



## Policy and Resources Committee

6 January 2020

<b>Title</b>	<b>Customer Strategy update – Improving customer services</b>
<b>Report of</b>	Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Status</b>	Public
<b>Urgent</b>	No
<b>Key</b>	No
<b>Enclosures</b>	Appendix A – Customer Survey key insights, high level plan and target operating model
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### Summary

A motion was passed by Full Council on 30 July that requested Policy and Resources consider;

- (i) ‘...a full programme of improvements with £1,000,000 of investment’ and
- (ii) ‘...a longer-term improvement for customer service’

This report provides an update on the delivery of the council’s customer strategy and seeks agreement to the next phase of the customer transformation programme. This report is not seeking new funding. As set out in section 5.4.4 funding will be drawn down from pre-approved funds, that have been agreed to deliver the customer transformation programme.

The report provides an overview of what has been delivered to date, the resident engagement and insight and key aims of the next phase of improvements.

In summary the next phase of improvements will include:

- a work programme to implement a new integrated customer facing system in Streetscene to improve the end to end customer experience, detail provided in section 1.33
- improvements to act on the resident engagement and feedback provided to date via a customer experience survey and resident focus groups, detail provided in section 1.16
- improving and simplifying correspondence and email confirmations across services to make them easier to understand and clarifying residents expectations with regards next steps within any interaction, detail provided in section 1.32
- the next phase of the programme will be supported by an internal campaign to ensure all staff understand their role in delivering excellent customer service, detail in section 1.41
- it will also look at technical and process integrations to improve the end to end customer experience providing staff and residents with the right information when they need it
- a detailed review of the current contact centre platform to improve stability, automation and integration to service applications improving the resident experience when they call the council, interact online or via social media
- improvements to be prioritised in high-volume services that will provide the biggest opportunity to improve resident satisfaction e.g. Street Scene, Council Tax, Parking and Highways
- improving the customer experience requires a whole organisational response and the next of phase of the programme will work with services across the Council to ensure services are joined up and frontline staff have the data they need to support residents proactively when they contact the Council

## **Officers Recommendations**

- 1. That the committee note the actions being taken by officers to improve customer experience and achievements made to date**
- 2. Agree continuation of the customer transformation programme into the next phase delivering the improvements highlighted in this report**
- 3. Agree the recommendation for the council to sign up to the Local Digital Declaration, detail can be found in section 1.43**
- 4. If committee agree to the overall approach and direction of travel outlined in this report, then the committee endorse the production of a refreshed strategy for publication in 2020**

# 1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

## INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A motion, in the name of Cllr Thomas, was passed by Full Council on 30 July that requested Policy and Resources committee consider a full programme of customer service improvements. This report outlines priorities and a timetable for the next phase of improvements.
- 1.2 Barnet's Customer Transformation Programme (CTP) has recently concluded delivery of phase 2 of the agreed programme of works and this report provides an update on those deliverables.
- 1.3 The CTP was agreed at the Policy and Resources Committee in October 2016 to implement the recommendations of the Customer Access Strategy and began in 2017, with a further update report in May 2017 agreeing further phases to the programme.
- 1.4 An investment of £5.4m was agreed to fund the transformation and delegated authority was agreed to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee to enable delivery of the programme in phases, with payment contingent on successful delivery against milestones. This report provides an update on the deliverables of phase 2 of the programme and outlines priority areas for phase 3, to be delivered within the initial budget approved in 2017.
- 1.5 Over time we have seen changes in behaviour as more people prefer to interact with organisations online and the council, enabled by this programme, has also witnessed changes in customer behaviour. In 2013 the council's contact centre received over 960K phone calls a year compared to just under 500K last year, reducing phone contact by nearly 50%, saving the council c£2m. Customer satisfaction in the contact centre has also increased by 9% since 2015 from 72% to 81% in 2019. This is measured via a survey with residents following their contact with the council, as a combined figure across all methods of contact e.g. phone, website and email.
- 1.6 The delivery of the 'My Account' digital platform on the website in October 2017 was the first major milestone for this programme and set up the infrastructure to deliver further customer improvements and financial benefits for the council.
- 1.7 Phase 2 of the CTP delivered a new website in February 2019, which:
  - made it easier and quicker for customers to complete top tasks and access key information
  - improved and simplified content making the site more relevant to those who use it
  - improved navigation and search functionality making it easier to find the information people need
  - improved the scalability, resilience and security of the new site by moving to an industry leading modern cloud hosted solution (award-winning Amazon Web Services).
- 1.8 As well as the new website, all transactional forms on the site have been upgraded to improve functionality and redesigned to make them more intuitive, for example pre-

populating resident information, if residents have registered for a My Account. Within the account, improvements have been made to include Council Tax account information to enable residents to change and register a new address and advice online if they are moving out of their property, thus removing the need to phone the council or for staff to re-key information into systems manually.

