

## MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

<b>COMMITTEE:</b> Cabinet	<b>REPORT NUMBER:</b> <b>MCa/18/10</b>
<b>FROM:</b> Lead Member for Customer Services, Councillor Suzie Morley	<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b> 9 July 2018
<b>OFFICER:</b> Sara Wilcock, Assistant Director for Customer Services	<b>KEY DECISION REF NO.</b> CAB35

### REFRESHED CUSTOMER STRATEGY

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The report introduces and provides supplementary information to consider, alongside the refreshed Customer Strategy at Appendix 1.

#### 2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The options that have been considered are:

- a) Continue to work to the emerging Public Access Strategy as set out in the Council papers of September 16 titled "Future Model for Public Access including Accommodation".
- b) Develop an alternative Public Access Strategy that does not focus on our customers.
- c) To update and refresh the strategy in line with the progress that has already been made but taking into consideration, how culturally we embed a customer centric culture.

#### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The refreshed Customer Strategy be agreed.
- 3.2 In consultation with the Cabinet Member and Lead Member, minor amendments to the strategy be delegated to the Assistant Director for Customer Services to ensure the strategy is kept up to date, and reflective of emerging strategies which overlap.
- 3.3 That an action and communication plan is developed, which will ensure the Customer Strategy is widely shared across the organisation and provides for an opportunity to engage with our staff, embedding a customer focused organisational culture.

#### REASON FOR DECISION:

To provide an updated and refreshed Customer Strategy that states our organisational aim to put the customer at the heart of the organisation, and by doing so, improves our ability to better deliver our customer need.

## **4. KEY INFORMATION**

- 4.1 In 2016 we set out in a Council report titled “Future Model for public access including accommodation”, a public access strategy. The public access strategy focused on five key access channels, face to face, telephony, email, online digital services, webchat/SMS and stated the intent to work collaboratively in place based teams to support our most vulnerable customers.
- 4.2 During the past 2/3 years progress has been made with notable achievements including the opening of two new public access points in Stowmarket and Sudbury where customers can access our services in person. We have also implemented a new call centre telephony system as well as consolidated two websites into one.
- 4.3 Progress against our priorities has been as a result of the decision made in 2016 regarding public access and accommodation, and so now seems an opportune moment to refocus and update the public access strategy
- 4.4 The refreshed Customer Strategy outlines 9 key principles across 4 themes which will enable us to have a customer centric approach, so that we place the customer at the heart of our organisation.
- 4.5 The strategy is deliberately titled, more simply, the Customer Strategy. This is in an attempt to focus on wider aspects of how we deliver a customer centric approach across the organisation, rather than associating ‘public access’ just with locations and specific channels. The refreshed Customer Strategy places a greater emphasis on how organisationally we will create a culture that considers and put the customer first.
- 4.6 There has often been debate around the use of the term ‘customer’ as opposed to various alternatives such as citizen or resident. Local Authorities provide a range of diverse services; some of which are statutory services, some of which are focused on particular groups e.g. Housing tenants, others where individuals can express a choice of whom to contract a service from e.g. Building Control. An important element of the strategy is continuing to confirm our priority, of understanding the needs of a wide range of groups and individuals, and appreciating that they will be different, depending on a range of factors including the types of services they need or would like to access.
- 4.7 In this sense our use of the term ‘customer’ helps us maintain a level of consistency and common understanding; in that irrespective of the services provided, our ethos is to provide positive experiences and relationships with high levels of satisfaction.

## **5. LINKS TO JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN**

- 5.1 The refreshed Customer Strategy particularly aligns with two of the key strategic themes or outcomes; Community Capacity Building and Engagement as at 6.0, and an Enabled and Efficient Organisation. The Customer Strategy directly links to taking advantage of modern technology, so that residents can access our services at times and in ways to suit themselves, which will ensure that our reducing resources can be aimed at assisting those most in need.

## 6. SHARED SERVICE / PARTNERSHIP IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no shared service implications. However one of the strategies guiding principles is that we will support all of our customers to become self-serving where ever possible and work in partnership with other like-minded organisations to deliver this. It is important to recognise that we cannot deliver more strategic objectives like digital inclusion alone and that there are wider benefits to be realised from having a partnering approach, both for our customers and us. Working in partnership in this way would also be in line with the Joint Strategic Plan ambitions of building our communities capacity

## 7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Customer Strategy suggests a number of initiatives and activities that as implemented will change the culture of the organisation as well as deliver improved customer services. Some of these activities are considered as business as usual and within our current gift to deliver within our existing budgets. However the development of business cases and more detailed project plans will be required setting out key financial considerations for some of the initiatives, for example the implementation of a Customer Record Management system. Substantial organisational projects like this will be subject to a comprehensive business case, and will follow the Councils normal governance processes, to gain sign off prior to implementation.

## 8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None identified

## 9. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Significant Risk Register No 5f, as set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
If we do not have more efficient and effective public access and agile working arrangements then we will not be able to tailor the services our customers need and target those in need	2 Unlikely	2 Noticeable/ Minor	New public access points are up and running in both Stowmarket and Sudbury. Services can be accessed through both; with a range of assisted/self-serve/telephony support available. Further development and review is on-going. We are also developing regular feedback mechanisms to develop customer satisfaction measures. We have undertaken a staff survey which will inform an action

			plan in the future, tackling areas of concern
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**10. CONSULTATIONS**

10.1 As part of wider public engagement activities on the proposal to create a single council to replace Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, a market research company carried out an independent telephone survey of 4000 residents. The survey showed high support from electors for a number of key objectives, one of which was “delivering services that are better tailored to the needs of local residents”. This directly links to the Customer Strategy aims, of understanding the needs of our customers and focussing on their priorities.

**11. EQUALITY ANALYSIS**

11.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment was carried out as part of the Future Model for Public Access in September 2016. It is envisaged that the refreshed strategy and ensuing initiatives would be an enhancement to our current service, and would have a positive effect. A further assessment will be carried out to understand if the refreshed strategy will have any increased impact

**12. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 Increases in online contact should impact positively; reducing print and paper costs across the organisation, and reducing the Councils carbon footprint

**13. APPENDICES**

Title	Location
(a) Customer Strategy	Attached

**14. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

14.1 None