

North Tyneside Council

Report to Cabinet

Date: 28 May 2019

ITEM 5(b)

Title: We Listen and We Care - NTC Customer Service Programme

Portfolio: Community Safety and Engagement

Cabinet Member: Councillor Carole Burdis

Responsible Officer: Jacqueline Laughton, Head of Corporate Strategy and Customer Service

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Wards affected: All

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

A key theme running through the Our North Tyneside Plan is to listen to our residents and to focus on ensuring that the Authority works better for residents.

The motto on the Authority's crest is "we serve" and this should be firmly at the core of how the Authority delivers the Our North Tyneside Plan – a promise to serve the people, communities, businesses and visitors across the whole of the Borough.

The total efficiency savings that the Authority has had to find due to cuts in funding from central government now stands at just over £120m. A number of these savings have resulted in changes to the way the Authority is organised and how it delivers services.

As a result of this change, the Elected Mayor, Cabinet and the officer team are seeking to review and improve the customer service experience delivered by the Authority and its partners and to really demonstrate that we listen and we care. This report sets out how this will be done.

To help to shape these plans, the Authority has looked at what its customers are saying is important to them through the annual Residents Survey. The Authority has also been out and about across the borough in the Big Community Conversation 2018 to test with over 500 residents and visitors they would want their experience of Authority services to be.

In addition, internally the Authority has also asked its partners through the State of the Area event in October 2018 and tested out ideas with staff from across all parts of the Authority and with delivery partners Engie and Capita.

Through the insourcing of the repairs and maintenance service project the Authority has worked closely with council tenants to help to shape how the new housing repairs service will be from April 2019. The Authority has also worked in the past with its social care, culture and leisure customers to design its services with them.

The Authority has also looked at any key themes from other forms of feedback from its customers including: members enquiries, complaints, social media, Mayor's Listening events to see how this might help to shape how to improve things from a customer service perspective.

The Authority also listens to young people and responds to their concerns. The Young Mayor and Cabinet are developing their 10-year plan for the borough looking at what they see are the key issues to address in North Tyneside to make it a place where they would like to bring up their own children. Working with the Elected Mayor, Cabinet and Officers they will develop their ideas on how this is done.

The Elected Mayor, Cabinet and the Officer team have then spent time working through what this evidence was telling the Authority in terms of:

- What is good customer service?
- What is bad customer service?
- What type of customer service does the Authority want to offer, how does the Authority achieve that and what needs to change?

The Customer Service programme set out in this report spells out the scope of what the Authority will aim to achieve with its delivery partners for its customers.

1.2 Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet agree:

- (1) the Customer Service Programme as set out in this report;
- (2) the proposals to engage;
- (3) that the delivery of the programme will be overseen by a Steering Group comprising the Chief Executive, lead officers, delivery partner representatives, the Deputy Mayor and the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Community Safety and progress reported regularly to Cabinet.

1.3 Forward Plan:

Twenty-eight days notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 1 March 2019.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework:

This report is directly concerned with the Our People theme in the Our North Tyneside Plan.

1.5 Information:

Background:

- 1.5.1 The Authority works continuously to improve its service to customers and largely speaking, as the evidence set out below in more detail shows, it does a good job. The Authority's staff are very well motivated and focussed on providing excellent services to customers. However, there is still huge scope for improvement to ensure that the

Authority improves on overall levels of satisfaction amongst its customers but also to keep pace with changing customer expectation as well as the need to continue to manage demand in line with reducing resources.

1.5.2 The Authority's Efficiency Statement and Budget for 2019/20 includes the following proposals which will be core components to the successful delivery of this customer service programme:

- **social care customer experience** (getting the right person to do the right thing correctly the first time, making best use of the new My Care portal)
- **post-2019 construction delivery** (the return of services for delivery construction back into the Authority from the Kier North Tyneside joint venture with a re-modelled approach to service delivery including customer service)

These proposals for 2019/20 are in addition to the following existing projects which aim to improve customer service and experience as well as contribute towards annual budget savings