1.9 The ability to send proactive notifications has also been introduced enabling residents to track requests and be provided with status updates, removing the need to chase up progress. To make full use of this functionality there will be a need for further system integration and good data will be critical to ensure updates are accurate, relevant and in real time. Street scene is leading a pilot exploring where we can take advantage of this functionality and early in 2020 there is an aim to begin to proactively contact residents on streets where access has been blocked delaying bin collections. We anticipate in 2020 this functionality will improve as more systems are integrated into the My Account.

1.10 Other digital and customer improvements include;

- the launch in November 2019 of an online booking facility enabling residents to book appointments 24/7 for registering births, notice of marriage and book sports facilities. The ability to book library venue rooms online will go live early in 2020
- a new online Parking solution went live in September 2019 to enable residents to purchase and manage parking permits and vouchers. The new system is easier to use and enables residents to upload documentation directly from a smartphone in a couple of clicks removing the need to post or email proofs. As of November 2019, over 50% of customers have activated their account using the new system
- a new digital offer, for electronic visitor parking vouchers, has been launched and this is being offered alongside printed scratch-card visitor vouchers. Residents will be able to use the vouchers immediately after purchase as there is no physical documentation that needs to be posted. Since launch, in September, 35% of visitor vouchers are now ordered in this way and customers wishing to continue purchasing scratch card vouchers rather than the virtual offering are able to do so
- in April 2019 the Library Service installed a new Library Management System to manage stock and enable a resident account through which books are issued, returned, renewed and reserved and through which new items are purchased. The new system has provided an improved customer interface, which is easier to use and has increased the functionality available. Customers can now join the library and place reservations for items directly from the library catalogue, see electronic items such as e-books, eAudiobooks alongside hard copy resources, reset their PIN without staff intervention and pay charges online. Notifications are now sent to customers, that have registered, to avoid generating late return fines and update when their library card is due to expire or when they have a reservation awaiting collection. The Library Service has also invested in a range of new electronic resources for customers including a collection of local, national and international newspapers and magazines from over 100 countries and in 60 different languages
- there have also been improvements to the council's phone menu system to make it simpler and easier to navigate, reducing the number of options and removing any options that do not provide an opportunity to speak to someone
- new online forms are live to allow professionals (e.g. GP's) and residents to make online referrals to social care direct alongside greater quality assurance and improved updates managing expectations better

- introduction of an automated payment line and online payment facility for Assisted Travel (Blue Badge and Freedom passes) went live in October '19

1.11 A key principle of the improvement initiatives to date has been to engage with both internal teams and our residents to ensure the changes work for them and, where possible, are designed with them. This has been positive in bringing different teams from across the council together and working more collaboratively to resolve issues faced by our residents when accessing services. This will continue into the next phase.

1.12 Although it is still relatively early to measure the full impact of the changes, the indicators below show a positive direction of travel:

- 38%\* increase in visits to the website and an 18%\* increase in use of the top 5 digital forms on the website
- Over 66,000 people have now signed up for a My Account
- there has been an 8%\* reduction in residents needing to call the Council
- the Council's web 'content quality score' has increased to 95% from 67%, prior to the launch of the new website (the national average is 85%)
- Customer satisfaction in phone, email and face to face channels has remained consistent during this period of change

(\* comparison compared Q2 usage for 2018 Vs 2019)

1.13 The council is aware digital is not for all, albeit this is an increasingly smaller proportion of the population. It is important safeguards are in place to ensure nobody is left behind by the digital changes and the council supports those that need additional help. A programme of activity is being designed to implement the council's Digital Inclusion Strategy to reduce the proportion of residents who are digitally excluded and ensure that those that are digitally excluded still have effective, cost efficient ways of accessing council services. Residents' feedback has highlighted lack of skills, equipment or access costs being too high (telephone/broadband subscription) as barriers to engaging online.

