

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 22nd April 2021

Portfolio: Customer & Corporate Support Services –
Cllr Sam Kane

Subject: Customer Service Update

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To note the update on 'what our customers are telling us' plus an update on our Customer strategy.

What our customers are telling us

Overall customer satisfaction – KPI 80%

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
69%	71%	71%	74%

We have made a significant change to the website customer satisfaction survey making it easier for customers to give feedback and for our Customer Contact team to respond to comments. The survey is now on every page allowing us to discover which service area is receiving more feedback for us to deal with.

Residents and visitors to our district are telling us they would like to see more information on where they can park, as well as the cost of a parking permit and the location of electronic vehicle charging points. Our website currently contains information on our pay and display car parks and each of the locations provides a link to the MIPermit website which includes a map. Information on parking permits is also available on our website. The communications team are looking at how to improve the search facility of our website to cover third party sites to ensure information is accessible and easy to find.

With regards to electric charging points we have the second highest number of plug-in fully electric and hybrid vehicles on the roads in Essex according to the latest available Dept for Transport statistics. However, according to www.zap-map.com there are relatively few public charge points, suggesting most local EV owners have off street charging facilities at their home or workplace. Residents in flats or houses with no off street parking may be put off acquiring an EV as a result, so we are working on a pilot to install 'rapid' public chargers (50kW+ allowing 80% charge in 30 mins) and 'fast' (overnight) chargers this year, using facilities and infrastructure under our control such as car parks and some lamp posts. Public charging on the Highway is a matter for Essex County Council and there is a bid ECC has submitted which may result in public chargers in residential streets in Loughton. For further information or to submit ideas: Transport@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

For Elections, residents are asking for information on what candidates are standing. Visits to the election pages of our website usually peak in the five to six weeks leading up to the local elections in May. The Communications and Elections teams work together around a series of key dates starting with the Notice of Election in March and culminating with the publication of the results in May. 2021 is an exceptional year. In addition to the scheduled County Council

and Police Fire and Crime Commissioner elections, elections for district, town and parish councils held over from 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic are also taking place this year.

First point resolution – KPI 45%

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
49%	50%	47%	44%

The customer contact centre has been supporting Revenue and Benefits with an overflow of calls concerning business grants, Council Tax reminders and year end billing hence our highest call volume into the contact centre this year (see stats below). These queries would attribute to the slight reduction in first point resolution as some residents required further information from the Revenue & Benefits team.

Complaints - KPI 85% within SLA

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
88%	98%	89%	82%

Ninety-seven complaints were received in quarter 4. A significant increase was seen for Revenues due to grant applications declined and business owners expressing dissatisfaction via the complaints process. A number of complaints were received due to the time taken for housing repair works to be completed, Assets and Qualis are working together to complete repairs in a timely manner and resolve complaints.

Call volumes

Overall, we have seen a reduction in calls from 2019/20 to 2020/21 of 7,384 which equates to one month's call volume. This quarter has as seen our highest call volumes however a 97% answer rate has been achieved, with average call waiting times of 1 minute 2 seconds.

A high number of calls are received for straight forward transfers to Qualis for Housing Repairs. We are looking into changing the phone options for residents to select so that they have the option to select Housing Repairs much quicker in the hope this addresses the issue.

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
27,556	28,169	21,506	30,711

What's worked well during lockdown

Throughout lockdown we have seen many more customers channel shift to serve themselves helped by the following service improvements.

Simplification of customer email channel

We removed 'contact us', channelling all customer emails through our general enquiries form, encouraging customers who can self-serve to use the online forms available or for those who can't they have the option to select a general contact form to get in touch with us. This resulted in an average of 64% of customers choosing to self-serve over the past year.

This change resulted in a reduction from December 2019-February 2020 of 4,365 emails received vs the same time period for 2020-21 with 258 emails received.

Longest wait time for calls reduced

As a result of more customers choosing to self-serve, our longest wait time for calls reduced from 11.31 minutes to 4.36 minutes on average over the past year.

First point resolution

The automated scripts developed to support our customer online forms are also used by our Call Centre Officers to resolve customer queries and this has resulted in our first point resolution increasing from an average 38% 2019/20 to 47% for 2020/21.

What hasn't worked so well

What hasn't worked so well is for those customers reliant on face to face contact primarily for making payments. Whilst the cash office at the Broadway has been closed and the Waltham Abbey library for access to the payment kiosk our payments team have continued to support this group of customers taking payments over the phone.

What has worked well

Covid-19 and lockdown has seen the use of digital technology for customer interaction accelerate. Many service areas have transitioned to online contact with customers with the use of teams and zoom where possible and this will continue once the Civic Office re-opens. Face to face customer interaction will still take place for those customers who require this support.

Customer Strategy

Last year our strategy focussed on fixing the basics and introducing a customer shoes culture. We now need a greater understanding through data analytics, personas and customer engagement of their needs from us as a council so that we can meet these expectations. Bridging the gap between us, customers and our colleagues in other service areas will be key. We will continue to drive one point of contact through the transition of remaining service areas 'customer' function into the contact centre.

