

CUSTOMER SERVICES REVIEW – INTERIM REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

- 1.1 The corporate plan included a delivery plan which set out a number of key actions for 2016/17. This delivery plan was set out against the background of continued funding reductions and included a review of customer services to 'Transform the management of demand through digital customer services and engagement (having regard to the work of Fit for the Future)'.
- 1.2 This report provides the panel with an interim update on the work of the project team and member task and finish group and outlines some early findings to be considered by the Project Board.

2. CUSTOMER SERVICE REVIEW

- 2.1 The project brief identified four main areas for the review to consider including customer strategy, digital service delivery, information offices and the customer services centre. Issues and opportunities within these areas are being considered by a project team of key officers and service representatives, and a member task and finish group comprising of:

Cllr A Alvey
Cllr B Andrews
Cllr G Beck
Cllr Mrs F Carpenter
Cllr M R Harris
Cllr A D O'Sullivan (Chair)

- 2.2 Work has been undertaken to inform the strategic direction of customer services for the future; other strategies have been assessed, top ten transactions identified, current arrangements documented and customers have been surveyed. Task & finish group members have also visited Information Offices and the Customer Service Centre and observed transactions as part of the project. This work is ongoing but has resulted in some initial findings and short and medium term key actions to be reported to the Project Board to progress the review.

3. INITIAL FINDINGS

- 3.1 Customer Service Strategy

The general initial consensus arising from the review is that multiple delivery channels are necessary to meet the differing needs of the district's residents. This is further supported by the findings of the customer survey which concludes that there is a need for face to face support for some of the more complex enquiries i.e. Housing and Housing Benefit.

However, there are opportunities to encourage those who could use online service delivery, but perhaps lack confidence to do so, through assisted support at the information offices i.e. digital champions and in time this would free up resources to support our most vulnerable customers and those who are unable to engage digitally, now or in the future.

It is suggested that a simple strategy be developed to support this approach and it is intended that any changes to the way services are delivered, and the promotion of the potential benefits, are widely communicated to customers.

3.2 Digital Service Delivery

To support a strategy that encourages online delivery and meets the increasing digital expectations of society, the customer experience has to be simple and effective, giving them control over when and how they access services. This will require the development of the website to better enable self-service and online service delivery functionality, integrated with back office systems and underpinned by re-engineered processes that provide the most efficient workflow, designed around the needs of the customers. This in turn should reduce unnecessary demand at the Information Offices and the Customer Service Centre.

3.3 Information Offices

As part of the material considered by the Task and Finish Group, information and costs of the arrangements with partners was shared, and opportunities for all information offices continue to be considered as part of the review.

4. NEXT STEPS

4.1 Website Development

The project team and task and finish group received a number of demonstrations from technology providers, each of whom highlighted the need for website development and enhancement. In the short-term it is suggested that the current website be developed to ensure some quick wins in terms of functionality and look and feel. This work is underway. The task and finish group has endorsed the need to extend the arrangements with the current provider whilst detailed procurement opportunities are examined for the future redesign and delivery of the website. A specification to detail the technology requirements will be compiled by the end of June 2017.

4.2 Back Office Systems

Website development has the potential to provide a more user-friendly experience to the customer, although efficiency benefits will only be derived if this is supported by appropriate back office systems to enable an end to end process that requires little, if any, human intervention. The need for this investment has already been identified for key areas including waste and recycling and further identification of system improvements should arise from the process mapping and re-engineering of top tasks.

4.3 Top Transactions and Demand Management

The management of demand is a key objective of the review to ensure that unnecessary customer contact is reduced and resources are freed up.

To reduce this type of demand it is necessary to process-map top transactions and identify, and remove activities that result in little or no value to the customer. This will be a key action moving forward with a target completion date of the end of June 2017.

4.4 Public PC's

Visits to Information Offices and to our Town & Parish partners have identified improvement opportunities including the current provision of public computers in the offices which are inadequate and wouldn't support digital self-service or assisted self-service in the future. The appropriate provision of technology needs to be considered to enable this i.e. tablets or self-service hubs and enhance the benefits of the partnership arrangements that already exist.

4.5 Other Authorities

Visits to other authorities are planned to gain an insight into the support and technology available and to ensure NFDC can offer an exemplar customer service experience.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report although investment in technology is a likely outcome of the review which will in turn result in financial efficiencies. These will be reported upon as they arise. Some interim improvements to the Council's website may incur modest costs.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 That the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel notes the initial findings and key actions for the customers services review contained within the report.
- 6.2 That a further report be brought to the Panel in September 2017.

For Further Information Please Contact:

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Background Papers

Customer Services Review Project Brief –
COSP 22 September 2016

Our corporate plan 2016-2020 Delivery Plan
Cabinet Report Feb 2016

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