1.14 To address these, the council has put in place the following initiatives and continues to engage with residents to understand where to prioritise resources in a meaningful way.

- Various IT training / support initiatives that aim to upskill residents who wish to learn basic IT skills, delivered in libraries
- Initiatives that provide free Wi-Fi and free (limited) use of computers for those who may have limited access otherwise (e.g. libraries, town centres, sheltered housing)
- Customer Advocacy Service (CAS) for customers who are unable to use the internet and need additional help to access council services.
- A new customer service centre has opened in the Council's Colindale building to support residents get online or who cannot access online services or have a more complex support need

1.15 In summary, although good progress has been made, it is clear there is more to be done as results of our recent customer experience survey demonstrate (outlined in section 1.16). The investment made to date in regards the technical infrastructure provides a good platform to work with services to deliver end-to-end process improvements and automation that will further improve the customer experience. The Council now has an excellent opportunity to improve both the customer experience and reduce costs further

and it is important to continue to build on the successes to date and embed a culture of continued customer improvements.

## **RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER INSIGHT**

- 1.16 To ensure the next phase is informed by our residents, businesses and visitors, a customer experience survey was conducted in April and May 2019 to better understand how customers perceive their interactions with the Council. There were over 2000 respondents in total, 92% of whom identified as a Barnet resident when responding. A summary of results and analysis of the survey can be found in appendix a.
- 1.17 When asked to rank what was important when interacting with the Council, the following were considered most important:
- Customers want to have confidence that issues would be dealt with right first time
  - Customers want to transact completely online
  - Customers want confidence that issues will be easy to deal with
  - Customers want the 'safety net' of being able to speak to someone
- 1.18 Online is most often the first port-of-call for customers for simple transactions but where there is an emotional element, a case is being chased and/or re-assurance is sought, customers tend to use the phone. This was demonstrated by the different options customers preferred depending on what they were contacting the council for.
- 1.19 68% of respondents had contacted the Council in the previous 6 months. Of these, 16% had contact in the week preceding the questionnaire and over 90% said they had contact within the last 12 months. A good cross section of ages and geographical areas of the borough were represented.
- 1.20 29% of respondents contacted us to ask us to do something / request a service and 22% to report something. Disappointingly, 7 in 10 contacted us to 'chase something up' or contact the council about a previous enquiry. The main areas of contact among respondents were Street Scene, Revenues & Benefits, Parking and Highways, which accounted for more than 7 in 10 of all the contacts of those who responded to the survey. Improvements in these areas will be prioritised in the next phase.
- 1.21 When respondents were asked to rate statements based on their most recent experience, the scores were unfortunately low and this has provided focus for prioritisation in the next phase. When asked how easy the council was to deal with, the majority, 53% found it hard to deal with the council, to varying degrees, Vs 36% finding it easy. This did improve when people were asked specifically about the website with 44% of respondents finding it easy to use vs 31% difficult.
- 1.22 Through the survey and resident engagement it was clear that many residents are not aware of the online improvements from the previous phases, thus there will be an increased emphasis on awareness of recent online improvements to ensure the full benefits of these changes can be realised.
- 1.23 It should be noted that the timing of the questionnaire provides a good baseline to monitor and track progress but clearly all the benefits of phase 2 will not have been felt by residents completing the questionnaire.

- 1.24 Following the survey, resident engagement sessions have been held to understand the results in greater detail. 3 focus groups were held, in which over 30 residents participated. Barnet is fortunate that residents are actively engaged with the council and these sessions have been invaluable in providing more detail to ensure the interventions taken are targeted to issues that matter most to our residents. We will continue to engage residents as improvements are made. These further insights have helped shape the next phase of improvements and can be summarised as below:
- Good and bad practice was highlighted with issues of inconsistency being raised for those contacting various services.
  - There was acknowledgement that things will not always be perfect but being honest with people to manage their expectations was critical
  - Signposting to other organisations who can help (if not the council) and more support for those acting on behalf of someone else was also important
  - There were a lot of detailed comments and suggestions from residents that will be taken forward and fed back when resolved. There are over 40 smaller improvement initiatives being worked through as a direct result of these sessions
- 1.25 It should be noted that some of the resident feedback from these sessions are relatively easy to fix and work has begun on them, such as improving phone menu systems and correspondence out to residents to reduce jargon making it clear and simple and providing more accurate updates to residents. Due to the success of these sessions the aim is to run similar resident engagements monthly from January 2020.
- 1.26 In addition to the resident survey a detailed analysis of data in regards complaints, members enquiries, reason for contact and feedback where things have gone wrong was carried out. This identified these key areas for improvement:
- Improving transparency with better progress updates preventing the need to chase
  - Ensuring front line staff have the right information to prevent queries being passed around
  - Improving communications and setting clearer expectations with a more honest conversation
  - Improve process failures to ensure we get it right first time
- 1.27 The overriding message is that more needs to be done to improve the experience of our customers and, at a time when financial constraints on the council are increasing, interventions need to be targeted and informed by greater analysis of what is causing greatest customer frustration and thus provide the biggest opportunity for improving satisfaction and reducing costs.

