

## DRAFT HOUSING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY

### Purpose

The purpose of the Customer Experience Strategy is to achieve our first Housing Strategic objective; **'To provide a high-performing service to customers across Housing'**.

We will do this through the delivery of services, which has the customer 'up front and centre' which will be articulated through a new housing service standards – which sets our expected behaviours and practices when dealing with customers for our staff. This clarity of 'what **brilliant services** looks like' provides a clear basis upon which staff can be assessed and measured through supervision and the appraisal process

Through this strategy, we will deliver three core programmes:

- Customer focus culture and operating environment
- Customer Insight and Customer Engagement
- Digitalisation and Modernisation of Customer Services

This strategy should be read in conjunction with the Corporate Customer and Digital Strategy, which collectively underpins the delivery of our customer experience programme.

We recognise the importance of sustained focus on customer service to ensure business success and as such we will:

- Ensure that great customer service is integral to our target operating model
- Recognise customer experience as a valuable asset by providing a **brilliant service** that will improve loyalty in what continues to be a challenging external environment
- Work to ensure our customers have the best possible experience when they use our services at a time when demand is increasing owing to factors including welfare reform, higher poverty levels, an ageing population, and our regulatory responsibilities to rehouse those who are vulnerable and in need

In the current economic climate, we cannot continue to provide services in the way we have previously, as this is costly and resource intensive, therefore we will find new delivery methods that meet both the demands of our customers and the efficiencies required of us.

Our people will make this strategy a success; the best customer service business models demonstrate the link between highly engaged, empowered and motivated employees and first class customer service. **Brilliant Customer Experiences** makes good business sense as it helps to create a happy customer base and engaged and empowered staff who are enthused about their work and their part in our success.

We will ensure we create the right customer service environment for our people, through our Culture Development Programme and the programme of customer service orientated training including Mary Gober. This will enable us to build capacity and rally staff around the new customer focus culture.

*'Many of the highest performing organisations already recognise the connection between employee engagement and customer satisfaction'*

## The Institution of Customer Service

'Customer Service Trends. What 2016 will bring'

**Our Customers:** The majority of our customers are tenants, leaseholders of our housing stock, home seekers and private landlords. The main focus of the programmes in this strategy is aimed at these customer group. We recognise that we have a range of customers in addition to this group including, other registered providers, local people using facilities owned by Brent Housing Management. Over the course of this strategy we will strengthen our customer insight across all of these groups in order to develop and enhance our customer proposition.

Welfare reforms are impacting on a large number of our customers, many of whom are struggling with their finances. We recognise that we need a deep understanding of our customers in order to tailor our services to suit their needs. As part of this strategy, we will develop an approach to **Customer Insight and Engagement** which will, in turn, help us to deliver our **Digitalisation and Modernisation** programmes. We will also launch a set of housing specific service standards for Housing Management. This will clearly set out our core offer to our customers and we in turn expect from them.

### Customer Focus Culture and Operating Environment

**Brilliant customer service requires:**

#### Strong leadership

The culture of any organization is the way in which its people behave. This ethos is strongly influence by senior managers and shaped by attitude and the behaviours they encourage. We will not drive up improved customer experience unless we create the right internal environment and without accepting that a key element in delivering **brilliant customer service** is employee satisfaction and treating employees in the way we want our customers to be treated.

We will strive for clear and consistent leadership from the top and ensure staff are rewarded when they provide the right experience for our customers, we will use the Pride of Brent and DMT recognition scheme to celebrate examples of when staff have delivered exceptional customer service. We will also ensure we provide on the 'on the spot' feedback where appropriate. **Brilliant customer service** will intertwine into everything we do and become the way things are done across the Housing Department.

#### People

Customers want to be confident that when they contact the Housing Department, their enquiry will be dealt with promptly by someone who is knowledgeable, professional and empowered to resolve their service request. Irrespective of the job title, **brilliant customer service** will always be an essential part of our service plans. Continued investment in employees will be key to the implementation of this strategy.

We will continue to ensure that our staff demonstrates the necessary values and understanding when dealing with our customers as well as how our operational processes and procedures meets customers' demand and drives value. We will also ensure our staff understands the impact on our services if we are inconsistent in our

approach to customers, or if they consistently fail to deliver our obligations and promises.

People with the right attitude are essential to building a successful customer focused approach – **hire for attitude, train for skills** will be the motto throughout the department.

Individual and teams will be expected to understand the actions they must take to support the delivery of the strategy. Their actions and targets will be agreed through our 1-2-1 and appraisal processes. This will ensure delivering a **brilliant customer experience** becomes everyone's responsibility and not just individuals delivering frontline customer service roles.

