

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 25 July 2023
Subject: Customer and Corporate Support Services Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Sam Kane

Recommending:

That the report of the Customer Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Customer Service

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.

Improving our customer experience using AI

We have been exploring new technology to understand how it can help us address our service challenges and ultimately improve our customer experience.

Currently in the discovery stage, we are exploring, building, testing and learning. We have focussed on two key priorities which are

1. Development of a **corporate customer insight portal**, enabling us to capture all insight in one central place, using AI to analyse data and provide key recommendations on improvements. The ultimate aim is that we develop a corporate insight portal which will have corporate benefits for all service areas.
2. Secondly, identifying a model to give us transparency on our most costly, lengthy **customer journeys**, identifying pain points for customers and again areas for improvement.

We are also looking at how AI can automate repetitive tasks as well as exploring Phone & Web Chat AI for deflection of first point of contact customer queries. AI can provide accurate responses to frequently asked questions using a pre-built language model. The findings from our discovery work will be presented to senior leadership in August.

Data Capture Process – Trial with Neighbourhoods Team

As a reminder we are introducing a 'data capture process' to enable us to capture better customer insight. Regardless of the way customers contact us we need a greater understanding of the reasons they contact us, how they contact us to determine blockers to using digital as well as insight on their customer experience,

positive or negative. This data will be fed into our 'customer insight portal' for analysis and recommendations for improvements.

We have been trialling the process with the Neighbourhoods team. The feedback from customers has been really positive they feel more confident they will get a response to their telephone contact as Officers are raising contact requests rather than transferring calls to voicemail if the query is of a technical nature. Since the trial started in May, all contact requests have been responded to within the SLA of one working day. Learnings from the trial are being implemented after which the process will be extended to all of Housing Services, followed by other service areas.

Contact Centre

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. Full KPI information will be reported to Stronger Council.

Member Coffee Mornings

The next coffee morning is being hosted on Wednesday 12 July and will be used to obtain feedback on the induction and training programme, as well as the usual Officers being available to answer any queries or requests. We encourage Members to let us know of any particular subjects they would like to hear about at Members coffee mornings, please email Kim Partridge at memberservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Improving the Member induction and training programme

We are working in collaboration with Democratic Services to digitalise all induction forms Members are required to complete into a 'tell us once' digital form. This will save both Members and Officers time.

We are also creating an e-learning area on our online training platform Litmos to create engaging and interactive training content, enabling Members to complete training at their convenience without the need to attend in person sessions. This will increase participation in training and reduce Officer time spent delivering multiple sessions. The timescales for completion of both strands of work is March 2024 in readiness for the May 2024 Election.

2. Digital Inclusion

Independent Living Digital Skills sessions

We are working with local volunteers and partners, including WECAN (West Essex Community Action Network) and Essex County Council, to install Wi-Fi in the communal area of the Independent Living Scheme Hyde Mead House in Nazeing. The project aims to increase residents' confidence with technology and access to services through delivery of a series of digital skills coaching sessions. The project is in the discovery stage and a plan is yet to be developed.

Epping Community Hub Digital Coaching

The weekly drop-in service delivered in partnership with VAEF (Voluntary Action Epping Forest) continue to be popular. The current themes of support are focused

on online form completion and the ability to use the internet to research.

Website Improvements

Officers have used the annual Cabinet Office Accessibility report to make improvements to the website. Using Site Improve software more creatively, the team has seen a number of incremental improvements to accessibility and other areas such as Search Engine Optimisation. Revisions were also made to the website Accessibility Statement. Progress on the development of a new Local Gov Drupal website has been placed on hold while options for joint development with Colchester City Council are explored.

Payment Solutions

At the end of March our remaining payment kiosks at Epping Forest Civic Offices were decommissioned, following which they were physically removed in April. Council Tax and Business Rates kiosk customers had been supplied Allpay cards in February (Housing already had them) and customers channel shifted to this alongside our other existing options. Allpay has been well received by Council Tax customers, with growth since launch to a current average of £112,000 of income collected from around 755 customers per month in the current financial year since April.

A project is underway to update our payment solutions to support the new Housing Civica Cx system. This project is on schedule and expected to be completed by the beginning of September with Civica Cx expected to go live at the end of October.

The high priority of the Housing Civica Cx project along with contractual delays means the project to migrate our payment solutions to the cloud has been delayed. We are currently evaluating which works can proceed in tandem with the Civica Cx project and creating a project plan for delivery.

We have recently completed a project to implement Pay360s Planned Payment Module (PPM). This gives the council an additional scheduled payment option for customers, and we are in the process of planning a pilot of this solution followed by wider demonstrations and implementation within business areas where this channel will be of benefit.

