

## **Cabinet – 15 December 2021**

### **Walsall Customer Experience Strategy 2021 to 2026**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader, Regeneration

**Related portfolios:** All

**Service:** Customer Engagement

**Wards:** All

**Key decision:** Yes

**Forward plan:** Yes

#### **1. Aim**

The aim of the draft Strategy (**Appendix A**) is to provide a vision for how we will achieve excellent customer experience in the future, in a way that aligns to our new ways of working, the Walsall Proud promises, and the Corporate Plan outcomes. It aims to support the Council to deliver the aspiration of improving services, by facilitating evidence-based, customer centric decision making, and achieving more consistent, accessible, and easy to use services. The strategy also seeks to embrace, and contribute to, the Resilient Communities model, by supporting residents to become more self-sufficient by allowing them to access services via new 24/7 digital self-serve pathways. It also recognises the need to support our most vulnerable residents, including providing a face to face service where needed, through a trusted network of community and voluntary sector partners.

#### **2. Summary**

2.1 The Council has developed a Customer Experience Strategy (“the Strategy”) which sets out our customer vision, values and actions to strive to deliver a truly customer focussed service. To do this, the Strategy has been developed following significant customer and stakeholder consultation. This feedback has directly shaped our Vision of “we want to do things right first time, every time, and make services accessible” to achieve our overall organisational objective of reducing inequalities and maximising potential for all.

2.2 The Strategy directly aligns to the delivery of the 3 Proud Promises, which aim to:

- Improve Outcomes and Customer Experience
- Improve Employee Satisfaction and Engagement
- Improve Service Efficiency and Performance

- 2.3 This Council has always sought to put customers at the forefront of its service delivery. The Strategy will help to provide a clear vision that all staff, customers, internal services and partners can use to help align their services so that customers receive a better, more consistent and coordinated service.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 That Cabinet approve the Walsall Customer Experience strategy 2021 to 2026 as set out in Appendix A
- 3.2 That Cabinet delegates authority to make any future amendments to the Strategy to the Executive Director of Children's and Customer Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration.

### **4. Report detail - know**

#### ***Context***

- 4.1 The Council has started to deliver improvements to customer experience but there is still a lot of work to be done. We have already:
- successfully increased the number of services accessible to customers 24 hours a day via our on-line customer platform.
  - developed a new Digital Design for our website; and
  - procured a partner to advance the development of a new Customer Relationship Management system to help facilitate a 'whole council' approach to customer engagement;
  - piloted face to face support for vulnerable customers in partnership with existing Community and Voluntary Sector partners.
  - re-designed and built various new self-service processes for Clean and Green and a council-wide Corporate Complaints process (which will be available to Walsall residents before the end of 2021).
- 4.2 The way many council services are delivered has changed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The most notable changes for Walsall have been in relation to customer contact services, with most staff now operating from home and having to establish new ways of working to meet our customers' needs. Many of our front-line specialist services now offer digital electronic meetings for customers, which has helped to save officer time, and allowed customers to fit their appointments around their other commitments. Adoption of digital meetings has also supported our key professionals to strengthen engagement with other partners and minimised inefficiency associated with travelling to physical meetings.
- 4.3 The Council has developed and enhanced some digital self-serve customer processes. The draft Strategy seeks to build upon this early work, expanding the number of self-serve processes available to help realise our longer-term ambition of delivering modern and accessible services for all residents. A key action within the Strategy Action plan is to encourage more of our customers to move from using face to face and telephone access channels to digital self-service capabilities (with the overall aim of 90% of customers accessing via digital channels by the end of 2023). Facilitating more people to self-serve digitally is key to the Council's new 'Ways of Working' approach and will be a positive contributor towards releasing

staffing capacity and delivering future financial benefits. Where possible, we intend to install self-serve kiosks in public places such as some libraries, leisure centres, and within the town shopping centre. Promoting digital self-sufficiency and improving our web offer will also help increase independence amongst residents, providing an easier and more accessible route to find out essential information, with minimal 'customer effort'. It has been recognised through data analysis that a large amount of customer demand is generated because customers are unable to find the information they need simply and easily on the Council's webpages. The Customer Strategy seeks to consolidate, simplify, and standardise all customer facing processes and all communication channels so that residents receive a better quality, more consistent service that represents better value for money.

