

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	26 March 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	Customer Care Strategy Action Plan Update
<b>Report of:</b>	Director: Digital and Organisational Change
<b>Corporate Lead:</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Lead Member for Customer Focus
<b>Number of Appendices:</b>	1

## **Executive Summary:**

In the Council Plan (2020 to 2024), 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, which was introduced in 2020, has played an important role in helping us to deliver this promise and provide a focus for customer care. Our commitment throughout the strategy is to have a proactive approach and to support our customers by going the extra mile for them.

This report provides an update on the 2023/24 action plan, which is the final year of this strategy.

## **Recommendation:**

**To CONSIDER the progress made against the actions within the Customer Care Strategy 2023/24 action plan.**

## **Financial Implications:**

Managed within current resources and budget

## **Legal Implications:**

None directly arising from this report.

## **Environmental and Sustainability Implications:**

None directly arising from this report.

## **Resource Implications (including impact on equalities):**

None relating to this report

## **Safeguarding Implications:**

None relating to this report

### **Impact on the Customer:**

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.

The action plan has provided a framework for us to deliver customer-focused improvements across the organisation, and now that a new management structure is in place which brings together services that can together significantly influence the quality of our customers' experience, a new strategy will be developed following the launch of the Council Plan and the launch of the council's new omni-channel portal, as well as the development of new customer care standards.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** The Council Plan 2020 to 2024 (set to be replaced from April 2024) highlights the Council's value that it will always put 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'. Our Customer Care Strategy has been an important step to making these commitments a reality.
- 1.2** It is important to recognise that customer care is 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 must be embedded in the culture for everyone who works for Tewkesbury Borough Council.
- 1.3** Our Customer Care Strategy was approved in 2020, and this is its final action plan. Following a new management structure, which brings together the customer-focused services of digital, IT, communications and customer care, consideration is currently being given to how best to ensure excellent customer care is delivered through our strategy delivery – with a suite of new strategies set to be delivered following the launch of the new Council Plan 2024 to 2028. In addition to this, the Council will be introducing a new omni-channel customer care portal from May, which will provide meaningful insight and data to our customer demand and is crucial to help shape and inform our future approach.

## **2.0 PROGRESS ON 2023/24 ACTIONS**

- 2.1** To help us achieve the commitments we set out in our Customer Care Strategy, it is supported by an annual action plan. The action plan is focused on the strategy's themes and details how we will achieve our commitments to customer care.
- 2.2** Good progress was made on last year's action plan, with 11 out of the 15 actions achieved as shown in Appendix 1. It is important to note that this progress was made during an unsettled period for the customer services team as a result of staff changes.

Highlights include:

- A new structure for the Customer Services team, which introduced a new Communications and Customer Experience Manager and the replacement of a Customer Services Team Leader post with a Senior Customer Services Advisor post. The new structure is working well, with examples such as our flooding response and garden waste renewal highlighting the benefits of having a single manager overseeing the two teams and ensuring information is shared – both to and from our customers – in a timely way.

- The Council has invested in a new customer contact system that allows us to use multiple channels to interact with customers, such as live chat, automated chat bots for straight forward enquiries, Facebook Messenger, and SMS. This system and our approach will completely reinvent the way we interact with customers, helping us to work more efficiently and to improve our service.
- The Customer Services team has been instrumental in ensuring the customer experience sits at the heart of the Council's digital services – as described in the action 4c update.

**2.3** Four actions were not achieved last year, and these are detailed below:

Action	Reason
1a: Carry out a review of the customer care standards to ensure they reflect best practice and put the customers' experience first.	A review of the customer care standards will feed into the rollout of the Council's new omnichannel contact centre, as described below. The new standards will introduce performance indicators and ensure consistency in performance to the Council's approach to customer care.
2a. Review the membership of the panel and communicate with them to establish if they would like to remain on it.	The Citizens' Panel currently has 234 members. A review of the panel has not yet taken place but will be delivered by the end of April 2024 with members being asked to confirm they would like to remain on it, and that the data we hold for them is accurate.
6b: Consider including an administration cost to bookings made over the phone, such as garden waste and bulky waste.	This was not progressed during 2023/24 due to resource limitations but will be considered as part of a wider approach to delivering paid-for digital services, being mindful of the impact on residents who do not have access to online services.
7b: As part of the office refurbishment, improve the Public Services Centre signage.	The office refurbishment project was put on hold during 2023/24 but the Public Services Centre signage will be included when it progresses.

**3.0 NEXT STEPS**

**3.1** The Council will shortly be adopting a new Council Plan, and it has an internal ambition to become a high performing organisation (HPO). Where the Council Plan sets out what outcomes we want to deliver for our residents and communities, the emerging HPO programme will provide an approach for how we deliver them.

**3.2** In line with this, and following the management restructure bringing together customer-focused services as described earlier in the report, the following strategies will soon be reviewed to ensure they reflect the new direction of the organisation:

- Customer Care Strategy – including customer care standards
- Digital Approach
- IT Strategy
- Communications Strategy

**3.3** One approach that will be explored is to combine the Digital Approach and Customer Care Strategy to provide a Digital and Customer Access Strategy, reflecting the Council's digital by default ethos and promoting the importance of access for all.

#### **4.0 CONSULTATION**

**4.1** Consultation will take place with councillors, staff and our Citizens' Panel on the development of new customer care standards over the coming weeks.

#### **5.0 ASSOCIATED RISKS**

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

#### **6.0 MONITORING**

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

#### **5.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL PRIORITIES/COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

**5.1** Council Plan 2020 to 2024  
Digital Approach  
Communications Strategy

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**Background Papers:** None

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**Appendices:** Appendix 1 - Update on the action plan for 2023/24