In summary our strategy this year will cover;

- Gaining a better understanding of our customers and their needs
- How they contact us and why
- Utilising modern technology to enhance the customer contact experience
- Service delivery improvements
- Customer shoes cultural training
- Digital buddies support for residents

Note. Resourcing is still an issue and a resolution is currently being worked to enable us to fully deliver our service plan. The priorities will be the launch of our new welcome lounge and partnership hub, continued service delivery improvements plus transition of the remaining service areas customer contact into the Customer Contact Centre.

What's coming up in quarter one

New welcome lounge and partnership hub

We are working with partners coming into our new community hub to understand their requirements, process mapping the customer journey and ensuring our partners needs are fully supported.

For the welcome lounge our Receptionists/Floor Walkers will be smartly dressed in a uniform of a white shirt and navy bottoms plus a 'Here to Help' lanyard so that they are easily recognised by visitors.

Our new Visitor Management kiosks will be in place for the building re-opening. Phase 1 will

enable customers to self-check in and alert Officers to their arrival (this is for customers with pre booked appointments) those without will be assisted by our welcome team. Officers will also be able to book meetings and interview rooms. The next stage planned for Quarter 2/3 will see customers able to book venues themselves such as the Limes Centre.

The customer contact element of Community, Culture and Wellbeing has 95% transitioned to the contact centre. The remaining part is for the ability for customers to self-book venue hire. Work is being carried out in quarter one in preparation for this.

‘Customer Shoes’

Following the successful pilots of this behavioural training we are taking the learnings to develop staff webinars with the training company, in addition we are looking at developing our own in-house videos to support the ‘customer shoes’ culture we will continue to embed.

Service Superstars

Our ‘Service Superstars’ initiative proved very popular when launched during National Customer Service week and as a result is now a quarterly initiative via Perkbox. Daniel Ragen, Business Support Officer was Q4’s Service Superstar with four votes, he was nominated for his excellent customer service. In particular he was recognised for his work in Local Land Charges, supporting the delivery of a new electronic process that allowed the team to work from home without accessing paper files. Improving efficiency and level of service to customers.

Going forwards nominations will be based on our values and behaviours with Innovation the theme for quarter 1.

Cash Office re-opening

The Broadway Cash office will re-open on 12th April enabling those customers who are reliant on cash to make payments. The payment kiosk at Waltham Abbey library will re-open on 12th April and the kiosk at the Civic with the building re-opening on 21st June once the building has been fitted out for EFDC occupation and made Covid safe for external customers.

We have been looking at long term solutions for cash paying customers and a report on this will follow in due course.

Webcasting

Regardless of whether Members and Officers are in the office or attending virtually new hybrid webcasting capability will ensure a seamless webcast. We will also be extending our current webcast contract for a further two years.

Digital buddies

Epping Forest Census Support Helpline

In conjunction with Voluntary Action Epping Forest a dedicated helpline has been set up for residents in Epping Forest to contact if they need assistance filling out the census form.

Epping Forest support line: 01992 56420
Monday, Tuesdays and Fridays between 9:30am and 3:30pm

The support line is in operation from 1 March 2021 till 26 June 2021.

Epping Forest Census Digital Support Drop-In Centres

We have supported VAEF to identify suitable venues to host drop-in digital support centres which began early March and continue until the end of April.

Mondays 9:30 am – 3:30 pm (April 26) Oakwood Hill Community Centre, Longcroft Rise, Loughton, IG10 3NB will be open Mondays 9:30 am – 3:30 pm.

Tuesdays - 9:30am-3:30pm (April 13 / 20 /27) Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre, Hillhouse, Waltham Abbey, Essex, EN9 3EL

Fridays - 9:30am-3:30pm (April 16 / 23 / 30) Ongar Leisure Centre, Fyfield Road, The Gables, Ongar, Essex, CM5 0

Internal Digital Buddies

Discussions are taking place with colleagues in Community, Culture and Wellbeing to agree a plan going forwards to re energise, the following actions are already happening;

- Digital buddy support to residents via the Community, Culture & Wellbeing doorstep visits, these could not take place face to face due to Covid, some support has been given over the phone. We hope to provide doorstep support when coronavirus restrictions are lifted
- Support line for residents in sheltered accommodation – residents received a flyer with a number to call to request support from our digital buddies, this line also provides access to a befriending scheme. There hasn't been much take up, during February only one call was received for help with a laptop.

Members Technology & Members Contact process review

Feedback was captured from Members and Officers on the use of the Members Contact process. Short term the decision has been made that all new Members enquiries are to be raised via Members Contact. Once Members are in discussion with Officers the conversation will continue on a one to one basis with confirmation back to Members Contact once a query has been resolved. Longer term this process will feed into the development of the Members Portal.

As for ICT issues, we are publishing a weekly reminder of the agreed process in the Members bulletin which is for Members to email Members Contact who will raise on their behalf. Customer services are receiving a daily live update of open IT issues and ensuring pro-active speedy resolutions.

A review of Members technology requirements is also underway to ensure the tools provided are fit for purpose and meet Members' needs. We are pro-actively contacting Members to identify and address ICT issues or concerns plus check their level of digital adoption.

A working group has been set up and recommendations will be provided in due course. This will also allow us to plan appropriate training on the right topics and in the right format.

A review of Members induction process is taking place to look at how equipment is issued and returned to improve efficiency of this process. In addition, the Induction pack is being reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose and Members are aware of their IT responsibilities.

Reason for decision: None

Options considered and rejected: None

Consultation undertaken: None

Background Papers: None