- 4.4 The Council has introduced a new centralised Customer Experience Centre capability, supported by a new telephone system, which has future capability to integrate with the digital customer platforms. This will provide a more personalised service for residents and customers to apply, report, book and pay for council services at a time, and place, convenient for themselves. Over the next two years the Council will begin to phase out approximately 200 direct dial telephone numbers which currently exist for Council services, and instead move towards a single telephone line through which all calls will be managed and monitored more effectively.
- 4.5 The Council has appointed a strategic partner to support the development of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which will eventually provide a 'single record' of all customer contact. This new technology will be integral in delivering the aims of the Strategy and will support us to gain feedback from customers on their key priorities but also give them updates about services or opportunities that might benefit them. It will enable the Council to gain better insights about our customers and build up a history, and profile, to help inform future service design and maximise any commercial opportunities for traded services. Aligned to this will be a refreshed council web site with improved information content, contact details, signposting and integrated e-forms. The current Customer Management System (CMS) for the website will be phased out and replaced with a new one which will support with on-going governance of webpages, and support the organisation to keep things up to date and within accessibility standards.
- 4.6 An on-line customer survey earlier in 2021 suggests that there may have been a small improvement to the satisfaction rates of our customers with rates reported as increasing from 67% in 2019 to 73% in 2021. To test this further, and to ensure targeted input into the development of this Strategy, the Customer Engagement Team has undertaken further public consultation. The results from the consultation which explored customer priorities, and needs, in a post Covid-19 world, indicate that the biggest priority for customers (at 81% of respondents) is that information provided by the council is accurate and up to date. This is followed by 'the need for the council to be clear about what it can and cannot deliver' (at 71%) and that 'the council is easy to contact' (at 68%). The Strategy has been designed to ensure that the benefits gained as a result of the new ways of working developed during Covid-19 are not lost as restrictions are lifted.
- 4.7 A key action within the Customer Strategy is to develop a set of new Customer Service Standards and Performance Metrics for the whole Council. These will be

used to monitor our compliance against the Customer Promise within the Strategy which is to deliver GREAT services:

- **Get things done quickly**
- **Respect our customers and the communities we serve**
- **Excellent customer service, first time, every time**
- **Align the way we work with customers, partners and internal services**
- **Tell people about our services and be clear about what we don't do.**

A copy of the draft Customer Service Standards and Performance Metrics is attached at **Appendix B**. Further work is now required to consult with staff and members to finalise these, and put processes in place to help monitor them effectively on an ongoing basis. The evidence and data captured through this new customer performance framework will be used to help prioritise future organisational change initiatives and process improvements.

- 4.8 During the Covid-19 pandemic we have seen the local voluntary and community partners in Walsall rise to the challenge and support our most vulnerable residents with exceptional kindness, and compassion, delivering outstanding outcomes for many. The Customer Strategy strives to better align Council services with those delivered by key partners, including the voluntary and community sector, with the aim of delivering more resilient communities in Walsall.
- 4.9 Feedback from disability groups suggests there is still demand for face-to-face support from our most vulnerable customers and also a need for more local access points. The Council therefore needs to change its pre Covid-19 operating model which saw large numbers of customers accessing the First Stop Shop daily. As mentioned previously, during the pandemic, voluntary sector partners in Walsall took a lead role in supporting vulnerable and elderly residents who were shielding. The consultation revealed that the voluntary and community sector also contribute significantly to supporting residents where English is not their first language, and for those with low literacy levels. We want to further enhance the new customer pathways and relationships, including specific services for those with protected characteristics, coordinating it through the Strategy and associated delivery group.
- 4.10 All essential services such as child and adult protection, enforcement, and outreach support, continued during the Covid-19 pandemic but these were delivered in a more targeted and Covid secure way. The Strategy champions the continuation of these essential face to face services for our most vulnerable customers, with the Council providing a front-line support offer through community hubs and local buildings, home visits, outreach and in-person community-based professionals meetings (when customer need requires it). The Strategy also seeks to consolidate all the learning gained to facilitate better alignment of our remaining in-person services with those being delivered by our partners.

### ***Council Corporate Plan priorities***

- 4.11 The Strategy is linked to all services and all areas of the council and its development and implementation will be in line with the 5 areas of focus and the 10 outcomes within the Corporate Plan and aligned to the Walsall Proud promises.

### ***Risk Management***

- 4.12 The risk of not having an approved Strategy is a lack of a coordinated approach to the development of further customer focussed services, both by the council, but also linked to its partner agencies.
- 4.13 Reverting or continuing with any services that don't use the new and enhanced digital platforms that provide more efficient and accessible services for customers, could create both a financial risk to the council, and a step back for customers. At the same time, it's essential to ensure that there are face to face engagement options with customers where needed, to ensure that vulnerable groups are not disadvantaged.

