

Cabinet – 23 October 2019

Walsall Proud Programme – Customer Access Management

Portfolio: Councillor M. Bird, Leader of the Council

Related portfolios:

Service: Transformation, Walsall Proud Programme

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Aim

- 1.1 Improving customer experience is at the heart of the Walsall Proud Programme; as such, we are developing ways of working that meet customer expectations and reflect changing demands for the future. Walsall has embarked on a programme of work in relation to how customers contact us and access our services. This will deliver significant improvements to customer experience, outcomes & efficiencies across the whole council. To inform this work, we will be seeking customer feedback in order that we can design our customer contact accordingly.

2. Summary

- 2.1 This report outlines the council's approach to achieve better outcomes and customer experience through the Customer Access & Management (CAM) workstream of the Walsall Proud Programme (WPP). The work will also contribute to increasing staff satisfaction and engagement and improving service efficiency and performance.
- 2.2 The report requests approval to undertake customer / public engagement, which will shape the development of future ways of working for how customers contact the council and access our services.
- 2.3 The report seeks to:
- Provide an update on recent work as part of the Walsall Proud Programme to achieve better outcomes and customer experience
 - Seek approval to conduct research on current customer experience so the voice of our customers can further shape our future ways of working
 - Set out next steps for how the council plans to develop its arrangements for customer access and management in the future.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 To note the council's approach and work underway as part of the Walsall Proud Programme to develop and improve the experience for customers, including how they access information and services with the council.
- 3.2 To approve customer / public engagement research to be undertaken in order to inform and shape future ways of working.

4. Report detail – Know

Context

- 4.1 To achieve its vision and Corporate Plan, the Council requires fundamentally different ways of working. The Council's ambition is to modernise ways of working to be digitally enabled, more flexible, entrepreneurial, and efficient.
- 4.2 The Walsall Proud Programme (WPP) was established as the council's future transformation programme in order to achieve this ambition, taking a cross-cutting approach across the whole organisation. Achieving better outcomes and customer experience is a key objective of the Walsall Proud Programme. In addition, a key guiding principle for the Council's Corporate Plan is to put the Customer First, with resolution of queries at first point of contact.
- 4.3 As part of the WPP, therefore, the council is taking a deliberate and holistic look at everything we do to serve our customers, how they access information and services and their overall experience.
- 4.4 We know that the current experience for customers, whilst good in some areas, is not always planned or consistent. Significant effort is spent on administration and data entry, and there is fragmentation in how customers receive information or services.
- 4.5 In the future, we want to deliver a modern and consistent customer experience. We want to be better in helping customers to reach the right information or support they need at the right time. We also want to improve how customers can access our services online or through digital channels, so their enquiries or requests can be addressed at a time which best suits them. This will mean that we will be able to focus more on delivering services and outcomes.

Key features of future ways of working

- 4.6 As part of the council's work earlier in the year on the design of its overall future ways of working, a desired model for the Customer Access and Management capability across the organisation was developed. Key features included:
 - **Digital access:** A greater range of options to access information and services digitally, including an improved website. This will enable digital channels to meet many customer enquiries and requests, while the council is also able to support residents who perhaps cannot use online services in other ways.

- **Customer service model:** A more consistent and centralised model for customer access, where multi-skilled customer officers are able to handle a wider range of common enquiries at first point of contact, working closely with services. This will help meet customer requests more quickly and effectively, while also freeing up time for staff in the directorates to focus on delivering high quality services.
- **Developing our technology:** Strategic planning and investment in the digital infrastructure required to improve customer access and experience, supporting more self-serve opportunities. This will mean customers will be able to access key services 24/7 online, as well as building stronger connections across relevant services in the council.
- **Stronger insight and understanding of customer needs:** Working hand in hand with service areas, our improved customer capabilities and feedback from customers will be used to continuously improve their experience of interacting with the council.

4.7 The Walsall Proud Programme has begun the next stage of work to develop future ways of working in more detail so the council is able to make the changes it needs in a co-ordinated and sustainable manner.

Engagement to develop and implement future ways of working

4.8 Working closely with customers, employees and services is essential to further develop and then implement these future ways of working, and particularly the creation of a future customer service capability that will lead to improved outcomes and customer experience.

4.9 As part of the programme's work to date, the council has engaged employees with a series of workshops across the organisation. The workshops have considered current arrangements, staff ideas for how the customer experience can be improved and what is needed by the council to make the required changes. This has led to many creative and exciting opportunities for change that will make a big difference to what the council wants to achieve.

4.10 Service areas across the council also have feedback and insights from customers, which helps us, know what the council currently does well and where we can do better. However, at this point in time, we do not have a strong enough voice from our customers to inform what we do to address key issues and best deliver improved outcomes and experiences in the future. The council wants to undertake dedicated research, which will ask customers for their views to inform and shape our plans for how we manage their contact best in the future.

4.11 The research will consist of a set of focus groups and a survey with the following set of aims:

- To gather consistent insight on customers and their interactions with the council, including why they would or would not contact the council, and their preferred methods of contacting the council.
- To identify key needs and priorities for different customer groups which can be used to shape how the council provides customer access and management in the future, including the use of online, phone and face-to-face channels.