We will continue to promote **brilliant customer service** beyond the life of the Transformation Programme and we overlay of cultural development programme with the right environment for staff to have a 'can do' attitude and show respect to customers at all times. We will continue to seek feedback and listen to the views of staff and use these to deliver ongoing improvements. The strategy will promote team work to ensure joined up approach and collective ownership for delivery brilliant customer service.

### **Efficient processes**

Brilliant customer service can only be delivered by providing teams with current, accessible and relevant data and information. This, in turn is achieved through the use of enabling technologies, underpinning efficient and effective operating processes.

Our operating processes will be designed to add value for customers, streamline the organisation and eliminate unnecessary process steps. The outcome will increase effectiveness (value for customers) and efficiency (lower customer for the service).

### **Customer Insight and Customer Engagement**

Our approach is to tailor how we develop and deliver our services so that they offer cost effective services that provide great customer experiences throughout the business. This will allow us to:

- Know, understand and respond to our current, future and potential customers
- Develop services that meet the needs and aspirations of both existing and potential customers
- Provide an offer to our customers that is right first time
- Influence a shift in channel preferences
- Allocate resources effectively and efficiently to ensure Value for Money
- Enable knowledge based decision making
- Embed the use and ownership of Customer Insight within our culture and practices
- Gather relevant information on our customers to build Customer Insight.

### **Data**

We collect data about our existing customers and the communities that we serve – this can be from a variety of sources including through our housing application

registration process, tenancy audit, self-declaration through online portal, CORE and census data etc.

## **Information**

We will add structure to our data through the new CRM platform and management infrastructure, which allows us to identify how often our customers engage with us, for what reason and by what channels. Profiling our customers by grouping them based on shared behaviours, ideas or characteristics creates 'personas'. This can take the form of satisfaction measurement to identify needs, wants, behaviours and expectations. We will also seek to import data available to other Council department through the Client Index system

## **Intelligence**

This information is used as intelligence to inform key business decisions, how we communicate and the services we offer. This allows us to identify trends and predict which customers are likely to need our services and when.

## **Knowledge**

The final stage looks at embedding the intelligence and sharing this across the housing service so that it can be used to enable knowledge based decision-making. This will form a core component of the work of the new Performance Insight and Service Improvement Team. The PII will also enable us to carry out service reviews, research and customer journey mapping

## **Customer Engagement**

Our approach to resident involvement will be embedded across the organisation and puts customers at the heart of service improvement. We have established a framework which empowers involved residents to shape our products and services so they are right for both us and our customers.

Through our Customer Engagement programme, we will refine this further and seek to improve how we engage with those within our communities. We understand that there may be barriers that prevent customers from being involved however we will work to ensure that all segments of our customers' base are able to participate fully in resident involvement, initiatives and that our framework empowers customers to become more active within communities.

Through the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing we ensure that customers are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- The formulation of housing related policies and strategic priorities
- The making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered
- The scrutiny of our performance and the making of recommendations to us about how performance might be improved
- The management of their homes, where applicable
- Agreeing neighborhood priorities, through our neighbourhood action plan programme.

Our approach to customer engagement is to ensure that customers have an opportunity to be involved in service activities at all levels so they can influence and improve service delivery. To ensure we are accountable to our customers and that we comply with regulatory requirements. We will:

- Consult and involve customers to improve service delivery
- Continue to support successful co-regulation
- Promote opportunities for involvement and offer support to customers who wish to get involved
- Seek feedback from the wider customer base to ensure views are representative.

## Customer Feedback

Customer feedback helps us to know what customers think we are doing well, identify those who are not happy with our services and track recurring problems to identify solutions which help us increase our overall satisfaction.

We will make it easy for customers to give us feedback on our services and we will listen to what customers say. We will use customer surveys through our website, telephone and face to face services and we will make these simple, focused and quick, and the results will be fed into our continuous improvement cycle. Customer journey must be the core element in the design of our services. Over the lifetime of this strategy we will use the emerging CRM platform and other core systems used across the housing department to review the ways in which we collect customer feedback and measure their relative effectiveness.

Whilst we aim to provide excellent standards of service to our customers at all times, we recognise that there may be occasions where we get things wrong or when customers are dissatisfied with their individual experiences or their expectations are not met. Where this happens, we will capture any lessons learned and, wherever possible, use this intelligence to improve the customer experience. Our approach involves regular reviews by the Corporate Complaint Team, which provides challenges surrounding root causes and general quality of our response. This challenge and robust oversight by the Departmental Management Team enables us to continue to respond to customers effectively and in line with the Corporate Policy.

