

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TASK GROUP** held at 10.30 am on 3 April 2020 at REMOTE MEETING.

**Elected Members:**

- \* Mr Will Forster
- \* Mr Bob Gardner
- \* Mr Nick Harrison
- Mr Chris Townsend
- \* Mr Richard Walsh

Members: Will Forster (WF), Bob Gardner (BG), Nick Harrison (NH),  
Richard Walsh (RW)

Officers: Clive Mentzel (CM)

**1 RESIDENTS' SURVEY MEETING, 2 MARCH 2020 [Item 1]**

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. WF outlined the potential recommendations that he formulated, which were circulated in an email prior to this meeting. NH invited comments on these.
2. RW asked exactly how the budget consultation with residents, as mentioned in WF's potential recommendations, would be done. The Council should make choices in a succinct way that the public would appreciate and understand. WF responded that this point was about using processes to obtain survey data.
3. Budget consultation gave residents some choice and the ability to weigh up pros and cons. The Task Group was looking at the Council going down this route.
4. Members emphasised that as part of resident budget consultation it was important to give respondents options and information. Asking residents what they wanted the budget to be without any specific options was not helpful as answers could be lacking in direction. It was also deemed important to differentiate between statutory services, where there may be minimum levels of spending, and non-statutory services.
5. NH mentioned a residents' consultation he had encountered at another Local Authority (LA) in the past, which had a format whereby respondents had to provide their top three areas or preferences for the Council. He was of the opinion that this was a good format to consider.
6. BG said that Surrey County Council had conducted research in the past where they asked a panel of residents to allocate a sum of money to services, which made residents realise the difficult choices when it came to the budget. However, as residents could struggle to find a solution without the broader context and background about where to allocate funds, this sort of consultation may not be very useful, as it may not provide answers.
7. RW remarked that consulting with residents using methods beyond the survey could be difficult as certain group, for example, Councillors and others who had contact with the Council, could have their own vested interests and political considerations.
8. NH reflected that it would be useful to ask residents the reasons for their opinions on the budget. This would provide a range of opinions, be more instructive and hopefully provide some guidance on what could make residents change their minds. However, BG was wary

about giving residents the option to say they wanted no council tax at all.

9. BG noted that it would be useful to compare Surrey's Residents' Survey response rates with those of Hertfordshire, being a statistically similar LA. WF reminded Members that with comparisons of this sort, it was important to not just compare with a statistically similar LA, but also a LA with a similar method of survey, as these varied widely.
10. NH summarised that there should be public consultation in two forms – a general survey, together with a more structured survey that used in-depth questions and answers. This could be borne in mind as a potential recommendation of the Task Group.

## **2 MEMBERS' ENQUIRIES [Item 2]**

### **Witnesses:**

Rachel Basham, Member Services Manager

### **Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. CM said that following the Contact Centre visit he had spoken with the Member Services Manager about the initiatives she was taking, and had circulated a paper written by the Member Services Manager on this topic prior to this meeting.
2. The Member Services Manager expressed hope that the recommendations of the Task Group might support the work that she was doing on Member interaction and training with Customer Services. The Leader of the Council had asked for work to be initiated on improving a joined-up approach between Democratic Services and Customer Services, to ensure that Customer Services provided quick, good quality responses to Members' enquiries. The Member Services Manager met with the Customer Relations and Service Improvement Manager monthly to receive performance info, and would report this to Members every six months.
3. Around half of Members never used the councillors' customer service hotline. There was a need for training for Members, as many Members were not confident in using the online self-serve reporting tool. The Member Services Manager was working with Customer Services on developing a training course on this and hoped to roll out a pilot in summer 2020.
4. Work would be done on the quality of responses that Members received through dip-testing.
5. It was important to acknowledge that there was pressure on Customer Services at the moment because of Covid-19. A new inbox for Members' Covid-19 related enquiries had been set up; it had a 24-hour turnaround and was a collaboration between Democratic Services and Customer Services.
6. BG responded that he did use the online reporting system to report issues that residents had raised in-person with him. He was of the opinion that guidance for the public was also important, so that they knew that they could report issues online rather than having to report via Members.
7. Also, Members agreed that it would be useful to receive feedback on reporting and on whether each enquiry would be followed up or not. NH remarked that it may be easier to collect this information for online enquiries than telephone enquiries. NH further expressed preference for online enquiries as they provided a more permanent record of the

enquiry, meaning that it might be more likely that enquiries would be followed up and resolved.