- **community hubs** (providing on the doorstep, comfortable locations for customers to access the services they need with integrated teams – each one tailored to meet the needs in each of the four localities across the borough)
- **customer journey programme** (developing and delivering new technology to increase self-service and mobile working to enable better access to services at a local level)

Scope and approach

1.5.3 The Authority's customer base is of course extremely wide ranging in scope - including residents, service clients, housing tenants, visitors, businesses, schools and others in the education sector, community and voluntary sector organisations. In addition, the Authority's service offer is equally wide ranging with hundreds of different services delivered both directly by the Authority and indirectly through partners, contractors or sub-contractors. As this network of service providers has expanded, the type and level of customer service and experience has become more and more disjointed with inconsistency with respect to the core set of standards to be delivered.

1.5.4 North Tyneside has over 204,000 residents and over 6.6 million visits to the borough. The Authority delivers thousands and thousands of transactions each year e.g. the customer service team answered over 293,000 calls and dealt with over 60,000 visits in the last year.

1.5.5 To address the above issues the scope of this Plan will include the full range of Authority services – those delivered directly by the Authority and those delivered by our strategic partners, Engie and Capita.

1.5.6 The scope of the Plan will include any relevant elements of existing projects as set out in paragraph 1.5.3 above as well as new projects to be established as set out in the rest of this report.

Current customer service

- 1.5.7 The Residents' Survey shows that 66% of people who had been in touch with the Authority were satisfied with the helpfulness of staff; 57% were satisfied with the final outcome of their enquiry and 56% with the contact experience overall. In addition 60% of residents feel that they are kept informed about the services which the Authority provides. Overall, this holds up well in comparison with other similar local authorities. However, there is some variation in the levels of satisfaction, which is dependent upon factors such as the reason for contact and the way that people contacted the Authority that demonstrates there is room for improvement.
- 1.5.8 Through the annual Big Community Conversation activity over the summer of 2018, the Authority attempted to gain a greater understanding of what people felt about the customer service provided. Residents described the key factors in delivering a good service as:
- the overall outcome: when the customer service was good, residents talked about being happy with examples such as "I got an appointment" and "(they) did what I asked".
 - the speed at which action was taken: residents provided examples such as "swift response - out the same day for a repair" and "tree work was done really quickly"
 - staff attitude and approach: residents described the way that they were treated as a positive, examples including "staff were great, really helpful and dealt with you as an individual" and "the lady was very friendly and made the work a priority"
- 1.5.9 People with a negative view of their experience reflected the same issues, but in a negative way. For example, one resident described the reason why their experience was negative as the service not being delivered "after being told that they would be collected in 48 hours. They didn't do what they said they'd do".
- 1.5.10 There were 4,894 members enquiries in the last financial year. The most frequent were; parking, roads, footpaths and street cleaning. In addition, the latest annual report for the complaints service highlights the low numbers of complaints, compared to the number and variety of interactions that the Authority has with its residents and service users.
- 1.5.11 The Authority's Corporate Equality Objectives, which Cabinet agreed in January 2019, include an objective to "ensure our buildings and communications are accessible'. It is expected that this objective will be delivered, in part, through additional equality actions that will be identified through the development of this programme.
- 1.5.12 The Authority also knows it often serves its customers at very difficult times in their lives. Whilst the offer at the Authority's leisure centres and parks have fun at their heart, the Authority also works with people at very difficult times in their lives, for example through the Bereavement Service and in relation to safeguarding matters such as child protection. There are therefore some constraints on the customer service linked to the work that the Authority does.

What do the Authority's staff team think?

1.5.13 As a part of the annual Big Team Brief activity in Autumn 2018, people across the organisation were asked what they thought was key to delivering a good customer experience so that the Authority could incorporate this into the design of this Customer Service Programme.

The three key elements that were fed back had a clear correlation with the feedback from residents in the Big Community Conversation as follows:

- listening
- efficiency
- honesty

What do the Authority's partners think?

1.5.14 At last year's annual State of the Area event in October 2018, workshops were run to seek views from both residents and key partners around what elements make up good customer service or experience. Again, this demonstrated a strong correlation with the feedback from residents and staff in earlier engagement activities as outlined above.

