

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES**

<b>TO:</b>	POLICY COMMITTEE		
<b>DATE:</b>	20 JANUARY 2020		
<b>TITLE:</b>	CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY		
<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	CLLR EMBERSON	<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	CORPORATE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
<b>SERVICE:</b>	CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICES	<b>WARDS:</b>	BOROUGHWIDE
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**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to present the new Customer Experience Strategy and the business case and mobilisation underpinning the implementation of the Customer Experience Strategy. The strategy and the implementation plan sets out how the council will embed the Strategy and move to a Customer Fulfilment (CF) Model of Customer Service delivery.
- 1.2 The Customer Experience Strategy (2020-2024) sets out an ambitious and customer focussed programme of transformation for delivery of frontline customer services, defining best practice and a new operational model. Implementation of the Strategy will enable the Council to develop and embed an exemplar Customer Service, be at the vanguard of innovative thinking around digitisation and data and make efficiencies to support the MTFS.
- 1.3 This report and appendices sets out the information to support a decision to approve the Strategy, mobilisation plan and the placeholder for the capital bid (Customer Digital Experience) which provides the funding for a 4-year programme of digitisation and implementing the customer services model.
- 1.4 Appendices:  
1: Customer Experience Strategy  
2: Business case and mobilisation plan  
3: Customer Digital Experience capital bid business case  
4: Equality Impact Assessment

**2. RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- 2.1 *Endorse and adopt the Customer Experience Strategy, mobilisation plan and programme to embed the Strategy within the organisation.*

**3. THE PROPOSAL**

**3.1 The Current Position**

- 3.2 The existing digital and IT strategy, that includes a focus on Customer Services channel shift strategy has expired. A number of key improvements have been implemented as a result of this strategy including an increase in online transactional services, text messaging services and a 'right first time' approach to resolution of customer enquiries in a number of key service areas such as Adult Social care, Registrars and Council tax services. However there remains a significant gap in delivering best practise customer service delivery across all areas of the Council.
- 3.3 Customer contact has in part been consolidated into the Customer Hub, Contact Centre and corporate website. However this is not true of all services. We currently have technical/specialist resource delivering simple and supported customer transactions outside of the Customer Contact function as part of a 'back office function'.
- 3.4 The Contact Centre team currently holds joint awards of the Customer Contact Association (CCA) and Customer Service Excellence (CSE) where we achieved a Silver Award this year. This is because the working practices adopted are considered to be best practice, standards are clear and measures are in place to assess satisfaction and ensure we operate to our published standards.
- 3.5 There remains many 'customer service' that do not operate within the Customer Contact Centre. We often transfer customers from the front-end customer service operator to a 'back office' team when all they require is simple transactional support or signposting. This creates a delay for the customer; their experience is not consistent and can mean issues are not resolved first time round - resulting in the customer contacting us again seeking a solution.
- 3.6 The view of our customers is fragmented across the organisation. We sometimes fail to recognise that any one person can be a customer of multiple services across the Council. We have varying standards of delivery and we are inconsistent in how we measure the service we provide.
- 3.7 Furthermore the current model of customer service delivery means we do not understand or manage the customer journey across a wide range of council services. We do not measure or have sight off the interactions our customers have with other back office teams such as tenants services, parking, bus lane enforcements, green waste collections, empty properties and housing advice as these are not reported on in the same way as our Customer Contact Services.
- 3.8 Other areas of the Council often operate to different customer service standards, with different telephone opening times, resolution times, and multiple telephone numbers. This creates confusion for our customers and a different fragmented customer experience.

## **4 Options Proposed**

- 4.1 The Customer Experience Strategy is built on a best practice approach to delivering customers services in both the public and private sector, a number of Councils have already adopted this model such as Oxford City Council and Aylesbury Vale District Council. Others such as Hampshire have adopted the same model however it is delivered though a contract.
- 4.2 The strategy sets out our vision to achieve the best possible experience for our customers, whoever they are (residents, businesses, partners or suppliers) and whenever they deal with us. It also sets out our plan to get there by putting customers at the heart of everything we do. The strategy includes a high-level roadmap of transformation over the next 4 years.

