

Our Council Transitional Committee

Meeting held 10 February 2022

**PRESENT:** Councillors Dawn Dale (Chair), Zahira Naz (Chair), Christine Gilligan (Deputy Chair), Penny Baker, Bryan Lodge, Cate McDonald, Colin Ross, Barbara Masters (Substitute Member) and Kaltum Rivers

Non-Council Members in attendance:-

Eugene Walker – Executive Director of Resources  
Alice Nicholson – Policy & Improvement Officer  
Elyse Senior Wadsworth – Head of Business Strategy and One Year Plan Theme Lead  
Paul Taylor – Head of Customer Services.  
Rachel Marshall – Principal Committee Secretary

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**1. WELCOME AND HOUSEKEEPING**

1.1 Welcome and housekeeping arrangements were explained.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bryan Lodge and Councillor Julie Grocutt.

**3. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

3.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

4.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

5.1 Minutes of previous meeting held on 7 July 2021 were agreed to be a true record.

**6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

6.1 There were no public questions or petitions.

**7. CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS**

- 7.1 The Committee received a report of Eugene Walker, Executive Director of Resources setting out the 2 main application of standards and how they can help to improving customer experience.
- 7.2 Present for this item was Elyse Senior-Wadsworth (Head of Business Strategy and One Year Plan Theme Lead) and Paul Taylor (Head of Customer Services). It was acknowledged that the current standard being offered to customers is below expectation and the Committee have been asked to use their knowledge and experience to describe the future experience of a customer, what their ambitions are for customers so that Council officers deliver improvements that make steps towards an ambitious commitment to customers. Identify any gaps in knowledge and understanding.
- 7.3 The report contained information on Customer Focus – New Beginnings. It highlighted the significant improvements to be made, knowing what ‘good’ would look like, the Role of Standards, the LGA Peer Review, Getting it Right, Members Steering the Vision and Members setting the right application of Quality of Standards.
- 7.4 A presentation was also shared and contained slides on shaping the future, who the customers are, accessible services and future steps.
- 7.5 Members of the Committee made the following suggestions:
- To make use of the technology available, look at reducing the volume of calls, log housing repairs via a designated online system, keep customers informed if someone is not able to attend a repair, phase sending out communications to reduce call volumes in any one day, ensure communications arrive before weekends, use mobile phones or voice activated systems to allows customers to book time slots for a call back, access a service within a reasonable time frame of 15 minutes, build in efficient and continuous data management, share caseloads between officers so staff absence does not delay a service, give customers reference numbers to act as a unique identifier to their query, communicate a response time, do not promise on things which cannot be delivered.
  - Form a set of overarching principles of how people are treated throughout the whole of the service.
  - Explore a phased approach to targeted work so that by the end of the 3 years the right standard is implemented across the organisation.
  - Look at where other councils have got things right and to look at some positive examples of good practice within SCC and to learn from previous mistakes.
  - Provide some statistics around wait times and call volumes and potentially use a chat feature to filter out some volume of queries.

It was recognised by Members that officers are working hard and that this piece of work is to explore the systems that need to change in order to provide support to allow them to do their jobs.

- 7.6 The following responses were given:
- The LGA peer review highlighted a lot of improvements that are to be made. An initial starting point should be made where there will be a greater

impact. It was highlighted that by gaining an insight into the customers experiences will help reshape the service to meet customer needs and that the correct use of technology can be explored. It was noted that having measurable and reasonable standards is important.

- It was stated that moving to a qualitative approach is also important i.e dealing with customer queries in one go as opposed to rushing, which could result in further call backs. Technological improvements are being explored and for those customers that can access technology would help clear the queues for those that cannot.
- A designated repair line would still be presented with similar challenges due to the same resources but could potentially be made smoother by getting through more quickly.
- It was explained that by using a standards framework for the whole organisation, an improved service and experience would be delivered.
- It was explained that the data management would need to be improved by looking at how contacts are managed for a continuous experience for customers and looking at how to improve the connectivity of core council systems. A customer portal and the costs to this are currently being explored. It would be the hope that customers could create an account and track the progress of their queries.
- It was suggested to look at other areas of the council where learning has taken place and apply this into creating standards.
- It was explained that it is important to establish who the customers are when setting standards and this can be as broad as people who live, work and visit the city. It is thought that there is approximately a 3-year work plan concerning this piece of work and establishing a starting point is important.
- It was noted that setting expectations which can be achieved is also important as is the importance around accessible services and inclusivity.
- The industry standard framework standards in the report were referred to and Members were asked to explore which ones would be best to adapt moving forwards. It was explained that there is the hope to use the self-assessment tool to provide feedback to Members at the next meeting.
- Members were also asked for their suggestions to collate 'Postcards from the Future'.
- It was explained that benchmarking is taking place from work with other authorities including Birmingham, Leeds and Cardiff. It was stated that compliments are being captured and recorded where possible.
- It was stated that a web chat feature is on the verge of being released which will hopefully reduce volumes of calls and queries. Other web chat features and functionality are also being explored.
- Members were welcomed to come and listen in at the contact centre to get a feel for what is said.
- The ripple of effects of the pandemic were explained.

7.7 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- a. Set some overarching principles about how customers are treated in initial phases.

- b. Look at targeted work in key areas of concerns with the highest level of issues.
- c. (i) Specific Members to work with officers prior to the next meeting to formulate a report ready for the next meeting.  
(ii) Alice Nicholson to arrange a session for Members and officers.

## **8. DRAFT WORK PLAN**

8.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer on the Draft Work Plan.

8.2 Present for this item was Alice Nicholson (Policy and Improvement Officer). The report contained information on the work plan of the Committee, that has included the Future Approach to Priority Budgeting, Customer Experience and Performance Management.

It was suggested that the Committee continues doing some more work in relation to customer service standards and expectations as a workgroup and that this be the core agenda item for the 10<sup>th</sup> March meeting.

8.3 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:-

Continue with the work around customer service standards and expectations, and this be brought to the last meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> March for consideration.