

Cabinet

15 January 2014



Customer First Strategy Refresh 2014-2017

Key Decision NS22/13

Report of Corporate Management Team: Terry Collins, Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services Councillor Brian Stephens, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval to carry out a public consultation on a new Customer First Strategy for the Council for 2014-2017.

Background

2. In the light of MTFP savings and changing customer preferences, the Council needs to develop, implement and embed a revised Customer First Strategy across the council to replace the existing strategy agreed in 2010 following LGR.
3. The revised strategy document will provide a direction of travel for the way in which we will provide access to services and a commitment to ensure customers are at the forefront of service delivery within the context of reducing budgets and diminishing resources.
4. The main focus of the strategy document encompasses the main contact channels used by customers; streamlined service delivery and the council's approach to use of feedback, intelligence and data to inform service development.
5. In line with the 'whole council approach' to Customer Services the Customer First Strategy will seek to broaden accessibility to information and increase the online capability to transact with the council. This approach will ensure best use of existing resources and buildings to provide a network of service access points which is instantly recognisable through a single branding, provisionally entitled "Information Durham". When implementing this approach clarity will be provided in relation to where key transactions will be offered, such as benefits. By evolving this approach customers will have much greater access to services and information with little to no revenue budget implications.
6. The Customer First Strategy needs to be clear, concise and linked to the wider priorities of the Council. As delivery of the Strategy will result in changes both internally in relation to integration of services and enabling "channel shift" so that customers are able and want to access services through digital means at a time and location convenient to them. It is

important that a comprehensive consultation process is developed to enable effective engagement with all stakeholders.

Development of the Strategy

7. The first part of the refresh process has involved working with staff to develop a draft document which addresses the known issues surrounding effective customer care.
8. A cross council project team has been set up to drive forward the refresh of the strategy, which has contributed to its content and format; this included identifying service improvements in relation to access to services and statistical data around customer contact.
9. Research data from surveys showing customer preferences in relation to access channels and demographics in terms of the make-up of our communities has also been used to ensure the strategy document is focussed around customer needs.
10. A copy of the refreshed Strategy is attached at Appendix 2 for information.

Consultation

11. The statutory requirement to consult is based on section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 in which it states that a best value authority must secure continuous improvement in the way its functions are exercised and in deciding how to fulfil its duty; an authority must consult a range of stakeholders including taxpayers.
12. It is proposed that a consultation exercise is undertaken to obtain the views of the public on a number of issues central to the strategy document and the direction of travel proposed in it including:
 - Consideration of the vision statement and main areas of focus
 - Current customer preferences
 - Future access channels
13. A number of consultation methods have been agreed to encourage wide participation, including:
 - On-line survey (Paper copies will be available at locations across the county to ensure those without access to PCs/internet access can participate)
 - Focus Group meetings and signposting through AAPs
 - Disability Partnership
 - Partnership Delivery Improvement Group
 - Investors in young people
 - People's Parliament

14. The consultation will take place over a 12 week period, commencing on 20th January 2014 and running until 14th April 2014
15. The results of the exercise will be included in a future report to Cabinet on the new strategy document.

Customer Access Point Review

16. Whilst it is intended to consult on the revised wider Customer First Strategy an immediate decision is required regarding the future provision of Customer Access Points to meet MTFP and Capital Programme timetables. A separate report on Customer Access Point provision is included on this agenda.

Recommendations

17. That Cabinet approves the commencement of a consultation on the Customer First Strategy
18. That a further report is brought back to Cabinet following the consultation exercise in order to confirm the final strategy document

Background Papers

Cabinet 29th June 2010 Customer First Strategy

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

The strategy aims to deliver value for money customer service within the context of savings targets

Staffing

Staff have been consulted in line with the Internal consultation exercise

Risk

A full Risk register has been developed

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The strategy document sets out a clear commitment to ensuring that equality and fairness are key features of the Council's approach to customer service. The Equality Impact Assessment has identified a potential impact in relation to the review of access channels which may result in the potential reduction in Customer Access Points. A separate EqIA will be completed in relation to that review.

Accommodation

The Strategy action plan will include a review of the council's Customer Access Points

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Consultation

A range of consultation exercises have been developed in line with the consultation and engagement plan

Procurement

Not applicable

Disability Issues

Access to services is a key component of the Strategy

Legal Implications

Legal Advice has been sought and it is considered there are no implications.