3. Corporate Services

People Strategy

The new people strategy for 2023-2027 was signed off by Cabinet in May 23 and launched to the organisation June 23. However, there has been a review and reprioritisation of the projects identified for 2023-2027, this is due to the focus and work taking place in the HR shared service programme.

Our focus, in addition to BAU now being the following:

Continue	Pause
Legislative Changes/Updates	Total Reward/Employee Benefits Framework review
Disability Confident – assessment	Learning & Development/OD – Employee

underway. Pause at Stage 2	Skills Analysis
Implement Wagestream – working in collaboration with Colchester and Braintree.	iTrent – Recruitment Portal & Application Form development
iTrent Multifactor Authentication	Internal Comms Ambassadors
Employee Insight – Adopting a High-Performance Culture Survey June-July 23	Internal Communications Strategy Review
Service Led Workforce Planning Part 1 – already in flight	Digital Performance Management Tool (Digital Strategy)
Local Pay - NJC	Digital Skills Analysis (Digital Strategy)
T&Cs – Contract review – Pause at SM level. Standby/Call out payments	

Contingency Planning

Service specific BC plans have now been adopted with a process to support those still being created with suitable timetable in place. Corporate Plan is in final stages. Validation exercise is being created for this year to test and train all managers on their individual plans.

Business Support

Local Land Charges (LLC), HMLR Project

- Con29 searches at approximately 30 working days for 'complex land' searches. Approximately 15 'complex land' searches awaiting completion. The Local plan's approval has contributed to the number of land searches received.
- HMLR project completed end of April 23. HMLR are giving us glowing feedback. Achieving 99-100% data accuracy. It is one of the best they have seen.
- New charges introduced April 2023 splitting Residential and Commercial search fees. This will be used to offset the loss of income in personal charges.
- Processes have been mapped and improvements are being highlighted.
- An additional burden payment of £24,000 has also been made.

Restructure

- Following the reduction in 12 FTE from Business Support in April 2023 resource has been rebalanced between the teams. Resilience is being built in and cross training taking place.

Finance Team

- Working with the Shared Services Finance Lead as part of the discovery stage to understand current processes.
- Supporting the move of Grounds Maintenance to Qualis by providing 3 months of training and support to Qualis colleagues.

Accommodation – Commercialisation of our bookable spaces

- The contract between IWG, Regus Epping and EFDC commenced on the 1st of April 2023, we are working together to advertise the space and encourage bookings.

Insurance and Risk

- A Council wide Risk Management Framework, Policy & Strategy is going to Audit and Governance Committee on the 17 July 2023 for approval, with ultimate approval by Cabinet thereafter.
- Risk Management training is continued to be rolled out across the Council to individual Service Areas. Member training will be rolled out in November 2023 in conjunction with the Chief Internal Auditor.
- The Insurance & Risk Specialist has commenced and will deliver further training workshops for insurance with individual service areas where appropriate throughout the year.
- The Insurance & Risk Specialist is continuing to work with the Fleet Management team, Health & Safety and HR on revising our Driving at Work policy, Drink & Drugs policy and producing a Drivers Handbook to ensure the Council is compliant with its obligations under the Health & Safety at Work Act and Road Traffic Acts amongst other obligations and is expected to be finalised by Q4 of 2023/2024.

Elections

- The local elections were held successfully and without incident. This has been reviewed by the Elections Planning Group in preparation for the 'All-Out' elections next May, and the Group has visited a potential new Count Venue location.
- The Annual Canvass is getting under way this month. This will culminate with a new Electoral Register being published in early December.

Democratic Services

- Following an unsuccessful recruitment campaign for our vacant Democratic Services Officer role, we have engaged the services of the Resourcing Team at Essex County Council to fill the vacancy.
- We have also started the recruitment of a Higher-Level Apprentice for the Team. The advert is on the Council's website and the deadline for applications is the end of July.

4. ICT

Melissa Kemp-Salt joined the Council on 20 June as the new Joint ICT PMO & Transformation Service Director for Epping and Colchester. Mel has over 20 years' experience in local government in the programme and project profession leading on digital services, including experience of shared services.

Service Management, Security & Networks

The one team approach in ICT continues to improve the customer experience, with the teams jointly working on BAU and projects to drive performance and improvements. Customer feedback was overall positive with 100% satisfaction. Tickets are being managed extremely well with 'on hold' tickets being at their lowest with 6 and tickets are 100% within SLA's.

Phishing ICT security campaign has now successfully been completed. The phishing test comprises of a group of emails randomly sent to all staff, if the recipient clicks on any links or opens the attached document, they will be informed that this is phishing test, and they will see a short video on how to spot and avoid phishing emails. A

second phase will be implemented to those colleagues who were absent during the first campaign.

