

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 21 March 2023

Portfolio: Customer

Subject: Customer Service Strategy Update

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Democratic Services Officer: R Perrin (01992 564243)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To note the update on our Customer Service Strategy and provide feedback on 'what our customers are telling us'.

What are our customers telling us?

1 Members will be aware of the issues with the current **Waste and Recycling** contract and the number of missed collections experienced by residents in recent months. Customer Service are still receiving an increase in calls above the norm however volumes are slowly declining. From 1st Jan to 1st March 23 call volumes were 9.76% higher than the same period last year due to waste calls. The number of calls resolved by the contact centre at '**first point resolution**' saw an average increase of 5.11% for same Jan-March period and a 5% increase in online customer transactions in comparison to last year. Full KPI information will be reported to Stronger Council.

2 **Formal customer complaints** for waste from 1st Jan 23 to 1st March 23 were 141 in comparison to 20 for same period last year. Whilst waste remains the highest volume for formal complaints, the volumes are starting to decrease.

Customer Strategy 2023/24 Update

3 Our aim this year is to continue to improve customer access to our services, increasing use of digital solutions, whilst retaining phone contact for less digitally enabled customers. Our proposed projects are outlined below, many of these are awaiting a corporate prioritisation exercise to confirm we will proceed with the projects.

4 We are launching a **data capture process** which will provide us with improved customer insight, namely call causation on why customers call us as well as visibility of back-office customer contact. Customers who need to speak to a Technical Officer will no longer be transferred to a voicemail if an Officer is not available, instead, the team will receive a 'contact request' to a generic email account. Corporately we have agreed to one working day response time for initial acknowledgement back to the customer. Managers will have access to a Power BI dashboard to view and extra customised reports. Senior leadership will receive key messages from the reports on a monthly basis. This process will launch in March.

5 Our objective is to improve our **online customer experience** through simplified web content, better navigation and search as well as a consistent look & feel to instil trust in our brand. Officers will be provided with a web content strategy as well as templates to assist with writing web content. Project awaiting corporate prioritisation.

6 Following the **closure of Debden cash office** on 29th November 2022 and the roll out of Allpay cards to Council Tax and Business Rate customers in November over £87,952.21 of income has been received using this new scheme. Monthly income from the Debden Cash Office accounted for between 0.2%-0.5% of total income, and with total income variance each month considerably more than this it's not possible to identify which channels customers have shifted to globally. However, examining average Council Tax income at Debden for the last year and comparing it to the income of the new Allpay service at this early stage around 65% of income has channel shifted to this service with usage of the Allpay cards increasing month on month.

As previously advised, we have now removed the payment kiosk from Waltham Abbey library. The intention is to remove the kiosks at the Civic offices by the end of March. As with Debden, cash paying council tax and business rates customers have been sent Allpay cards enabling them to make payments at over sixty Post Offices throughout the district.

We will be migrating to a **cloud-based solution for our payment's** solution provider Pay360 when the current contract expires at the end of March 23. This migration will reduce licensing, support and transaction costs as well as creating savings within ICT for hardware, software, licensing and disaster recovery. Go live date for migration will be August 23. Over a five-year period, revenue savings are estimated at £85,000.

7 On our digital Members journey we will continue to support the transition to digital with the launch of the **Members portal**, providing access to all information in one place. The portal was launched to Members at one of our regular Members coffee mornings. Timescales for this project are awaiting the corporate prioritisation exercise after which further engagement sessions will be held. There is a wide range of digital support for Members available from drop in sessions prior to meetings, one to one support, coaching on using Mod.Gov and your EFDC iPad, please email Louis Walton on lwalton@eppingforestdc.gov.uk for further details.

Our **members coffee mornings** continue to be popular with regular Officers across service areas such as the People team, Planning and Parking attending. We have also had updates on Members Safety with the upcoming elections as well as an update from Qualis on their works. We would encourage Members to let us know of any particular subjects they would like to hear about at Members coffee mornings, please email Louis Walton.

8 **Community Hub** partner engagement continues to be on the increase with the highest volumes recorded for January 2023 – 284 visits. With our most popular services being EFDC benefits, DWP, EFDC Homelessness, Epping Foodbank and Barclays. In most recent months we have welcome three new partners: Essex Police (Community Engagement), Essex Family Support Services and Essex Wellbeing Services. The Hub continues to receive positive feedback from visitors regarding the face-to-face support and help on offer. The majority of The Hub users are from Epping, Loughton, Waltham Abbey & North Weald & Buckhurst Hill.

9 To enhance the **audio quality in the Council Chamber** and taking account of budgetary constraints, Facilities, ICT, Planning and Corporate Communications have been working with the assistance of several councillors to develop affordable enhancements to the audio and visual quality.

A new Wi-Fi-based hearing assistance system based on smartphone technology is due to replace the outdated and inadequate IR hearing system. A new Digital Signal Processor (DSP) has been installed to improve audio quality along with new speakers to enhance sound quality. Larger TV monitors are being installed to aid viewing of PowerPoint and planning presentations.

10 Webcasting Update

Microsoft Teams will replace Zoom for hybrid webcast meetings later this year. Members will be able to join meetings via the Council's licensed MS Teams app. Free MS Teams app and browser options are also available to external attendees such as objectors, applicants, and parish councils at planning meetings.

The move to MS Teams is part of the Council's wider savings. Further cost reductions have been identified in the Council's webcasting contract. From July, webcasting costs will be reduced by approximately 50 percent to £10,000 per year. Main webcasting commitments will be retained including the live streaming of

- Full Council
- Cabinet
- O&S
- DDMC
- Plans Sub Committees

Reason for decision: none

Options considered and rejected: none.

Resource implications: none

Legal and Governance Implications: none

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: none

Consultation Undertaken: customer consultation.

Background Papers: none

Impact Assessments: none

Risk Management: none

Equality: customer consultation on digital usage includes contact details for digitally excluded customers requiring support