

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	12 January 2021
Subject:	Customer Care Strategy
Report of:	Head of Corporate Services
Corporate Lead:	Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Customer Focus
Number of Appendices:	Two

Executive Summary:

In our Council Plan, we make the promise that we will put the needs of our customers at the heart of what we do and listen to what they say, treating people fairly and without bias. Our Customer Care Strategy is an important step to making this a reality.

This Customer Care Strategy details how we plan to deliver our customer care and outlines the organisational commitments we will make to our customers.

Our commitment throughout the strategy is to have a 'can do' attitude, and support our customers by going the extra mile for them. The strategy has an annual action plan which details how we will achieve this.

Recommendation:

To consider the Customer Care Strategy and RECOMMEND TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE that it be APPROVED.

Reasons for Recommendation:

We want to provide the best possible service to all of our customers, particularly in terms of resolving queries at the first point of contact. We recognise how important first impressions are, and how vital it is to get things right from the start.

Every time a customer contacts us, we must remember that the way they are treated, the standard of customer care they receive, and the quality of the outcome all influence their opinion of us.

Resource Implications:

None other than Officer time to implement the action plan.

Legal Implications:

None directly arising from this report.

Risk Management Implications:

Without clear customer care standards, there is a risk to our reputation.

Performance Management Follow-up:

Progress in delivering the action plan will be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

Environmental Implications:

None directly arising from this report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1** Our Council Plan highlights our value that we will always put our customers first. We make the promise that we will put the needs of our customers at the heart of what we do and listen to what they say - treating people fairly and without bias. Supporting our values we also have an ethos that whatever we do will be 'better for customers, better for business'. This Customer Care Strategy is an important step to making these commitments a reality.
- 1.2** This strategy builds on our previous Customer Care Strategy and reinforces the Council's values and ethos by setting out how we plan to deliver our customer care, and what organisational commitments we need to make to our customers to deliver our promises.
- 1.3** It is really important to recognise that customer care should be a Council-wide priority. While we have a dedicated customer services team, which acts as the front face of the Council for many visitors and callers, valuing customer care needs to be embedded in the culture for everyone who works for Tewkesbury Borough Council.
- 1.4** Over the past year, customer behaviour has changed significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Customers who used to visit our offices and our advice and information centres now reach us over the phone, online or in virtual meetings. The impact has been managed extremely well, with very little negative feedback and the current demand, particularly for our advice and information centres, remains low. Moving forward, we need to capture this success and ensure that we tailor our future customer care in a way that reflects this new way of working while also recognising that there will always be a need – when it is safe to do so – for face-to-face support too.

2.0 WHAT WILL OUR CUSTOMER CARE STRATEGY ACHIEVE?

- 2.1** To ensure we are fulfilling our promise to put our customers first, and put them at the heart of what we do, the Customer Care Strategy introduces six themes. These themes highlight what we as a Council need to focus on to achieve a high level of customer satisfaction.
- 2.2** We need to:
- Introduce a refreshed set of customer service standards.
 - Make it easier, simpler and more convenient for customers to interact with us when requiring a service.
 - Use feedback from residents to help shape future service delivery.
 - Make sure our staff are equipped with the skills to deliver high quality customer service.

- Promote channel shift - providing services in a way that is more convenient for customers and less expensive to deliver for the Council. By doing this, we will free up capacity to support customers who need the more traditional methods of communication.
- Work with our partners in the Public Services Centre to ensure our customers experience a seamless and worthwhile experience when visiting the offices.

2.3 The strategy's supporting action plan (which can be found at the end of the strategy) is shaped around these six themes, and pulls out specific ways in which we can improve our customer care moving forward.

3.0 CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS

3.1 The strategy is also supported by a set of customer services standards which outline what our customers can expect from their experience with us.

3.2 The updated standards will be adopted and embraced across the Council, and will help us to continue being a truly customer-focused Council. The standards are split into the following categories:

- What customers can expect from us generally, as well as when they:
 - Phone us.
 - Email us.
 - Send a letter.
 - Visit in person.
 - Make an enquiry online.
 - Make a formal complaint.

3.3 The standards are largely the same as our existing ones, although there are a number of additions/amendments and these have been underlined in the document at Appendix 2. The more significant changes include:

- Encouraging staff to take ownership of the calls they answer so callers have a clear point of contact.
- Reducing the number of days we are expected to respond to emails from 10 days to five days – to reflect best practice and meet customer expectation.
- Including a section on catering for people with special needs, interpretation needs or learning difficulties.

4.0 ACTION PLAN 2021

4.1 To help us achieve the commitments we set out in this strategy, it is supported by an annual action plan – which can be found at the end of the strategy. The action plan is focused around the strategy's six themes and details how we will achieve our commitments to customer care.

4.2 Progress on this action plan will be reported each year to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 Not applicable.

6.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

- 6.1** Council Plan 2020 to 2024.
Digital Strategy.
Communications Strategy.

7.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

- 7.1** None.

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

- 8.1** Managed within current resources and budget.

9.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

- 9.1** None.

10.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

- 10.1** None.

11.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

- 11.1** None.

Background Papers: None.

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Appendices:
1. Customer Care Strategy.
2. Customer Care Standards.