
Customer Focus – New Beginnings

Background

We have significant improvements to make

1. The Council offers a wide range of services, advice, and support to its customers and in some areas the quality of that customer experience is not what customers reasonably expect or we would want to be offering. This is not an issue with a single team but is a systemic weakness that needs to be addressed. The Customer Contact Centre is a particularly visible example but also demonstrates how a customer journey should be considered end to end.
2. Our staff who are the front window for the Council do an excellent job under at times very difficult circumstances, improvements are needed to ensure these staff work within a system that is fit for purpose and does not put unreasonable pressures on them or indeed any other point of the journey.
3. We know through the data we have and from listening to our staff and customers that across the Council failure demand is a significant issue and one that costs the Council an unknown but significant amount of money through wasted effort and rework.
4. LGA Peer Review heard evidence and input from a range of stakeholders and members and the recommendations are constructive and clear Support to make the right next steps has been offered, including some limited funding.
5. Linked to the Budget process Corporate Leadership Team, have commissioned a Strategic Review into how we meet the needs of our customers and how we can do this in a more efficient way. Efficient for our customer by fulfilling needs quicker and better the first time in a joined up but also in a more financially efficient way. CLT used the input from members on this issue and the very clear view that progress needs to be made, insight from customers and staff and data where we have it agree that this is a Council Wide Review and not simply about the Contact Centre.

We need to know what good looks like

There are no up-to-date Standards, Charters, Customer Commitments that set out what we should be offering to our customers.

Although we know enough to know that our current position is in places poor without a measure of good it will be hard to set a consistent expectation and drive improvements across all customer journeys.

The Role of Standards

Standards offer two different opportunities.

A commitment to our customers we can measure ourselves against and our customers can hold us to account on. Across other organisations these are called Customer Charters, Customer Promise, Customer Values but what they have in common is that they are a statement that commits the organisation to deliver to that standard.

There are industry standards that set out very comprehensively what good looks like in delivery terms. These standards can be adopted to drive up improvement and to recognise good customer experience. These standards

are usually accredited and involve some administrative costs to license and then implement.

LGA Peer Review recommendation on Standards

Findings

Clear standards and vision: Whilst there are multiple documents stating customer service commitment, a standard approach and consistent focus on customer standards is 'not apparent'

Recommendations

Revise, refresh and then actively promote your 'customer commitments' as a driver of excellent customer service, ensuring these are relevant for today's digital world as well as consistently applied by staff in all roles throughout the Council

Look at ways to continuously check and improve customer service standards by actively seeking user feedback, analyse your complaints and comments to understand the cause and consider carrying out mystery shopping exercises

Getting it right

There have been a number of phased change programmes that have given us some good customer insight and intelligence which will shape some of the areas of improvement, but we need to work small and scale up with a proportionate level of governance.

Standards was one of the proposals coming from the most recent output of the now paused customer experience programme, so some thinking has already been done.

Members Steering the Vision

In 2020 a review of the then Customer experience programme recommended involving members in the way forward. Therefore, members, as our leaders and our customers representatives and advocates are asked to support shaping the Vision and to input into the decision on how Standards can be used to drive improved experience and fulfilment.

Postcards from the future

Members could have a real impact on this work by setting out what the future should look like. By turning the experience of those customers who contact their Councillor into a description of what the future, improved experience for that same customer would look like.

Members set expectations on the right application of quality standards

There are several options for using a set of pre-determined and accredited Quality Standards, but these could also be developed locally.

Framework	Comments
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 <p>CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE®</p>	<p>Cabinet Officer Standard</p> <p>Very common across public sector</p> <p>Flexible Council Wide or single service</p> <p>Self-Assessment free and easy to do</p>
	<p>A range of individual or complimentary standards that can be used in a targeted way to solve challenges.</p> <p>Costs to license the approach and individual standards.</p> <p>Less commonly used in the Public Sector.</p> <p>International</p>
	<p>Flexible approach, benchmarking build into framework and used in all sectors.</p> <p>Membership required and tiered license depending on approach.</p>
<p>Create our own – Our Sheffield</p>	<p>Several Senior Officers have experience of working with the above Standards so have knowledge and expertise.</p> <p>Standards could be co-produced with members and customers</p> <p>No administrative costs, but project costs as a one off would be required.</p> <p>Not accredited so doesn't come with external recognition.</p>

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