

1. Background and Context

Customers in all their guises are the primary reason we all work in public service, whether that be on an individual experience level or accumulative impacts across groups and communities. Yet resoundingly the quality and / or timeliness of customer contact is all too often not good enough and, in some areas, a significant issue. This is seen in our performance data but also the increasing voice and challenge of elected members.

Building on the work of the Committee this report sets out what the key workstreams of activity will be to shape a fundamentally better offer to customers and some recommendations. These recommendations will be fed into the Strategic Review of Customer Experience but also form the basis of the handover from Cllr Dawn Dale as chair of the Our Council transitional committee and the Committee Chair in the Committee System following May's elections.

Through an unprecedented degree of change and financial pressure we need to ensure that through these very difficult months that what comes through is a renewed and cross council commitment to our customers.

The Council's customer base is broad and should be thought of in distinctly different groups.

- Universal customers (waste management, council tax, voters)
- Key customer groups (tenants, job applicants, residents receiving social care services, parents)
- Customers who experience barriers in how they can access Council Services
- Customers who we identify (where we assess or determine via enforcement)
- Internal customers – how we work together for our customers

We will use insight to understand our customers and the challenges they face. Our services will be well designed and developed using innovative technologies and delivered in a way that meets our customer needs and enhances *their* experience of dealing with us.

In addition to the public meetings of the Our Council Transitional Committee representatives of the committee have met with officers to do detailed workshops style activity for further shape the approach and recommendations. These were held on the 3rd, 18th and 25th of February.

2. Considerations

Finance

There are no financial savings identified for 22/23 linked to the Strategic Review. Being financially sustainable in the future however demands that duplication, waste, and inefficiency is removed, and all customer journeys meet the Good Service Guide criteria and are subject to continuous improvement.

Lessons Learnt and building on strengths

Our Council Transitional Committee – Strategic Review – Customer Focus

Customer Experience Programme was paused earlier in 2021. Evaluation of this has been done and although there were significant strengths as well as learning the programme did not deliver the ambition it embodied. Large scale delivery has not delivered the required outcomes.

LGA Peer Review finding;

‘Multiple well-intentioned efforts to address the challenges have been undertaken over the years but not had the desired outcome. For SCC to make meaningful inroads it will require a dedicated focus, organisational buy-in, culture change and investment – of both time and resources – to break down siloed approach to customers and transform services’

What comes next must build on the lessons learnt and the detailed insight gathered – but move forward at pace. The customer insight, areas of improvement already developed have been built into this review approach to make sure we use everything that is helpful from previous work. There are many strengths which can be read in the LGA Peer Review findings – **appendix 1**

Members have throughout their challenge to senior officers to make improvements been clear in the recognition and admiration of frontline staff and colleagues working hard to make things better. Improvements are at a system level across services and improvements should also make the day-to-day experience of staff better.

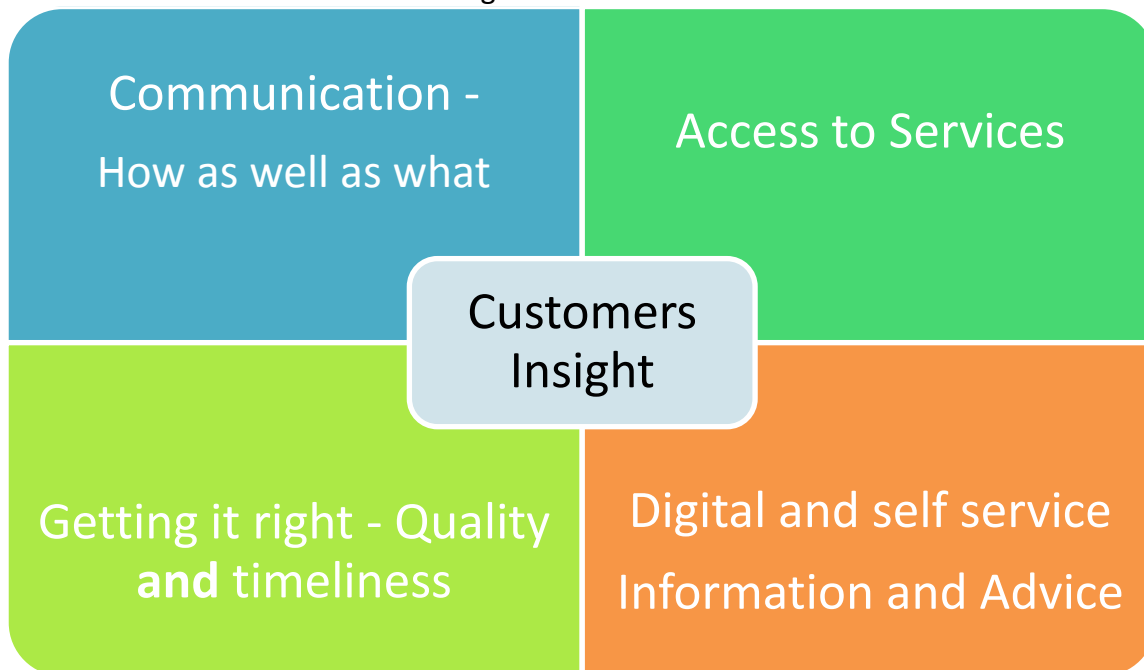
3. Approach

LGA Peer review sets out the elements which together create a Customer Service Ethos.

