

Item No. 21.	Classification: Open	Date: 8 December 2020	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Corporate Customer Access Strategy 2020 to 2024	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Alice Macdonald, Equalities and Communities	

FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR ALICE MACDONALD, CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITIES

2020 has been an extraordinary year that none of us could have predicted. Coronavirus has impacted on all of us. As a council, our priorities have been to keep our residents safe and to support them through one of the most difficult times any of us have ever known. A key part of our response has been ensuring that Southwark residents were able to receive the information and support they needed through our customer services functions.

This included setting up a special telephone hotline and email box for residents to use with any questions and service requests relating to COVID-19. Liaising with the Community Hub and the voluntary sector, we supported vulnerable residents and provided advice and support on a range of issues. During COVID19 we have responded to 10,684 telephone enquiries and 9,841 emails from residents (@ 20/11/20), and helped with 713 enquiries from businesses. These enquiries covered everything from assistance with shopping and picking up prescriptions to welfare support and loneliness. Businesses were also able to receive advice on how to claim government funding and local funding during the lockdowns.

The crisis has taught us many things about how we can better provide and support residents across Southwark and informs this Customer Access Strategy which is published as we begin to look to the recovery. The strategy has been developed to simplify the way we provide services to the people of Southwark. It explains what we want to do to enable people to get the best out of the council and will help us ensure that everyone working for the council:

- Understands their role and purpose and knows what is expected of them
- Has the right tools for the job (increasingly this is digital and tech)
- Helps to create the right customer service culture, where if there were a choice, people would choose Southwark.

Underpinning the strategy are three core principles

- Channel shift: our aim is to be digital first; increasing online availability which will reduce service delivery costs through efficiency savings
- Listening and responding to customers so we deliver excellent services
- No one left behind: ensuring everyone can access the services and information they need recognising that not everyone will be able to access digital services.

We have strong foundations to build on. Since the first customer access strategy was published in 2012, the number of registered My Southwark personalised account holders continues to grow and has now passed the 100,000 mark, new technologies, such as smart phones and tablets, have enabled customers to access information and carry out transactions at a time and place that is convenient to them and we have saved millions by bringing services back in house.

The strategy contains a number of clear commitments to our customers:

- Setting out maximum response times and service standards, they can expect when contacting the council.
- Training for all customer facing staff to ensure all residents receive a consistent and good customer experience.
- Up to date and easy to use on-line services so that residents can request a service at a time convenient to them and be able to track their request.
- Opportunities for customers to provide feedback. We need to know when we've done something wrong so we can rectify it. Customers can also tell us when we've done a good job too.
- Commit to maintaining traditional service access (telephone and face to face) for those in our community unable to access digital services."

This strategy aims to deliver the following four outcomes:

Deliver a great customer experience:

- Provide clear communication and information, helping people make informed decisions.
- Improve the quality, search capability and accessibility of the Council website and ensure two-way dialogue with customers, being more consistent and responsive.
- Keep customers up-to-date on progress, setting and managing their expectations be open and transparent about what the Council does and its service standards.
- Measure the customer experience in a meaningful way to continuously improve services involving customers in the definition and improvement of new and existing services.

- Provide customers with choices on how they access services, whilst promoting digital up-take gathering appropriate customer insight and then use it to inform service improvements.
- Redesign the most popular processes end-to-end to encourage customers to self-serve ensures customer-facing staff are kept informed of major Council initiatives.

Build the skills and capabilities in the workforce:

- Lead by example, walking the walk, talking the talk, and being consistent in what is said and done promoting the values and culture we expect from each other.
- Role model great customer service behaviors providing staff with the digital and customer service skills needed to deliver great service.
- Involve staff in decision-making, in the design and improvement of services by promoting culture of collaboration, measured risk taking, and no blame.
- Redevelop relevant policies helping staff to take decisions and work confidently to improve the quality, search capability and accessibility of the Council's intranet

Provide technology that enables collaboration:

- Improve and extend existing Wi-Fi, internet bandwidth and remote access services.
- Make audio-conferencing an effective option with additional tools and services.
- Provide video-conference solutions in offices and for remote access on computers.
- Introduce cloud-based (SaaS) software solutions for cost-effective collaboration

Implement modern systems for data-driven decision making:

- Reduce the number of outdated systems to simplify access to information.
- Invest in the skills and capacity needed to integrate and perform analysis on data promoting the use of meaningful measures as part of the decision-making process.

- Enable data sharing through information sharing protocols with other organisations and publishing open data through a new website to better support communities and businesses.
- A holistic view of the customer, through the consolidation of systems and data

Our ambition is to be a digital first council providing excellent services to residents in a cost effective way.

“I am therefore asking the cabinet, after consideration of the officers’ report set out from paragraph 1 onwards to approve the recommendations below.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the cabinet note and endorse the corporate customer access strategy contained within Appendix 1 of the report.
2. That cabinet notes the equality and health analysis as per Appendix 2.
3. That the cabinet notes that progress and delivery of the corporate customer access strategy will be reported through action plan based on the commitments set out in the strategy and at regular annual reporting on the council plan itself.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. Southwark Council published its first Customer Access Strategy in November 2012. That strategy set out to transform how our customer services operated and took significant steps towards modernising how customers access services in Southwark.
5. Notably, customer services functions, including the telephone contact centre were brought back in house in 2013 following termination of the outsourced contract, delivering £4.5m in savings to date. In addition, customer satisfaction with customer services has increased year on year.
6. The number of registered My Southwark personalised account holders continues to grow and has now passed the 100,000 mark. This established the beginning of an online hub for customer services, where customers can, for example, find information about their local libraries or view their rent or service charge account if they are a council tenant or homeowner.
7. In the years since the 2017 strategy was published, new technologies, such as smart phones and tablets, have enabled customers to access information and carry out transactions at a time and place that is convenient to them.

