

North Yorkshire County Council

Executive

13 December 2022

Recommendations of the Customer Member Working Group

Report of the Chair of the Customer Member Working Group

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To advise the Executive of the recommendations of the Customer Member Working Group and the process by which it arrived at those recommendations.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The Customer Member Working Group is one of seven such Groups that were established by the Executive on 21st June 2022.
- 2.2 The Working Groups were set up to engage with Members on the necessary decision-making processes that are required prior to vesting day for the new North Yorkshire Council – 1st April 2023.
- 2.3 The Working Groups were established as cross-party Task and Finish bodies to consider, review and make recommendations to the decision taking body on areas within their remit.
- 2.4 The Terms of Reference for the Customer Member Working Group (“the Group”) agreed the following areas of focus:
- Customer Strategy
 - Face to face/telephone/online interactions
 - Complaints procedure
 - Performance standards

3.0 Findings and Feedback from the Group

- 3.1 The Group was chaired by Councillor David Chance. The full Membership and officer support is attached at **Appendix A**.
- 3.2 The Group met on four occasions – 23 August, 5 October, 1 November and 16 November 2022.
- 3.3 The initial meeting provided an overview of key service principles and an outline of challenges and options for a single online and telephony “front door” alongside access to a network of face-to-face access points (jointly agreed with the Locality Workstream). It was highlighted that while the focus is on being “safe and legal” for vesting day, there will be some early transformation to facilitate a positive customer experience. Members gave a steer on a number of issues: -
- The need for plain English in all communications for both customers and Members.
 - That there should not be an over-reliance on on-line contact as this is not suitable for all customers. It was noted that on-line contacts are currently significantly higher than for face to face and that a network of face-to-face access points would continue to be provided across North Yorkshire.
 - A desire to ensure that customers do not have long waiting times when contacting the council by phone.

- Support for retaining community offices and the option for customers to continue to pay by cash if they desired.
- Chatbots were identified as useful but could also be frustrating. It was felt these would be helpful to guide the customer and to support customers with form filling.
- It is important that there are redirects on existing numbers and websites, as many customers will take a while to become aware of the new Council and ways of contacting.
- It is important that the new Council has the capacity to deal with the volume of contacts from day 1.

3.4 The second meeting considered more detailed information about the customer journeys for digital, telephony and face to face services. Members were broadly supportive of the approaches outlined and gave feedback in a number of key areas as follows: -

- Clear signposting required from the website about how to report something that is an emergency.
- To ensure that the natural language IVR can understand a range of voices, accents and dialects.
- Support for the use of the safety net team, where customers cannot navigate the natural voice system.
- Support for not publishing direct dial numbers as these lead to frustration and delays if staff are absent
- Desire to see additional face to face access points across North Yorkshire, particularly as some of the existing main offices are not close to the main centres of population (whilst recognising that existing offices will be used for day 1)
- To ensure that customers can continue to receive their message alerts, where they have signed up for these.
- A desire to see localised social media messaging that is relevant to the local area.
- Members requested additional information about call abandonment rates and current average time to answer calls to inform the discussion at the next meeting.

3.5 The third meeting focused specifically on the development of the customer strategy, customer service standards and the complaints policy. Members considered examples of customer strategies adopted by other authorities that had been through the LGR process. Key feedback points were as follows:

- Members felt the Cornwall document was particularly appealing and customer friendly.
- Case studies were felt to be useful and a mystery shopper approach.
- The approach taken by Cheshire in undertaking a resident survey around customer services was considered to be useful.
- Members favoured a two-year strategy, with an option for review if things were not working.
- The Strategy should be written in plain English.

3.6 Members considered the draft service standards at this third meeting. Further information was requested about existing service standards to give greater context prior to developing recommendations. Members highlighted the importance of targets being “stretching” but also recognised that they needed to be achievable across the customer service centres.

3.7 Members also considered the draft complaints policy, which was commended due to its accessible nature, fair and robust procedures and appropriate timescales. Members suggested it may be helpful to separate out complaints and compliments and put anything procedural at the end of the document. The working group confirmed its endorsement of the proposed policy.

3.8 At the final meeting Members considered further updates and detail in relation to the customer strategy and service standards. Members were happy with the proposed content of the new Strategy and the direction of travel for the “look and feel” of the Strategy.

Members reinforced the need for the new Strategy to be inclusive and to consider the differing needs of customers across the County. They endorsed a strong emphasis on customer feedback and insight and the need for the Strategy to be visually appealing and easy to read and understand.

3.9 Members reviewed customer service performance data from across the authorities and recognised some of the initial challenges around achieving consistent standards across eight sites, based on some of the current differences in service breadth, depth and complexity and the current variations in data collection and monitoring.

