

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 15 June 2021

Portfolio: Customer and Partnerships

Subject: Customer Service Update

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Recommendations:

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

1 What our customers are telling us

Last quarter we made significant changes to the website customer satisfaction survey making it easier for customers to give feedback and for us to respond. We've dealt with feedback relating to waste related subjects such as revised collections for Bank Holidays, collection calendars, recycling outlets and during May queries regarding Elections. We continue to respond to feedback where the resident has not had a positive experience, has not received what they requested or is sometimes simply asking a question. Residents have given positive feedback that they appreciate they are being listened to and their feedback acted upon.

2 Complaints

Several complaints have been received regarding the lack of street cleaning. With lockdown restrictions easing and more residents out and about in the District there has been an increase in litter. These complaints have been investigated and responded to by the Waste Management Team Manager. Revenues have continued to receive a high volume of complaints mainly related to Business Grants these complaints have not been upheld.

3 Recycling Outlets

Customers are now familiar with recycling sack outlets in the district. These outlets will continue to provide sacks once the Civic re-opens, removing the need for residents to visit the office for sacks.

4 What's worked well

The re-opening of the Broadway Cash Office has received positive customer feedback since reopening on Mondays/Tuesdays from 12th April along with the payment kiosk at Waltham Abbey Library. In the first month since reopening, the Cash Office has taken almost £210,000 in total of which £109,000 was cash, with the kiosk taking over £57,000 in total of which £31,000 was cash.

The kiosks at the Civic will open once the building is ready to re-open and is Covid safe for external customers. We have been looking at long term solutions for cash paying customers and a report on this will follow in September once we have further usage data from all payment streams to make an informed decision.

5 Customer Strategy Quarter One Update

5.1 New welcome lounge and partnership hub

Good progress is being made to get ready for the re-opening of the Civic Office and the launch of our Welcome Lounge (previously known as Reception). For the launch of our Community Hub we have been working with partners and internal Officers to create a 'week in the life of' outlining those services and organisations in the Hub on certain days. A full communication plan is being developed including a video to support the launch. Partners joining us include Food Bank, Phoenix Futures, Nacro, VAEF, ECC Family Solutions, DWP, CAB, CHESS Homeless, Changing Pathways and Peabody. We are in discussion with further partners who have expressed an interest in joining. The aligning service areas will be in attendance in the Hub on the same days/times as partners providing a one stop multi agency approach for our residents.

5.2 'Customer Shoes' behavioural training

We recently ran a larger training seminar attended by thirty-eight colleagues, held by the training provider the Impact Factory and again feedback was positive. This training is aimed at new starters or Officers with a basic level of customer service behavioural skills who would benefit on coaching for difficult and challenging customer conversations. We have recognised there is a need for more real-life scenarios to be included and those experienced Officers dealing with the most challenging conversations daily will be supporting with 'knowledge share' short videos or in attendance at the next session.

In conjunction with other service areas we are taking a holistic view of our customer behavioural training to define training modules, ensuring the right training is in place for all levels from 'customer shoes' behavioural skills, to telephone aggression and conflict management.

5.3 Multi-Channel Digital Platform

As part of our digital strategy, we are investigating potential suppliers for a multi-channel customer engagement platform in the Contact Centre. The platform will enhance our customer experience via additional contact channels such as live chat and an IVR function as well as providing improved analytics. Expected benefits will be increased first point resolution, better customer contact analytics, reduced call volumes and an improved customer experience. Our Officers will be freed up to help those customers who need us the most.

5.4 Corporate External Communications

We received confirmation of the successful conclusion of the Census in March by the Office of National Statistics. All areas bar one were recorded as 'Green' thanks in part to our extensive communications support. The remaining area also became green following further support from colleagues at Norway House in North Weald.

Corporate Communications invested extensive support in the delivery of the recent County, District Police Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) and Town and Parish elections. Candidate and polling information was provided through the website with Social Media signposting. Detailed information and analysis were provided to local media through a special 'Elections Pack'. Results of the elections were posted via the website and social media throughout Friday 7 May, while the team liaised with Colchester Borough Council separately for the PFCC. The election count centre at North Weald Airfield featured extensively in the local TV news coverage broadcast by BBC London.

Following the cessation of emergency measures to support virtual meetings during the Covid Pandemic, Corporate Communications facilitated the technical delivery of Annual Council within the new Conference Suite, utilising mobile webcasting technology to support Members of the council. Conference suite arrangements are being modified to accommodate further face to face meetings pending the anticipated lifting of restrictions in the Council Chamber from 21 June.

Corporate Communications worked in conjunction with Economic Development and other Council Services to facilitate the safe reopening of local high streets as government restrictions lifted from March through May.

5.5 Members Technology & Members Contact process review

Newly elected Members, as well as many of the existing cohort attended the Civic Offices to be inducted. This event was a collaboration between Customer Services, ICT and Democratic Services. Members met with Corporate Communications to get photos taken for the website, with Democratic Services to get an understanding of upcoming meetings and how to use the committee management system Mod.Gov, with ICT to address any technical enquiries and receive their IT equipment and lastly with Customer Services to receive their induction pack and to be taken through the Members Contact process which ensures queries are efficiently logged and tracked to resolution.

In conjunction with ICT and Democratic Services we are continuing to review Members technology to ensure tools provided are efficient and fit for purpose. To date, forty-four Members have been contacted to understand their level of digital adoption, any technical issues, training needs and for feedback on their use of technology. The main issues identified are calendar integration between Outlook and the committee management system Mod.Gov, copying and pasting between websites, and Members wanting to set up emails on their personal phone. These issues are all being investigated by the working group and solutions are being tested before implementation with Members.

The Member Contact process is also under review, in conjunction with Cllr Sam Kane and ICT, to ensure a simple and effective process. Changes to be implemented include; an improved method of logging in to the form, amendments to questions asked and enhancements to how Members are notified of progress updates. The new improved form will be tested before implementing with guidance issued to Members on usage including suggestions on how to get your device to remember your password (this was an issue identified by Members).

Consultation undertaken: none

Resource implications: none

Legal and Governance Implications: none

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: none

Background Papers: none