- To establish a baseline measure of customer opinion and experience, which the council can then use to regularly measure and track the impact of improvements regarding customer access and management.

4.12 The engagement with customers through this research will be used to inform and shape the Customer Access & Management workstream as part of the Walsall Proud Programme. Wider input from customers, employees, services, our elected members and other stakeholders will also inform the direction of travel and future changes for the council.

Customer Access & Management workstream

4.13 The Walsall Proud Programme is taking a combined approach which will allow the council to make quick, tactical changes to address immediate challenges while preparing and establishing the longer-term foundations for improved customer access and management in the future.

4.14 There are three key strands of the Customer Access & Management workstream:

- (a) Tactical Process Improvements to deliver immediate benefits to customer satisfaction and ensure greater consistency by addressing priority processes across the Council. Some of the Tactical fixes which are currently being worked on are: -
 - Improved ability to apply and pay online for: Taxi Licences, Operator Licences; Bulky Waste Collection; repairing bins and replacement bins
 - Relocate licence printing technology to where Taxi Licensing is based
 - Review options for Pest Control service requests
 - Review Registrar Services for areas to enable self-service and booking of appointments
- (b) Web Content Redesign in order to consolidate information and improve the council's website. This will help members of the public to navigate the website and find the information they need, supporting ease-of-access and search. The revised versions will be compliant to Government Digital Standards (GDS). The pages currently prioritised for redesign include: -
 - Clean and Green services
 - Planning
 - Leisure
 - Council Tax
- (c) Constructing the blueprint for the Council's future Customer Access & Management capability, including how the first building blocks of a council-wide customer service centre can be established. This will achieve greater consistency, visibility and efficiency in how enquiries and simple customer interactions are managed. This work will provide the foundations for building and growing additional customer capabilities from across the Council, realising significant additional benefits as new technology and improved processes are implemented. The aim of the work will:

- Build a collective understanding and agreement on customer needs, detailed design principles and parameters for the future Customer capability, particularly the core customer service centre.
- Establish an agreed, evidence-based methodology and programme plan for the initial set up and subsequent development of the future Customer capability over the coming years.
- Prepare the detailed blueprint, information and requirements the Council needs to implement its core customer service centre.

14.15 The council will work closely with customers, staff, services and other stakeholders to keep them informed and engaged as future ways of working are further designed, developed and implemented.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

14.16 The Walsall Proud Programme is fundamental to the successful delivery of all priorities, particularly our Internal Focus on efficiency. It also enables an embedded focus on customer experience and outcomes.

Risk management

14.17 Effective governance arrangements are in place for the Walsall Proud Programme to allow for successful delivery of the programme. These consist of:

- Transformation Programme Board,
- Commercial Group,
- Design Authority,
- Customer Access & Management Steering Group

Financial implications

14.18 This work is funded as part of already agreed budgets in the Walsall Proud Programme, as per the Cabinet resolution on the Walsall Proud Programme in December 2018.

14.19 No other financial implications.

Legal implications

14.20 The report presents no legal implications

Procurement Implications/Social Value

14.21 The report presents no procurement implications since it forms part of the overall approach to the Walsall Proud Programme with a partner already procured to support the Council's capacity to change and transformation.

Property implications

14.22 None at this stage.

Health and wellbeing implications

14.23 None

Staffing implications

14.24 The Customer Access Management workstream will assist in improving employee experience. At this stage, there are no direct staffing implications arising from this report.

Reducing Inequalities

14.25 The implications for reducing inequalities have been taken into account and assessed within EqIA Ref 29/19 and submitted to the Equality and Diversity Team. The EqIA will be reviewed as CAM workstream progresses.

Consultation

14.26 The Walsall Proud Programme has been informed by evidence gathered and submitted during the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process, our employee survey, the stocktake undertaken by PwC and via consultation with Cabinet members and senior managers. Briefings have also been held with political groups and the trade unions.

5. Decide

To agree to customer / public engagement research via focus groups and online survey to gather insight on customers and their interactions with the council, including why they would or would not contact the council, and their preferred methods of contacting the council.

6. Respond

It is anticipated that the Customer Access & Management workstream, as part of the Walsall Proud Programme, will continue to deliver agreed outcomes in accordance with the set governance arrangements.

7. Review

7.1 Feedback and insights from the customer / public research will be reviewed following engagement and used to inform the Customer Access & Management workstream and future ways of working across the council.

7.2 Following the engagement and completion of the design for future ways of working, it is our intention to return to Cabinet. This will include an implementation plan for future ways of working so Members and customers can see what changes and timescales the council is planning to take forward. The council will then start to put the plan into action to establish consistent and sustainable new arrangements, which will deliver better outcomes and experience for customers.

Author

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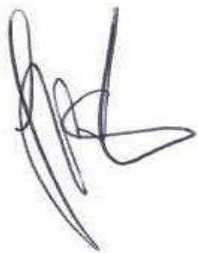
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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Simon Neilson'.

Simon Neilson
Executive Director Economy
and Environment
(Corporate Management Team Sponsor for
Customer Access Management)
11 October 2019

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Councillor Bird'.

Councillor Bird
Leader of the Council

11 October 2019