3.10 The variance in staffing numbers across authorities was noted and the difficulty in establishing true staff capacity and service resilience because of the factors highlighted in 3.8 above was discussed. The need for ongoing review of staff capacity against customer service demand to avoid a degradation in service was agreed.

3.11 The following headline standards were endorsed:

- To answer calls within 4 minutes (240 seconds)
- To receive an immediate acknowledgement of receipt of an on-line form.
- For letters to be responded to with 10 working days (If longer we will tell you why)
- For emails to be responded to within 5 working days
- To be seen within 10 minutes of arrival at a face-to-face centre.

3.12 Members supported effective monitoring of the new standards through quarterly monitoring reports to the Executive.

3.13 Members endorsed the approach to customer delivery through the single digital and telephony journey, supported by a network of face-to-face access points. Members were happy with the proposed new 0300 number for the new council and the proposals for familiarisation prior to vesting day, including the inclusion of the new number on the Council Tax bills.

3.14 Members also supported the emerging themes below for transformation of Customer Services, although noted that the wording of these would need to be in plainer English for an external audience.

- Self-service, where appropriate
- Increased resolution at the first point of contact
- More proactive provision of targeted services in partnership
- Single systems, insight and tools to support harmonisation and transformation of services.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no additional financial implications arising directly from this report. Financial and resourcing requirements have previously been identified and approved as part of the LGR programme for the new, single complaints policy and the day one customer journeys for digital, telephony and face to face.

4.2 The broad approach and direction of travel for the customer strategy, service standards and future transformation opportunities was agreed by the Member Working Group. However, the final policies will be the subject of further approvals, which will identify any specific financial implications at that time.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the proposals set out in this report.

6.0 Climate Change Assessment

- 6.1 An initial impact assessment has been completed which highlighted the need to progress to full impact assessment of activity within the composite projects, although generally the work of the Customer work stream will result in positive climate impacts. For example, the development of accessible and efficient digital services, alongside an effective approach to telephony should result in a reduced need for customers to travel to access services from face-to-face offices. This will be reflected in the climate change impact assessment completed for the Customer Strategy and available as part of the Executive Report.
- 6.2 A climate change impact assessment will be submitted as part of covering papers for the Complaints policy.

7.0 Equality Implications

- 7.1 The approach to developing the customer strategy is underpinned by principles of equality and accessibility and is based on an understanding of the different needs of customers. The Strategy will set out how this will be achieved in practice and includes the use of practical tools like customer personas to ensure service development is considered from the perspective of customers with differing needs. The approach to service delivery (digital, telephony and face to face) is being developed in line with the government design principles which highlight inclusion and accessibility.
- 7.2 A full Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) will be completed as part of the development of the full Customer Strategy and available as part of the Executive Report.
- 7.3 An EIA will be submitted as part of covering papers for the Complaints Policy.

8.0 Conclusion

- 8.1 The Group considered carefully the information presented and provided substantive feedback to inform the more detailed development of operational services and policy areas. Overall, the Working Group were happy to endorse the approaches as recommended below.

9.0 Recommendations

- 9.1 That the Executive consider the contents of the report and the findings of the Working Group and approve:
- i. The development of a customer friendly, accessible customer strategy for an initial period of two years as set out in paragraph 3.7 above. The completed Strategy will be the subject of Executive approval.
 - ii. The development of a set of performance standards for the new Council as part of the Customer Strategy as set out in paragraph 3.8 and 3.9 above.
 - iii. The new complaints policy as set out in paragraph 3.6 above. The completed policy to be submitted for Executive approval with the customer strategy in due course.

Councillor David Chance: Chair of Customer Member Working Group
County Hall, Northallerton
30 November 2022

Report Author: Jo Ireland, Head of Customer and Community Services, Scarborough Borough Council (Lead for Customer Workstream, One Front Door)

Appendices: Appendix A – Working Group Membership

Membership

Customer Member Working Group		
	Name of Councillor	Political Group
1	Councillor David Chance (Chair)	Conservative
2	Councillor Richard Foster	Conservative
3	Councillor George Jabbour	Conservative
4	Councillor Nick Brown	Conservative
5	Councillor Melanie Davis	Labour
6	Councillor Yvonne Peacock	Conservative
7	Councillor Malcom Taylor	Conservative
8	Councillor Kirsty Poskitt	Independent (unaffiliated)
9	Councillor Karl Arthur	Conservative
10	Councillor Dave Whitfield	Green Party

Officer and external support	
Name	Role
Wallace Sampson (Harrogate Borough Council)	Project Sponsor
Jo Ireland (Scarborough Borough Council) Julie Gillett (Harrogate Borough Council) Sarah Foley (NYCC) Anne-Louise Arkle (NYCC) David Evans (Harrogate Borough Council)	Subject matter experts
Theresa Dykstra (NYCC)	Project Management Office
Diane Parsons (NYCC)	Democratic Services