

Customer Access Strategy

Cabinet

Date: 5 September 2018

Author: Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services
Director of Performance, Organisational Improvement and Communications

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report outlines the results of a recent consultation on the Council's draft Customer Access Strategy and offers recommendations as to how the Council should modernise customer access in the future.
- 1.2 This report is necessary in order that the Council can modernise its approach to customer services and keep in step with customer expectations as to how they wish to contact the Council.
- 1.3 The modernisation of Customer Services is a key part of the Swindon Programme which aims to make the Council more modern, efficient and effective by 2020.

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1.4 Note the results of the Customer Access Strategy consultation and the accompanying analysis
- 1.5 Endorse the Customer Access Strategy 2018-2021
- 1.6 Recognise the contribution of the March 2018 cohort of Aspiring Leaders to the development of the Customer Access Strategy

2. Customer Access Strategy

Development of the Draft Customer Access Strategy

- 2.1 A key success measure of the Swindon Programme is that 85% of customer transactions are completed online by 2020. This ambitious target was set because the Council wishes to offer more convenience to residents by offering the opportunity to interact with us at a time which suits them. It also brings the Council in line with the way in which other organisations and companies offer services to the public. Furthermore, digital interactions are much cheaper for the Council to fulfil and, by offering digital services to those who want to use them, the Council is able to focus its resources on those for whom digital interaction is more problematic.
- 2.2 The draft strategy is therefore comprised of two parts: a customer access strategy which outlines how we will seek to achieve the 85% target set out in 2.1

Customer Access Strategy

Cabinet

Date: 5 September 2018

and our offer to customers and secondly, a digital access strategy which outlines how the council will seek to support those for whom access to digital services is more difficult for whatever reason.

- 2.3 As part of the initial development of the draft strategy, the first cohort of the new Aspiring Leaders programme were set, as part of their programme, the challenge of understanding which residents within the borough may find digital access difficult, the reasons for that difficulty and to suggest ways to overcome those difficulties. Their research, findings and recommendations form the basis of the Digital Inclusion Strategy found within Appendix A.
- 2.4 The development of the draft Customer Access Strategy was informed by several stakeholder engagement meetings including discussions with the Cabinet Member Advisory Group for Equalities, the Digitisation Cabinet Member Advisory Group, the Swindon Senior Forum and the Aspiring Leaders working group. The outcome of that engagement was a draft Customer Access Strategy which was consulted on from 11 June 2018.

Consultation on the Draft Customer Access Strategy

- 2.5 Consultation on the draft Customer Access Strategy took place over seven weeks from 11 June 2018 to 30 July 2018.
- 2.6 In order to reach those groups of people identified as having the potential to be digitally excluded within the initial Diversity Impact Assessment and Aspiring Leaders' research, we wrote to 175 different groups in Swindon to ask them to either take part in the survey or make their members aware of the consultation. The message provided a brief explanation of the consultation and routes to further information. The link to the survey and information on the website was provided along with information of how to request assistance or request physical copies be sent to them.
- 2.7 The communications around the survey included 28 social media posts which had a reach of 24,000. We also had over 1000 visits to the website pages during the course of the consultation. We also distributed 160 copies of the survey to community locations and each of those locations had a physical copy of the draft strategy for residents to read should they choose to.
- 2.8 The survey has also been promoted internally through internal communication channels three times. The messages informed staff (circa 75% of which are Swindon residents) of the survey, how to engage, the location of physical copies and featured a request to share the message with customers and those who may be vulnerable to missing the message.
- 2.9 The survey was also featured in Highways News on 29.06.18 which was sent to 2,160 recipients. A press release was issued to local media on 13.06.18 which resulted in four pieces of coverage (both digital and physically within the paper).

Customer Access Strategy

Cabinet

Date: 5 September 2018

During the seven weeks of the public consultation a web banner was in place on our public website alerting people to the consultation.

- 2.10 In total, 482 people responded to the consultation with 22 people responding in paper form.

Results of the Customer Access Strategy consultation

- 2.11 The results of the Customer Access Strategy consultation largely bear out the research and engagement carried out in the development of the draft strategy. Full results are attached as Appendix B. The headline results are highlighted below and split into three categories:

- a) Results of whole cohort;
- b) Results of those who identified as English not being their first language;
- c) Results of those who completed the survey in paper format.

Results of whole cohort

- 2.12 There was a good age range among the respondents to the survey albeit with slight under-representation at either end of the age spectrum. Of those who responded, 78% of people identified themselves as being very/ extremely confident accessing online services with less than six per cent saying that they were not so/ not at all confident.
- 2.13 59% of those responding said that they access council services online with phone contact being used by 22% of respondents. However, 69% of those responding said that they would prefer to be able to contact the Council online. It is interesting to note that online was the preferred channel for all age groups up to the age of 84.
- 2.14 When asked, 52% of respondents said it would be very convenient for them to contact the Council outside of normal working hours and the majority of them would prefer to do this online. The second choice of those who responded that it would be more convenient to contact the Council outside of office hours was via the telephone after 5pm.
- 2.15 In terms of digital confidence, 80% of those who responded were very or quite comfortable using website with 62% feeling very or quite comfortable using webchat and 54% feeling very or quite comfortable using facebook.

Customer Access Strategy

Cabinet

Date: 5 September 2018

- 2.16 In terms of paying for council services, 75% of respondents would prefer to pay online for council services with card payment over the phone being the second most popular choice with 9% of respondents choosing that option.

