy.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 Delivery of the CSI Strategy contributes significantly to achieving the Council's priority of 'Corporate and Customer Excellence', therefore reducing the risk of not achieving this priority.

1.6.2 A comprehensive risk assessment will be undertaken as part of fully planning the programme of work to deliver the CSI Strategy. The main risks, ratings and planned responses are as follows:

Risk	Probability 1 – Minimal to 6 – Very high	Impact 1 – Negligible to 4 - Major	Response	Mitigating action
Lack of resources in ICT	3	2	Reduce	Conversations with Head of MKIP ICT by Feb 2013 to pick up issues and book in work - Completed
Insufficient capacity in the service teams being reviewed to participate	3	3	Reduce	Conversations with services in March/April 2013 to identify requirements and resources
People won't use new processes/online forms	2	3	Reduce	Use Mosaic Public Sector to establish the communication and transaction preferences of our customers – Completed Apply this knowledge in designing services as part of service efficiency reviews Work with other Kent authorities to compile a behavior change strategy to make sure people use online services
Lack of cooperation from suppliers of existing ICT systems or prohibitive cost of making changes	3	3	Reduce	Make ICT service aware of aims of strategy – Completed Good client management of existing suppliers Ensure clear understanding from all parties on timescales and clearly set out responsibilities and the specification of any work required

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1. Financial



2.	Staffing	X
3.	Legal	X
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	X
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	X
9.	Asset Management	X

Financial

1.7.2 Delivery of the CSI Strategy will help the Council meet its Medium Term Financial Strategy by delivering cashable savings. It will also deliver efficiency savings in officer time, which could be turned into cashable savings by reducing staff numbers where this is appropriate, or allow the Council to move staff resources from lower priority services into higher priority services. There will be a cost to delivering the Strategy because of the officer time spent on it. There will also be additional costs, for example we may need to purchase new ICT systems or pay other companies to make different ICT systems integrate with one another. However, the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership already has plans to standardise ICT systems across the partnership, so funds are already identified for replacement of ICT systems. Any additional investment would have to be justified by the benefits it would deliver: either substantial efficiencies in staff time or real revenue savings.

Staffing

1.7.3 The programme of work required to deliver the CSI Strategy will require substantial staff resources. The work programme will be led by the Head of Business Improvement and Business Improvement team, but staff in ICT, Customer Services, Corporate Support and in all the services to be reviewed will also be required to work on the programme. This time commitment has been discussed with all the relevant heads of services so this can be factored into service plans.

Legal

1.7.4 The Council has to comply with legislation around the management of information. Any legislative requirements will be considered when looking at where and how we can improve information management to ensure we comply with relevant legislation.

1.7.5 The Council also has to comply with various legislation and regulation in the delivery of services. These requirements must be fully understood and considered when we examine the services we deliver and how we deliver them through the service area efficiency reviews

Equality Impact Needs Assessment

1.7.6 An Equality Impact Needs Assessment has been undertaken and is included at Appendix B. The new model for service delivery has also been forwarded to the Disability Focus Group for consideration. Comments from the Group have been mainly supportive of the new model of customer service delivery and the concept of 'digital first' (asking people to do things online in preference to other service channels). The need to ensure the website is easy to use and meets accessibility guidelines was highlighted, and the fact that older people and some disabled people are less likely to use computers. This has been recognised in the CSI Strategy. In order to ensure the Council's new website is as accessible as possible, the link to beta testing site, which is currently out for user testing, has been forwarded to the Disability Focus Group for comment.

Procurement

1.7.7 A procurement exercise is currently being undertaken for the services of an external expert in information management. Other procurement of services and, for example, ICT software may be required.

Asset Management

1.7.8 One of the objectives of the CSI Strategy is 'We will have decided the best way to deliver the services that we will still provide face to face, ensuring we make the optimum use of our accommodation to ensure value for money'. Therefore, the Strategy will ensure we make the best use of our assets.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

Appendix A – Customer Service Improvement Strategy
Appendix B – Equality Needs Impact Assessment

1.8.2 Background Documents

- Channel Shift Strategy 2011-2015

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

March 2013.....

This is a Key Decision because: it is a corporate strategy.....

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Wards/Parishes affected:All

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