- Clear standards: For everyone to work to supported by performance measures and Business Information
- Staffing: Recruited, trained, and supported to deliver excellent customer service who have the autonomy and authority to make decisions when dealing with customers
- Technology tools and solutions: IT and telephony designed to support staff do their job, and meet customer needs
- Customer Insight: An understanding of and engagement with customers to design user friendly services
- User designed: Access to user designed services including online, for those customers who are happy to use them

These elements are broadly understood across SCC but it helpfully provides a clear checklist that should be used across all of the work programme to make sure efforts are holistic and customer focused. Full details can be found in **appendix 1 – LGA Peer Review**

The Committee have outside of the public meeting considered a range of evidence from officers and customers, this work has driven the recommendations at the end of this report.



4. Governance

Customer at the heart of what we do requires a shift in approach and the governance should reflect that. Standing up specific governance to guide this work positions this as something with a start and finish point, when what is needed is that it is what we all do – all the time.

Director of Customer Services and HR cannot make this shift happen alone, accountability and responsibility has to sit with everyone.

LGA Peer Review recommends work in this area should be underpinned by;

- **Organisational leadership: Senior officer and member ownership**
- **Governance arrangements: To support, oversee, monitor and scrutinise customer service**

A governance approach that reflects the need to build in a continuous improvement element as well as a programme of change activity to shape the organisational culture and commitment to working together for customers. This includes linking to other pieces of change delivery as well as delivering the work of the review.

The subgroup of the committee (who met on the 18th and 25th of February) offered feedback and input into the proposed governance approach. Most importantly recognising that some things need to get better now and other things will take longer. This group welcomed the Customer Panel which is being created as a good way to continue to capture customer voice.

4. Dependencies / Constraints

Our Council Transitional Committee – Strategic Review – Customer Focus

This Strategic Review will make it easier for customers to identify solutions for themselves but get assistance easily if it is needed. Doing this has some dependencies that will need to be managed.

- Web Platform and web form projects – making our web offer a better combination of well-designed customer journeys and a high-quality source of advice and information to reduce the need for customers to contact us.
- Automation – being more efficient will allow us to put our resources where it matters the most. The capacity to deliver automation is limited and needs to be prioritised across a range of workstream including Customer.
- Project resource will be needed as the work progresses and needs to be planned so that the resources are used in a targeted and effective way.

5. Closing recommendations and findings of the Our Council Transitional Committee

Realising the ambition of members as set out in the One Year Plan over the coming short, medium and long term has been shaped by the work of our Council transitional Committee. As we create the internal mechanism to deliver this programme of work the final Our Council meeting should note that work from this point on is based on the ambition and direction set out by the committee.

In future months and years this review will be overseen in the Committee System which comes into place following the May elections. The way this committee has worked with officers has shown the value of working in a different way to achieve a positive outcome for customers, but particularly those who need us the most.

It has been important to members and officers alike to recognise the hard work of our frontline staff. Challenging the Council to do more is not about those individuals.

Our Council Transitional Committee recommends that;

- Identify a way of working across the Strategic Review that builds on strengths, builds in the LGA Peer review findings and brings internal stakeholders together but puts **customers first – every time**.
- Reduce the need to make contact through good service delivery and design – **Good Service Guide approach (appendix 3)**
- Make good advice and guidance easily available – **self-service and self-assessment**
- Make commitments to customers about what they can expect and then deliver it – **Customer Charter, Strategy and Vision**
- Support customers who prefer one channel over another, digital first but alternatives must be effective
- All services must be accessible to everyone – **remove barriers and challenge assumptions**
- Continue to recognise the contribution of frontline staff, all members are recommended to take part in **'back to the floor'** sessions to allow them to hear first-hand the issues of customers and the skills of our staff.

Our Council Transitional Committee – Strategic Review – Customer Focus

- Use performance management and benchmarking to establish what good looks like including consideration of adoption of a standards framework– **customer service excellence**
- Develop shared ownership and joint working to achieve seamless outcomes for customers – **one council**
- Provide members with a periodic report of issues and feedback of the Customer Panel – **keep listening**

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