We will establish different ways of measure customer satisfaction, including the introduction of Net Promoter Scores (NPS) a management tool that is be used to gauge the loyalty of customer relationships. It serves as an alternative to traditional customer satisfaction research and will enable us to focus on the areas of our services that will lead to our customer not promoting their experience accessing services from the department.

## Digitalisation and Modernisation of Customer Services

We want our customers to have the best possible experience when they use our services. There are a number of ways that customers can access our services including face to face, telephone, email/letter, text messaging, web chat and a Self Service Portal ('MyAccount'). Customers' expectations are changing; they increasingly expect to be able to transact and interact at any time of the day, and 'self-serve' using a range of devices, including, smartphones, tablets and laptops to access services via online and social media channels. If we fail to address their requirements, we risk investing in the wrong services, using our resources ineffectively.

Our ability to recognise and meet these expectations is an important part of providing a **Brilliant Customer Experience**. We're constantly seeking to make efficient use of

our resources and we must find new delivery methods to meet both the demands and expectations of our customers and the efficiencies required of us.

We are committed to understanding our customers and their needs. Our approach to digitalisation will be to develop our services to ensure that they are accessible to all customers online and to encourage as many customers as possible to access services this way.

We know that some customers do not have the skills, knowledge or confidence to use online services or have access to equipment and the internet to make this possible. We will work with other Council departments and local agencies including, voluntary sector, Employment and Skills Team to support customers who are digitally excluded by:

- Encouraging customers to use our UK Online centre
- Supporting volunteers to become 'Digital Champions'
- Signposting to partners funded to tackle digital exclusion.

Currently our online service offering, MyAccount allows tenants to manage some aspects of their tenancy online, such as, viewing a rent balance, reporting a repair. The launch of the online housing assessment system for home seekers is start of a wider roll out of a programme of online services. We are already reshaping the ways in which our services are delivered. We will launch the new customer portal (linked to the CRM platform) in Housing Management as a way of enabling our customers to have greater control over the services that they use.

We need to be confident that the customer journey through self-service is positive. If their experience is a bad one, they may revert back to more costly, resource intensive methods. At worst a bad experience may impact on our reputation and customer satisfaction. This will be a key focus as part of the CRM Customer Portal

We will continue to provide face to face contact if required for our more vulnerable customers contributing to sustaining tenancies. Our target will be for the Customer Experience Team to handle an increasing percentage of all incoming calls with only the more complex of enquiries, for example serious rent arrears cases, to be transferred to our specialist staff. A programme of customer service training will be implemented to ensure the success of this approach. Our frontline team will be trained to deliver on quality and outcomes for the customer as opposed to speed of response. This team will provide customers with a central, consistent service that recognises their preferences and behaviour with every contact.

The Make Every Contact Count (MECC) approach will be embedded in our approach to provide brilliant customer service. We'll ensure staff are empowered to be the 'face of the Council' and take ownership for taking the effort away from the customer.

As outlined above a key focus will be on the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM). When customers make contact with us, we must ensure we have reliable, up to date and clear information in order to achieve the most value from that contact. We will introduce 'persona driven nudge scripts'. For example, a customer calls to log a repair, the customer experience team is alerted to the fact that they are in rent arrears and deal with the call accordingly. They will also recommend using online services if the customer has not yet registered with MyAccount (CRM Customer Portal). Customer contact will be captured and recorded, identifying valueless (avoidable) contact with a view to eliminate.

At present the day to day technology used by staff in front lines teams is primarily desk based, with staff using email, internal shared drives, making one to one calls etc. Initially the strategy will focus on the foundations which will involve the full roll out of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and the new Electronic Document Management solution. The strategy also focuses on the implementation and embedding of the new mobile and agile working solutions.

Other planned investment will include the roll out of a new customer portal through the CRM platform for Housing Management. Together the pilot of a Chatbox messaging platform in Private Sector Housing. Given the fast moving pace of technology enhancement, we will develop a housing specific technology enhancement programme. This will set out range future technological requirements which will feed into the Council's Digital Strategy

### **Monitoring and Review**

Our Customer Experience Strategy will be delivered through a Delivery Plan, overseen by an operational project group. This group will provide regular updates on key priorities that are being progressed to the Housing Operational Transformation Board and local Departmental Management Team. Outputs from the operational project group will also feed into the resident involvement structure to enable scrutiny and constructive challenge.