Responses of those for whom English is not their first language

- 2.17 Of the 482 people who responded to the survey, 31 identified as having a first language which is not English.
- 2.18 Those for whom English is not their first language self-identified as having slightly lower levels of digital confidence and higher usage currently of the Council's face to face services.
- 2.19 However, still over half of those for whom English is not their first language would prefer to access online services with a much higher preference for the use of face to face services than the total of respondents.
- 2.20 In terms of digital confidence, while all less than 10%, there was a higher requirement for support to access online services, either in a community facility (9%), with the help of a friend or family member (6%) or via the help of a member of staff (6%), for those who identified as having a first language which was not English. This group showed similar levels of confidence using social media (facebook and twitter) as the wider group but self-identified as having slightly less confidence on websites and webchat.
- 2.21 Despite this, there was still significant preference for online as a form of payment for Council services over the other options with paying for services face to face at the Council a second preference.

Responses of those who completed the survey in paper form

- 2.22 22 people completed the survey in paper form and, while a very small group, there was broad representation across the different age bands (with the exception of age 25-34).
- 2.23 The responses completed on paper suggested slightly less digital confidence among this cohort than the wider group of respondents although nearly 60% of those responding on paper identified as being either extremely or very confident using the internet. They identified as requiring more support to complete online services and respondents who completed the survey on paper had a much higher than average usage of face to face services at the Council.
- 2.24 While 45% of those responding on paper would prefer to access face to face services at the Council, 50% of those who responded would prefer to use online services when interacting with the Council. Among these respondents, there was little appetite for telephone contact. Furthermore, among this group the ability to contact the Council outside of office hours was less appealing than with the broader group of respondents.
-

Customer Access Strategy

Cabinet

Date: 5 September 2018

- 2.25 In terms of digital confidence, those responding on paper identified as having less confidence with facebook, twitter, websites and webchat than the wider group but 55% responded when asked that they didn't need help accessing online services. 55% of those who responded on paper would also prefer to pay for Council services online.

Next steps following consultation

- 2.26 The consultation has borne out the research and engagement which went into the development of the draft Customer Access Strategy. No changes have been made to the strategy as a result of the consultation and it is clear that the vast majority of residents want to engage with us online, at a time which suits them, from wherever it is most convenient for them to do so.

- 2.27 The Council is committed to ensuring that customers have a modern, efficient and effective digital experience and has invested significant resource into its digital capacity. There is a two year programme of improvement underway to improve our online presence and to ensure the five customer principles outlined in the Customer Access Strategy are achieved. They are as follows:

2.27.1 *Services will be "Digital by Design" wherever possible* – with greater use of electronic and social media to report service issues and communicate with residents.

2.27.2 *All customers have fair and equal access to services and greater control over how they receive and access those services* – there will be increased access to online services mainly through the customer's own use of the web, but for those customers who cannot do this additional access and support will be available including making use of community facilities and support. We aim to provide a choice of services available at times and locations to suit the customer.

2.27.3 *Customer needs will be resolved at the first point of contact* – via trained staff who are enabled to make decisions in order to ensure problems are fixed.

2.27.4 *Customer feedback drives service improvement and policy and procedure changes* – via feedback from our customers

2.27.5 *Customer requirements will be fulfilled in the most cost-effective way possible* as long as this does not contradict any of the points above.

- 2.28 In terms of digital inclusion, once adopted, the Council is committed to providing digital skills training via its Lifelong Learning Team to ensure that anyone who wants to improve their digital literacy is able to. We will also provide training to our staff both on the Council campus and in our other community facilities so that

Customer Access Strategy

Cabinet

Date: 5 September 2018

they can support residents to engage with us online should they wish to. The Council's approach to Digital Inclusion is outlined in the Customer Strategy at Appendix A (pages 8-17)

- 2.29 It is also important to note that the adoption of the Customer Access Strategy does not signal an end to face to face or telephone services at the Council. The purpose of the strategy is to enable those who want to use online services to interact with us to do so, supporting the Council to reserve face to face and telephone services for those for whom online services are difficult to use.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 The Council could choose not to adopt the Customer Access Strategy. It could continue with its current offer to residents.

4. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 4.1 The adoption of the Customer Access Strategy and implementation of it will improve services for customers as well as reducing the cost of Customer Services within the Council by around £515,000 in the longer term. However, recognising the importance of improving our web offer £150,000 of this saving has been reinvested in web capacity and improvements. There is therefore a net saving attached to the realisation of this strategy in the region of £375,000.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 4.2 Legal and Human Rights considerations have been fully taken into account in compiling this report and it is believed that the recommendations are in compliance with Convention Rights.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 4.3 There will be changes to the working practices of members of the Customer Services team as we implement this strategy. These will be consulted on with affected staff members in due course.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 4.4 This strategy support Swindon Borough Council's delivery of the Public Sector Equality Duty, and in particular the duty to advance Equality of Opportunity. Our assessment, as demonstrated throughout this document, is that increasing the number of customer interactions through online methods will generally create a positive impact. However, we have clearly identified four areas where there may be adverse impact: Older residents, residents with learning disabilities, residents

Customer Access Strategy

Cabinet

Date: 5 September 2018

who can only speak limited or no English, lower income families and residents for whom affordability is a barrier to accessing online services.

Mitigations to these adverse impacts have been identified, and will be used on implementation of each part of this strategy, and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure access to customer services at Swindon Borough Council is improved in line with this strategy.

Risk Management

- 4.5 The adoption of the Customer Access Strategy and the subsequent implementation of it reduces the risk that our customers are not able to interact with us in the way in which they would prefer to. We will use the Council's current performance management and risk processes to ensure that we are not increasing any risk to the Council in the implementation of this strategy.

5. Consultees

- 5.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all Cabinet reports.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 None

7. Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Customer Access Strategy (*The appendix is available online at the Council's website or on request from Committee and Member Services*).
- 7.2 Appendix 2 – Results of the Customer Access Strategy consultation (*The appendix is available online at the Council's website or on request from Committee and Member Services*).

8. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan

- 8.1 This is a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan for September 2018.