

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 21 September 2021

Portfolio: Customer & Partnerships Services

Subject: Customer Service Update

Officer contact for further information: Susan Lewis

Democratic Services Officer: R Perrin (01992 564532)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

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

1 What our customers are telling us

A small percentage of customers fed back concerns regarding broken links on our website. These links have been fixed and customer feedback will be monitored. Social media continues to grow as an interactive communications resource as customers report day to day issues such as flytipping and littering. The website continues to provide one of the most effective and efficient means of accessing Council information, making payments and requesting services. In the year to 31 August there were 1,038,956 visits and 3,196,021 page-views. Highest page views were recorded in April (411,120) corresponding with the usual increase associated with the elections. Over the same period webcasting achieved 33,935 views. The largest single webcast was Full Council on 8 February 2021 – 775 live views.

2 Complaints

Quarter 1 saw a total of 65 complaints which is a reduction from 97 received in the previous quarter, there are no particular trends to report. We received thirteen waste complaints for street cleaning potentially due to people out and about more and thirteen for Revenue & Benefits for delays with grant payments and Council Tax related.

3 Customer Satisfaction & Complaints Performance

Quarter 1 – KPI's

- Overall customer satisfaction 66% (target 80%)
- Complaints resolved within SLA 89% (target 85%)
- First point resolution 49% (target 45%)

Service levels have been severely impacted by resourcing issues in the customer contact centre due to long term staff absences. The knock-on effect means increased pressure on the remaining staff who have shown great resilience however increased wait times for phone calls are inevitable.

4 What's worked well

The Welcome Lounge opened on 19th July, after a slow start we are seeing an average footfall of 45 visitors a week (in comparison to an average of 300 pre Covid). Visits were mainly for Housing and Revenue & Benefits. Visitors requesting recycling sacks have been more than happy when advised of all the local outlets around the District to collect sacks.

Our Community Hub opens 13th September following recent familiarisation tours for Partners. A press release was issued w/c 6th September including a video to support the launch. As a reminder partners joining us include Food Bank, Phoenix Futures, Nacro, VAEF, ECC Family Solutions, DWP, CAB, CHESS Homeless, Changing Pathways and Peabody.

We are in discussion with further partners who have expressed an interest in joining. The aligning service areas will be in attendance in the Hub on the same days/times as partners providing a one stop multi agency approach for our residents.

The Broadway Cash Office continues to see strong usage since reopening on 12th April, with over a thousand unique customers and £660,000 income, of which nearly £320,000 has been cash. The kiosk at Waltham abbey has taken £182,000 in total of which £100,000 was cash. The kiosks at Epping Civic offices reopened on 21 July, taking £34,000 total of which 16,000 was cash.

At the beginning of June we launched a touch tone telephone payment service to replace our end of life voice recognition system. This replacement has resulted in a significant increase in the number of successful automated payments, with far fewer customers struggling to use the system and requests for additional officer support down by approximately 70%.

With regards to the paper on the future options for cash paying customers, final analysis is being completed prior to the publication of this report. This is expected by the end of September/early October.

5 Customer Strategy Update

5.1 'Customer Shoes' behavioural training

The last planned seminar will be held on 13th September when again thirty colleagues will be attending the training session to be run by the training provider the Impact Factory.

In response to delegates feedback we have several experienced Officers & Managers attending to experience share how they deal with very difficult and challenge customer conversations. The session will be recorded and shared with all colleagues.

We now have three modules in place to support colleagues with challenging conversations and this is module one. Module two focusses on telephone aggression and module three conflict management. At the last Select Committee some Members expressed an interest in receiving this training. The content of the session has been refined and developed up until this stage, now it's in the final format a conversation will take place with Democratic Services with regards to potential budget to accommodate next year.

5.2 Multi-Channel Digital Platform

At the last select committee we reported that we are investigating potential suppliers for a multi-channel customer engagement platform in the Contact Centre. Due to severe resourcing issues this project was put on hold. A detailed business case outlining the expected outcomes and benefits will be produced shortly.

5.3 Corporate External Communications

Extensive digital and social media output continues across a wide variety of Council services. Corporate Communications continues to prove support for Covid recovery. A campaign in coordination with West Essex CCG and Essex County Council targeted specific areas of low vaccine uptake within the district. Further pan-Essex coordination included communications responses to the Afghan resettlement programme.

The introduction of hybrid webcasting technology to the Council Chamber has successfully facilitated the inclusion of remote participants such as planning applicants and objectors via Zoom. Government legislation prohibits the participation of members remotely but feedback from other participants suggests the technology works well, with reduction in the requirement for physical attendance also contributing to the Council's climate change aspirations.

Plans are in progress at time of writing for the launch of a news app – provisionally titled District Matters. Following a soft launch in September, the app will provide a digital platform for the Council to share its own and third party news content from partners and other relevant stakeholders such as Essex Police, Essex County Council and Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau.

5.4 Members Technology & Members Contact process review

Recruitment is underway for a new Team Manager but we are yet to find the right candidate therefore the recruitment campaign continues.

Our aim is always to ensure you have ease of access to the information you need. In the absence of a full Members Portal at this stage, we are in the process of developing an interim single access point via the website. Going live in early September, all the main links that Members need should be included in this one location including access to Members Contact.

5.5 Digital Inclusion

Our aim of providing coaching and accessibility to technology is shared by partners throughout our District and we recently held a workshop with several Partners as well as Cllr Lion to discuss how we can work together in a collaborative manner. It was a really positive session with some great examples shared of how our residents have been receiving digital support via coaching sessions. Everyone agreed that a working group going forwards is a good idea. Once the new Team Manager is on board this work will progress.

Reason for decision: none

Options considered and rejected: none

Consultation undertaken: none

Resource implications: none

Legal and Governance Implications: none

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: none

Consultation Undertaken: none

Background Papers: none