

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF THE HOUSING & CUSTOMER WORKING GROUP ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2019

PART A: REPORT

SUBJECT: Strategic direction of Customer Services

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PORTFOLIO AREA: Neighbourhood Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Customer Access Strategy (2013-17) set out standards of care and service that ADC aims to provide to our customers.

This report briefly reviews progress since the implementation of the 2013-17 Strategy, it introduces a new draft strategy and sets out a process of implementing the updated strategy. This includes consultation and workshops with elected members and staff culminating in a report returning to HCSWG with a recommendation to Cabinet for adoption in 2020.

The draft Customer Access Strategy (2020-25) reflects the Council's 2020 Vision and suggests a new Customer Services Vision which aims to place the customer at the heart of everything that the Council does. It also sets out how a new strategy will be embedded into the organisation together with a proposed timescale.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members are asked to note the report and the timetable for the development of the Strategy 2020-25.

1. BACKGROUND:

- 1.1. In 2013 the Working Group was presented with the Customer Access Strategy 2013-2017 together with an associated Action Plan.
- 1.2. The Action Plan was divided into several areas of working arrangements for customer services staff, corporate systems and technology, review of written communication to the public and a review of the Arun website. The progress made with the action plan is reviewed below.
- 1.3. The Action Plan was envisaged to be a living document which would move and change as the organisation changes. The principles on which the previous Strategy was based continue to be relevant and are represented in the updated draft Strategy.

2. PROGRESS ON ACTION PLAN

2.1. The following successes and achievements have been made since the implementation of the last strategy. These include:

- Multiskilled Staff – staff within the Customer Services (CS) team are able to deal queries for all service areas both in the contact centre and at the front desk
- SharePoint – accessible to all staff and enabling CS staff to access up to date information directly for service areas
- Eforms & Workflow – many services areas have implemented systems enabling the public to access services directly through the website
- Website redesign – although further work is needed progress has been made improving access for the public
- Smartphone Access – through the redesigned website smartphone access is better served
- Self-service access to more services – access to a larger number of services is now available to the public e.g. on-line reporting missed bin collection, on line payments.
- Social media – regular Facebook updates and answers to public queries / Tweets providing information / update of services

2.2. Work in Progress

- Collection and monitoring of feedback – from internal services and from the public on how the Council is performing
- Consistent quality of outgoing communication
- My Arun website portal – some services are providing self-service portal however there is no consistent policy approach to implementation.
- A Digital Strategy

2.3. Included at Appendix 1 is a graph which illustrates existing customer contact trends. This was taken to the HSCWG in June 2019 and identifies the main methods (often referred to as channels) that the public contact ADC together with the number of contacts.

2.4. This clearly shows that by far the largest number of contacts are made by digital means – largely through the website, and that this has been increasing. The other methods are by phone or in person and have remained static over the three-year period identified.

2.5. The Customer satisfaction survey (2019) asked how the public would like to be kept informed. The largest percentage (44%) said that their preference was by the website. This was followed by local media (37%), printed information (34%), and the Council's magazine (32%). Direct contact through meeting staff or meetings and events was at the lower end of the list (13%). This reflects what people are actually doing as illustrated in Appendix 1.

2.6. A report on the full Customer satisfaction survey 2019 is due to be presented to a future working group.

2.7. The draft Customer Access Strategy together with Digital Strategy aims to build on these trends and to ensure that when a customer needs to gain information from ADC, or to contact us, they can do so as efficiently and effectively as possible.

3. THE DRAFT CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY

3.1. The Councils 2020 Vision is to provide the best services we can afford to help improve resident's lives. It states that we will continue to deliver priorities without costing more by:

- Offering an improved customer experience
- Building better relationships with other organisations and the community
- Providing more digital opportunities to make dealing with us easier
- Becoming smaller but more effective

3.2. We will endeavour to provide 'an improved customer experience' through striving to implement the following Customer Services Vision:

We aim to be a customer focused organisation – we'll work to understand our customers better and put them at the heart of everything we do, and we'll support customers to do more for themselves.

3.3. This Vision cannot become a reality solely by the actions of the Customer Services staff. Every Service area, and every member of staff in the Council has a role and responsibility for providing the best quality Customer Services. The strategy will therefore need to be further embedded into the culture of the organisation ensure that the vision is owned by all staff.

3.4. To implement this Vision we need to ensure that we put the Customer first in everything that we do. A draft Strategy (Appendix 2) sets out the above Vision together with the aims and objectives, the priorities, challenges and opportunities and provides proposed service standards.

