

Item No. 12.	Classification: Open	Date: 20 November 2012	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Customer Access Strategy	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Peter John, Leader of the Council	

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Across the council, every day, there are examples of council employees going the extra mile to be helpful, tolerant and kind. In large part, the people who work for Southwark do it because they are motivated by a commitment to public service and to working to improve and enhance our community. To create a council that treats everyone in the community as if they were a member of our family, however, we must improve the consistency of our customer services and customer experience.

In order to achieve this, earlier in the year we ended our contractual relationship with the private company that managed our customer services, including our call-centre and one stop shops, and brought the service back in-house. We did this because we believed that it was only by having full control over our customer services operation that we would be able to react to changing technologies and deliver lasting improvements.

This new Customer Access Strategy sets out our vision for what those lasting improvements will look like. It will deliver services that put the customer first. We will not only measure success in terms of the number of enquiries that we receive in a year or how quickly we respond to them, but in terms of the quality of those responses. In doing so we aim to create customer services that get things right first time, treat all with courtesy and respect and embrace new technologies by treating digital as default. We will empower people to use self-service options where appropriate to increase efficiency, reduce costs and focus our limited resources at our frontline services, where they are most valued.

I am confident that by making these changes we will move closer to delivering our vision of a council that treats people like a member of our own family and I'm delighted to bring forward this report that marks the next step on the journey.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Cabinet agrees the Customer Access Strategy set out at Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. On 15 May 2012, the Cabinet agreed the Principles for Agreement for the transition of customer services to council control on 1 June 2013 and delegated authority to the Strategic Director of Housing Services to agree the Deed of Variation, necessary to implement the transition of the services.

3. On 31 May 2012, a deed of variation was signed between the council and Vangent Ltd. The deed included a detailed Exit Plan to establish both parties' responsibilities to delivering a smooth transition of services to the council's management, building on the existing contractual provisions that provide for the transition of services upon expiry of the contract and to ensure that service levels are maintained throughout.
4. Since May 2012, work has been underway between the council and Vangent to manage the transition of customer services back to council control. The transition programme is led by a Customer Services Transition Programme Board, which is chaired by the Strategic Director of Housing and Community Services. The council also meets regularly with Vangent to monitor progress against the exit provisions in the contract and ensure that appropriate due diligence is carried out before services transition to the council. The council is also working closely with Vangent and trade unions to ensure that all staff affected by the transition of services are fully involved and consulted on the changes that will be taking place during the transition period.
5. The Cabinet report agreed on 15 May 2012 asked the Cabinet to note that the council's future operating model for customer services would bring the service under council management and give the council greater control over the operation of customer services. The report also committed officers to returning to Cabinet with further details about this operating model and the council's approach to delivering customer services in the future.
6. Following this decision, officers have been working to develop the new operating model, starting with the key strategic principles that will guide the new service. The Customer Access Strategy included at Appendix 1 of this report sets out the council's long-term vision for customer services and the high-level operating model for delivering this. The Customer Service Standards included as an appendix to the strategy are the council's commitment to its customers about what they can expect when contacting the council.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Policy implications

7. One of the six Fairer Future principles set out within the Council Plan is 'Treating every resident as though they were a member of our own family'. The Customer Access Strategy sets out in detail the council's approach to fulfilling this principle and ensuring that residents receive excellent customer service whenever they contact the council. The Customer Services Standards included as an appendix to the strategy detail the service that residents can expect to receive.
8. Another of the six Fairer Future principles is 'Transforming Public Services'. This strategy is a key component of the council's wider ambitions to transform the way council services are delivered.

Community impact statement

9. The provision of customer services by the council has a significant impact on the community. Residents expect the council to be able to deal with their enquiries in an effective manner by ensuring that issues are followed up promptly and successfully and that information provided is accurate and clear. Public satisfaction

with the council will be determined to a large extent by the effectiveness with which residents are able to interact with council services.

10. In developing the Customer Access Strategy thought has been given to making sure the council's most vulnerable customers are well served and, where changes do need to be made, these are communicated well. The strategy recognises that many contacts with the council result from complex, personal situations that require the council to act with care and sensitivity. The improvements to customer service that will be driven by this strategy will recognise this and make sure that we will continue to offer services through all access channels where necessary for the customer or the transaction. Our digital inclusion approach has three key advantages for our communities which together form a strong basis to support a wide range of other initiatives especially in promoting economic growth, tackling social disadvantage, and in achieving a low carbon society.

Resource implications

11. The additional costs arising from delivering the Customer Access Strategy and transitioning customer services back to the council will be met from within the existing Customer Services budget.

Finance implications

12. There are a range of costs associated with the movement of the call centre to in house provision. However, there are substantial cost savings that will accrue from the 2013/14 financial year that will more than offset these costs within the first two years of the new arrangements and provide a continuing, cost effective reduction in the cost of service provision.
13. The range of costs that are associated with this include costs associated with refurbishment of accommodation, the implementation of updated systems and costs related to the maintenance of service provision within the final year of the contract. These costs will be covered from the accommodation reserve, the modernisation fund and existing budget provision.

Consultation

14. The strategy sets out the changes in customer preferences for accessing council services and explains how this has informed the council's thinking about the future delivery model for customer services. The take-up rate for online council services and the My Southwark portal demonstrates that there is significant demand for greater delivery of council services online. Detailed consultation on the strategic principles has not been carried out with the public, but any significant changes to the delivery of services as a result of this strategy would be communicated clearly. A full equalities analysis will be undertaken on new services to ensure we are meeting our equalities duty through implementation.
15. Significant consultation has taken place within the council to ensure that the Customer Access Strategy will be owned and delivered across the organisation. The Corporate Management Team have played a lead role in developing the strategic principles and ensuring that the strategy is relevant to the wide range of council services to which it will apply.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Legal Services

16. This report seeks the Cabinet's approval to the Customer Access Strategy as set out in Appendix 1. As noted in paragraph 5, the Cabinet asked officers to return with details of the future operating model for customer services, which this report now details. There are no specific legal implications relating to agreement of this strategy. Officers from the Legal Services division are advising and will continue to advise on the transition of services back to council control.

Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services (CR/F&CS/08/11/12)

17. The Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services notes the financial implications in paragraphs 12 to 13 and understands that further work is being undertaken to reconfigure and improve service delivery and drive out substantial savings over the medium term.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Customer Services Centre (CSC) Contract with Vangent Ltd – 15 May 2012 Cabinet report See link to document on council website: http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s28863/Report%20Customer%20Services%20Contract%20with%20Vangent%20Ltd.pdf	Report on the council's website	Everton Roberts 020 7525 7221

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Customer Access Strategy

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Peter John, Leader of the Council	
Lead Officer	Gerri Scott, Strategic Director of Housing and Community Services Graeme Gordon, Director of Corporate Strategy	
Report Author	Shazia Ullah, Customer Transition Programme Manager	
Version	Final	
Dated	8 November 2012	
Key Decision	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Legal Services	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate services	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	8 November 2012	