



One Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

26th November 2013

Report from Operational Director Brent Customer Services

For Information
Wards Affected :ALL

Future Of Customer Services

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with a summary of the key deliverables achieved as a result of the Future of Customer Services project.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note that the Future of Customer Services project was formally closed in December 2012 with project deliverables transferred to Brent Customer Services from that date.
- 2.2 To note that the work undertaken as a result of the Future Customer Services project and new Brent Customer Services Unit is now being developed further to ensure that Brent's overall customer access arrangements remain effective and fit for purpose.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The Future Customer Services project was set up to review arrangements for handling customer contact across the Council and make these more efficient and effective. The project scope included a range of work streams that covered the various ways in which residents contact the council web, telephone, face to face or post and creating more consistent and coherent arrangements for handling these contacts. It set out to achieve a more strategic approach to the design of customer contact, identify clear priorities for expanding the range of service that can be accessed on line and better alignment of customer contact resources to match patterns of customer demand for services.
- 3.2 The project was complimented by projects undertaken in Housing Benefits, Council Tax, Housing Needs and Adult Social Care, all of which had carried out end to end reviews of service delivery, focussed on improving our customers' experience, resolving enquiries at the first point of contact and achieving efficiencies.

3.3 The project agreed a set of design principles that would form the basis of service delivery models and create greater coherence to these. These included:

- Understanding our customers (Customer insight) and designing services to meet customer needs on a more holistic basis
- Designing delivery to ensure that customers could “tell us once” and enable information to then be shared across services and prevent duplication and delay.
- Resolving enquiries at the first point of contact wherever possible and designing out hand offs between front line and back office staff
- Actively promoting and increasing use of on line access channels and self service facilities
- Ensuring customers experience is consistently good across all access channels and services

These principles are currently being reviewed as part of the work being undertaken to develop a new customer access strategy.

3.4 The One Council programme board considered the closure report in December 2012 and this included an assessment of the degree to which the project successfully delivered against its objectives. The following sets out a summary of these objectives and achievements against them.

3.5 The first objective was to bring together disparate points of contact and approaches to customer service into an integrated customer services environment able to resolve the majority of enquiries at the first point of contact in a consistent and high quality manner.

3.6 The project has resulted in the successful transfer of a range of telephone contacts including Blue badges, taxi cards & freedom passes, schools admissions, free school meals and home to school travel and children and families information service. Additionally a review of published telephone numbers has been undertaken and resulted in some streamlining of these, reducing the numbers publicised from 154 to 89 and the number of published email addresses for services from 95 to 87.

3.7 With the move to the Civic Centre, face to face access to services has now been consolidated into two customer services centres, located in the north (Civic Centre) and south (Willesden). For the first time in Brent’s history customers can access all Council services from one location in a purpose built state of the art customer services centre which is co located with a range of other services and facilities. Our customer services officers are now immediately recognisable to visitors and customers with branded ties, neck scarves and names badges and a consistent colour scheme for their dress code. This is helping to create a strong customer ethos (we are here to help you) and reinforce Brent’s branding and image as a customer focussed organisation..

- 3.8 Post handling has also been centralised since the opening of the Civic Centre, through the creation of a digital post room that scans and delivers post electronically to desktops. This has eliminated the need for courier delivery and expensive paper storage. Over 93% of post received is now delivered electronically. It is also supporting flexible and remote working as staff can view documents from any location.
- 3.9 During 2012/13 there was a fundamental review and redesign of the Council's web site, with the new site launched in the spring of 2013. The new site has been fundamentally redesigned and a new content management system has greatly improved the look and feel for customers and the ease with which they can search and navigate the site. New governance arrangements have been established to ensure that content is displayed in a way that makes sense to customers and remains relevant and coherent.
- 3.10 The creation of the Brent Customer Services Unit and the new Customer Services Board has facilitated a stronger and more cohesive approach to the development of Customer Services strategy, monitoring of performance and identification of priorities for the future. Performance reporting for all contacts is being developed but is not yet comprehensive.
- 3.11 The second objective was to achieve financial savings. In financial terms, the project broadly achieved the agreed savings targets, with projected savings of £1.496M (from 2012/13) and £1.634M for future years. The project resulted in a reduction of 47 posts in total.
- 3.12 The third objective was to achieve more effective management of access channels. There have been a number of activities undertaken in relation to the achievement of this objective. The fundamental review of the web site and content along with the implementation of a new content management system has provided a strong foundation stone from which to expand and develop Brent's on line/ digital offer. Brent's web offer has been considerably expanded over the last 2 years, with the implementation of a comprehensive suite of on line parking services, significant increases to the take of on line schools admissions, implementation of the online booking system for pest control and sports activities and work currently in progress for further on line services including benefits, council tax, housing, Adult Social Care and waste and recycling.
- 3.13 A new automated switchboard was implemented in February 2012 and this is now routing 20,000 calls every month without the need for human intervention. The system's ability to accurately route calls has been improved and further work is being undertaken to ensure that the system recognises the service or person requested. Automated routing of calls is enabling Customer Service Officers to dedicate more time to enquiry and improving call answering rates.
- 3.14 Overall, the Future of Customer Services project was a significant success creating a firm foundation for continuing to reshape customer access for residents of Brent. Work is now underway to build on the work of the project

and develop a customer access strategy for the next 3 years. A key element of this will be the expansion of on line and digital services and self service provision. This reflects the significant financial challenges facing Brent in the future and the need to ensure that our resources are targeted to support the most vulnerable by migrating contact to on line/ digital access channel where there is a propensity to do so.

- 3.13 The move to the Civic Centre in the summer of 2013 involved a significant change programme for both staff and many customers. As with any change programme of this scale there have been a number of learning points and issues identified and plans are in progress to address these. Specifically feedback about the Welcome desk is being acted upon Europa, the Facilities management contractor who manages this, to ensure that initial signposting and booking in arrangements for visitors are improved. A telephone improvement plan is also in progress and includes a number of work streams that include: additional training for staff on the new telephone system and smartphones, actions to investigate and resolve any technical issues, configuration improvements and improved management of telephone call answering. The actions being taken are aimed at improving customer experience of visiting or telephoning Brent and ensure that arrangements for both are effective.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 Total projects cost were £904K , delivering annual savings of £1.634M .

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There were no direct legal implications arising from the project

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment was carried out as part of the project.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 The project resulted in a reduction of 47 full time equivalent posts and the creation of a new Brent Customer Services unit.

Background Papers

FCS Closure report

Contact Officers

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