#### ***Financial Implications***

- 4.14 There are no specific financial implications directly associated with the Strategy. The priorities contained within the Strategy will require funding that will be through existing identified budgets. However, if there are any actions that have significant financial implications for the Council, these will be the subject to separate reports to this Cabinet.

#### ***Legal Implications***

- 4.15 The Strategy is not a statutory requirement. Any actions described in the Strategy that may have legal implications would be the subject of separate reports to Cabinet where necessary.

#### ***Procurement Implications/Social Value***

- 4.16 There are no direct procurement implications arising from this report. Advice will be sought from procurement to ensure that any future contractual changes associated with the Strategy are completed in a compliant manner and aligned to Proud workstreams where applicable.

#### ***Property Implications***

- 4.17 Any actions described in the Strategy that would have significant property implications would be the subject of separate reports to Cabinet where necessary.

#### ***Health and Wellbeing Implications***

- 4.18 There are complex links between service users accessing council services. The correlating factors include service users who are vulnerable and more likely to experience health problems, high unemployment, and low incomes. Considerations to the health related aspects of service users and wellbeing for the residents of Walsall is important and will be considered through effective service delivery.

#### ***Staffing Implications***

- 4.19 The very nature of moving to a more digital platform focussed service, will mean potential changes to the way we work. Blended working has already been the subject of a report to this Cabinet. However, to deliver the Strategy, there will be

staff who continue to deliver face to face services to customers, potentially in different settings, such as community based locations.

### ***Reducing Inequalities***

- 4.20 An Equality impact Assessment (EQIA) is attached at **Appendix C** and shows a need to continue the consultation and communication processes to ensure the needs of diverse communities are met. The EQIA showed a need to communicate more effectively with all groups, make reasonable adjustments where required and maintain an ongoing dialogue with communities to ensure changes in need and aspirations are met.

### ***Consultation***

- 4.21 The Council conducted a comprehensive consultation exercise to help build a modern and resilient council. All residents, stakeholders, staff and key partners were given an opportunity to have their say and be involved in developing the strategy. A public survey, along with a members survey and staff survey allowed for key variables to be tested such as how important certain aspects of customer services were to different groups. A series of focus groups sessions also took place with stakeholders, and protected characteristic groups, which allowed for a more qualitative approach and a more detailed understanding of the customer journey. A telephone survey in addition to an easy read survey was provided to those who required additional help. In order to provide a comprehensive response to the strategy, booster samples for some groups such as young people and those from ethnic minority groups were also collated through partner agencies and more informal channels.
- 4.22 Further feedback on the draft Strategy was sought from 28 September 2021 Scrutiny Overview Committee which made various recommendations about how to enhance the Strategy and increase engagement, in particular with Council staff and children. The comments received have now been incorporated into the revised document but the action plan will continue to be updated during the life of the Strategy.
- 4.23 Some elements of resetting of the council and the way it operates may require further consultation with staff, Trade Unions and service users. Appropriate consultation using established Human Resources policies will be put in place when required.

### ***Climate Change***

- 4.24 The Strategy will allow for the development of key actions which will ensure faster and a more focussed customer response. In return this will mean queries will be dealt with more efficiently therefore reducing the need for further customer contact where possible. In turn this will help reduce the overall usage of council and partner resources, subsequently helping reduce the council's carbon footprint.

## **5. Decide**

- 5.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the Strategy, to ensure a coordinated approach to customer related services in the borough. The 'do nothing' option risks a lack of

coordination and customer service as we continue to implement our Walsall Proud promise.

## **6. Respond**

- 6.1 On approval of the Strategy, the Council will work up an evidence base along with key actions which will be delivered through the Council, partners and wider communities.

## **7. Review**

- 7.1 The project will be monitored by the CAM Steering group and will report back in line with Walsall Proud governance procedures.

## **Background papers**

### **Author**

Elise Hopkins  
Director of Customer Engagement  
[elise.hopkins@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:elise.hopkins@walsall.gov.uk)  
07967639334

Rashida Hussain  
Housing Strategy Analyst  
Mobile: 07788328531  
[Rashida.Hussain@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Rashida.Hussain@walsall.gov.uk)



Sally Rowe  
Executive Director Children's and Customer

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021



Councillor Andrew  
Portfolio holder Regeneration

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021

**Appendix A – Customer Experience Strategy 2021-2026**

**Appendix B - Customer Service Standards and Performance Metrics**

**Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment**