

CABINET- 23 FEBRUARY 2021

CABINET RESPONSE TO THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TASK GROUP REPORT

Recommendations:

1. The Task Group recommends:

- a) **Changing the manner in which the Council conducts budget consultation with residents.** It is, however, recognised that responsibility for consultations does not fall under the remit of Customer Services.

Potential changes include:

- Using a multiple-choice format;
 - Providing residents with detail and information so their response to a consultation is more informed
 - Using an approach that is deliberative in nature so that residents can give reasoning and opinion that can add context to their responses Clearly differentiating between statutory and non-statutory services; and
 - As appropriate, employing an approach that will engage with a wide section of residents as is practical and not just those who are interested in its outcome
- b) **Distinguishing between open ended (all options open) and closed consultations for other consultations undertaken by the Council.** There was a need to:
- Ensure each consultation is clear about its aims and objectives and that respondents understand what can (and can't) be influenced by completing it Use a combination of two types of consultations which includes quantitative questions (e.g. multiple-choice format) and qualitative (e.g. open ended questions), providing relevant background information in an accessible format to inform respondents and set the scene; and Organise an ad-hoc private meeting of Members or to use relevant select committees for pre-scrutiny of public consultation, using expert advice to look at how consultation questions are formulated, types of questions asked and whether questions are pertinent and open-ended where appropriate, before they are put to residents, partners and stakeholders.
- c) **Consolidating training on Customer Services offered to Members** by Democratic Services, including training on the uses of the Members' enquiry inbox while continuing with the current training provided to Members.
- d) **Undertaking deep-dive benchmarking in Customer Services beyond the work of the Task Group and existing benchmarking exercises** in collaboration with a statistically similar Local Authority, such as Hertfordshire.

- e) **Maximise the use of existing feedback mechanisms operated by Customer Services** to actively demonstrate to residents that the Council takes their opinions on board.
- f) **Ensuring that digital avenues** (for example, using YouTube videos to explain reporting procedures; Members using the Members' enquiries email address) are publicised and utilised in Customer Services wherever possible.
- g) **Ensuring sufficient publicity and awareness amongst residents** about the Customer Services pathways to access, and actively signposting residents to these.
- h) **Organising visits to the Contact Centre for all Members, as part of the induction process after the May elections.**
- i) **Scrutinising the Customer Experience during the Covid-19 pandemic** and the social transformation that it has effected.
- j) **Assessing the desirability of a further review in two years** in the light of advances in digital technology, the implementation of new services such as the Learners' Single Point of Access, progress with the Customer Experience Transformation Programme and to keep up with best practice.

Mr Nick Harrison
Chairman of the Customer Experience Task Group and the Resources and Performance Select Committee

Response:

I welcome the recommendations from the members of the Customer Experience Task Group and appreciate the time they took to learn more about the fantastic work undertaken, both by our Customer Services Team and those involved across the Council in the important task of gathering the views and opinions of residents through our consultation processes. Regrettably, the work of the Task Group was cut short by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this once again highlighted how vital it is that we have a strong customer ethos as an organisation. Our Customer Services team were able to do what they do best and quickly step up to support the most vulnerable in our local communities through setting up and operating the Community Helpline, undertaking local contact tracing and, most recently, responding to a high volume of resident enquiries about surge testing. All of this has been achieved whilst still continuing the day-to-day business of making sure our residents are able to easily access vital services and receive the right information, help and support.

These recommendations will feed into an exciting programme of work we are currently undertaking around reshaping the customer experience to meet the ambitions set out in our organisation strategy in order to deliver the 2030 Vision. Every time a customer interacts with us, it shapes both their experience and their opinion of us as a Council. We want to improve this experience by being more efficient, proactive and connected in our approach, accelerating our use of advanced digital technology to provide 24/7 online self-service for key services and, fundamentally, making it simpler for people to find information and access our services when they need to. This will reduce duplication, delays and multiple hand-offs between teams, which can often be a source of frustration for our customers. It will also help us get things right first time more often, shape demand for services by providing advice and information at an early

stage, support people to be independent and make informed choices, as well as deliver the right kind of experience for our customers based on their needs. Learning from other organisations around innovative delivery of Customer Services is helping refine our own approach.

Engaging in meaningful consultations with residents, where their views are heard and can make a difference, is an important part of our role as a public authority. Task Group members have made some valuable observations around the consultation process, which will be reviewed and reflected upon to identify opportunities to build on existing practice, so that we can continually improve our approach.

Finally, I was delighted to see that Task Group members expressed an interest in Customer Services training and visiting the contact centre. I can confirm that this type of training is being included as part of the induction process for new Councillors and I would encourage all members to learn more about the work of our Customer Services team and our future ambitions. There is also an open invite to visit the team once it is safe and they have settled into their new home in the Dakota Building in Weybridge.

Reply from Mr Mark Nuti
Cabinet Member for Communities
23 February 2021

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