

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE: COMMUNITIES (CUSTOMER SERVICES)

Purpose of report: To share details of the Cabinet Member for Communities priority areas of work for Customer Services, including strategy and policy developments, and to provide an overview of the budget position and performance.

Introduction:

1. Customer Services is the first point of contact for most Council services, including Adults & Children's Social Care. Last year the service dealt with approx. 200,000 calls, 90,000 emails, 16,000 Blue Badge applications, 18,000 Twitter mentions (via our Customer Services account) and 1,300 customer complaints, in addition to 7 million web visits and over 6,000 live web chats (launched towards the end of the year).
2. The purpose of Customer Services is to provide a consistent, high quality, resident focused experience and to champion and support the delivery of this throughout the organisation. We want our customers to have the best possible experience when they contact us, at a time when demand on our services is increasing and the resources available to us are reducing. This includes proactively informing customers about services and support available in the wider community and online, so that people can help themselves and each other and make informed choices. Use of new technologies will allow us to empower customers to help themselves through self-service, so we can focus on people that need our support the most.

What does the Cabinet Member expect to achieve in 2021/22?

3. Key priorities for 2021/2022 include:
 - a) Successful move to Dakota Building, Brooklands, and adopting a new agile working model for the service - hybrid office/home to maximise collaborative ways of working, create flexibility and retain talented and experienced Customer Services staff.

- b) Embed ongoing response to Covid-19 (Community Helpline and Local Contact Tracing) into daily operational activity in the most proportionate and effective way.
- c) Work in partnership with the Digital Programme to improve the digital customer experience, e.g.
 - Roll out further 'Chatbot' prototypes – a digital assistant for customers using the SCC website.
- d) Maximise use of the Single Point of Access model via Customer Services to free up capacity within key service areas, e.g.
 - Working with services such as Adult Social Care, Registrations and Home to School Transport to re-design and improve both the digital and non-digital customer pathways into the service.
- e) Explore opportunities to change behaviours and create a different kind of relationship with our residents e.g.
 - Promoting digital accessibility & inclusion and delivering customer service skills training for staff and Members.

Performance and Budget

- 4. Customer Services reports regularly on its performance through Corporate KPI reporting and the monthly service-specific performance snapshot. It also benchmarks performance around online uptake with other similar authorities, as well as engaging regularly with industry leaders to challenge practice.
- 5. Customer Services is a key enabler for the delivery of services and financial and non-financial benefits across the Council in support of the Council's corporate priorities of Empowering Communities; Enabling a Greener Future; Tackling Health Inequalities and Growing a Sustainable Economy.
- 6. Customer Services is currently on track to directly deliver £200k of efficiencies, as set out in its 21/22 budget.
- 7. Key achievements to date:
 - a) Successful delivery of Learner's Single Point of Access (L-SPA) – almost 8,000 calls taken to date.
 - b) Award-winning chatbot prototype delivered for School Admissions – 95% satisfaction rate and 3,300 conversations with over 110,00 total interactions between the chatbot and customers since its launch.

- c) Innovative inhouse web redesign delivered for Highways, Ceremonies, Recruitment, the Coroner's Service and Surrey Fire & Rescue to improve the online experience, make it easier to find information and drive-up interest and usage.
- d) Roll-out of live web chat across key areas of the SCC website – an online exchange of messages in real time between a staff member and a website visitor to help a person quickly find the information they need. Currently a 94% satisfaction rate.
- e) Customer Services selected as finalists for two prestigious awards - the UK Customer Satisfaction Awards 2021, run by the Institute of Customer Services, and in the Team of the Year category at the LGC Awards 2021.

Conclusions:

- 8. Customer Services is pursuing an ambitious programme to improve the customer experience for Surrey residents, is a key enabler for the delivery of services and efficiencies across the Council in support of Corporate priorities, and is on track to meet an efficiency target of £200k for this financial year.

Recommendations:

- 9. The Select Committee:
 - a) reviews the information contained in this update and offers feedback to the Cabinet Member.
 - b) considers where it may add value to the Cabinet Member's work through scrutiny and scopes topics as required.

Next steps:

The Cabinet Member to return with a further update at a future formal meeting of the Select Committee.

Report contact

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Sources/background papers

None.

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