3.5. The following extract of the draft strategy provides illustrations of the commitment we will be seeking from staff when dealing with our customers:

- be respectful, polite and treat you with dignity
- be clear about what you can expect from us
- give you a positive experience whenever you contact us
- resolve enquiries the first time you contact us, wherever possible (working towards a target of resolving 80% of enquiries at first contact)
- do things when we say we will, and be clear about our timescales
- make it easy for you to give us feedback. We'll listen, learn and improve
- encourage and support you to tell us when you're not happy and deal with your complaints within agreed timescales

- help and support you to use our online services
- respond to your messages or requests through social media promptly during normal working hours (during exceptional or emergency situations we'll respond out of hours too)
- offer you an appointment with a member of staff if you need more support
- keep the information you give us safe and secure.

3.6. The draft strategy is likely to introduce different working practises in parts of the organisation. The objective of the process set out in Section 5 below will aim to address this and take account of changes to the draft, leading to greater integration and ownership of the final strategy.

4. DIGITAL STRATEGY

4.1. As referred above steps have been made to improve the public's access to services through digital means. The Council's 2020 Vision identifies that this is an important strand of work by 'Providing more digital opportunities to make dealing with us easier'

4.2. Currently the Council does not have a Digital Strategy. A new 5-year ICT Service Strategy was approved by Cabinet in January 2019 which included elements of digital delivery. CMT have had initial discussions on this at strategic planning meetings to move our digital agenda forward. Further discussions on our digital approach are planned to lead into our future discussions on the 2020/21 budget and the savings/efficiency plan.

4.3. The following themes have been identified as areas to develop within a Digital Strategy:

- Redesign of our website to improve access to Council services and information, with a focus on providing opportunities to encourage customers to self-serve.
- Invest time and money in developing digital channels, by identifying costs and benefits, investing in the best technologies and recognising investment also includes having people that can make the changes.
- Provide self-service - via a computer / website, by providing interactive web services that are engaging, targeted to customer needs and that add additional value to the customer.
- Provide self-service - via a mobile device / application, by providing scalable technologies that can be re-used on multiple device platforms and considering the additional value a dedicated app could provide.
- Simplify processes, then make digital, by working with the services to understand the customer journey and considering the processes that sit behind them before applying any technology.
- Complete the whole interaction using a digital channel, by looking at automation technologies that can support end-to-end processing, avoid manual handoffs and that keep the customer informed throughout.

- Make digital channels customer friendly, by delivering solutions that are convenient to our customers, reliable, easy to use, intuitive and saves them time and effort.

4.4. The work of this review of the Customer Access Strategy will work alongside a Digital Strategy which is a key part of improving the access of services to the public.

5. PROPOSED PROCESS FOR IMPLIMENTING THE NEW STRATEGY

5.1. Included at Appendix 3 is a timescale for the implementation of a Customer Access Strategy.

5.2. Following the Working Group meeting the draft strategy will be circulated for initial comment from a selected group of staff who use the CS services. It is anticipated this will be shared with teams for comment. This will form part of the preparation for the workshop as described below.

5.3. As identified above to ensure that the strategy is embedded into the culture of the organisation the it needs to be owned by staff. It is therefore proposed to hold a number of workshops.

5.4. The workshops sessions are proposed to be held with both staff, specifically the CS team and other staff, SMT/ and Councillors made up of the HCSWG member. The workshops will aim to:

- Fully share understanding across the organisation of what is meant by a Customer Access Strategy.
- Provide opportunity for comments, suggestions and improvements for the draft strategy and by doing so seek ownership of the strategy.
- Ensure a consistent approach and response from all services areas (not just existing clients) to internal and external customers.
- Ensure that the strategy enjoys agreement and commitment across the organisation.

5.5. The workshops feedback will be incorporated into a final draft strategy which will set out an Action Plan for implementation. Each action will be set out with a proposed timescale where possible. The final draft strategy will be taken back to the working group.

2. PROPOSAL(S): To note the report and the timetable for the development of the Strategy 2020-25.		
3. OPTIONS: N/A		
4. CONSULTATION: Consultation will follow as set out within the project timetable.		
Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		No
Relevant District Ward Councillors		No
Other groups/persons (please specify)		No
5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial		No
Legal		No
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		No
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		No
Sustainability		No
Asset Management/Property/Land		No
Technology		No
Other (please explain)		No
6. IMPLICATIONS: Improvement of Customer Access to ADC services		

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION: To work towards the replacement of the Customer Access Strategy 2013-17

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS: Customer Access Strategy 2013-17
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