## **CUSTOMER TRANSFORMATION NEXT STEPS**

- 1.28 The first phases of the customer transformation programme have largely focused on improving our online offer to ensure residents can more easily access services online and the initial interaction with the council is improved. Improvements to the 'front door' will continue but in the next phase there will be a greater emphasis on improving the customer's experience of the whole organisation and all the touchpoints a person has with the Council, improving end to end processes and system interfaces. The aim is to

ensure staff have the right information to support residents at first point of contact and then proactively update our residents, reducing the need for people to chase requests or have to make a follow up call.

- 1.29 Customer expectations are increasing, for example the ability to contact an organisation 24 hours a day, seven days a week using the web and social media alongside more flexible and personalised services, all as demand on services continues to grow. This increased expectation and demand coupled with reducing council resources, makes it important that services adapt and become more responsive and agile to transform the customer experience. There will be an emphasis on improved customer insight to inform and shape service delivery and greater engagement with residents to equip the council with the right knowledge and insight to ensure investments can be targeted to best deliver the outcomes our communities need.
- 1.30 Building on the foundations of the early phases and responding to insight gathered, there will be a focus and priority on end to end integration of the customer experience across StreetScene, Council tax, Parking & the Highways service. The data indicates these demonstrated the highest volumes of contact and complaints and thus will make the biggest impact to residents when improving the customer experience.
- 1.31 How we use data transparently and with the trust of our communities is a critical tool to support the end to end experience of our customers. Making better use of data has huge potential to improve people's lives, be it in social care, on our highways or bins through to how we interact and communicate. The programme will be working with these key services to ensure customer data is secure and used to provide a more proactive and personalised service to our residents.
- 1.32 Our residents have told us that correspondence they receive from the Council, be it a letter, email acknowledgement or update is not always clear and can be difficult to understand and without a clear indication of what will happen next or when an enquiry will be resolved (if it cannot be solved straightaway). For example, Council tax letters sent out to residents were often raised in the focus groups as being hard to understand and often led to unnecessary follow up calls. Work has already started to improve these and residents have been involved in workshops informing what is most important and relevant to them. Council tax billing and reminder letters are being prioritised to support annual billing and best practice guidance produced for use across all services will be rolled out. To improve correspondence a new tool will be implemented, which uses artificial intelligence (AI) technology to quickly review and analyse content and informs re-design based on the optimum way people review and process the information.
- 1.33 The next phase of the programme will look at technical and process integrations to improve the customer experience, this will include integration of a new Street Scene system, providing a more robust end to end digital process updating customers proactively and removing the need for callers being passed around teams. Over time the ambition is for real time information to be available online and available when someone calls so they are better informed. This will also help optimise route scheduling to ensure rounds can be completed in a more efficient and timely manner. The enhanced Street Scene customer experience will offer:

- Personalisation of the My Account dashboard by automatically displaying bin collection dates
- proactive notification, including text messaging capabilities, when a bin is not collected, providing customer reasons for non-collection
- notifications when problem reports are resolved, including images of the resolved problem, so customers know when something is resolved
- enable businesses to request a commercial waste agreement online
- enabling images of problems submitted by customers to reach crews, ensuring problems are correctly identified and resolved
- real time updates and ability to message residents proactively, in bulk, to manage demand around exceptional events (e.g. extreme winter weather affecting collection routes)

