

Swindon Programme – Modernising Customer Services

Resources O&S Committee

Date: 18 January 2017

Author: Cllr Keith Williams – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Digitalisation and Samantha Mowbray – Director of Performance, Organisational Improvement and Communications

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report outlines a draft proposed approach to the modernisation of Customer Services which forms part of the Organisational Excellence programme.
- 1.2 This report seeks to give members of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee confidence that a coordinated approach to modernising customer services is in place and that this approach is being developed in conjunction with the Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy which aims to ensure that all of Swindon's residents are able to access the universal services which the Council provides.
- 1.3 The Organisational Excellence work stream is one of four themes within the Swindon Programme. The Swindon Programme is a £30m savings programme intended to ensure that the Council is financially and operationally sustainable by March 2020.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Recognise that the proposals are currently very much in draft form and offer any views to the report author at the meeting on 18 January 2018 where a fuller explanation of the proposals will be presented

3. Modernising Customer Services

Vision for Customer Services in the future

- 3.1 By 2020 Customer Services will be a flagship area, leading the way in using technology to manage all customer interaction, with over 85% of transactions being managed [end to end] online.
 - 3.2 We will have removed all unnecessary face to face and phone contact by providing clear information on the website to either enable customers to do things for themselves; signposting customers to other external services; or correctly routing them to the right services within the Council.
 - 3.3 Working with business areas we will have transformed business processes so that we can offer all transactional services via the Customer Portal, My Account.
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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Samantha Mowbray, 07823 525337, smowbray@swindon.gov.uk.

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Customers will be able to use the account to apply, report, pay, book and feedback on services; and their requests will be automatically routed to the point of delivery, without the need for multiple handoffs en route to fulfilment.

- 3.4 Customers will be in control of their interaction, being able to track progress; avoiding the need to chase for responses. They will be able to use web chat functionality to communicate with staff both in Customer Services and in Delivery Teams; and get regular up to date information relating to their case.

Current customer transactions

- 3.5 In 2017 we successfully implemented the Customer Portal, which enables customers to transact with us on line for over 60 process, including waste services, highways, housing and environmental services. It is early days but for these processes, 47% of transactions are now being done on line and to date we have almost 17000 residents' My Accounts open and the number is increasing daily. The Council has also seen a continuing reduction in face to face contact, down a further 18% year on year.
- 3.6 Particular challenges in 2017 have arisen with our telephony service. Response times for answering the telephones have been significantly higher than in previous years; with the average speed to answer now 91 seconds. Staffing numbers are 33% lower than twelve months ago and calls volumes have only reduced slightly to date; meaning there is limited capacity to manage at peak times. However, we anticipate that this will improve as more and more services are available online.

Proposed future of face to face customer service

- 3.7 It is proposed that there will be a consolidated customer services offer on campus with fewer reception points. The Civic reception will be solely for business visitors and visitors visiting elected members or members of staff. A reception in Wat Tyler, much smaller than is currently available to reflect the reducing numbers of residents who need to visit our campus, will provide a reception for those residents with pre-arranged appointments and a guided digital service will be available to support those for whom digital access is a challenge. It is proposed that the customer reception at Waterside is closed.
- 3.8 Assisted digital support will also be available to those for whom digital access is a challenge through libraries and community hubs (please see separate digital inclusion strategy support for more information).

Proposed future of telephone customer service

- 3.9 It is proposed that telephone contact will be consolidated to reduce the number of access points into the Council and there will be smarter call routing, providing

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key messages to customers while they wait which actively promote online services.

- 3.10 As services go through digital service re-design, specific telephone numbers for services will be consolidated into a single contact centre number where it makes sense to do so and where call enquiries can be fulfilled by customer service operatives. If enquiries are regularly likely to require professional expertise to fulfil then they will remain with the service and their direct line numbers will be maintained.
- 3.11 Staff answering calls from members of the public will support them to complete their transaction digitally where it is possible to do so but will complete the transaction online for residents where they struggle to do so themselves.
- 3.12 We are also currently investigating whether there is a business case for call centre staff to also be able to provide assisted digital support in the form of webchat which would enable call centre employees to answer any enquiries over the web.

Proposed approach to customer service by email or letter

- 3.13 While there may still be some services for which email contact with residents and customers is valuable, it is proposed that the generic customer services email address is removed and that any written digital correspondence is completed through the customer portal. This will allow for greater integration with our business systems and enable a more effective and efficient customer interaction which provides valuable management information without the need for additional manual data and information entry.

Involvement of members in the Modernising Customer Services project

- 3.14 The proposals are very much in draft form at this stage and are being considered by the Digitalisation CMAG which meets for the first time on 9 January. This CMAG is being led by Cllr Williams. It is intended that both the CMAG and the Resources and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider and help shape the proposals before a final proposal is considered by Cabinet in March.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could choose not to change the way it offers customer services to its residents. However, it is considered that this would not be in keeping with the way in which modern organisations engage with their customers and residents and have considerable financial and reputational implications for the Council.

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5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There is a £500k savings target associated with this project within the Organisational Excellence workstream.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Legal Services have been fully engaged in our reporting requirements relating to headcount reduction. As the Swindon Programme will mean an overall staffing reduction of more than 100 job losses per year, this must be reported to the Treasury and a formal 45 day consultation process must be followed. Swindon Borough Council's approach to this has been discussed and agreed with both Legal and union colleagues.

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

- 5.3 The delivery of the Organisational Excellence workstream will lead to staffing reductions in some of our services as we reduce duplication, fix broken processes and automate some service delivery. We are working with colleagues in HR and OD to prepare staff and managers for change and have engaged early with union colleagues to ensure they are aware of any implications of the projects for their members. We have profiled the likely change in staffing requirement within Customer Services over the life of this project and are hopeful that we can reduce numbers through natural wastage should final proposals be similar to what is suggested here and adopted by Cabinet in March.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.1 A number of DIAs have already been undertaken in relation to Digital Services and possible changes to customer services. DIAs will be considered throughout the project scoping process and will be conducted before any business cases are developed and final proposals made.

Risk Management

- 5.2 There are a number of risks associated with this project and they are contained within the Organisational Excellence risk register which is available should members of the committee wish to see it.

6. Consultees

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

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7. Background Papers

7.1 None

8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – operating principles for Organisational Excellence theme