8. The strategy explains what we want to do to enable people to get the best out of the council and will help us ensure that everyone working for the council:
 - Understands their role and purpose and knows what is expected of them
 - Has the right tools for the job (increasingly this is digital and tech)
 - Helps to create the right customer service culture, where if there were a choice, people would choose Southwark.

9. The strategy can be summarised as:
 - Channel shift
 - Listening and responding to customers
 - No one left behind.

10. The refreshed corporate strategy will seek to strengthen customer relationships, enhance experience and increase satisfaction influencing positive behaviour changes by encouraging engagement, involvement and increasing digital inclusion.

11. The refreshed strategy will also provide a framework cutting costs across all areas of business, creating an organisation-wide set of standards and key principles to help introduce change ensuring services and workforce are supported and that customers continue to experience consistency and high standards from every council interaction.¹

12. The refreshed corporate customer access strategy 2020/2024 will be aligned to the Council Plan and the Council's Digital Strategy offering greater digital focus to reflect the Council's vision.

13. The aims and objectives of the refreshed Customer Access Strategy will form the basis for the Council's transformation programmes which will drive the:
 - Implementation of essential underlying technology
 - Redesign of business processes
 - Challenge to the way the Council delivers its services
 - Delivery of excellent customer care
 - Deliver projects using Agile methodologies
 - Becoming a digital Council and developing a digital borough
 - Channel shift high volume services
 - Gaps in future service change

¹ Channel Shift: Realizing the Benefits, GovDelivery

Research suggests that face to face interaction with a customer can cost a local authority £10.53, managing a basic phone query can cost £3.00 and a customer interacting online or carrying out a transaction £0.08

- Build on developing staff offering training and development opportunities inline with Investors in People accreditation.
16. The new strategy also continues to meet the requirements of Equality Duty 2010, which requires public bodies to publish relevant, proportionate information annually demonstrating their compliance with the Equality Duty.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

17. The Customer Access Strategy Action Plan will be the corporate mechanism for coordinating and monitoring projects resulting from this strategy across the council as delivered by service areas.
18. Monitoring and evaluation metrics to measure the impact of the Customer Access Strategy on internal and external customers will be identified and implemented.
19. The Customer Experience division will provide support and expertise to enable services to design and implement service improvements. These improvements will enable service areas to realise efficiencies and financial savings and improve customer experiences.

Policy implications

22. The customer access strategy supports our overall priority to be a council that is fit for the future, as set out in the refreshed council plan. The progress and delivery of the strategy will be reported through an action plan based on the commitments set out in the strategy and at regular annual reporting on the council plan itself.

Community impact statement

23. The Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities to have due regard to a number of equality considerations when exercising their function. This process may be informed by an equality analysis
24. Pursuant to section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 Southwark Council has a duty to have due regard in its decision making processes to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct.
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - (c) Foster good relations between those who share a relevant characteristic and those that do not share it.
25. The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual

orientation. The Public Sector Equality Duty also applies to marriage and civil partnership but only in relation to (a) above.

26. As the Strategy is far reaching across the entire organisation, for all major existing and future customer access projects, service areas will be required to carry out an impact assessment to fully understand how various parts of our communities will be affected by the introduction of redesigned services. Greater emphasis will be placed on those projects looking to phase out and close traditional engagement methods, the implications of such changes and the measures to be put in place to support the vulnerable in our communities to continue to access services.

Resource implications

27. There are no specific implications arising from this report. Existing resources are already in place to meet the strategic aims. Any actions arising which have resource effects will be subject to separate decision-making process and reallocation within existing budget.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law and Democracy

28. The Localism Act 2011 gives councils a general power of competence by which they have power to do anything that individuals generally may do. The ongoing provision of a Customer Access Strategy as described in this report is an exercise of those powers.
29. Paragraphs 23-25 of the report set out the Public Sector Equality Duty which the Cabinet must comply with when considering this report. Appendix 2 to the report is an Equality and Health Analysis that will assist the Cabinet in meeting this duty, particularly its reference to mitigating actions that will be taken where there are potentially adverse impacts on those with identified protected characteristics.
30. The Public Sector Equality Duty is a continuing one; the report details in paragraph 26 how ongoing analysis will be carried out within specific service areas in relation to all future customer access projects, to monitor and assess any changes or impacts to protected characteristic groups over time.
31. Approval of the continuing Customer Access Strategy is an executive function that can be determined by the Cabinet in accordance with Part 3 of the council's constitution.

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (FC20/022)

32. The Strategic Director of Finance and Governance notes the recommendations of this report and that there are no specific additional resource requirements at this juncture. This will be kept under review and

reported as the programme progresses.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None.		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Customer Access Strategy 2017-2020
Appendix 2	Customer Access Strategy Refresh 2017: Equality and Health Analysis

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Alice Macdonald, Housing and Modernisation	
Lead Officer	Richard Selley, Director of Customer Experience Housing & Modernisation	
Report Author	Savina Vagarwal, Project Manager	
Version	Final	
Dated	30 November 2020	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
List other officers here		
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	30 November 2020	