1.5.15 In terms of the key elements of good customer service the feedback from the workshop was the following:

- efficiency
- knowledgeable staff
- keeping promises
- feeling valued and that people care

1.5.16 Conversely, the key elements of bad customer service were felt to be:

- failure to keep promises
- unknowledgeable staff
- feeling not listened to or ignored

1.5.17 The rest of this report explains in more detail the Elected Mayor and Cabinet's aims to improve how the Authority does things from a customer point of view and to therefore provide a more consistent and improved customer service.

1.5.18 Based on the above evidence it is proposed that the Authority chooses to define the optimum customer service as one where people feel valued and listened to, where the Authority does what it said it would do; and, where people are dealt with efficiently and effectively. The Authority's activities and performance management will therefore aim to deliver this experience as well as possible and as consistently as possible.

A Programme to Improve Customer Service

1.5.19 It is proposed to establish a programme across the Authority that aims to improve customer service and to demonstrate that "we listen and we care".

1.5.20 This programme will have the following four parts

- Customer promise
- Brilliant basics
- Customer focussed services
- Better never stops – a continuous improvement culture

1.5.21 The key activities for each of these parts are set out below

1. Customer Promise

What the Authority will do

The Authority will use the evidence that it has gathered from staff, customers and partners to shape a single set of customer service standards that will seek to improve consistency across all Authority services (regardless of who delivers them) as well as contribute to an improved customer experience. The Authority will use its residents and staff panels to test out the standards before they are implemented to ensure that they reflect what people expect to see.

This will also include how the Authority ensures these standards are achieved through its staff.

How will the Authority do it

The Authority will implement these standards across all Authority services and publicise them so that customers know what level of service they can expect to receive

Through its training programmes, the Authority will ensure that all team members are trained in the level of customer service standards that are set out in the customer promise. The Authority's core competencies for all of its staff will be reviewed to ensure that they reflect the customer service standards that the Authority expects and these will be assessed on an individual basis each year through the individual performance review process.

2. Brilliant Basics

What the Authority will do

Often there can be inconsistency in how the Authority communicates with customers. Simple errors and missing attention to detail can result in a poor customer experience where people must come back more than once to have their query dealt with. This workstream will look at improving basics and getting the little, and often important, things right.

It is also important that everything the Authority does is clearly and easily recognised as being the responsibility of the Authority so that customers and others will know that they can expect the customer service standards that will apply.

How will the Authority do it

This work stream will improve the clarity, quality and consistency of the hundreds of small, but vital, impressions the Authority makes through:

- letters, e-mails and written acknowledgements: including the use of plain English, correct spelling; signatures; language; and grammar
- phone handling including pick-up times; how they are handled in someone's absence; and the way the Authority follow-up phone calls which require responses or input from across several different services
- contact directory and signposts: looking at how the Authority can direct both staff and customers to where they need to be - quickly and accurately
- consistent branding of all activities including on the Authority's buildings, vehicles, corporate workwear, communication products or channels and regeneration projects

3. Customer Focussed Services

What will the Authority do

Building on the previous work of the Customer Journey programme, the Authority aims to continue to change how services are delivered to make things easier and more joined-up for the customer and to be as efficient as possible.

How will the Authority do it

The Authority will achieve this by two programmes of work. The first will be a systematic analysis of all customer transactions, prioritised by volume, where the Authority will look to understand the right customer experience and streamline accordingly. For example, allowing more dates to be made available for direct debit payments.

The second will be a programme of internal service reviews, prioritised by customer impact and feedback.

Following these analysis and review programmes, the Authority will aim to deliver change through:

- increased self-service through online and digital applications designed around the customer including improving the Authority's website, including the possible development of a customer account to be used to access our online services where appropriate
- delivering more joined up services through community hubs
- social care customer experience project (getting the right person to do the right thing correctly the first time and increasing use of the MyCare portal, as contained in the budget proposals)
- post-2019 construction delivery project (including a remodelled approach to service delivery)

- this workstream will also include how the Authority can improve the accessibility of services in line with the corporate equality policy and objectives.

