

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Customer Service Strategy 2013-18

Meeting/Date: Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well- Being) -
3rd October 2013
Cabinet – 17th October 2013

Executive Portfolio: Customer Services

Report by: Head of Customer Service

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

- 1.1 The Customer Service Strategy for the period 2007 – 2012 has expired, and a new strategy has been developed for the period 2013 – 2018.
- 1.2 A Members Working Group has been involved with this development as part of the Overview & Scrutiny (Economic Well Being) Panel. The main strategy document is supported by a two-page summary for distribution to staff.
- 2.1 We aim to be a service organisation with a reputation for good customer service. We will provide accessible services via a range of channels, but focussing on self service (via the internet) to keep costs down.
- 2.2 Customers can expect a high level of service, no matter which department they are in contact with. We will do this by empowering staff to complete customer transactions, preferably at first point of contact.
- 2.3 We will find out more about our customers and use this information to assess their needs and how we can meet them. At the same time, we will use resources efficiently by enabling more self service interactions from customers.
- 2.4 The Customer Service Strategy is shown in Appendix A, the annexes of the strategy are shown in Appendix B and the summary document is shown at Appendix C.

Recommendation:

it is recommended that Members approve the Strategy.

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1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE?

- 1.1 This Strategy was created to be a starting point to ensure that all councillors, managers, employees and customers of the Council understand what customer service is to the Council, why it is important, how we are aiming to continually improve and how putting the customer first can help us achieve our financial savings objectives.
- 1.2 This Strategy is a high level document that will enable and oversee positive change within HDC by placing the customer at the heart of all council activity and decisions. Business cases for projects that will deliver return on investment in terms of financial savings will be created as a consequence of this strategy.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The previous Customer Service Strategy has expired and successfully achieved. It is important to set the direction and aspiration for customer service for the next five years; the vision and objectives will be made visible and clear so that all staff feel sure why they are here and what the Council is hoping to achieve. This Strategy will feed into annual service plans and KPAs to ensure it stays on track.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 As this Strategy proposes fundamental changes in the way our services are delivered – i.e. shifting customer contact online to free up resources and enable the continuation of services, analysis has been undertaken into digital inclusion and exclusion. This is research into how people access the internet and who potentially cannot access these and how this may impact our plans in this area.
- 3.2 Significant research was undertaken into how other Councils are reacting to austerity and how they are simultaneously improving services as well as making financial savings.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

- 4.1 The draft Strategy was considered by the Economic Well-Being Panel at their meeting on 3rd October 2013. The Panel has been extensively involved in the development of the Strategy and recommends that it should be adopted and implemented.
- 4.2 The Panel commented on a range of issues, including -
- ❖ the need to be aware of the potential implications of transferring customer contact online on the adult population (specifically the elderly) within the District’;
 - ❖ the potential opportunities to make better use of the Town and Parish Councils to support the delivery of District Council services in their areas;

- ❖ the opportunities that exist for working in partnership with other public sector organisations to deliver services for Huntingdonshire residents from the Customer Services Centre; and
- ❖ a suggestion was made that the Council's own services might be promoted on some of the more popular web pages.

4.3 The Panel has also indicated their support for the future co-location of the Council's Call-Centre with the Customer Services Centre and suggested that this should be progressed. There may be scope to accommodate other local authorities Call Centres within the District Council's facility.

4.4 Members have commented on the need to monitor satisfaction levels to ensure that the implementation of the Strategy does not have an adverse impact on customers. It has also been suggested that the introduction of a series of milestones to 2018 to enable the Council to establish that the Strategy is on track.

4.5 The Panel has also discussed the ways in which Members can help to support the change in culture which the new Strategy would require. It has been suggested that there is a role for local councillors to encourage members of the public to use web services where they are able to do so.

5. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

5.1 The Strategy recommends looking at how we operate as a Council and putting the customers first in all activity and decisions that are made. This involves challenging managers and staff members and encouraging staff to think differently. This is already being addressed in the course of creating the strategy, which has been circulated for comment to all team managers, senior managers and other key staff members.

5.2 Huntingdonshire District Council is going through a period of major change with services beginning to radically change the way they are operated and delivered (e.g. shared services and outsourcing.) The principles and objectives highlighted in this strategy need to be considered when engaging with partner organisations if this strategy is to succeed.

5.3 The channel migration activities outlined will require investment as a series of invest to save bids.

5.4 Achieving this Strategy will involve a significant amount of effort from the web team. Additional or re-directed resource will need to be considered as part of the channel migration business case.

6. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 There are two comprehensive action plans within this Strategy as well as a table of objectives which sets out on a high level what we aspire to achieve over the next five years. The customer service strategy action plan can be found starting from page 9 of the strategy. The channel migration action plan can be found within Annexe 4, Appendix 2 of the strategy.

7. LINK TO THE LEADERSHIP DIRECTION

- 7.1 This Customer Service Strategy enables delivery of a number of corporate aims. To achieve the 'golden thread' through our performance management framework, we have adopted these aims in this customer service strategy and they will be used to inform service plans and individual staff key performance areas (KPAs).

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 This Strategy has been created in consultation with all HDC team managers, Heads of Service, COMT, other key staff members and a small members working group formed of the Overview and Scrutiny Economic well-being panel.

9. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Channel migration does have an impact due to some customers not having access to the Internet or being unable to use self-service channels.
- 9.2 The equality impact assessment for this strategy is shown in Appendix D, which requires due regard.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 10.1 This strategy will pave the way for Huntingdonshire District Council to become a more effective and productive Council while simultaneously improving the service our customers experience. Approving this strategy will give the innovative staff of HDC a mandate to move the council forward in terms of customer service, process improvement and meeting the needs of our district's residents with a reduced budget.

11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix A - Customer Service Strategy 2013-18
Appendix B - Annexes of the Customer Service Strategy
Appendix C - SAMPLE 2 page version of the strategy for circulation to all staff
Appendix D - Equality Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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