- 1.34 Greater personalisation by enhancing the MyAccount will be an important part of the next phase. For example, enabling sharing of data to allow customers to validate residency when applying for a parking permit without the need to provide additional documentation, and offering more proactive services e.g. offering library card information when a resident moves into Barnet.
- 1.35 Continued improvements to online services will be important to enable those residents that want to transact online, whilst prioritising the resources in our contact centre to support residents who want to speak to somebody. This may be because an issue is sensitive and/or more complex, or because something has gone wrong or simply because accessing online services is difficult for them
- 1.36 It is recognised that there have been some major issues with the Councils phone system over the summer and residents have experienced issues calling the council. Whilst most of these issues have now been resolved a full review of the telephony system is being undertaken to ensure resilience and technical assurance in the platform to mitigate future problems and the recommendations will inform the next phase of delivery.
- 1.37 Work will be carried out to investigate an improved contact centre platform to improve stability, automation, personalisation and end to end improvements to the customer experience alongside a better join up between services and the multiple ways people contact the Council i.e. somebody needs to talk to multiple services about one issue or they have logged something online but want to check progress over the phone if urgent. By improving data and systems in the contact centre it will be possible to triage callers better to identify where somebody is known to have additional support needs, has told us they cannot get online easily or have contacted the Council before about a similar issue and then route the caller better to the correct team and/or be prioritised as necessary.
- 1.38 The Highway Service, are researching the development of an improved pothole application for public reporting, with a much-improved interface and reporting facility to enable proactive updates to residents and all other stakeholders and the ability to better forecast trends to enable better prioritisation and resource planning. This is currently in a 'proof of concept' stage to fully understand the feasibility of a fuller application being launched in 2020.

- 1.39 As part of the improvement programme the Re. customer service centre will be merged with the main customer contact centre to improve resilience, performance and the overall customer experience with more joined up processes, allowing a single point of contact for residents.
- 1.40 A high-level plan and operating model has been included in the appendix and the following summarises the priority areas for the next phase of customer service improvements:
- the new StreetScene database will be implemented and integrated into the Councils website and contact centre and will be prioritised in the first half of 2020
  - the review of the Councils telephony platforms is being concluded and investigation into an improved solution and implementation will take place mid 2020
  - the correspondence review, of all communication sent out to residents has already begun with Council tax billing, reminders and summons and will roll out across other service throughout 2020
  - a new web insight analytic tool will be implemented early in 2020, which will provide much greater insight into where people use the Councils website but cannot complete their transaction due to something going wrong or struggle to complete a form because it is not intuitive enough, for example. This will enable rapid and continuous improvements to the Councils website
  - further promotion will take place to ensure residents are aware of and fully utilise the investment to date in new digital solutions in Council tax, Parking, Libraries and the other service areas mentioned in the report
  - work will continue across 2020 to improve the customer experience in the MyAccount and provide residents with a single point of access to service information and be provided with more proactive notifications and service statuses
  - On-going resident engagement will ensure changes are prioritised to areas that make the most difference to our residents and staff engagement will aim to develop a customer focused organisation, which works with its residents to co-design services and continually improve the customer experience

## **INTERNAL STAFF CAMPAIGN**

- 1.41 The changes mentioned above will be supported by an internal campaign to ensure all staff understand their role in delivering excellent customer service, in line with the vision for a more collaborative, outward facing, values-led and customer-oriented organisation.
- 1.42 The plan is about making sure that all staff are aware of the standards and expectations our customers have, what they mean to them in their role, and why it is important that we all play a part in delivering an excellent customer experience. The approach will include
- defining and increasing awareness of what is a good customer experience and why it really matters
  - celebrating examples of delivering good customer experience and highlighting the impact where this hasn't been delivered.
  - introducing greater personal accountability for delivering good customer experience

- delivery of refreshed and easier to understand customer service standards and commitments to the delivery of a great customer experience
- ensure the customer service standards are developed both with internal staff and our residents to make them relevant to their needs. These standards will compliment professional standards, such as professional standards for Health and Social care

## **LOCAL DIGITAL DECLARATION AND ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS**

1.43 Gov.uk have set up a Local Government digital service, with a £7.5 million innovation fund which Councils can bid for to support them with regards improving their online offer. Councils sign a declaration to work towards achieving the GDS digital standard; 211 authorities are signatories already. The local digital declaration supports Barnet's ambitions and potentially enables access to funding opportunities, promoting collaboration with other local authorities. Some of the principles that support Barnet's own ambitions are;

- redesign our services around the needs of the people using them
- challenge the technology market to offer the flexible tools and services we need
- joining a public sector digital community enabling sharing of solutions and working collaboratively with other councils
- commitment to designing the best digital services for our residents
- access to free GDS training

Greater detail can be found at <https://localdigital.gov.uk/declaration/> and it is recommended the Council sign up to the public commitments affirming the ambition to be a resident focused organisation fit for a digital age.