4. Better Never Stops – Continuous Improvement Culture

What will the Authority do

This will look at all the ways the Authority has to collect queries, feedback and complaints; the quality and consistency of the Authority's response and how the Authority uses the feedback gathered to inform ongoing service delivery.

The Authority will also develop the way its employees act as the eyes and ears of the organisation to ensure that the quality of service provided is up to the standard that the Authority has set itself. Building on some successes in safeguarding, the Authority will make sure that all of the employee team are encouraged to spot things that are not up to standard and have an easy way to report them to be improved.

This part of the programme will also look to improve how great customer service is recognised and celebrated.

How will the Authority do it

Complaints: ensuring that the Authority has the best structure and systems to ensure that complaints are dealt with effectively, sensitively, and in a timely manner. This will include making sure that the Authority improves quality and ensures that even the most technical material is explained in plain English.

Members' Enquiries: ensuring that the Authority is accurate, clear and consistent in the way it answers Members' Enquiries, and meeting Members' expectations in relation to quality, including the use of plain English to explain even the most technical matters.

Engagement programme: refreshing the Authority's annual programme of engagement and how the Authority will use the residents' panel to ensure regular feedback on what the Authority does.

Real time feedback: exploring the options to seek more real time feedback via the Authority's various communication channels.

Recognising good customer service : the Authority has used the Institute of Customer Service and National Customer Service week to do this in the past but needs to do more. Working across the Authority, ENGIE and Capita work will be undertaken to systematically recognise, reward and celebrate great customer service. These examples will be used and shared as best practice as part of a culture of an organisation that seeks to continuously improve its levels of customer service.

How the programme will be managed

1.5.22 The Customer Service Programme will be led and co-ordinated by a Steering Group comprising the Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team, Young Mayor/Cabinet,

lead officers, delivery partner representatives, the Deputy Mayor and the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Community Safety.

Measuring success

1.5.23 A set of performance measures will be agreed to test delivery of the customer experience. As far as possible these will be measured in real time. But a critical measure will be the Residents Survey due in 2020 when the Authority can expect the impact of the programme to show results. There may also be some impact of early changes made in the next Survey due in 2019.

Next steps

1.5.24 The next steps are:

- Establishing the Steering Group to oversee delivery of the programme
- Agree a programme delivery plan through the steering group

1.6 Decision options:

The following decision options are available for consideration by Cabinet:

Option 1

Agree the programme, the approach to engagement and the management of delivery.

Option 2

Ask for further work and a revised programme to be submitted to Cabinet in due course.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

Following reflection on engagement undertaken, it reflects the Elected Mayor and Cabinet's priorities for the delivery of the Our North Tyneside Plan.

1.8 Appendices:

None.

1.9 Contact officers:

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1.10 Background information:

The following background papers/information have been used in the compilation of this report and are available at the office of the author:

(1) [Our North Tyneside Plan 2018-2021](#)

(2) [State of the Area 2018](#)

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

Any costs incurred from the initial development and implementation of the Customer Service Programme will be met through existing budgets. As the programme continues to embed and evolve, if any new proposals are developed that have a financial impact, approval to proceed with these proposals will be sought through the normal approval process.

The impact that the Customer Service Programme has on the savings proposals outlined in section 1.5.3 will be reported to Cabinet through the existing budget monitoring process.

2.2 Legal

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. As projects and plans come forward individual consideration of the legal implications of these plans and projects will be undertaken as required.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

2.3.1 Internal Consultation

The report is based on discussions with the Elected Mayor and Cabinet Members as well as detailed technical discussions across the Senior Leadership Team and incorporates results of engagement with staff at the Big Team Brief sessions.

2.3.2 External Consultation/Engagement

The report is based on extensive Borough-wide consultation; The Annual Big Community Conversation; Budget Engagement, State of the Area and Youth Council consultation. Further engagement will take place on the Customer Promise – the set of customer service standards to be developed – as set out in the report.

2.4 Human rights

There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken to inform the planning of each project delivered through the plan.

2.6 Risk management

Specific projects will have their own risk management arrangements in line with the agreed corporate approach.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

The contents of the plan aim to support sustainable development.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Chief Executive
- Head of Service
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Head of Corporate Strategy and Customer Service