- 4.3 The strategy will be delivered in a phased manner and the mobilisation plan sets out key and core activities to support the implementation of the strategy and covers phase one of the programme to the end of 2020/21.
- 4.4 Inevitably there will be valuable learning from the first phase which will be factored in to the proposals for future phases which will be presented back to CMT/Members in approximately 12 to 18 months' time following a lift and shift process of customer facing teams and business process engineering.
- 4.5 Underpinning the Customer Experience vision are six core themes that are outlined fully in the strategy:
- Achieving Customer Service Excellence
  - Adopting a mindset and promise
  - Involving the organisation
  - Putting the customer at the heart of service and process design
  - Harnessing digital technology
  - Realising the power of data.
- 4.6 The strategy and mobilisation plan outlines the new operating model. Moving to this model will mean that self-service becomes the primary channel for our customers to interact with us. High volume transactional, processing and assessment services will be brought together and managed in one place within the Council. Moving to a self serve model, allows us to prioritise our resource on customers that require additional support.
- 4.7 This model of delivery will ensure that our customers engage with us at the most appropriate point to support their need. We will analyse all our transactional service delivery functions and profile this against the 4 tiers of customer service delivery. By bringing these transactional and fulfilment functions together into one operational service, means that our technical specialists can be refocussed on delivery of services to meet the more complex needs of our customers.
- 4.8 Phase 1 of the mobilisation plan covers the foundational projects required to deliver future strategic and visionary elements including but not exclusively:
- Implement customer culture change programme
  - Move to one telephone number
  - Implement new core service standards across business
  - Implement KPIs across business
  - Implement the new operating model - including business process re-engineering
  - Pilot of virtual processing agents
  - Define primary digital enabling elements
  - Data strategy and tactical deployment
- 4.9 The mobilisation plan remains high level at this stage. The final implementation plan will be co-designed with service areas as part of the initial discovery phase of the programme. Therefore scope remains to shape and develop our approach in accordance with business need.

## 5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The Customer Experience Strategy aligns to our corporate priority “Ensuring the Council is fit for the future, with its drivers aiming to ensure:

*Our customers will be able to connect with us at the time and place they choose. They will only need to tell us once and will be confident that we will get it right first time. Every interaction will be a positive experience: better, faster, simpler*

- 5.2 The strategy is also aligned to the TEAM Reading Culture and has informed our strategy and approach to serving our customers:

T : We will work Together: A whole organisation approach

E : We will drive Efficiency: Adopting new technology and streamlining processes

A : We will be Ambitious: Adopting stretch target across all our customer facing services

M : We will Make a Difference: Ensuring our customers have a positive experience and their needs are met

- 5.3 Our ‘whole organisation’ approach, will ensure we embed consistent behaviours and measures of success, and we will evaluate our performance across all customer facing teams. We will design our services to meet the needs of customers and make the best use of new technology. This will help us reduce the cost of delivering services and allow us to focus even more on customers with complex needs.

## 6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 Workstreams within the wider strategy will benefit from community engagement and benchmarking against accessibility. This is specifically relevant to the digital enabling elements relating to the digital user experience and we will build into the programme user testing groups to ensure we are responding to their feedback. The council is also working with the Shaw Trust to ensure all new and existing online functionality meets the governments accessibility criteria.

## 7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An equality impact has been completed for the overarching strategy. The strategy is designed to be inclusive and recognises that not all customers are able to self serve.

- 7.2 Where customers need additional support or resources to interact with the council the strategy aims to create the capacity within the organisation to effectively respond to these needs, by joining up and simplifying the customer journey. Bringing together our multiple customer service teams into one, highly-skilled Customer Fulfilment Team, will mean frontline staff will be equipped to deal with a range of issues, by extending and expanding the scope of the current customer service offer and ensuring our ‘technical experts and specialist’ staff are focussed on delivering complex services.

- 7.3 We have an annual subscription service with the Shaw Trust to ensure digital accessibility remains front and centre of the strategy to ensure everyone, regardless of their skills, abilities or disabilities, can access information, technology, products and services, often using assistive technology. The Shaw Trust digital testing team will provide technical support and consultancy in this area and will monitor our online service on a monthly basis to ensure we maintain accessibility as we expand and refine our digital offer.

- 7.2 For those customers that are not able to use online services there are processes in place to provide assistance to these customers. This includes; face to face support at our Customer Hub at the Civic Centre, 9-5 telephone support; self-service computers

available at the civic centre and libraries across the borough and Communicare, a local advice agency provide practical support to help people complete on-line forms.

## 8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 *None*

## 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The business case sets out the methodology and modelled costs for the implementation of the Customer Experience Strategy.

9.2 The table below shows the totality of capital and delivery fund costs and the known revenue implications

	%	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	Total
		£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Budget of Capital Programme			750	1,000	750		2,500
Cost of Capital Programme	6		45	60	45		150
Delivery Funding already approved		120	120	240			480
Revenue costs		100					100
Savings generated for GF			(132)	(132)	(132)	(185)	(581)
<b>Total Cost to the Council</b>		<b>220</b>	<b>783</b>	<b>1,168</b>	<b>663</b>	<b>(185)</b>	<b>2,649</b>
Return on investment							18%

9.3 All digital enabling elements are included within the Customer Digital Experience capital bid of £2.5m. The details and spec of each digital element will be defined during the discovery phase, and business cases will be brought forward to the Digital Futures Board, for sign off and to ensure alignment to the other IT strategies emerging. Revenue implications for each business case will be better understood at that time and will be assessed for value for money.