

# **Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee**

**Date of meeting: 15 September 2020**

**Portfolio: Customer and Corporate Support Services  
Councillor S Kane**

**Subject: Customer Service Update Q2**

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

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

## **Report:**

### **What our customers are telling us**

#### **Customer frustration**

We have seen an increase in calls to the contact centre from customers who are frustrated that changes in services have not been communicated to them. All service areas have been reminded of the importance of putting themselves in their customer shoes and pro-actively telling customers of changes as well as informing the contact centre; this has been addressed with the relevant areas on each occasion.

#### **Paying cash**

35% of customers did not wish to channel switch to alternative payment methods and as a result we opened Broadway cash office two days a week, four hours a day to take cash payments. In the first two weeks 68K cash was taken and a steady stream of customers queued highlighting the demand for this service. This is a short-term solution and a longer-term solution is to be developed.

#### **Special collection waste service**

Positive feedback has been received via the customer contact centre that our special collection service is value for money.

#### **Topics via social media channels**

Potholes and pavement maintenance are a topic of frustration, customers still contact EFDC trying to get them fixed. Commonplace received much constructive feedback on the council's High Street Covid recovery options. The Bell Hotel featured heavily in local, social and national media coverage including The Times, The Mirror and the Observer. Flooding such as the recent flooding in Loughton High Road has seen a mix of posts, residents still have little understanding about the distinction between us and ECC, although in this case the situation is further complicated by Thames Water responsibility for the sewers.

Reports of fallen trees – usually associated with high winds have resulted in requests to have them removed.

## Customer Strategy

*Note the customer strategy was not launched to customers due to Covid-19 and a decision needs to be made as to the right time to do this.*

### **Phase 1 'Fix the Basics'; (Barriers buy in from service areas)**

All service areas were requested to conduct an internal customer service health check to identify areas for improvement and to encourage the 'think customer' culture change. Overall buy in has been lacking; the teams who did complete it have improvement plans which are reviewed quarterly and have reported on the benefits of doing so.

There is a requirement for this health check to be made mandatory – the consequences if we don't is that barriers are not identified, and customer frustrations are not fixed as highlighted above. Agreement will be sought from Leadership for this decision.

### **Phase 2 'Customer Shoes';**

We are still exploring options to find a suitable provider who can deliver an exciting innovative approach, using the latest technology (zoom) to deliver training in our current virtual world.

We need our employees to understand it is not WHAT they do but HOW they do it; the impact their behaviour, style and tone can impact the outcomes of customer interactions regardless of the method of interaction ie. verbal, face to face or written Key skills such as actively listen, taking ownership, being credible & reliable, doing what we say we are going to do and turning situations around when they go wrong, will be covered. An initial pilot will be launched with a mix of front-line staff across service areas. We have given prospective training providers the challenge of developing an e-learning training video in order to deliver this training cost effectively to all staff.

### **Benefits include**

- Improved employee understanding of Customer value
- Alignment to internal organisational values and behaviours
- Morale improved through gaining new skills
- Improved customer satisfaction and emotional loyalty
- Reduction in official complaints
- Officer time saving for complaints investigation

### **Phase 3 'Embracing New Technology';**

Priorities are being reviewed as part of ICT project prioritisation exercise.

### **Looking forward**

5<sup>th</sup> October sees the start of National Customer Service week, the aim of this week is to highlight the importance of customer service and a week of events will be planned along with the involvement of senior management. We hope to launch the customer shoes training pilot in the same week.

### **Key messages must include:**

- Complete your customer service health check and identify areas of focus in your areas to improve your customer service
- Everyone to buy in to the 'think customer shoes culture' – *every area has customers and is accountable for customer service not just the Customer Service team*
- Managers to role model; praising great customer service and identifying areas for improvement

**Reason for decision:** There is no decision related to this report.

**Options considered and rejected:** N/A

**Consultation undertaken:** N/A

**Background Papers:** N/A