



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 19TH JANUARY 2016

SUBJECT: DRAFT CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY 2016-2020

**REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND SECTION 151
OFFICER**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members with details of the draft Customer Service Strategy 2016-2020.
- 1.2 To seek Members' views on the draft strategy prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Council's Customer Service Strategy has been in place since 2006 and has been partially updated on a number of occasions. However, the financial environment in which we operate has changed significantly in the last few years, as have the expectations of our customers who are increasingly expecting services to be available on-line. There is therefore a clear need to put a new customer service strategy in place.
- 2.2 The main thrust of the strategy is to improve the consistency of customer service across the organisation; to meet customer expectations that services will be available online which will also reduce the cost of customer contact; and to develop in-person customer service so that it is more focused on delivering complex services or dealing with more vulnerable or disadvantaged customers.
- 2.3 The strategy, once formally agreed, will be supported by a Delivery Plan that will be monitored by the Corporate IT Strategy Group (CITSG), of which the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services is a member.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Customer Service Strategy supports the Strategic Equality Plan with specific links to Strategic Equality Objectives 3 and 4, Physical Access and Communications Access, by helping make Council services accessible to everyone. It also links to Strategic Equality Objective 6, Diversity in the Workplace, by raising the awareness of Equalities and Welsh Language issues amongst staff dealing with customers.
- 3.2 The Customer Service Strategy also links to the Corporate Complaints Policy
- 3.3 The Customer Service Strategy supports four of the priorities in the Single Integrated Plan:
 - P2: Improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the County Borough.

- P3: Provide support to enable local people to compete for all employment opportunities.
- S4: Ensure people are supported to live in their own homes and communities in safety.
- H5: Ensure people are supported to live in their own communities to lead safe, fulfilled and independent lives.

4. THE REPORT

4.1 In 2006 the Council agreed a Customer Service Strategy that would significantly change the way in which customers access our services. Since then the strategy has been reviewed and updated, and much of the original objectives have been met. The strategy was subjected to a Peer Review in 2008, a SOCITM Benchmarking Review in 2011 and a Welsh Audit Office Review in 2012. However, the financial environment in which we operate has changed significantly in the last few years, as have the expectations of our customers who are increasingly expecting services to be available on-line. Therefore there is a clear need to put a new customer service strategy in place.

4.2 In August 2013, the Welsh Audit Office published a review of Customer Services in Caerphilly County Borough Council conducted by Pricewaterhouse Coopers which concluded that:

“The Council provides citizens with a range of channels to access its services but its strategic approach to customer services is fragmented and in need of updating, and it does not effectively evaluate its customer services provision”

4.3 The report also made two proposals for improvement:

P1: *Develop a more co-ordinated strategic approach to customer services*

P2: *Strengthen the approach to evaluating and improving customer services in a proactive way*

The report also provides examples of good practice that Pricewaterhouse Coopers have drawn from their work across the UK.

4.4 Since the report was issued a number of actions have been taken that address these proposals, such as the reintroduction of the Viewpoint Panel. These actions have previously been reported to the Audit Committee. However, the most significant action will be the introduction of a new corporate strategy that sets out how Caerphilly CBC will develop its customer service over the next few years.

4.5 The main thrust of the strategy is to improve the consistency of customer service across the organisation; to meet customer expectations that services will be available online; to reduce the cost of customer contact; and to develop in-person customer service so that it is more focused on delivering complex services or dealing with more vulnerable or disadvantaged customers.

4.6 The main strategic outcomes of the strategy are to:

- Ensure that customers receive a consistent, positive experience across all access channels.
- Maintain a range of contact channels for each service to ensure that customers with protected characteristics and/or specific language requirements or who are vulnerable or disadvantaged, can access services in a way that is appropriate for them.
- Migrate customers to the most appropriate contact method for their enquiry to generate efficiencies and savings.

- Minimise the cost of each transaction, including the cost of the “end to end” process.
- Ensure that every contact adds value for the customer.
- Reduce the number of customer contacts by ensuring that the way we deliver services does not result in unnecessary contacts

4.7 The strategy, once formally agreed, will be supported by a Delivery Plan that will be monitored by the CITSG which will also be responsible for the approval and monitoring of projects arising from the strategy and ensuring that the strategy remains relevant. The CITSG includes the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Service, the Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer, the Acting Head of IT Services, the Monitoring Officer, the Corporate Customer Services Manager and Senior Managers representing each Directorate.

4.8 The Corporate Customer Services Manager will be responsible for the Delivery Plan, reporting progress to CITSG and chairing a Customer Service Project Group consisting of relevant senior officers. The Corporate Customer Services Manager will also monitor customer service activity across the Council, including customer service performance standards and will report performance to CITSG.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Customer Service Strategy supports the Strategic Equality Plan across the board, but specifically links with Strategic Equality Objectives 3, 4 and 6: Physical Access, Communications Access and Diversity in the Workplace.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no ongoing financial implications arising directly from this strategy. However, the strategy will support the Medium Term Financial Plan. To ensure a consistent standard of customer service training across all services areas, Corporate Services Reserves of up to £30k will be utilised during 2016 and 2017 to engage an appropriate training provider.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There will be personnel implications arising from the adoption of this strategy as residents increasingly use digital online services rather than other contact channels.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 The views of consultees are included within the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That members provide views in respect of this proposed strategy prior to its formal consideration by Cabinet.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 To inform Members of the detail of the strategy and to allow them to comment on the draft strategy prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Act 2000.

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Nicole Scammell, Interim Director of Corporate Services and S151 Officer
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Appendices:
Appendix 1 - Draft Customer Service Strategy 2016 - 2020