8. NH said he had thought that the Customer Services Members' enquiries inbox was only for highways related enquiries, so he had been surprised to learn recently that it was for enquiries relating to all services. The Member Services Manager said it was useful to know this and perhaps efforts should be made to ensure all Members were aware it was not only for highways enquiries.
9. RW said that he used the Members' inbox for all enquiries after discovering it could be used so, and he found it satisfactory. However, the responses came directly from Officers to Members, meaning that these could contain sensitive information and would need to be edited before they could be passed on to residents. Members may therefore need to alter the wording to tailor the reply to the resident.
10. The Member Services Manager assured Members that the Council was keen not to stop or discourage Members from contacting individual Officers.
11. The target for response rates to Members' enquiries was 90% within five working days; currently achievement figures stood at just under 90%.
12. NH requested that the Member Services Manager share the monthly Customer Services reporting with the Task Group. The Member Services Manager agreed to this and added that she would continue to share the six-monthly reporting with all Members.
13. NH mentioned a slideshow he had sent out with screenshots from the online pothole reporting process. He had seen some YouTube videos put together by the Finance team that he found quite effective, and he suggested that a similar video could be created for the pothole process. RW agreed that YouTube videos were an effective way to reach residents, including younger residents, and could be created for a number of topics, such as tree planting, verge enhancement and what it means to become a councillor. The Member Services Manager informed Members that there was already a Becoming a Councillor video on YouTube starring Will Forster, and she would send a link to this video to Task Group Members.

**Actions/further information to be provided:**

1. For the Member Services Manager to share monthly Customer Services reporting with the Task Group;
2. For the Member Services Manager to send to the Task Group a link to the Becoming a Councillor YouTube video.

**3 VISIT TO CONTACT CENTRE, 6 MARCH 2020 [Item 3]**

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. NH mentioned the low uptake of customer contact surveys, which were offered to customers on the phone after they had made an enquiry. Low uptake for this type of survey was common; however, it could be more effective to conduct a phone survey a day or so after the enquiry. It would be good to attain feedback for Customer Services this way. BG added that taking residents' feedback on Customer Services was a good thing as it showed that the Council took their enquiries seriously. NH suggested that this could be considered as a recommendation of the Task Group.

2. NH praised the staff and the level of engagement that Task Group Members had witnessed at their visit to the Contact Centre. He asserted that it would be useful for all Members to visit, even if they had visited before some years ago, and perhaps this could be organised. RW agreed and added that the most fascinating part of the visit was listening in on customers' calls. NH said that he listened for 45 minutes or so during the visit, and was also impressed by staff's response to calls, and residents' reasonable and positive demeanour on calls.
3. At the Contact Centre, NH observed that even in a case when an Officer could not give a conclusive answer to a customer's query, the Officer gave practical advice and the customer had a positive response.
4. NH asked what the situation was with following up on information outstanding on the Residents' Survey as actions from the Task Group's 2 March meeting, and from Customer Services on contact details for benchmarking visits to District and Borough customer service centres. Members were informed that this would be followed up when the relevant Officers were less busy with the Covid-19 response.
5. RW noted that the Task Group should consider the Covid-19 virus and where things would be in three to six months' time. For the customer services benchmarking visits, he considered it preferable to visit other LAs in-person rather than remotely in order to grasp the 'flavour' of their customer services, not just the bare facts. It was important for the Task Group to discuss the next six months to a year and how meetings would fit within this timescale. Members and CM agreed that it would not be practical to visit any other LAs in the next six months, nor would now be the right time to send surveys to other LAs, as they would be occupied with the Covid-19 response.
6. Members agreed that a visit to Hertfordshire would be desirable, due to that LA's statistical similarity with Surrey.
7. NH observed that ways of working in LA customer services would change due to the social transformation effected by the virus, and these changes could also be scrutinised.

**Actions/further information to be provided:**

1. For Democratic Services Officers to follow up on information outstanding from the actions of the Residents' Survey meeting and District and Borough customer services contact details when relevant Officers were less busy with the Covid-19 response.

**4 MEMBERS' SURVEY [Item 4]**

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. NH informed Members that there were 26 responses to the Members' survey.
2. RW remarked that the survey results were pretty much as expected. Even if the number of respondents seemed low (26 out of 81 Members), it was a normal proportion for this sort of survey. However, the Council could look into making this sort of surveys opt-out rather than opt-in to increase uptake.
3. NH said that in the Task Group's report, it could be helpful to highlight the top responses from the survey. However, he does not think that

- the results of the survey are surprising. NH asked Democratic Services Officers to look through the survey and draw out key findings.
4. WF reflected that the Task Group wished to ensure that the report was released by the municipal elections, which had been delayed until May 2021 because of the virus. He asked what the timetable was for the report pre-Covid-19. NH replied that it had been expected that the Task Group's work would be completed by April 2020, but that this deadline had been looking unlikely even before the virus emerged. NH expressed the hope that the Task Group's work could be finished by autumn 2020, but it was noted that December 2020 was a more realistic target for the completion of the Group's work.
  5. NH advised that it would be best to wait until the end of April before contacting Officers with the Task Group's queries and requests.
  6. RW said that the virus would probably peak during the next three months. If the Task Group could make some progress before the end of June then visiting other LAs by autumn 2020 could be considered.

**Actions/further information to be provided:**

1. For Democratic Services Officers to look through the Members' survey and draw out key findings.

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