1.44 New government regulations in September 2019 require all public-sector websites and mobile apps to meet certain accessibility requirements. This means, our website must be usable by people with impaired vision, motor difficulties, cognitive impairments, learning difficulties, deafness or impaired hearing. To make sure our information and online services are open to all we have:

- carried out an evaluation of how accessible our website is to required accessibility standards
- have fixed or are fixing code and content accessibility issues, the website current accessibility score is 94.2 % in comparison to the local government bench mark of 77.4%. The aim is to achieve 100% compliance by end of January 2020
- in line with the regulation a transparent statement has been published on the Council's website with regards what is accessible, what isn't and what we are doing about it.

## **SUMMARY**

1.45 Improving the customer experience is a process of continual improvement as expectations, needs and opportunities develop and change. Our community is constantly changing and we need to better understand what's happening and adapt. The message from our survey is clear with regards how we need to improve; we need to keep our customers up to date, we need to make it clear what they can expect from us, we

need to resolve things right the first-time and we need to capture and share information better so that they don't need to repeat themselves.

- 1.46 Within the main service areas listed above, analysis suggests 7 in 10 contacts made to the council are potentially linked to the services highlighted in this report and over 50% of contact was generated due to the themed improvement areas listed in section 1.20. This represents a significant opportunity to improve the customer experience in a targeted way while also reducing costs. By prioritising these will ensure we focus on what matters most to our residents demonstrating continuous improvement.
- 1.47 By using data and a greater understanding of our customers' relationships with the council and their community, we can better target our interventions to achieve wider outcomes be they behaviour change, early intervention, greater efficiency and partnership working, better engagement or satisfaction.
- 1.48 We also know from the results our customers want to be able to transact with us primarily online as a preference but will then phone us if something has gone wrong or their issue has not been fully resolved. This presents a good opportunity to save money and also enables prioritisation of staff answering the phone for those who said the option to speak to someone if they need to, is important where the issue is more sensitive or complex.
- 1.49 In summary, duplication of effort and contacts leads to increased costs across the organisation and poorer outcomes for residents. By addressing this we can improve customer satisfaction, as well as deliver efficiencies and savings. Improving the customer experience requires a whole organisational response to enable these ambitions and the improvements highlighted will continue to show progress in this regard.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Although progress has been made in improving customer services and reducing costs, the recent survey and analysis carried out demonstrates further improvement are required and it is a priority of the Council to continue to invest and improve the customer experience across the whole organisation.
- 2.2 Due to the investment made thus far in delivering this programme, it is important to keep up momentum and focus on this area to ensure this investment is maximised both in terms of financial return and ongoing customer benefits.

## **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

- 3.1 None.

## **4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 The council will continue to ensure the improvements highlighted in this report are monitored and will track both the customer and financial benefits enabled by these changes.
- 4.2 The pace of change in digital developments will require a continual focus to ensure the council's website continues to improve, meets resident's expectations and has the flexibility to enable the overall ambition and priorities of the council. A focus on co-

designing changes with residents and businesses to ensure the website works for them in the future will continue to be a key priority and focus.

- 4.3 The improvements outlined in this report will be implemented and investment released to achieve delivery.
- 4.4 To support engagement both with residents and staff a refreshed customer experience strategy will be drafted for approval by committee in 2020.
- 4.5 The Council will be added to the list of signatories for the Local Government Digital Declaration and seek collaboration and funding opportunities for future digital innovation.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

5.2 Barnet's vision in the Corporate Plan is to have re-designed local services that are integrated, intuitive and efficient, making life simpler for residents and customers. The Customer Transformation Programme enables this priority and is enabling contribution to the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

5.3 Improving customer services is highlighted as a key priority for the authority and is a corporate indicator.

### **5.4 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

5.4.1 Policy and resources committee approved an investment of £5.4 million in May 2017 to invest in the required technology and a programme of work to implement the Councils Customer Access Strategy, primarily to improve customer satisfaction.

