

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 28 APRIL 2015****REPORT OF: MRS HELYN CLACK, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES****LEAD OFFICER: YVONNE REES, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITIES****SUBJECT: CUSTOMER PROMISE – THE COUNCIL’S COMMITMENT TO DELIVERING EXCELLENT SERVICE****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

On 10 February 2015 County Council approved the Corporate Strategy and agreed that focusing on ‘Resident Experience’ is one of the organisation’s three strategic goals.

To better define Resident Experience the Council conducted research including speaking to staff, Members and customers about what they thought were the most important principles behind excellent customer service.

The research and feedback has been used to create the Council’s new Customer Promise which will be used as a framework to improve Resident Experience.

This paper presents the new Customer Promise and sets out the steps the Council will take to embed the Customer Promise into the organisation to improve Resident Experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Cabinet endorses the new Customer Promise and the proposed steps to embed it into the organisation to improve ‘Resident Experience’.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

To maintain and improve customer service across the Council for the benefit of Surrey residents.

DETAILS:**Research**

1. The Council’s Customer Services team spoke to people at roadshows and in workshops, and conducted an online poll which received 1,136 responses and 240 comments.
2. The following four principles emerged as being most important to people:
 - Treating people in the right way

- Making it easy
 - Keeping people informed
 - Getting it right
3. These principles have been used to create the new Customer Promise. The Council has confidence that these are the right principles to focus on because they reflect the conclusions of other studies into the key drivers of customer satisfaction in the public sector, such as:
- ‘What do people want, need and expect from public services?’ Ipsos MORI (2010).
 - ‘The Customer Service Excellence standard’ Cabinet Office (2008).

Embedding the Customer Promise to improve Resident Experience

4. The following steps will be taken to embed the Customer Promise into the organisation’s culture and processes:

Leadership

5. Strong leadership is critical to creating a customer-focused culture. Leaders in the Council will be asked to communicate the importance of the Customer Promise, role model the required behaviour and ensure there are plans in place to improve customer experience.

Employee Engagement

6. It is essential for managers at all levels of the organisation to champion the Customer Promise. Managers must articulate how it relates to people’s roles and support their teams so that everyone in the Council feels ownership of the Customer Promise.
7. This engagement will be achieved through such initiatives as the organisation’s ‘Employee Engagement Campaign’ where managers will be asked to actively promote and participate in creating a customer-focused culture.

Systems and standards

8. The principles in the Customer Promise must be underpinned by effective systems and clear service standards. To fulfil the commitment to being responsive the Council will undertake a comprehensive review of its telephone policy. This review will look at how voicemail is used and how well teams respond to calls.
9. The Council’s Customer Service team is currently working with a number of the Council’s Services to achieve and maintain the Government’s ‘Customer Service Excellence’ standard which is a well established and proven approach designed to improve customer service standards.
10. It is important that the Customer Promise extends to those services which are not directly managed by the Council. The Council will therefore ensure that the appropriate standards are built into the Council’s commissioning processes.

Recruitment, induction and training

11. The recruitment process will be reviewed to ensure that competency based questions which reflect the commitments in the Customer Promise are included at interview.
12. An introduction to the Customer Promise will be built into the induction process and will form the foundation for all customer service training.

Reward and recognition

13. It is very important that managers value and recognise the right behaviours. To support managers in doing this, customer-focused competencies will be built into the staff appraisal system.

Measuring success

14. The following methods will help us measure success and drive improvement:
 - The Council's quarterly resident survey.
 - Feedback measures at the point of customer interaction.
 - A decrease in complaint escalation and a decrease in avoidable complaints, such as those resulting from staff behaviour.
 - Changes in customer behaviour (e.g. increasing use of self-service).

CONSULTATION:

15. Staff, Members and customers have all contributed toward the development of the Customer Promise.
16. The following groups have reviewed and support the Customer Promise and the proposed steps to embed it into the organisation:
 - Continual Improvement and Productivity Network (23 February 2015)
 - Communities Select Committee (19 March 2015). The Communities Select Committee requested an amendment to the wording of the Customer Promise which has been made
 - People, Performance and Development Committee (2 April 2015)

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

17. Failure to improve resident experience may cause the Council reputational damage.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

18. Embedding the Customer Promise into the organisation does not have any budget implications at this stage beyond the current agreed revenue budget. Any further budget implications will be considered in relation to any more detailed and specific proposals that stem from the overall Customer Promise.
19. It is expected that improved customer service will reduce cost as unnecessary customer contact will be avoided, self-service will be made easier, and

principles such as 'getting it right first time' will improve efficiency and reduce complaint escalation.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

20. There are no financial implications outside existing budgets as a result of this proposal at this stage. Any longer term implications, if relevant, will be incorporated into future budget planning at the appropriate time.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

21. There are no legal implications at this stage.

Equalities and Diversity

22. The Customer Promise sets out commitments that have positive implications for all residents, including protected groups. An equality impact assessment has not been completed at this stage as there are no expected negative impacts on residents and staff with protected characteristics.
23. Any equalities implications will continue to be considered in relation to any more detailed proposals that stem from the overall Customer Promise.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

- The Customer Promise will be published on the Council's website.
- The Council's Customer Services team will progress the activities described in this report to embed the Customer Promise into the organisation.
- Select Committees will scrutinise work and performance.

Contact Officer:

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Consulted:

Staff, Members and Customers

Continual Improvement and Productivity Network (23 February 2015)

People, Performance and Development Committee (2 April 2015)

Communities Select Committee (19 March 2015)

Annexes:

Annex 1: Surrey County Council's Customer Promise

Sources/background papers:

- The Government's 'Customer Service Excellence standard (2008).
 - What do people want, need and expect from public services? Ipsos MORI (2010).
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