National Cyber Security Awareness month takes place in October 2023. Internal Communications and ICT will be looking at promoting customer engagement and awareness during that period.

The network connection in the Chamber has been increased from 1Gb to 20Gb to fall into line with all the other edge network switches and improve performance.

ICT attended prior to the extra ordinary Council Meeting, to resolve any technical issues.

Aruba Wi-Fi access points have now been installed at all the Scheme Manager sites and simplified the way this works. Older Aerohive units, Terminals, Monitors, ShoreTel phones and printers were removed. This will enable the scheme managers to be able to work at any sites.

Mike Chapman has been covering the Asset Management officer role since January 2023. I am pleased to inform you that Mike managed to save £63,191.70 on our licensing renewal from 16 January to 24 March 2023.

KPI's – SLA Metrics & Analysis for w/c 26 June 2023

Tickets Raised	Outstanding	On Hold	Resolved	Within SLA	% Within SLA	Outside SLA	% Outside SLA
124	30	6	94	124	100%	0	0%

Customer Feedback June 2023

Satisfaction Level	Ticket Handling	Customer service	Technical skill	Time taken
Very satisfied	100%	100%	100%	100%
Satisfied	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Dissatisfied	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Very Dissatisfied	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
(blank) No response	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Customer comments on service provided:

- Quick resolution to problem by knowledgeable officer.
- Thanks to the support desk and to Business Partners for running the report again this year for me.
- Excellent response and resolved issue.
- Quickly sorted and great advice given.
- IT were very quick to get the issue resolved which was appreciated.
- I was late with the Leavers request, but it was all handled in time.
- Housing IT were very through in finding a solution. Well done and thanks again!
- Excellent response under the notice period given to implement - Outcome successful.

Strategy

The ICT strategy is being implemented in line with the need to find efficiency savings in the service and across the business to ensure that resources are focussed upon the areas of greatest impact.

Shared services with Colchester City Council and Braintree District Council are being explored and are currently in the discovery stage.

Projects – Business Applications and Infrastructure

The following projects have been delivered by ICT since the last report:

- Cancelling SurveyMonkey contract and using MS Forms saving £10k
- Supplier negotiations on the DR contract meant a renewal with a saving of £30k.
- The Lone Working Application PeopleSafe has been renewed and a saving of £10k. An alternative solution will be explored next year.
- Decommission of Boxi server 4.1 as we finished year end and moved to an alternative server.
- Microsoft Technology Service Group (TSG) SharePoint ICT are scoping in Housing only.
- EFDC Grounds Maintenance Team transferring to Qualis.

Priorities for ICT to deliver in the next few months continues:

- Members Portal
- Litmos for Members
- Telephony - Gamma
- ITrent Multi Factor Authentication
- Licence issues on servers
- Microsoft Office 365 Multi Factor Authentication
- Encrypted mail to our mail server
- Data cleanse F and Z drives

Corporate Projects

The Project Management Office (PMO) provides governance and project management resources. The 'project portfolio' currently consists of 28 projects, which are either in 'scoping and design' or 'in delivery'. Of these, 28 a number are categorised as priority projects, which are strategically aligned to EFDC's Corporate Objectives. Priority projects are also reported on a quarterly basis through Overview and Scrutiny.

The Priority Projects in progress include:

- Financial ICT Systems Replacement
- Housing & Asset Management System
- Epping Leisure Centre (Contract Agreement & Implementation)
- Waste Management Contract
- Transfer Services to Qualis
- North Weald Master Planning/Enterprise Zone
- Local Plan
- M3 PP Proposal

- People Programme

The PMO has continued to work on reviewing and aligning projects to EFDC's Corporate objectives so that time, effort, and money can be directed and supported on the right projects. Steering Groups continue to develop and evolve to support the roles of the key stakeholders involved.

Service Planning for the 23/24 financial year continues for all Service Areas. Draft Service Plans were received back from all Service Areas identified proposed projects for the 23/24 delivery year. The PMO have worked through and presented the output for each of these. Several key actions will now be worked through including mapping to strategic objectives, resource planning and delivery planning.

The PMO is also currently moving into a process to complete a full health check/deep dive on all Priority Projects to identify any gaps, re-align where appropriate and identify opportunities for support. This task aligns with the work that is underway on Service Planning. In addition, high level scoping will also be completed for all other proposed projects.

The PMO has procured licenses for TeamHood which gives us a tool to allow us to start to use a Kan Ban Board System which in turn will support our appetite for a greater level of agile project delivery within the organisation.