5.4.2 Delegated authority was provided to chief officers, in consultation, with the committee chairman to implement the programme in a series of phases.

5.4.3 This report provides an update on the first two phase of the programme and sets out the priorities for the next phase of improvements.

5.4.4 Of the original investment £1,009million has been allocated for phase 3 and no additional funding is being sought, to enable delivery of the improvements outlined in this report.

5.4.5 Payments will be made on completion of milestones against pre- agreed criteria to ensure clarity on what is delivered and payments not released until the agreed specific milestone are met.

### **5.5 Social Value**

The proposals outlined in this report seek to ensure that accessing the council's services is a more efficient and effective experience, that services are more transparent and accountable to the customer, that more information and services are available online so that customers can access them at a time of their choosing, and that barriers preventing

customers accessing online channels are addressed through a Digital Inclusion Strategy.

## **5.6 Legal and Constitutional References**

5.6.1 Under the Council's constitution, Article 7, Policy and Resources Terms of Reference include: responsibility for Customer Services and Resident Engagement.

5.6.2 The Council must comply with its Equality Act duties when re-designing services. Further detail is provided in the equalities and diversity section of this report. When re-designing services and communication methods, the Council will consider any statutory requirements to ensure these are still met. For example, prescribed information must be provided in relation to council tax bills and these will still need to be met, whilst ensuring that the correspondence is as simple and easy to understand as possible. The Council must ensure it complies with its GDPR requirements in relation to use of all data. These will be considered throughout the next phase

## **5.7 Risk Management**

The council's Risk Management Framework is used to identify and respond to risks across all the council's services and is used in delivery of the Customer Transformation Programme. An external audit on the Customer Transformation Programme was conducted in phase 2 and a substantial assurance rating was given in this regard.

## **5.8 Equalities and Diversity**

An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed when the customer access strategy was produced and updated following public consultation. It concluded that the combined changes proposed by the strategy will not detrimentally impact customers with protected characteristics. The EIA will be refreshed further when developing any future strategy.

Understanding and mitigating the impacts of all changes on customers is an ongoing responsibility that will be undertaken throughout the implementation of the Customer Access Strategy. The strategy recognises that there is a section of the community for whom face to face and telephone channels will continue to be needed and certain services where face to face access is required to achieve the optimum outcome.

The proposed changes will not exclude any customer from accessing a service, they need and actions highlighted in this report, in section 1.12, will ensure this commitment is met

In addition, a key aim of the strategy is to redirect valuable staff resources to where they are most needed, supporting residents who have more complex needs. Given the need to make savings, it is vital that we design out unnecessary interactions and automate transactional services as much as possible.

Residents across a wide range of demographics and disabilities supported the design of the new website that went live early in 2019 and have been involved in recent resident focus groups.

## 5.9 Corporate Parenting

In line with Children and Social Work Act 2017, the council has a duty to consider Corporate Parenting Principles in decision-making across the council. The approach outlined in this report will help the council identify key needs of our residents and where things are not working for them respond appropriately to continue to ensure the best outcomes for Barnet residents, including Children and Young People that are in the care of the local authority.

A new online form was introduced early in 2019, which simplified the online process to make referrals for child safeguarding and early help, addressing issues with the previous form that had been raised, improving stability and improved tracking for professionals. The form now allows a shortened option to enable members of the public to raise concerns about child safety more quickly.

Further improvements were made to online directories on the website for parents and better online forms for family services e.g. fostering & adoption applications, general enquiries and improving the referral to child and mental health or parenting programmes.

## 5.10 Consultation and Engagement

Referenced in the body of the report in section 1.15

## 5.11 Insight

Further insight was conducted reviewing internal data across all services, including the following:

- Customer satisfaction surveys, complaints and analysis of social media interactions
- High level customer journey mapping of key processes within services to identify the top pain points/common themes to understand internal failure demand and handoffs to other services
- Review of contact across services to understand levels and types of contact
- Analysis for each service area to identify common reasons for drivers of demand informing priorities to reduce this

## 6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 Report to Policy and resources committee – Customer Transformation Programme (funding agreement) 16 May 2017

<https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s39760/Customer%20Transformation%20Programme%20Phases%202-4.pdf>

- 6.2 Full council 30 July 2049 – Motion in the name of Councillor Daniel Thomas

<https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s54755/Cllr%20Daniel%20Thomas.pdf>